

## Program, Policy, and Culture Factors Minority Millennials Perceive as Important Within Their Workplace for Retention

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**Abstract:** Millennials make up the largest segment of the current workforce. However, research about minority Millennials and their needs are relatively unknown. The purpose of this study was to determine what minority Millennials deemed important within an organization's culture and the policies and programs that would persuade them to remain with the company. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. The results of the study indicated that minority Millennials expect programs that promote continuing education and opportunities for career growth. They also expect competitive benefits packages, pay, and workplace flexibility. Companies can use this information to gain a better understanding of the culture, programs, and policies that minority Millennials expect at their workplace.

*Keywords:* minority Millennial, generations, heuristic elicitation methodology, workplace diversity

A polarizing generation that is both admired and critiqued, Millennials are serious about changing work environments to meet their needs (Alsop, 2008). "This newest generation seems to possess an entirely different set of values" (Allen, 2008, p. 24). Born between 1982 and 2005 (Howe & Strauss, 2007), the Millennials (also known as Generation Y) are currently the youngest generation in the workforce (Brack, 2012). At 80 million, the Millennial generation has officially surpassed Baby Boomers (those born between 1943 -1960) as the largest generation in the United States, thus making them the largest generation currently in the workforce (Sherman, 2008). As Baby Boomers and Generation X (those born between 1961 - 1981) employees approach their retirement stages, Millennial employees look to take the lead in management and senior-level positions within organizations.

Over the last decade, a common idea that Millennials are different has prevailed. "By all accounts, Millennials are unlike preceding generations," (Brack, 2012, p. 2). Some perceptions even cast negative stereotypes about Millennials. "Popular perception (that is not supported by substantial evidence) is that Millennials are impatient, self-important, and disloyal, among other unattractive qualities from an organizational standpoint" (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 226). With the accusations of how different Millennials are, organizations may be in search of ways to manage and retain them. The Pew Research Center found that about two-thirds of all employed Millennials stated that it is not very likely or not likely at all that they will stay with their current employers for the remainder of their working life (Keeter & Taylor, 2010). Furthermore, organizations are having to compete in an ever increasingly global and diverse economy with the Millennial generation as one of the most diverse group of employees to enter the modern-day workforce. This study will show that although much research has been done on Millennials as a whole, the diversity of the Millennial generation, and in particular, the minority voices of the generation, have been

understudied. This study will seek to find out what minority Millennials find as important within an organization's culture and the policies and programs that would persuade them to remain with the company.

### **Literature Review**

Research shows that supporting a diverse set of Millennial employees can have a positive impact on an organization (Berman, 2012; Clark, 1999; Raines, 2002; Smith & Turner, 2015). Clark (1999) states that "forward-looking organizations, realizing the potential of diversity, have developed and employed strategic diversity plans that take advantage of this diversity to become more competitive in the global economy" (p. 3). Likewise, Raines (2002) states that in a "highly competitive business environment, companies across North America recognize that the differentiator is their people. Those organizations that emerge as winners in the battle for talent will have their fingers on the pulse of this newest generation" (p. 16). The Deloitte and the Billie Jean King study (Smith & Turner, 2015) found a vast contrast between what Millennials felt was considered diversity and inclusion versus the way Generation X and Baby Boomers defined the terms. The group felt that the results of the study would be a good eye opener for corporations as well as "critical to informing and elevating the inclusion conversations taking place across corporate America" (Smith & Turner, 2015, p. 3). An even more interesting fact the study found centered around engagement. The study reported that 83% of Millennials feel engaged when they believe their organization fosters an inclusive culture, compared to only 60% engagement in Millennials that feel their organization does not foster an inclusive culture (Smith & Turner, 2015). The results of this study tie back to the expectation Millennials have of an organization that embraces diversity and the outcomes it represents. However, all organizations are not clueless to the fact that diversity is needed and expected by its youngest generation. A study of CEO's and executive-level leaders conducted by IBM found that 75% believe that leveraging diversity is essential to organizational success (Berman, 2012). Research also shows that diverse organizations may help with stereotyping and bias. Rikleen (2011) states that "important that generational stereotyping not get in the way of the ability to understand the expectations and skill sets of each employee" (p. 8). Likewise, authors Kanter (1977) and Blau (1977) have argued that the greater the minority group is represented within the company, the more the majority can seek to understand their differences.

### **Methodology**

The Heuristic Elicitation Methodology (HEM), as described in Nardi & Harding (1978) was used as the framework for this study. "The goal of the HEM is to describe "cultural meaning structures," or the rules of correspondence which relate behavior to socially" (Kupritz, 1996, p. 314). According to Nardi & Harding (1978) "the Heuristic Elicitation Methodology has been developed to assess the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of a group of people through use of series of interlinked questions in which responses to one question determine the form of subsequent questions" (p. 39). In choosing a framework and research design, it was important to utilize one in that allowed the voices of the minority Millennial population to not only be heard verbatim but analyzed and quantified. The HEM is unique in that it is designed to extrapolate the respondent's own categories in his/her own language (Harding, 1974).

The first phase of the HEM is qualitative with the purpose of “discovering the range of knowledge about a particular domain as possessed by a given population” (Narding & Harding, 1978, p. 40). The intent of the first phase was to identify the domain or set of categories commonly used to describe situations, scenarios or problems in response to minority Millennial retention in the workplace. The HEM consists of different elicitation phases; however, any phase (Phase one in this study) can be used individually as a separate investigative study (Harding, 1974). To conduct the first phase of the HEM, the investigator conducted structured interviews with each of the 14 participants selected through purposeful sampling for this study.

The participants answered a series of interlinked questions where the first question identified the items in the domain and the subsequent questions identified the attributes. For example, one response to the first question was “diversity.” This answer was plugged into the second question as follows: “For diversity, what workplace conditions or situations would indicate that your workplace values diversity.” After this a probe question was asked “what other workplace conditions or situations would indicate that your workplace values diversity, other than what you just stated?” The probe question is presented to allow the participant to think of any other examples to describe the initial domain response. This sequence continued with questions three through five. At any point if the participant stated, “I do not know,” “I cannot think of anything else” or “my workplace does not do this,” it signaled to the investigator that this domain had been exhausted. The investigator would then start at the question one with the next domain item that the participant mentioned. The participants’ responses were recorded verbatim by hand and digitally. This allows the respondents’ language and patterns of speech to be preserved and utilized in later phases of the method (Harding, 1974; Harding & Livesay, 1984). An example of the domain definition questions is presented below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** *The HEM Phase 1 Domain Analysis—Interview Flow*

Question #1 What specific kinds of things (culture, policies, programs etc. are important to you for retention in the workplace? [Answers = “X”]	Question #2 For/when X, what workplace conditions or situations would indicate that the workplace/organization values X? [Answers = “Y”]	Question #3 What other workplace conditions or situations would indicate that the workplace/organization values X, other than Y? [Probe]
Question #4 For/when X, what workplace conditions or situations would indicate that the workplace/organization doesn’t value X [Q1]? [Answers = “Y”]	Question #5 What other workplace conditions or situations would indicate that the workplace/organization doesn’t value X, other than Y? [Probe]	Question #6 Describe your ideal workplace?

## **Findings**

### **Programs**

Inclusion and continuing education were the top two responses for programs required for minority Millennial retention. Participants felt strongly about the importance of their company investing in programs that promote diversity. The most common programs that participants mentioned were associate resource groups specifically focused on minorities. Other programs included an internal Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program and maintaining a Diversity and Inclusion Office. In terms of continuing education, participants talked about informal educational opportunities that their organization hosts to provide internal learning opportunities. They also mentioned formal programs that their organization must accelerate their learning and growth.

### **Policies**

Workplace flexibility and pay were the top two responses for policies required for minority Millennial retention. Participants felt strongly about their company having policies in place to allow for flexible working locations and hours. Minority Millennials also had expectations about time off and transition policies for maternal/paternal leave. In terms of pay, participants talked about the importance of being paid fairly and competitively. They preferred companies that had competitive leveling policies in place.

### **Culture**

Diversity and company culture were the top two responses for culture required for minority Millennial retention. Participants determined diversity by the number of minorities at their organization. They wanted to see that their company interviewed and hired a diverse pool of candidates. In terms of culture, participants enjoyed a culture that was inclusive, authentic, and offered personal interactive with key leadership. They also preferred companies where the vision was modeled and consistent.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Of the topics mentioned by the participants, fifteen were culture-related compared to six topics related to programs and seven topics related to policies. This demonstrates that for minorities, more than putting programs and policies in place, it is the overall culture and atmosphere of the working environment that really matters. Many participants could not recall a specific policy or the name of a certain program, but they each easily recalled how their company or department made them feel. Culture is something that is engrained starting with the executive leadership team and transferred to frontline leaders and managers. This study shows that, with minorities, culture matters. “Do you see me, do you hear me, do you value my thoughts?” These were the common threads that permeated throughout each interview. The results of this study align with the literature that 78% of Millennials prefer a company that may offer less money but is well known for having a great company culture (Shutan, 2016). Regarding culture, diversity and company culture were the two top listed factors that participants viewed as important for retention.

In researching many “what Millennial’s expect at work” studies via the University of Arkansas Library, there were none that listed diversity, inclusion or culture as must have’s or priority (Deal et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2012; Raines, 2002; Zemke et al., 2013). The list normally would include topics such as feedback, technology, work life balance, growth opportunities etc. Millennials that are a part of the majority do not have to worry about their ideas, opinions and thoughts not being taken seriously because of the color of their skin. They do not have to worry about being at a company with only one or two people that look like them in a leadership position. With this, Millennials are more likely to place higher value on factors such as pay, technology and workplace flexibility. However, minority Millennials may not be afforded that luxury. They need to feel secure that their workplace values and welcomes differences. They also need to feel confident that they can grow with the company and not encounter a ceiling because of their ethnicity. From the interviews, it was very evident that these are all very real factors that minorities deal with and are aware of. This is the reason the basic factors such as diversity, culture, inclusion and growth opportunities ranked the highest for most minority Millennials.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Feedback from the minority Millennials in this study demonstrate that having all three components of culture, programs and policies work together to provide the best way to retain minority Millennials. From this study, culture was the most important when compared to policies and programs. In terms of culture, an authentic culture that not only accepts but celebrates diversity, and differences amongst people is a must. Rikleen (2011) found that it is important to “foster an appreciation of diversity within the organization. This will help all generations avoid the stereotyping that gets in the way of valuing the skills sets of each employee” (p. 5). LaCore (2015) also agrees saying that leadership in organizations must address possible generational stereotypes and the different values that demographic diversity introduces into an organization. For programs, implementing programs to foster inclusion are important to minority Millennials. An example of this would be hosting townhalls and other programs where employees can gain an understanding of the importance of diversity and start to realize any unconscious bias. One participant stated, “we’ll have town halls and webcasts and things to discuss really hard topics.” Programs on unconscious bias, the importance of diversity and other inclusion topics can help to retain minority Millennials while also helping all employees to embrace differences. When it comes to policies, a very important aspect is to implement human resource departments that govern diversity practices. Research has shown that effective diversity management can be obtained through implementing the appropriate human resource policies and practices (Dass & Parker 1999; Shen et al., 2009). Likewise, Roberge et al. (2011) state that “when organizational strategy and human resources policies and practices support diversity initiatives, diversity is more likely to lead to positive performance outcomes” (p. 11). A human resource department can set the foundation of how diversity practices will be managed within the organization which in turn contributes to the culture. A human resource department may also be needed to create policies to manage any issues that may arise around fair treatment and diversity. In all, times are changing and with each passing day and year, workplaces will continue to be more and more diverse. Keeter and Taylor (2009) maintain that “this generation is also the most diverse generation ever and will redefine diversity in the workplace” (p. 4). It will be important

for organizations to understand what minority Millennials expect and need so that they can stay competitive in their market and retain their top-level talent.

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