The Millennials Culture Shock

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**Abstract**

As a program director of three radio stations, the team consists of over 35 diverse key individuals. For this inquiry project, I will be focusing on one radio station that is a millennial targeted radio station that is formatted musically as an urban hip hop and r&b radio station, which is targeted to the age group between 18 years of age to 34 years of age. This station has seven on-air personalities and three promotions assistants that fit into the millennial age group. The role of a program director is the overall daily operation of a radio station, which encompasses many different areas. Concerning this case study, I feel that an area to focus on is the responsibility to manage, direct, coach, train, support, and develop each talent and their on-air craft. As you can imagine the personalities are vast in range, and each person is very different in what motivates them. I have found that managing millennials had been quite challenging because of the nature of their culture. The purpose of this case study will be to provide mangers with tactics to communicate effectively with their millennial staff. For the team to have direction, it is necessary to understand the culture of the millennial. I will use the intercultural communication theory because it is the “study of differences and similarities of cultural content and its influences on persons within and across different cultures.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 156) My conclusion will be that the culture shock will take place for both millennials and non-millennial managers. This culture shock will help millennials and non-millennial managers work through the approach to management and communication with each other which will lead to a successful partnership between the two groups.

**Findings**

Millennials were born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. In 2017, they “account for [53 million workers](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/11/millennials-surpass-gen-xers-as-the-largest-generation-in-u-s-labor-force/) in the United States.” (Patel, 2017, para. 1) This case study will explore and reveal the culture shock for millennials when they are managed by non-millennials and the dialogic learning model will be applied. Intercultural communication will be demonstrated to be beneficial to connecting the two age groups. Bridging the gap between millennials and non-millennial managers will be necessary because “millennials will increasingly dominate the workplace in the coming years.” (Patel, 2017, para. 1) In the workplace, success looks different for different company cultures. Therefore, we acknowledge that “there is absolutely no cookbook recipe for success (Collins & Porras, 2004, p. 248) and for the radio business to develop further it is imperative to understand the culture of the millennial and tackle ways to manage their productivity. In my experience with Millennials, they place value on their workplace, often becoming friends with colleagues. In regards to their supervisor, they prefer one that can give them quick feedback, listen to ideas and provide them with opportunities as they view their boss as a mentor. The main culture shock for millennials is the level of being held accountable for their actions. In turn, this means for non-millennial managers the culture shock of their lack of desire to be held accountable. It has been my experience that millennials can tend to be against authority, directives, and unsolicited advice. However, they embrace the creative side, desire responsibilities on their terms, and enjoy no constraints. A recent situation highlights the accountability culture shock of millennials and having an issue of authority. I had a situation where a task was to be completed by Rebecca, a millennial employee by a certain day and time that involved a third party and their product. Rebecca did not receive the product from the third party by the required deadline and the employee used an outdated product. It is proper procedure that the employees are to notify their supervisors when duties cannot be completed as scheduled. Rebecca did not notify any manager and did not try to troubleshoot the issue by contacting the third party. This issue took place because Rebecca did not check her company email account where she would have found the email from the third party with links to download the product. The communication ethics issue with this situation is that there was no follow through on Rebecca’s end. This situation deals also with millennials lack of willingness to follow directives and desire for short cuts in order to get tasks completed.

Non-millennial managers desire millennial employees to have a level of commitment, respect, and patience, and this is important because “communication ethics in business and professional settings require a commitment to two complementary communicative actions: clarity of direction and the courage to pivot and change direction if and when necessary.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 176) In essence, the two groups can complement each other if they are willing to adapt to change. As a non-millennial manger, if I have explained the expected action plan for the requirements of your employment and you agree to those requirements, the expectation is that you fulfill those requirements. To further describe this situation, George a millennial employee does not agree with the daily expectations of his role after accepting the position. The millennial employee was in the state of culture shock of the workplace expectation of actually completing their assigned duties. The communication ethics issue in the situation is that the millennial employee has no regard for directives and at times refuses to complete the required tasks. The millennial employee even went as far to inform the non-millennial manager that the requirements were pointless and not fitting into the culture of the millennial lifestyle. The discussion point was that the requirements of daily digital blogs/vlogs and social media postings were not significant. I showcased the importance of connecting the millennial employee to the required duties by referencing company policy. Which I further backed up the rationale for the requirements showcasing information data from the PEW research center stating that “81% of Adults 18-29 use Facebook, 64% use Instagram, and that young adults were among the earliest social media adopters and continue to use these sites at high levels.” (Pew Research, 2018, para. 3) The millennial employee then confessed that he simply didn’t want to perform the duties. Over time, the employee has done a better job in performing his daily tasks but I find myself often reminding them about the requirements and double-checking to ensure that they had been completed.

The descriptive of millennials, also known as generation Y, has a broad range of descriptions both positive and negative. Through Facebook, which is an American online social media and social networking service there was a poll question posed in regards to millennials. “Describe the millennial age group with one word or phrase” some commenters described millennials with positive attributes such as curious, creative, innovative, powerful, brilliant, smart, courageous, idealistic, woke, entrepreneur, daring, different, vocal, thinkers, resilient, bold, eager, and collaborative. There was also negative descriptions of millennials the leading description was entitled along with other titles such as unarmed, impatient, asleep, lost, impractical, defiant, misunderstood, misrepresented, disappointed, confused, microwave, arrogant, naive, ungrateful, passionless, lazy, the right now generation, power-hungry, shortchanged, tired, all talk no action, self-centered, egotistical, undisciplined, big spenders, sensitive, spoiled, annoying, materialistic, instant, hard-headed, and self-involved. The Facebook poll rendered both positive and negative descriptions for millennials and gave interesting perspective.

As a manager of millennials and non-millennials, I have witness quite a few of these positive and negative connotations. However, I am sure that the millennials I manage have positive and negatives viewpoints about non-millennial managers and our old fashioned ways. However, many of my counterparts view millennials as a threat. I see them as a bonus to keep our radio industry alive and grow its potential.

**Discussion**

Intercultural communication fits this study of millennials because it is the “study of differences and similarities of cultural content and its influences on persons within and across different cultures.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 156) In the case of Rebecca, it was the difference in personal accountability cultures. The similarities are that we both wanted the job done; she just did not perform it correctly or go out of her way to troubleshoot this issue. In my case, I used my professional influence to review the duty requirements step by step, give a mandate that outdated products were prohibited, and that she is aware that her work and work ethic are reviewed weekly. The culture shock for non-millennial managers when dealing with millennial employees is understandable. They typically don’t live by the same set of ethics as the generation that precedes them like the Baby Boomers (born between 1940 and 1964) and Generation X (born between the late ’60s and 1980). “By 2020, Millennials will be 50 percent of the workforce” (Economy, 2015, para. 1), making it imperative that millennial and non-millennial managers utilize practical communication skills that would aid in bridging the gap between the different cultures. In the case of George and his unwillingness to perform daily required duties such as blog/vlog and social media postings. It was imperative to influence his decision to actually perform his duties as expected because it was the employment requirements and it added to the success of the company and his professional success.

There is so much to learn from each age group which could help the other excel at their craft and reach their full potential. The dialogic learning model is a key to the success of building relationships between millennials and non-millennial managers because the “dialogic perspective requires meeting and understanding various communication contexts and applications.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 94) Communicating with millennials can be a challenge, millennials feel the same about communicating with non-millennial managers and “dialogic ethics stresses the situatedness of ethical communicative interaction between persons.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 94)

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the intercultural communication theory assists those that manage millennials and the dialogic learning model assisted in repairing the culture shock between millennials and non-millennial managers. Non-millennials need to understand the culture of millennials and accept they ask the “why” questions because “clueing your employees into your decision-making will help them think through their own contributions and projects in light of the company’s bigger picture.” (Disson, 2018, para. 7) Millennials would rather call their supervisors “coaches” than bosses and they thrive on feedback. Therefore, “instead of telling your employees to “figure it out” and come back with a final product, consider building in additional sessions for brainstorming and feedback.” (Disson, 2018, para. 13) However, not all of the understanding falls solely with the non-millennial managers there should be interest on the millennials end as well. Millennials should take the time to understand the mindset and culture of their non-millennial managers as they are rich with knowledge that most are eager to share. In order for this to take place “trust is considered the number one contributor to team effectiveness.” (Jones, 2017, para. 9) The dialogic learning model can be instrumental in assisting the relationship between millennials and their non-millennial managers because the common sense factor is “not innate, nor is it common. Common sense is a by-product of what we know and what we practice.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 63) From both spectrums of the age groups they should “curtail the impulse to judge something as having or lacking common sense.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 63)

**Recommendations**

This case study makes the recommendation that non-millennial managers utilize the intercultural communication theory for the various roles at a radio station. Also, applying the dialogic learning model to communication issues between millennials and non-millennials can assist in communication breakdowns.

In an article by Peter Economy for Inc. entitled “*9 Powerful Tips for Communicating Better with Millennials”*, he identified nine powerful tips for improving the communication approach with millennials. “1. Keep it brief, but meaningful. 2. At the same time, provide details 3. Chose the best medium for communication 4. Understand the 24/7 communication cycle. 5. Communicate the path to career growth 6. Don’t condescend or make jokes about age 7. Demonstrate fairness in the workplace 8. Commit to a social bottom line 9. Most important, nurture their passion.” (Economy, 2015, para 5-13) These nine tips fit into the four questions that the dialogic learning model poses “1. Listening without demand: What is happening in a given moment? Whether we like or dislike that moment, we must engage the question(s) of a given moment. 2. Attentiveness: What are the coordinating grounds upon which stand the self, the Other, and the historical. 3. Dialogic negotiation: What temporal communicative ethics answers emerge between persons, pointing to communicative options for action, belief, and understanding? And 4. Temporal dialogic ethic competence: What work and what changes might now assist?” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 94).

The listening without demand portion of the dialogic learning model in regards to Peter Economy’s *9 powerful tips for communicating better with millennials* is in line with tips “1. Keep it brief, but meaningful and 2. At the same time, provide details.” (Economy, 2015, para. 5-6) These tips relate to listening without demand because it is “attending to what is before is – appreciated or not.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 225) The rationale for this comparison is due to that “business and professional communication ethics rejects the demand of keeping a given direction forever in place. The direction is at best one concern, with the other being change; the ultimate goal is survival and competitiveness, assisting all those who depend upon the success of given business and professional communication setting.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 186).

I found attentiveness from the dialogic learning model within Peter Economy’s *9 powerful tips for communicating better with millennials* with tips *“*5. Communicate the path to career growth and 9. Most important, nurture their passion.” (Economy, 2015, para. 9 and 13) I made this comparison because “attentiveness to survival and competitiveness as the goods of business and professional communication ethics requires public accounting for how such a good guides a given set of people. The good in sense is the ability to communication an action plan for growth and understand that persons passion towards that growth.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 188)

In terms of dialogic negotiation we know that “negotiation reminds us of the consistency of change that “I” can never control, but that “we” must negotiate together.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 132) I found that this was comparing Economy’s *9 powerful tips for communicating better with millennials* were tips *“*3. Chose the best medium for communication 4. Understand the 24/7 communication cycle and 7. Demonstrate fairness in the workplace.” (Economy, 2015, para. 7, 8 and 11)

Temporal dialogic ethic competence is the mainstay of “what worked, and what changes might now assist?” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 170) And this thought process with Economy’s *9 powerful tips for communicating better with millennials* was tip “8. Commit to a social bottom line” (Economy, 2015, para. 12) because the social aspect of who we are is continually changing.

The willingness of both non-millennials and millennials to come to a joint meeting ground can influence “organizational functions of the what/communicative practices and the how/understanding shape an ongoing community of memory.” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 145) This community of memory can assist in engagement in the present form and help build for a future that is on the horizon. If these recommendations are applied to situations that were highlighted in the findings section of the case study with Rebecca and George, we can tackle these and many other communication ethics issues between millennials and non-millennial managers.

**Implications**

If the culture shock for millennials when they are managed by non-millennials is not addressed, we are at risk of not developing young talent for our growing industry. Devin, one of my fellow colleagues, a non-millennial manager of millennials remarked that “millennials were developed in the cheat code era.” The more I thought about it, and it totally made sense. In that age group during their teenage years, if they wanted to advance to the highest level of a video game, they could go to the World Wide Web and search for the code to help them improve quickly. We must recognize that “we live in a culture in which instant gratification manifests itself in immediate recognition.” (Arnett, Harden, & Bell, 2009, p. 109) We live in a world of instant messages, instant answers on google, instant video to a person a hundred miles away. Everything is instant. If the business models don’t address the instant gratification of the millennial generation, non-millennial managers will be faced with their own culture shock in years to come.

If we solve the culture shock for millennials when dealing with non-millennial managers with intercultural communication and using the dialogic ethics model with the cases like Rebecca and George, the business model can retain, grow, improve, and promote those millennials in the industry. Current businesses should try to understand their millennial employees because at one time current non-millennial managers were once in their age range in a new environment dealing with a different generation of various values and cultures. If the culture shock barriers are resolved then the workplace culture can foster and support communication differences between the millennial and non-millennial managers which between the two assets to solve problems, grown the business, and understand each group's valuable input to the culture of the company.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The Harvard Business Review stated that “Founders and influential leaders often set new cultures in motion and imprint values and assumptions that persist for decades.” (Groysberg et al., 2018, para. 3). Radio should always be reinventing itself to keep up with new trends and especially with millennials because they are currently the most diverse group in the workforce. We live in a world of instant messages, instant answers on google, instant video to a person a hundred miles away. Everything is instant, so future research with actual millennials should be visual and interactive. Also, millennials are on the go, so the research projects should be quick and engaging.

Research topic ideas include; the relationship between millennials and non-millennial workforces. What is instant gratification for the millennial generation verses non-millennial managers? How do millennials identify with business models? How do millennials prefer to be managed? What do millennial employees look for in company? What motivates millennials consistently?

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