

Preface

An ancient Arab proverb proclaims that men resemble their times more than they do their fathers. The age-old notion that social change is embedded in value shifts from one generation to another has become something of a truism over time. Phrases like “my generation,” “the younger generation” and the “post-war generation” have crept into common vernacular as a means of demarcating significant social groups on the basis of their locations in history. Yet our recent interest in differences among the generations is not mere fad or pop-culture frivolity. The construct of generations has a long theoretical tradition in the field of sociology. The theory of generations is largely predicated on the foundational work of sociologist Karl Mannheim, whose 1923 essay “The problem of generations” posited that individuals born within the same historical period and socio-cultural context experience the same events and context during their crucial formative years, which provides them with a common “inborn way of experiencing life and the world” (Mannheim, 1923 [1952], p. 283). In other words, history imbues each generation with a unique worldview, which is forged by the historical opportunities and challenges of our times. Subsequent researchers and theorists have elaborated on this theory, noting that the shaping influences of a generation must be understood as the confluence of historical events, progression through the developmental life cycle and episodic period effects that impact on society as a whole (Ryder, 1965; Strauss and Howe, 1991). Others have depicted the generational phenomenon as a battle for resources, with younger and older generations fighting to serve their own specific interests (Edmunds and Turner, 2005; Eyerman and Turner, 1998). Thus, we can view a generation as the product of its historical context, experienced over the course of its biological life cycle, affected by periodic events that affect the opportunities and challenges it faces.

Although the cultural salience of the generational phenomenon has waxed and waned over time, its popularity has grown immensely in recent decades, largely as a reaction to the boom in birth rates following World War II, the so-called “baby boom,” which created a demographic phenomenon that has had lasting impacts on North American society (Foot, 1998; Ricard, 1994). The terms “Veteran Generation,” “Baby Boomers”

and “Generation X” have been popularized as a sort of shorthand for describing value differences that were evident in these societies as successive generations of people emerged with their own unique worldviews. By the end of the 1990s, authors were clamouring to identify and describe the latest generation, which has been variously labeled “Generation Y,” the “Net Generation,” “Nexters” and “Generation Me” amongst a host of other monikers. The term “Millennials” was coined by Neil Howe and William Strauss in their 1991 book *Generations* (before Generation Xers received their name from Canadian author Douglas Coupland’s eponymous book). Although there is general agreement on the beginning and end years of the Millennial generation, there is some variability among scholars. Starting points range from 1977 to 1982 and end points range from 1994 to 2005. The theoretical construct of generations is subjective in nature, so the boundaries between generations are not a matter of objective fact. The start and end dates should therefore be considered as guideposts in the ongoing flow of social change, rather than as definitive boundaries.

When this generation began graduating from college and entering the workforce in the early 2000s, an explosion of books, blogs, magazine articles, television documentaries and self-help seminars emerged, promising to help employers and older adults in general understand this strange new breed of purportedly tech-savvy, entitled, self-confident and coddled workers. The stereotypes abounded and it became increasingly difficult to sort fact from fiction. However, in recent years, the academic research concerning this generation has begun to take shape, providing much needed evidence to evaluate popular beliefs.

Unfortunately, as is often the case in nascent streams of research, the findings regarding generational differences in the workplace have been contradictory and generally inconclusive. The construct of generations has been criticized as “fuzzy” and imprecise (for example, Giancola, 2006). Nevertheless, the number of academic writings and popular press contributions on this topic continues to grow. While critics call for greater precision in the definition of the generation construct and efforts to disentangle the confluent effects of age, period and cohort, it is clear that the construct, however fuzzy, resonates with the public and with business practitioners and policy makers. Anecdotal evidence continues to amass suggesting that the Millennials are different – that they approach their working lives in a way that is novel and often at odds with the expectations placed on them by their Boomer and Generation Xer bosses.

What appears to be most fascinating about the Millennial generation is the ubiquity of their supposed values across the globe. The traditional theory of generations dictates that each country should have its own

unique generational phenomenon resulting from its specific historical, cultural and economic realities. However, a growing body of evidence from around the world suggests the emergence of a youth culture that pervades national borders. From the “Arab Spring” movement that created a flash-point for change in Northern Africa and the Middle East to the “Occupy” movement that recently swept the Western world, there is evidence of a global youth consciousness that is spurred by social media technology. Whereas the formative influences that shaped previous generations were largely experienced locally and were transmitted to people in different countries by their local media, historical events are now simultaneously experienced globally through communication channels that are instantaneous and direct. For instance, the world watched live as the terrorist attacks of 9/11 unfolded. More recently, millions viewed the destruction of the Japan tsunami through video captured on private mobile phones and cameras and shared on the Internet. It can be convincingly argued that we are experiencing the development of a global consciousness. Hence, Edmunds and Turner (2005, p. 564) argued that “While generations and generational change have traditionally been understood in national terms, there are reasons to suppose that globally experienced traumatic events may facilitate the development of global generations.” Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009) called for a “cosmopolitan sociology,” which abandons nationality as a basis for understanding social phenomenon and instead focuses on multiple local manifestations of global themes.

The purpose of this book is to meaningfully examine the idea of a global youth generation. The various chapters of this book document the generational phenomenon from a wide variety of cultural perspectives and through a variety of research foci. In Chapter 1, Jean M. Twenge and Stacy M. Campbell provide a review of the growing body of evidence about the Millennial generation in the US, which is often used as the de facto comparative benchmark for studies about this generation from around the world. Their review provides compelling cross-temporal evidence that the Millennials differ significantly from previous generations in their personalities and work attitudes. In Chapter 2, Jeannette Taylor investigates the veracity of the common perception of Millennials as altruistic and dedicated to “saving the world.” Her findings from Australia indicate no significant inter-generational differences in public service motivation (PSM), a value found among those in public service. Instead, she finds that Millennials value “job advancement” (a motivator) more than previous generations, while Gen Xers value “high income” (a hygiene factor) the most.

In Chapter 3, Rein De Cooman and Nicky Dries investigate the work values and employment preferences of Flemish Millennials in Belgium.

These authors report that Millennials emphasize intrinsic and social factors, suggesting that employers should offer millennial workers interesting and challenging jobs within an enjoyable context. However, even within the millennial generation, individual-level differences were found between genders and career orientations. In Chapter 4, the editors report the findings of their study of the shifting career expectations and experiences in Canada. Their findings indicate that despite a number of similarities, Canadian Millennials differ in a number of ways from older generations: they exhibit different career priorities; they are much more mobile in their careers, changing jobs and employers relatively frequently; they are less satisfied with their income; and less likely to have their expectations for personal pride in their achievements met.

In Chapter 5, Emily T. Porschitz, Chun Guo and José Alves examine the career expectations and career development of “sea turtles,” a group of Millennials who returned home to China after spending a period of time studying abroad. They find that the Millennials have high expectations for their careers and are looking to help build the Chinese economy, but experience difficulty transitioning back home and changed jobs often, in part because they have lost some of the *guanxi* or social capital critical to economic and social success in China. Chapter 6 provides evidence from Germany. Heiko Breitsohl and Sascha Ruhle investigate generational and gender differences in work-related attitudes. Employing data from the annual German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP), these authors compare Millennials and Generation X, while controlling for age. They report that Millennials are more satisfied with their income and have a more positive outlook. In addition, they found that gender differences in work-related attitudes have remained stable over the generations.

In Chapter 7, Stewart L. Arnold and Samantha Yue examine the perceptions of younger and older workers of each other in Singapore, where respect for elders is paramount among East Asians. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the entry of millennial workers working alongside older workers has created a faultline in which the generations have negative perceptions of each other. They make several important recommendations for organizations and managers on how to manage generational frictions. Chapter 8 provides insights from South Africa, where Nico Martins and Ellen Martins compared the work-related perceptions and attitudes of Millennials, Generation Xers and Baby Boomers. These authors found that Millennials, more than any other generation, are focused on training and development. There were many similarities between the two younger generations, when compared to the older generation: Millennials and Generation Xers had similar levels of satisfaction, more positive views of change and were more supportive of the organization’s mission and vision.

On the other hand, both of the younger generations also participated less in teamwork and had less positive views of leadership than the older generation.

In Chapter 9, Kivanc Inelmen, Isik U. Zeytinoglu and Duygu Uygur compare Gen Xers' and Millennials' intentions to stay in the hospitality industry in Turkey, in which turnover is perpetually high. They report that Gen Xers are motivated to stay chiefly because of normative commitment (outcome of sense of loyalty or moral duty), while Millennials are motivated because of affective commitment (sense of belonging), and contentment with financial rewards.

Chapter 10 provides a US perspective on the issue of career counseling for Millennials. Linda M. Hite and Kimberly S. McDonald examine the perspectives of career counselors on the career expectations of Millennials and their career counseling needs. These authors report that career counselors perceive the career expectations of Millennials to be different from other generations and that Millennials, when seeking work, prioritize working with people they like, having schedule flexibility, maintaining work-life balance, having the opportunity to advance, having autonomy and receiving a good salary. Interestingly, approaches to career counseling do not seem to fully reflect these differences in career expectations.

Our final set of chapters provides international comparisons of the Millennial generation. In Chapter 11, Rena Rasch and Brenda Kowske examine the importance of corporate social responsibility and business ethics among Millennials from 23 countries. Their research refutes the notion of Millennials as a highly civic-minded generation, as they place no greater value on socially responsible and ethical organizational practices than do Gen Xers or Boomers, a pattern that holds broadly across cultures. Emma Parry, Julie Unite, Katharina Chudzikowski, Jon P. Briscoe and Yan Shen compare the definitions of career success of Millennials from the US, China, Austria and South Africa in Chapter 12. Their findings suggest that achievement is a universal element of career success among Millennials from all countries, but there are differences in what achievement means in each country. In Chapter 13, Saba Colakoglu and Paula Caligiuri compare the career goals of Millennials with MBAs in 23 countries. Their findings suggest that graduate business students have career goals that are generally consistent with their respective countries' cultural values, but that Millennials from all countries expressed a similar desire for challenging tasks, and opportunities to work internationally. Finally, in Chapter 14, Jennifer J. Deal, Sarah Stawiski, Laura M. Graves, William A. Gentry, Marian Ruderman and Todd J. Weber examine the authority and leadership perceptions of Millennials from the US, UK, South Africa and India. Their results suggest that there are few

inter-generational differences in perceptions of authority or desired leadership attributes across the countries.

In sum, the studies reported in the chapters of this book show that although there is much cross-cultural difference within the Millennial generation, there is convincing evidence of a youth generation that shares in common a substantive gap between it and previous generations. Although, as might be expected, that gap is manifested differently within the social and historical contexts of various cultures, there is a common theme of disruption and discontinuity in the perceptions and experiences of working people around the world. We have merely scratched the surface in our understanding of the Millennial generation as a global phenomenon. We are proud, however, to have made an important first step with this volume.

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