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LEARNING PREFERENCES OF MILLENNIALS IN R & D WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE IT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

As collective generation workforce evolves at workplace, the learning formula must be modernised. Organizations need to create ecosystem that offers diverse learning modalities and appeal to contemporaries. By tailor making the training and development strategies, organizations may be successful in attracting and retaining millennial employees. The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand the learning preferences of millennial employees in IT industry R & D work environment. The study was conducted during December 2019 to March 2020 at a major IT organization in Bangalore, India. It is centred on two research questions: What learning practices increase the productivity and performance of millennials; and what organizational training and development programs engage and motivate millennials at the workplace? A survey was conducted and fifty-one millennial employees responded to it over email. Data collected was grouped and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to test research hypothesis. The findings indicated that the training programs that upskill millennials can significantly improve their job productivity and performance. It revealed that millennials prefer web-based learning, look for opportunities to work on live projects, case studies and appreciate a culture of experimenting and risk taking on the job. It also goes to say that millennials expect to jumpstart their career with the help of a mentor and prefer to engage with colleagues and industry experts at work place and social media platforms. The results of this study would significantly aid team leaders, project managers, R & D heads, HR and training managers in the organization to engage millennial employees more effectively and maximize employee learning and development. The research findings provide various insights to tailor-make the HR strategies in IT R & D organization for better performance and results.

KEYWORDS

millennials, learning preferences, workplace practices, training, productivity and performance, motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

India has become the digital capabilities hub of the world with major global digital talent present in the country. Indian IT core competencies and strengths have attracted significant investments from major countries. India's software industry body NASSCOM indicates that IT is a sector (Nasscom, 2019) which will likely be one of the largest and attractive industries that host millennials workforce in the days to come. The current IT organizational workforce is comprised of a mix of employees of various generations, namely Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976), Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1990) and Millennials (born since 1990). While the Baby Boomers at the workplace are retiring, the gap is filled by Millennials workforce.

While diverse workforce brings in unique background and perspectives, organizations need to understand employee communication, technology usage and learning preferences to ensure positive work environment and engage (Kieran, 2017) all generations of workforce. If organizations do not align to the changing patterns of learning, the training programs may become ineffective, time-consuming, expensive affecting the productivity and performance of individuals as well as the organization. Employees need to receive most up-to-date training to ensure best learning experience. The business progresses when the training and learning experience of the personnel progresses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review has been undertaken to analyse various aspects of the subject and the key information that is pertinent to the study has been reproduced in this section.

Training is an essential part of the organization's success to create and cultivate best workplace learning policies and procedures. It attracts employees and in turn leads to higher retention rate. Addressing learning preferences of working classes by using appropriate learning tools and techniques could be a significant way of engaging and encouraging them at workplace.

The academic landscape from where the millennials are originating has also changed due to the availability of high-end technology and management programs. The changing landscape and technology drive pushes the millennials to explore new avenues of evolving fields in Data Science like Big Data, Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence, Analytics, Cloud Computing, Internet of Things, Block Chain and so on. Millennials expect their organizations to develop them on cutting-edge technologies and provide them opportunities to explore those areas. When they find that their organization is not keeping pace with the changing environment and not giving them opportunity to learn new technologies and utilise their talent they tend to switch the jobs. They find significant opportunities in the job market based on their needs and requirements (Deoras, 2019).

The HRD should proactively revisit training and development strategies on timely basis to tailor existing learning methods according to the millennials workforce demands and preferences (Everwise, 2017). Mentorship and career development programs could be an advantage for millennials, but it takes the involvement of baby boomers and other experienced workers to make the relationship work (Joanna et. al., 2016). The training and development strategies that are suitable for millennials mind-set are:

- On-the-Job learning through rotation programs
- Mentoring and reverse mentoring
- Flexibility at work expanding horizons
- Focus on Data Analytics
- Scope for risk-taking and empowerment through independent decision-making
- Employee Value Proposition as a training measure

Millennials demand that work should fit into the way they want to live, not the other way around. They are looking for stability, loyalty and opportunities to learn and grow. They are motivated to do the work but expect employers to share the load by providing relevant training and invest on their ongoing learning needs. Millennials desire workplaces that are collaborative in nature, revolve around teamwork with constant mentorship and are structured so that they have the ability to give and receive immediate feedback (Harry, 2017). Learning methods will have to continually adapt to engage and educate younger generation. However, there may be a possibility for not retaining the knowledge for future needs and analysis as they are attached to the technological world where any information can be searched and availed at finger tips (Arlene, 2008). Robust mentoring and succession planning makes millennials feel that they are cared, and enable them to strongly connect with organization. Building respectful relationships across the organization becomes paramount when a business possesses multi-generation workforce. Millennial preferred behaviours must be a major factor in the strategic planning and design of programs in organizations (Richard, 2006).

In instances of mixed-generation training audiences, balancing and understanding the needs of each generation is paramount. Implementation of entirely millennial preferred training design may not be appropriate. However, the loss of millennial employees because of lack of millennial-preferred training design has the potential to significantly impact organization's climate, future growth and its development. One potential consideration for organizations would be to adopt a holistic lifecycle approach to employee development. According to holistic approach, employees are not developed at one particular moment in time (orientation, during training, annual performance reviews) rather the entire employee lifecycle is considered as each employee develops; beginning with recruitment and ending with separation. Adopting holistic approach to HR strategy could aid in improving not only millennials retention and commitment but also improve the broader organizational climate (Lindsey, 2014).

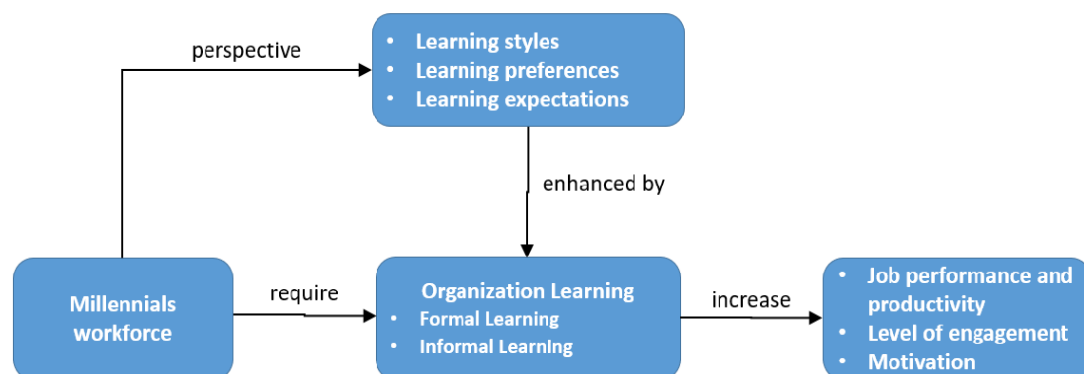
Millennials value technology and companies that are upgraded with their needs. Those organizations may have an upper-hand when it comes to attracting and retaining them (Megan, 2018). The organizations must rely on boomerang technique when it comes to employee development. Boomerang technique ensure employees to have a great learning and development experience at workplace, that those who departed always want to come back. As collective generation evolve at workplace, the learning formula must be modernised. Progressive L & D teams need to embrace informal and formal programs and create ecosystem that offers diverse learning modalities that appeal to contemporaries. As a result, the organization continues to innovate new content, new technologies, enhance learner's experience and add value to training programs (Kieran, 2017).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Millennial workforce has a strong desire for rapid career progression. It motivates them to use available learning opportunities and work on cutting edge technology to meet job requirements. Traditional learning experience and tools the organization provides may not work for new generation workforce to work efficiently individually and collectively. With large number of millennials entering the organization, the challenge for HRD practitioners in the workplace is to better support learning so that employees develop individually and also enhance organizational performance. Millennials hop jobs more frequently in search for a better, more competitive positions. They opt to find new opportunities when they feel that they have outgrown their current role, technology or workplace. It indicates employers to tailor to younger generation workforce wants and preferences. Their desire and drive to learn will propel them forward and make them more valuable. Employers should focus on retaining millennials through updated people and training activities that create opportunities and drive engagement. By offering safe learning environments and regular career conversations, employers can motivate them to attain their career goals with clear outcomes.

Learning needs of millennials are different from previous generation workforce. The organization's training and development procedures, learning practices has a direct impact on millennials job performance, productivity, level of engagement and motivation. Figure 1 shows how addressing younger generation learning preferences at workplace impact job productivity, performance, motivation, engagement levels and overall business results.

FIGURE 1: LEARNING PREFERENCES OF MILLENNIALS AND ITS IMPACT



The key problem areas pertaining to the research are summarized below:

1. Understand the learning practices that increase the productivity and performance of Millennials at the workplace
2. Identify organizational training and development programs that engage and motivate Millennials at the workplace

For the study, the learning preferences of millennials in IT industry R & D work environment was explored. The setting for the study was appropriate as the organization hosts almost 4000 personnel with a fair mix of seasoned professionals and new generation workforce. Almost one-third of the organization's population comprises of millennials.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the research is to identify the factors that increase learning in millennials workforce based on their styles, preferences and expectations. The specific objective is to gather data from millennials group of R & D engineers in IT industry on their learning preferences, analyse and apply it for talent development, employee engagement, enhancement of productivity and performance.

LEARNING PREFERENCES OF MILLENNIALS

According to Knowles learning principles, every adult learner will have five characteristics - Self-concept, Adult learner experience, Readiness to learn, Orientation to learn and Motivation to learn

Based on andragogy principles and Millennials behaviours & attributes, their learning preferences are mainly on

- Customized content based on individual learning preferences
- Learn new concepts to practically apply to different scenarios
- Cross-functional learning with strong feedback loops
- Preference for non-structured learning environments
- Group learning to explore, engage, enquire and achieve

The tools that enable Millennials to grasp more are:

- **E-learning** – Younger generation are more adapted to the visual way of learning and acquire more through technology. For collaborative experience, they prefer Multimedia platforms and social learning platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, Swayam, edX, Udacity
- **Gamification** – The key learning outcome through games align them with organization needs. Few popular ways are gamified assessments, providing choices, leader boards for status update and feedback
- **Simulation based learning** – Blended learning such as business simulation, scenario based, peer-to-peer, active, case-based, outbound learning fosters holistic development (Aman, 2016)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As part of research, millennials were enquired to understand their learning styles, preferences and expectations at workplace to build up a body of primary knowledge and take note of the internal and external factors that impact their learning process. The methodology used for the research is described in Table 1.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

S. No	Parameter	Value
1	Type of Research	Exploratory
2	Length of Study	4 months
3	Research Instrument	Structured Questionnaire
4	Survey Administration	Email
5	Instrument Validity Testing	Cronbach Alpha
6	Sampling Type	Simple Random Sampling
7	Sample Size	51
8	Analysis	Descriptive, Pearson's Co-relation and Cronbach Alpha
9	Hypothesis Testing	Coefficients Analysis

SAMPLING DESIGN

Simple Random sampling technique was used for the study. The sample included 51 millennials consisting of male and female employees with different years of work experience (Appendix 2).

DATA COLLECTION

The primary data was collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) via email communication.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Millennials have different learning expectations and preferences at workplace than other generation crew
- The findings of the study could be extended to the millennials workforce of similar organization.
- The organization is interested to invest on employee training and development to keep them motivated, engaged and up-to-date

LIMITATIONS

- The sampling size is a limitation of the study.
- The sample is restricted to a specific work environment of a leading IT company in India.
- No direct interactions such as face-face interviews were conducted to seek inputs from research participants.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Tailor made training programs on upskilling significantly improves job productivity and performance of Millennials workforce

H2: Higher level of engagement in Millennials can be achieved with continuous learning and development programs at the workplace

H3: Higher level of engagement motivates and significantly influences job performance and productivity of Millennials workforce

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected through the survey responses was collated and tabulated. The parameters tested, the tests performed and the results are as listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2: TESTS USED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

S.No	Parameter	Test	Table
1	Descriptive Statistics	Mean, Std. Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis	Table 3
2	Reliability Testing	Cronbach Alpha	Table 4, 5 & 6
3	Data Correlation	Pearson's Correlation	Table 7
4	Hypothesis Testing	Coefficients Analysis	Table 8, 9 & 10

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive data analysis of the responses collected through the survey is shown in Table 3. It includes mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. All the ten questions indicate negative skewness. Seven out of ten questions have kurtosis less than zero which indicates flatter than a normal distribution with a wider peak. The standard deviation and variables explains how the measurements of the group are spread out. The distribution of data outlines to proceed with the analysis.

TABLE 3: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Questions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Q1	51	4.549	0.673	-1.621	0.333	3.034	0.656
Q2	51	4.353	0.594	-0.291	0.333	-0.627	0.656
Q3	51	4.706	0.502	-1.416	0.333	1.071	0.656
Q4	51	4.49	0.644	-0.897	0.333	-0.212	0.656
Q5	51	4.373	0.747	-1.04	0.333	0.704	0.656
Q6	51	4.176	0.842	-0.769	0.333	-0.047	0.656
Q7	51	4.49	0.644	-0.897	0.333	-0.212	0.656
Q8	51	3.824	0.842	-0.488	0.333	-0.11	0.656
Q9	51	4.451	0.61	-0.63	0.333	-0.497	0.656
Q10	51	3.882	0.864	-0.348	0.333	-0.52	0.656

Reliability Test

The research instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha to measure the internal reliability of different questions. The alpha coefficient shown in Tables 4, 5 and 6 prove substantially that the instrument is highly reliable and valid.

Table 4 shows the Cronbach Alpha test output for Questions – Q1, Q2 and Q3. The internal consistency is high as the value of Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.658. It shows that these three questions can be grouped together and represent the job productivity and performance.

TABLE 4: CRONBACH ALPHA - GROUP 1 - Q1, Q2 AND Q3 - JOB PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.658	3

Table 5 shows the Cronbach Alpha test output for Questions – Q4, Q5 and Q6. The internal consistency is high as the value of Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.61. It shows that these three questions can be grouped together and represent the level of engagement.

TABLE 5: CRONBACH ALPHA - GROUP 2 - Q4, Q5 AND Q6 - LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.61	3

Table 6 shows the Cronbach Alpha test output for Questions – Q7, Q8, Q9 and Q10. The internal consistency is high as the value of Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.654. It shows that these four questions can be grouped together and represent training and development.

TABLE 6: CRONBACH ALPHA - GROUP 3 - Q7, Q8, Q9 AND Q10 - TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.654	4

Pearson's correlation Test

Pearson's correlation coefficient test which measures the statistical relationship between variables is shown in Table 7. For the study sample size, the values above 0.4 are considered to have strong correlation.

TABLE 7: PEARSON'S CORRELATION TEST

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Q1	1	-0.056	0.06	0.027	0.225	0.204	0.366	0.078	0.057	0.217
Q2	-0.056	1	0.293	0.432	0.388	0.298	0.077	0.277	0.378	0.071
Q3	0.06	0.293	1	0.395	0.442	0.183	0.395	0.09	0.344	0.301
Q4	0.027	0.432	0.395	1	0.49	0.113	0.399	0.222	0.213	0.285
Q5	0.225	0.388	0.442	0.49	1	0.484	0.462	0.254	0.514	0.461
Q6	0.204	0.298	0.183	0.113	0.484	1	0.138	0.326	0.326	0.301
Q7	0.366	0.077	0.395	0.399	0.462	0.138	1	0.247	0.229	0.348
Q8	0.078	0.277	0.09	0.222	0.254	0.326	0.247	1	0.305	0.097
Q9	0.057	0.378	0.344	0.213	0.514	0.326	0.229	0.305	1	0.368
Q10	0.217	0.071	0.301	0.285	0.461	0.301	0.348	0.097	0.368	1

HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND RESULTS

The tables 8, 9 and 10 below shows the significance level, based on which the hypothesis for the research study is accepted or rejected. If the significance level is below 0.05, it indicates hypothesis as accepted. If the significance level is more than 0.05, it indicates hypothesis as rejected.

The coefficients of hypothesis1 and p-value are highlighted in Table 8.

TABLE 8: COEFFICIENTS OF HYPOTHESIS 1

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p-value)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.801	0.334		11.38	0
Training and development	0.236	0.074	0.416	3.207	0.002

a. Dependent Variable: Job productivity and performance

The coefficients of hypothesis 2 and p-value are highlighted in Table 9.

TABLE 9: COEFFICIENTS OF HYPOTHESIS 2

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p-value)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.459	0.535		2.729	0.009
Training and development	0.694	0.128	0.613	5.435	0

a. Dependent Variable: Level of engagement

The coefficients of hypothesis 3 and p-value are highlighted in Table 10.

TABLE 10: COEFFICIENTS OF HYPOTHESIS 3

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p-value)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.965	0.348		11.406	0
Level of engagement	0.198	0.076	0.349	2.604	0.012

a. Dependent Variable: Job productivity and performance

H1: Tailor made training programs on upskilling significantly improves job productivity and performance of Millennials workforce

Table 8 shows the hypothesis test results of H1. With p-value 0.002, the hypothesis can be retained and hence can be concluded that the tailor made training programs to upskill millennials significantly improves their job productivity and performance. Along with correlation test results, the study substantially indicates that millennials prefer web-based programs for a better learning experience. The training programs that upskill them with new technology, applications and tools significantly improves their job productivity and performance. All the categories of gender and varied work experience millennial employees are in the agreement.

H2: Higher level of engagement is achieved through continuous learning and development in the workplace

Table 9 shows the hypothesis test results of H2. With p-value 0, the hypothesis can be retained and hence can be concluded that higher level of engagement is achieved in millennials through continuous learning and development in the workplace. Based on correlation test shown in Table 7, millennials are not seeking personalised training programs, rather they look for opportunities to work on live projects, case studies. Their job satisfaction level goes up when they take risks by experimenting on the job. It gives them opportunity to mingle and network with colleagues and industry experts better. All the categories of gender and varied work experience millennial employees are in the agreement.

H3: Higher level of engagement significantly influences job productivity and performance

Table 10 shows the hypothesis test results of H3. With p-value 0.012, the hypothesis can be retained and hence can be concluded that higher level of engagement significantly influences millennials job performance and productivity. The Cronbach alpha score in Table 6 indicates that the responses were consistent. According to correlation test shown in Table 7, millennials prefer to have a mentor who can guide them to perform better in the job. They look forward to network with colleagues, industry experts on social media platform to enhance the learning experience. They like to be connected with external world on social media platform

and are keen in developing themselves in latest technology, applications and tools to feel empowered, increase productivity and deliver superior results. All the categories of gender and varied work experience millennial employees are in the agreement.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the research are listed below:

- Millennials do not seek personalised training programs, rather they prefer web-based learning, opportunities to work on live projects, case studies and a culture of experimenting and risk taking on the job
- Millennials believe that training programs that upskill them on new technology, applications and tools can significantly improve their job productivity and performance
- Millennials prefer to keep them updated on new areas by networking with colleagues and industry experts at work place and social media platforms
- Millennials expect to jumpstart their career with the help of a mentor or buddy to improve job performance
- The opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership qualities at workplace motivate millennials

CONCLUSION

The research findings empirically validate learning preferences of millennials workforce. The study contributes to the understanding that, providing strategic training inputs with clear linkage to the learning needs of millennials, results in better employee value proposition, improvement in job productivity and performance leading to superior business results. The field study analytics indicate that innovative and creative learning practices substantially increases the productivity and performance of the younger generation at the workplace. In addition to that, the study also proves that variety in the areas of technology usage, communication, social networking and collaboration enhance millennials learning process.

In relative to previous generations, millennials are short on attention, high on expectations, low on commitment to stay in an organization for long. Training bridges the gap between organization expectations, employee expectations and the dynamics of ever changing technology and job market. Therefore, organizations must align to employee priorities and encourage them in innovation, pro-activity, creativity, risk-taking, entrepreneurial pursuits to focus on corporate strategic goals and objectives. The research findings are helpful to tailor existing organizational training practices and provide strategic training inputs to upskill and enhance productivity, performance, employee engagement of millennials workforce.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Gender	O Male	O Female				
Year of birth	O Before 1990	O On or After 1990				
Total work experience	O Between 0-5 years	O Between 5-10 years				
S.No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I like to have personalized training content which improves my job productivity and performance	O	O	O	O	O
2	Web-based training helps me to learn new technology, applications, tools and enhance learning experience	O	O	O	O	O
3	I like to have live projects, case studies as they help me to learn concepts to apply practically	O	O	O	O	O
4	I believe in experimenting and risk-taking on the job which increase job satisfaction	O	O	O	O	O
5	I like to network with colleagues, industry experts on social media platform and this will enhance my learning	O	O	O	O	O
6	I am empowered to create my own career plan and determine my training needs	O	O	O	O	O
7	I like to have a mentor within organization who helps me increase job performance	O	O	O	O	O
8	The training I get helps me to work at an optimum level and handle stressful situations at work	O	O	O	O	O
9	Working in teams and opportunities to develop leadership skills motivates me	O	O	O	O	O
10	I like to reverse mentor the seniors in my organization, in the areas of my strengths	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX 2: RESPONSES CATEGORY

Gender	Responses	Work Experience	Responses
Male	33	0-5 years	45
Female	18	5-10 years	6
Total	51	Total	51

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