

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN MILLENNIALS AT THE WORPLACE: UNDERSTANDING, RETAINING AND DEVELOPING MALAYSIAN MILLENNIALS

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Abstract: *Millennials will be making 75% of the workforce by year 2025, however little research has been found on Malaysian millennials at the workplace. This research hopes to identify what is important to the Malaysian millennials, if their personal and organisation values should match, what encourages organisation loyalty and how they would like to be managed and developed. This qualitative study uses a semi-structured open-ended interview questions where 20 urbanites between the ages of 18 to 35 were interviewed. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and four master themes were uncovered; organisation culture, empowerment, development and self-actualisation. The four themes were used to answer the three research questions posed in this study. The findings from this research will allow future research to be done more thoroughly on Malaysian Millennials at the Workplace in the hope that the development of specific hypothesis or prediction can be tested in future research.*

Keywords: *Malaysia, Millennials, Workplace, Understanding, Developing*

Introduction

Millennials, born between 1980s and 2000s (PwC, 2011) has required many organisations to rethink and redesign the workplace. They are an important generation to study because research has shown how they will reshape the economy by changing the way business is done in the future (GoldmanSachs, 2017).

Millennials are expected to form 75% of the global workforce by year 2025 and in some companies such as Ernst and Young, they already make up 60% of the workforce (Schawbel, 2013). In Malaysia, millennials make up 40% to 50% of the current workforce (PwC, 2011), and will soon be facing an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will see disruptive changes affecting business and the

employment landscape (World Economic Forum, 2016). So, while millennials are entering the workforce, organisations will not only deal with a different generation but need to understand how to engage them in steering the organisation forward.

Literature Review

Millennials and Their Values

Co-founder of Lean in Malaysia, Abir Abd Rahim said millennials are not demanding but are more vocal and independent thinkers who make their jobs part of their life's bigger meaning (TalentCorp Malaysia, 2016). Millennials intuitively align their objectives with strategic plans, are optimistic about the future of organisations, value teamwork, community, relationship and care about corporate visions and objectives (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They have potential to be change agents in enhancing organisation operations. However, this may be seen as a drawback when millennials who believe in big organisation missions become picky in the tasks they wish to do which causes management frustration.

Research also indicates values, transparency and impact on society are important to millennials. In a study conducted by University of Zielona Gora, 89.2% of the participants expected integrity in their future employers (Stankiewicz & Łychmus, 2017). 27% also reported being unable to work with an organisation disinterested in social and environmental impact and 25% said they would stay away from unethical businesses (Stankiewicz & Łychmus, 2017).

A survey found Millennials value importance in the work that they do, and want recognition (PwC, 2011). It is important to them to represent an organisation that upholds their core values. 88% highlighted they wanted employers with a corporate social responsibility to match theirs and 86% would leave an organisation whose values no longer matched theirs (PwC, 2011). This is similar to the findings in the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey that gathered 300 respondents from Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, where 70% of millennials believe their personal values and the organisation they work for should be similar and 80% indicated matching of their core values with the organisation would influence whether they would stay or leave the organisation in the next five years. The survey also indicated that millennials favour businesses that behave in a responsible manner and their impact in societies. This is coherent with findings that Malaysia is one of the top ten countries who volunteers, measured through Gallup's Civic Engagement Index (Kong, 2016).

The Deloitte Millennial survey found that what influences decision making were, their personal values/morals system ranking first and meeting the organisation's formal targets fifth. Sufficient to say that even when making high level decisions, millennials will use their own moral judgement first. On the subject of values and ethics, they found millennials focusing on sense of purpose around people rather than growth or profit maximisation. There were differences between priorities of the organisation, which is more profit centric while millennials tend to be more people centric. This suggests millennial leaders focusing on human capital as assets that steer the organisation towards success. This is perhaps why millennials do not characterise a leading organisation in numbers and figures but on how people, purpose, development and growth is emphasised in the long run (Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2016). While the studies/surveys above clearly indicate that millennials are creatures of values with Malaysians only being a small percentage of their target audience, this study hopes to find out through its first research question, "What are the personal values of the Malaysian Millennials and how important is it for it to match the organisation's values?"

Millennials And Organisation Loyalty

The PwC (2011) indicated that loyalty towards an organisation was low, 72% felt they compromised when they accepted a job, meaning, if there was another opportunity presented, they would consider it. Similar findings were reflected in the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey where 69% said they would have left their organisations before 2020. This data also includes millennials who have a senior position in an organisation, suggesting that this is not influenced by career pathways. The survey added that the lack of loyalty may be because their leadership skills are not fully developed in which over 70% of respondents from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand agreed. The survey also highlighted that there is a high percentage of individuals agreeing that if their leadership ambitions are supported, they will most likely stay in an organisation. This is synonymous with the findings from PwC (2011) reports which highlights 52% attributing career progression as an attractive feature with 44% indicating competitive salaries as the second priority.

The PwC 2011 report indicates millennials are ambitious, willing to learn and move quickly upwards in an organisation, however may leave if they don't get what they want. They prefer ample feedback as it provides assurance, especially through a mentor and mentee system and remained loyal when they are valued, looked after, appreciated and had a relationship, almost family like with co-workers and leaders in the organisation (Hershatler & Epstein, 2010).

Myers and Oetzel (2003) reported giving millennials more responsibility with broader issues creates involvement and increases organisation attachment. The more involved they are, the less bored they are at work, which is a reason for turnover (Alsop, 2008). In fact, Google and Apple, who have been successful in attracting talented millennials are constantly innovating ideas and are unstuck in the traditionalist way of retaining the workplace, which is why they appeal to millennials. Though not specifically targeting millennials, their culture especially towards empowerment, management approach and recruitment and retention programmes appeal to the millennials (PwC, 2011) and attracting the best talents.

Organisation openness may also be influential in determining a millennial's organisation loyalty as they feel empowered when leadership is transparent. Some studies have shown that millennials are not loyal to organisations but are committed to individuals (Pasioka, 2009; Patalano, 2008) especially towards leaders whom they have a meaningful connection with (Marston, 2007).

PwC (2011) also cited development and work-life balance as more important rewards in comparison to financial rewards, similar to findings from the Deloitte Millennial Survey where work-life balance surpassed career progression after competitive salaries were taken out of the equation. This is similar to findings in Hershatler and Epstein's (2010) study that found millennials preferred work-life balance, flexible working arrangements and had desire for sabbaticals to explore their passions and volunteer and had no problems making this demand to their employers. Findings from Carless and Wintle (2007) and Smola and Sutton (2002) also show millennials prefer flexible career paths because they prioritized work-life balance. According to Beekman (2011), giving millennials flexibility through work schedule is highly related to creating empowerment and independence at the workplace as millennials decide how and where to do work, which increases motivation (PwC, 2014).

The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey also indicated that organisation loyalty will increase if employees were satisfied with flexi-hours, options to work from home, more brainstorming

sessions at work, coaching, mentoring and development of new leadership skills. Hence, the second research questions this study aims to find is “What does it take to increase the Malaysian Millennials loyalty to the organisation for the next 5 years?”

Developing Millennials

According to Deborah Henretta, Group President, Asia & Global Specialty Channel of Proctor and Gamble, the workplace and workforce is going to change tremendously as Emotional Intelligence is emphasised over Intelligent Quotient as knowledge will be accessible through hand-held devices and computer technologies (PwC, 2011). The study by Hershatter and Epstein (2010) indicates that millennials have been hard-wired by technology, making them contributors to the fast-paced business world of immediacy. The internet enables information processing to be done quickly however organisations and people are more complex, hence individuals with higher EQ would be a greater contribution to the workplace as administrative tasks, systems and processes will eventually become automated or completed with technology like artificial intelligence giving employees room to focus on more complex tasks that require higher order thinking. These drivers of change and the type of importance and purpose millennials seek in the workplace would lead to changes in the way organisations work.

Millennials are the first generation of employees entering the workplace with a better understanding of key business tools that even senior workers have yet to grasp (PwC, 2011). Based on the generational gap further elaborated below, we witness a pattern of individuals gaining more personal understanding and an emphasis of personal needs as the years go by, which means millennials are willing to learn as long as they are exposed to a myriad of things, progress and gain constant feedback to improve themselves. This means even the management style in developing millennials will be different from previous generations, with a focus on their needs.

Findings also indicate that millennials have a strong relationship with their supervisors and this contributes to long-term satisfaction in the workplace (Jokisaari & Nurmi 2009; Martin 2005) and value feedback from their leaders (Society of Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2009).

71% expected to do an overseas assignment throughout their career, citing traveling to countries like US, UK and Australia favourable while only 11% were willing to work in India and 2 % in mainland China (PwC, 2011).

Sajith Sivananthan, the Managing Director of Google Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and New Emerging Markets said Google benefits from the millennial workforce due to their high leverage on technology. He added, a lot of google products are developed from within because the Google culture enables workforce to focus on opportunity, embrace challenges and are willing to learn (Talent Corp Malaysia, 2016).

Based on the study above, it appears that millennials' loyalty depends on opportunities from their organisations. If there is no room for progression, training and development opportunities, competitive rates, challenge and autonomy; they may switch jobs. If they don't find something suitable in all the organisations they approach, they may opt to work for small start-ups or start their own business. Since millennials are tech-savvy and self-learning, they will equip themselves appropriately to be entrepreneurial.

On digital literacy, millennials want organisation that work on digital platforms where systems and processes are fast, easy and efficient and operating digitally. Melissa Norman, Country

Managing Director of Kelly Services Malaysia said in an interview with BFM that tech-savvy millennials expected their workplaces to be ahead of the tech curve and enables the use of social media, IM and other social media platforms in the workplace (BFM, 2009). This raises the third research question for this study which is “How would Malaysian Millennials like to be managed and developed in the workforce?”

While the literature review does include a small percentage of Malaysians, PEMANDU (2016), highlights there are differences between Eastern and Western Millennials. According to a local marketing agency, Creative Paramedics, believe cultural and socio-economic factors influences millennials’ behaviour. A clear comparison of this is displayed in which an 18-year-old Western young adult would have gained financial-independence whereas Asians tend to be dependent on the families until much later in (PEMANDU, 2016). The differences in the economic situation, the weakening ringgit and the increasing property prices are some of the financial factors Malaysian Millennials consider.

Conceptual Framework

The main framework behind this research is the generational theory by Karl Mannheim which was later popularized in the 90s by Neil Howe and William Strauss (Codrington, 2008). According to the generational theory, the time in which a person is born affects the development of their perspective of the world. This is based on their value system which is constructed in the first 10 years of an individual’s life based on their interaction and experiences with their family, friends, communities and significant events that happens when they grow up (Codrington, 2008).

Hence, people who grow up in the same era, experience similar issues and are impacted by events that are similar and tend to have the same value system regardless of their place of birth, family socio-economic-status and background. These value systems becomes the predictor of how these individuals behave and act. A generation is typically described as 20 years in length representing the time of birth of a generation up to the time they come of age and start having their own children (Codrington, 2008). This theory involves looking deeper into the generations to identify similarities and differences that exists across the following generations. For the purpose of this study we will look into the millennial generation in closer detail.

Millennials grew up in a different world compared to the previous generation, hence their different worldview. They were exposed to rapid change, which has given them a set of priorities and expectations very different from the previous generations (GoldmanSachs, 2017). They grew to witness technology evolve, from VCR and cassettes, Walkman to CDs and iPod, dial-up connection to broadband fibre connection, this is the generation that were quick to adapt. They also were the ones that grew up to many social issues surrounding the world, poverty, terrorism, high school shootings, natural disasters and climate change. This is why millennials wants to clean things up and find consensus in a culture that tries to divide. In that, they focus on rebuilding institutions, value optimism and team-work (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Divorce rates increased in the 1970s to 1980s (Miller, 2014), which indicate that millennials were also children of divorce, separation and neglect which affects their schema and worldview making it instinctive for them to be influenced by greater impact. Millennials are more self-assured because of their experiences that enabled self-understanding. In that, they view their job as an enabler of purpose and fulfilment in their own life. Just like the Generation X, they prefer flexibility, aren’t afraid to question authority and value flat structured leadership instead of top-down approach. They want autonomy and value personal connection with colleagues.

Looking closer into Malaysia, 76% of 31,545,990 Malaysian population are urbanites, making room for 24% from the rural communities (Malaysian Digital Association, 2016). 21,056,125 (68.5%) of the entire population are internet users, with 5,368,070 (72.2%) owning household broadband, 20,650,133 (67.7%) users on top social network sites and 44,509,884 (144.8%) mobile subscriptions. According to Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission [MCMC] (2016), 37.9% of respondents said they were from a rural area and a 12.2% increase in internet usage in the rural community was reported. I believe this may be because many NGOs such as SOLS 24/7, a Malaysian based NGOs, among others, have been refurbishing old electronic devices and computers to equip the rural communities with access to the internet. MCMC (2016) also reported that non-users were typically above 50 years and an absence of formal education among the rural community did not hinder them from accessing the internet. This goes to show that a large population of Malaysians are users or have access to the internet. Millennials in Malaysia, especially urban Malaysians may be westernised due to technological advancements such as television including cable TV, internet, radio and even imported magazines. Besides the Asian financial crisis which had very little impact on the millennials, they grew up being exposed to popular sitcoms and programmes on TV, had accessibility to buy music or magazines from the US and UK and had the internet to experience a globalised world. They were able to enter chat windows and connect with people worldwide. Perhaps since there are remnants of the British colonialization and an importance given to the English language, many millennials grew up to English programmes, Disney cartoons; westernising this generation.

While Malaysia has its own identity, it's suffice to say that the Malaysian millennials grew up in a globalised world, and often looked at the west for reference. Pop culture was a huge part of most millennials and inter-racial marriages make Malaysian millennials diverse. The vastness of food, culture and diversity in this country makes integration and adaptation part of our identity and lifestyle. The Malay Muslims are also inherently becoming more westernised as they are exposed to more opportunities to attend elite schools, private universities or study abroad compared to the previous generation.

Based on the generational theory, I believe that Malaysian Millennials are similar to Western Millennials as their experiences and influences are alike and will be instrumental in reshaping Malaysia in the future. Using this theory and with the research questions posed in this study, the aim is to find out if Malaysian millennials are similar, generation wide.

Problem Statement

Millennials will soon dominate the workforce and they will eventually make way for the other changing generations to come. Organisations that do not attempt to understand, retain and develop them, may risk employing high potential and performing employees that contribute towards the organisation's goals if they do not change the way the organisation works. It is important for them to change for them to accommodate the younger generation that is to come.

Hence, it is vital for organisations to learn about them. It is with this problem statement in mind that this research paper aims to understand what is important to Malaysian millennials, what increases their organisation loyalty and how they would like to be managed and developed. The proposition made is that Millennials prefer flexibility, autonomy and empowerment in the workplace, organisations that match their core values, and leadership that is bottom up and these things will influence their loyalty to remain or leave an organisation. In this research,

urban millennials between the ages of 1982 to 2000 will be interviewed to see if the above proposition stands.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the personal values of Malaysian Millennials and how important it is for it to match the organization values?
2. What does it take to increase the Malaysian Millennials loyalty to the organisation for the next 5 years?
3. How would Malaysian Millennials like to be managed and developed in the workforce?

Significance of the Study

The findings from this qualitative study identifying key issues surrounding Malaysian Millennials, their values, how they would like to be developed and organisation loyalty may be the first step towards uncovering dimensions or factors that make them unique and different from other generations. The intent and scope of this study does not involve any attempt at parameter estimation via statistical sampling. As there is a paucity of research in Malaysia with identifiable conclusions on millennials' attitudes other than opinion polls, an exploratory study conducted through this research and its proposition will allow for more research to be done in this area in order to develop some specific hypothesis or prediction that can be tested in future research.

Research Paradigm

This research uses a traditional western epistemology worldview which is the philosophical branch that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Methodology

Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach used in this study is grounded theory, a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher will derive a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction which are grounded in the view of participants (Cresswell, 2003). According to Cresswell (2003), constructivists do not begin with a theory but "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings"(Creswell, 2003, p.9) throughout the research process. This is why this research will be a qualitative study using a semi-structured, open-ended interview to understand the worldview of the participants. Unstructured questions will also be used during an interview, if the researcher finds that there are interesting themes to probe further with, based on the participant's response. The data gathered will be analysed using thematic analysis whereby recurring and similar themes and patterns will be identified and grouped together into categories based on a coding mechanism. The researcher will look for recurrences and concepts and segregate them into categories.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out to 20 urbanites. The participants were approached by the researcher based on recommendations, mutual friends and acquaintances. All participants volunteered in this study and answered twelve semi-structured, open ended questions in a conversational manner where they shared their personal opinion based on the questions that were asked. During the interview, some participants were probed to ensure that their answered

were detailed and accurate to the understanding of the researcher and this sometimes-included extra questions based on the answer the researcher received.

Participants

20 participants, urbanites between the ages of 18 to 34 who are first year students in a university, graduating in the coming six month or have graduated but unemployed, working in an organisation below two years and working in an organisation for more than two years were interviewed for this research. The four categories were chosen to see if working experiences would contribute to any differences in their responses. 5 participants per category were approached individually and were all of Malaysian nationality that were made up of all races. The method of sampling is purposive sampling where participants were obtained through recommendation, acquaintances and mutual friends.

Materials

Materials used in this study are semi-structured, open ended questions, a letter to participant and informed consent, an informed consent for audio recording, member checking form and an audio recorder (Samsung).

Data Analysis

The data was examined using a method called thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) defines thematic analysis as “A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data.” (p. 79). This simply means that large forms of data are broken into smaller codes or themes in an attempt to understand what each participant is saying based on their own personal experiences, schema and values. Following the interviews, the data was transcribed verbatim into text and was analysed multiple times carefully in search for common keywords to form codes, which are sub-clusters of data organised into groups in search for common themes among participants. The data was carefully examined, and the themes uncovered are, organisation culture, empowerment, development and self-actualisation.

Data Modification

The data collected from this study underwent a reliability and validity check to ensure accuracy. The first method includes member checking where each transcribed interview was emailed back to the participants to fact check and they were allowed to make amendments to their transcripts to ensure the interview captured what they truly meant. This research also uses a triangulation method where journals of past studies, theories and books are used to increase the validity of the references made in this study. The researcher also used probing techniques to encourage the participants to elaborate on their responses to ensure that the researcher understands everything that is being said and to ensure that the participant’s responses are not misinterpreted.

Results

Analysis of the Interviews

A thematic analysis was done on the transcribed semi-structured interviews which were analysed in great depth to form codes for subthemes which were later used to categorise the master themes; Organisation Culture, Empowerment, Development and Self-Actualisation. The themes uncovered were created according to the research questions brought up, upon which four questions were asked to the participants based on the sub-category of questions as well as the participant’s responses. The master themes and sub-themes were arranged in a table while the master themes are presented in the thematic map in Figure 1.

First Master Theme: Organisation Culture

The first master theme is Organisation Culture. This was a recurring theme that occurred in many of the participant's answers based on the following questions, "What are the first three things you look at when you join an organisation?", "What are some of the benefits organisations should have?", "What do you think it takes to ensure employee satisfaction and retention at the workplace?", "If you were given a free hand and introducing new innovations at the workplace, what would you implement and why?" and "What would you hope to accomplish by introducing that?"

The master theme, organisation culture encompasses how people act and perform in the organisation with the following words used as descriptors; flexibility, hobbies, time, location, enjoying life, happiness, family, personal life, balance, self, leisure, efficiency. The sub-themes are; *Work- Life Balance, Employee Welfare, Progressiveness, Communication Platform, Facilities and Relationships.*

Work-Life Balance

The sub-theme work-life balance was something that most respondents brought up during the interview.

"We understand that we have to balance things, for example taking care of family, personal life, you tend to have your own hobbies, and have your own things and you can't jeopardize one for the other unless necessary. So, I would want to work somewhere where it understands that you have this balance." (Participant A, Age 21).

There also seems to be a lot of emphasis on efficiency and productivity underlying the reason for work-life balance.

"Some bosses want you to work 9 hours, but they don't care what you do during those 9 hours. So technically, you're being very inefficient, whereas other bosses say that I am going to give you this workload, you have to finish all of this within 2 hours and you're actually very efficient." (Participant A, Age 21)

Others cited location to save time on traveling and the amount of workload because of work-life balance: -

"Location of the organisation, whether it is near my place or I need to travel and as for personal life, if the organisation engages too much of time; 24 hours in a day and I am required to work 16 hours, I think that would be a bit too much for me." (Participant E, Age 21).

Employee Welfare

The other sub-theme that emerged was employee welfare which focuses on remuneration in the form of wages, increments, bonuses, allowances, privileges and benefits including medical, dental and health insurances, sabbaticals to study, sufficient maternity leave or travel, entertainment and an emphasis on well-being and health.

"Money, because you need stability. At the end of the day you can't work for free, but I mean a fair amount, I am not asking for a million dollars. Something that I can survive on that isn't going to make me eat Maggie Mee (noodles) every single day." (Participant A, Age 21)

Participants shared that wages must match the inflation rate and their current lifestyle:

"Pay would have to match what current inflation rates are like, what my lifestyle is like and what is required for me to live my life comfortably, not richly, but comfortably and also save towards retirement." (Participant R, Age 33)

Participants also shared that their income shouldn't eat into their commuting expenses to work: *"Parking or transport because you can't expect someone to be paying RM 20 per day to get to work because it's going to come from the salary and then there's no point for them to come to work every day, then go out for meetings and then come back and pay the fee. So I would say parking and transport allowances if someone doesn't have a car."* (Participant A, Age 21)

Participants also cited the need for proper health benefits and insurance. *"They should have proper health benefits. Say they (employers) can't cover for the family, at least for the staff because someone can fall sick, or meet in an accident and they need proper coverage and not everyone can afford it."* (Participant J, Age 29)

Communication Platforms

There are several responses leading towards a communication platform where employees can be heard by leaders.

"People want to be heard, so if there is a place for everyone to be able to speak, that would be really great. I think the old hierarchy, top down where the bottom has no way of reaching to the top but only to their own direct supervisor, doesn't work now. People want to reach to the top especially since they have their own opinions, especially if their superior is good or not and there is no way saying it." (Participant G, Age 24)

Having more feedback sessions with employees: -

"It could be as simple as increasing more feedback with staff, counselling sessions, every week you conduct meetings to vent and talk about work, the highlights and downers of the week, that would be interesting. If they can show initiative to preserve mental health and stress in the offices that would be great." (Participant N, Age 27)

Participants also feel communication between employees is equally important.

"I think it somehow is similar to how they built google. It is more on open collaboration area and they encourage their employee to communicate more. Employees would encourage each other, they would be more motivated to work, if they have any problems they can ask each other and maybe complete their task more effectively and efficiently." (Participant B, Age 20)

Progressiveness

Participants feel that the company must be progressive in their methods, systems, processes and conducive with the times and technology that is ever changing.

"Are they (company) are making the organisation conducive for millennials, are they adopting to new technologies, instead of old mundane technologies." (Participant I, Age 27)

Participants also want a leader that inculcates a culture of improvement by being progressive.

"So, you know how google does that whole 20% thing, that. I think that is so important and again I use a personal example but there are so many things I wish I had more time to do at work that I don't get to do." (Participant K, Age 30)

Facilities

Privileges or facilities would motivate employees.

"Free Food like a pantry (referencing googles). Every google employee, who works for google, after they retire or are still working, they were actually given a grant where they still pay them or something like that. There is a part of money spent on your well-being. It's like you're being treated more than a worker, but a human being." (Participant C, Age 22)

While other participants cited facilities and activities that could help with stress relief will be beneficial.

“One thing I would immediately try to implement, development towards clarity of mind. The new fad is mindfulness and meditation, there are some people who don’t buy into that so one of the easiest things is to set a very good focus point. Focus ties in to clarity of mind.” (Participant R, Age 33)

Relationships

Relationship is one of the most mentioned themes. Participants want to feel like the organisation and their colleagues are close to them, somewhat like a family.

“I like a work culture that encourages the employees to be a family, where they have team building from time to time, to also enable engagement between supervisors and employees, and also to encourage a good relationship between both parties. The relationship is more important than the extrinsic motivation.” (Participant B, Age 20)

Diving deeper into relationship, it appears that care is also emphasised either between the employees and the customers or leaders and employers.

“To care about the customer or their work. In Malaysia, most people just do their job. They don’t really care. They switch off their emotion when they work, so it’s hard to connect.” (Participant H, Age 24)

Second Master Theme: Empowerment

The second master theme discovered is Empowerment. This was a recurring theme that occurred in many of the participant’s answers based on the following questions, “Are you able to make decisions on your own?”, “What typically influences the decisions your make?”, “How would you like to be guided and coached in the workplace?”, “What do you believe is an essential component that leaders can implement to develop employees?” and “Describe a good and successful leader in your own words”.

The theme, empowerment, encompasses one sub-theme which is *autonomy* that looks into authority or power given to an individual to be accountable for their work by providing them with independence, ability to make decisions and trust. The descriptors of this theme are; space, freedom, time, imagination, independence, decision making, trust, not being micromanaged, opportunity, self-learning.

Autonomy

Most of the participants felt that they could make decisions especially if the decision related to their job and were typically influenced by their core values. Sometimes, they would make a decision and then run it by their leader just to get a second opinion if they are on the right track. For example: -

“I think in work wise, the responsibilities should be ourselves. At least for me. Because if I think I make the decision, there is always a reason and I can justify the reason. And instead of saying, oh let my boss make the decision, then I wouldn’t know how to justify it if someone did ask, so I think I would want to make the decision.” (Participant A, Age 21)

Participants also reported that they do not always get to make decisions but as long as their ideas and feedback are heard, they feel content and respected. For example: -

“I still can’t freely make decisions on my own. I take it as I am still new to the workforce, yes it has been some years since I started working but they have been here longer, so my thoughts

could be that is my idea, but they may have a different view. So that is healthy. So, we have a discussion and come up to a conclusion. If they shut me off I won't be happy, but if they hear me out I think that's fair.” (Participant S, Age 27)

Instances where they were not empowered leads to dissatisfaction and a lack of trust.

“My boss wants me to do things their way, when I can do something my way, but have the same outcome. So, I don't think they respect us as employees. We are individuals and we can make our own decisions on how to work and I think that they should respect this. Yes. I feel trusted. You trusted me with this project and you respect me as an individual and I have the ability to do instead of towering over me and I will feel pressured and it affects how I do work. Because my boss would stare at me and see how I do my job.” (Participant E, Age 21)

Many participants said that if they are given more empowerment, autonomy and trust in their roles, they would be more confident, content and motivated at the workplace.

“So, when they give you certain tasks and they make you responsible for it, you feel a sense of responsibility to ensure that the task is done. If you are just getting orders, like just do this, or don't do it this way or that way, do it my way, you wouldn't have so much emotional input in it and you wouldn't want to work harder.” (Participant H, Age 24)

Participants also reported that they don't like to be handheld at the workplace but adapted a more independent approach to learning on the job and completing their tasks, maybe even challenged by leading a project.

“I think I want to be guided in a way where I am not spoon-fed but guided in a way where I just do, so if it's wrong I just get real life working experience and not only always watching over me but just enough to know that I am not going the wrong way. Not both extremes, but in the middle.” (Participant O, Age 19)

Participants also reported that they would at least like to try things on their own but would want to get guidance when they are stuck: -

“I would prefer trying things out and when I get stuck, I get help and then restart the whole process again. Trial and error. I prefer to start thinking about it without help, then when I get stuck ask for help.” (Participant T, Age 30)

Third Master Theme: Development

The third master theme is Development with the descriptors as follows; reputation, opportunity, experience, exposure, track record, history, contribution, vision and growth of company, learning opportunity, leadership, growth learning, progression, career ladder and feedback.

This theme transpired in many of the participant's responses based on the following questions asked during the semi-structured interviews, “What are the first three things you look at when joining an organisation?”, “What are some of the benefits organisations should have?”, “What do you think it takes to ensure employee satisfaction and retention at the workplace?”, “How would you like to be guided and coached in the workplace?”, “What do you believe is an essential component that leaders can implement to develop employees?” and “If you were given a free hand and introducing new innovations at the workplace, what would you implement and why? What would you hope to accomplish by introducing that?”

The following sub-themes; *growth, leadership, appreciation and recognition and feedback and guidance* were identified.

Growth

Many participants would be loyal if an organisation gave them an opportunity and growth.

“If I see myself growing there, I would stay. So, if the environment is where I can learn a lot and I can obviously climb up the ladder I would stay there.” (Participant H, Age 24)

Participants also cited that there needs to be flexibility and benefits where employees could be given opportunities to further their education while working.

“Give them opportunities to study while they are working there or while they are in the organisation. If you offer value to the people you hire, they would want to stick on because you’re giving them something that cannot be bought, like opportunities to study, or enhance your management skills or something like that, you’d want to stick on.” (Participant H, Age 24)

Participants also cited the importance of having a career plan laid out for them and plenty of follow up to ensure their growth in the organisation.

“The organisation’s willingness to send employees for certification that will make them progress in their career path. For my current job, testing, I didn’t know that there are so many certifications, to become a professional tester, my management does not tell me about this because it will incur cost on them. So, these kinds of things, will make people want to stay because it shows your interest in developing them.” (Participant I, Age 27)

Others felt that introducing job rotation or training would also be a positive benefit for employees, especially in identifying their strengths and placing them in the right role.

“Maybe their strength is not supposed to be there. Some of them are not suitable in their position but they are doing that because of salary or something else. So, let’s say we have project and I rotate them into a position that is suitable for them so that the project would be better.” (Participant E, Age 21)

Leadership

Leadership is also often brought up by the participants, as they want someone who is a role model, motivating, approachable and listens to his/her subordinates.

“I think moods of the bosses plays a big part because you don’t want to come to work where someone is screaming and yelling every day, or someone is really moody. Because my ex-boss used to do that and a lot of people left the office because of that and it was hot/cold so you wouldn’t know what you’re coming to work to and I think that played a big part because he is supposed to be a team leader and bosses are supposed to be the ones that direct you and help you grow and get better and make sure that your team works towards the goal.” (Participant A, Age 21)

Participants also cited that leaders need to be transparent with employees by sharing what the bigger picture is, so they can understand their role better.

“Good direction from the boss. Clearly tell them what they are supposed to do and how it contributes to the organisation.” (Participant S, Age 27)

Others went back to core values and the need for the organisation, leaders and employees values to be aligned to ensure loyalty.

“Once the values are aligned, when I look at the leader, the leader is also very aligned, very purposeful, then immediately I will have that sense of loyalty to that company. I recently read this, great leaders they don’t manage their team, they mesmerise by their own purpose. So when the leader is able to really push and embrace their own value, its overflowing from him,

then immediately I will believe and following it. Loyalty is all about trusting the person, getting the expectation met then I will stay here, no matter what.” (Participant G, Age 24)

Participants also shared how they want their leaders to play a more supportive role in moulding them towards growth.

“I hope that my leaders are someone that can exercise leadership in terms of just rubber band. My leader can give me a sense of freedom, like a boundary, things that are within my control and at the same time, I know what are the things I can go to this person to seek for help, so in specific, I hope my leader can be open enough to me and be honest with my limitation and this person is willing to sit down with me and go over my strengths and limitations and see how I can improve from there.” (Participant Q, Age 29)

Low power distance and a more bottom up approach of leadership is also preferred.

“A leader should guide them and not instruct them, and they should be so that employees can always come back to them ask them something and this would be better.” (Participant D, Age 20)

Appreciation and Recognition

Many participants also brought up the importance of employees being appreciated and recognised to ensure loyalty.

“If I see that my bosses or my superior see what I am doing is satisfying them, or they are happy, I will definitely stay longer, but if I am not appreciated, then there is no motivation to go to work. Because if you work so hard, and no one sees anything, there is no point.” (Participant M, Age 27)

“I think if I have good managers, who are willing to take time and guide and ensure that I grow, would make me want to stay. Because you would feel a sense of loyalty towards them, maybe not an organisation as a whole, but in your team and with your managers itself, you will feel indebted. You will feel that you want to work hard, because they see potential in you. If they believe, you can do it, they will also want to do it. And that is actually what I am getting from my managers right now because they put a lot of trust in me and they think I can do it, which makes me want to work harder. So, I think that is a good foundation for making employees stay.” (Participant I, Age 27)

Feedback and Guidance

They also cited the importance of continuous and consistent feedback and guidance from leaders and mentors they work with regularly.

“I think what companies don’t do enough is value the performance employees give. The feedback given is very, normal. It’s like you’re doing fine enough for this job, you’re not doing exceptional work, but on the other hand, and the employee thinks that they’re doing a great job. So, I good feedback or criticism if needed. I think it adds to character, feedback to really develop your motivation to want to work.” (Participant I, Age 27)

Many also brought up the benefits of having a buddy or a mentor that can guide them at the workplace.

“Someone to mentor me along the way, to pull me back or drive me to follow on what the company does. It works for me and I am a self-learning person. But that works if people have trust in you. So, you get to learn something from your seniors from the start of your working experience.” (Participant C, Age 22)

Fourth Master Theme: Self-Actualisation

The last master theme is self-actualisation. This occurred in many of the participant's answers based on the following questions asked during the semi-structured interviews, "Describe three important core values that is important to you in your personal life and in your organisation?", "Would you join an organisation that doesn't match your core values? Why?", "What are the first three things you look at when joining an organisation?", and "What do you believe is an essential component that leaders can implement to develop employees?"

This theme points at the importance of core values participants have and how it impacts the decisions they make, whether it's the organisation they choose to work for and their overall sense of purpose based on the roles in an organisation. Descriptors such as values, fulfilment, purpose, goal, direction and happiness come up in this theme. As such, we will look into the following sub-themes; *core values and finding the right organisation and purpose* in the paragraphs below.

Core Values

Integrity is one of the most cited core values that is important to the participants.

"Integrity. To match it to the organisation, I would want something that is not only honest but keeps your morale values so there is no asking you to do something that is immoral and there is no such thing as someone taking credit for something or there is no scapegoat situation, and everything is very clear and very transparent." (Participant A, Age 21)

Many participants use their core values and make decisions about where they want to work, if it matches what they want to do ethically and with their purpose in life and if they are going to be able to contribute.

"I look at their track record, I try to see if they've appeared online or been on print, I try and see if they have a history behind them and I see what their objectives are and if I match that objectives, I especially look at company vision and their missions, how they plan to do what they want to do." (Participant K, Age 30)

Finding the Right Organisation and Purpose

It was also important to participants that the organisations they join practice what they preach.

"When someone goes into a company, they believe, or they buy into the marketing of the company. For example, I want to join this organisation because they do this, so you buy into their branding. When you get there, and it doesn't show, they don't do what they preach then immediately they may not want to be here anymore. Boils down to the purpose of the person and the purpose of the organisation." (Participant G, Age 24)

Delving deeper into purpose, participants feel that they need to feel connected to the work that they do. They need to have a why and what does it contribute to.

"My question is always why, why are we doing this, what is the end vision. I need to know what the bigger picture behind the whole thing is. People leave because they don't feel a purpose. They don't feel like they are doing something meaningful especially for millennials, it's so cliché but I need to find meaning in what I do. I need to know that I am making a difference, doing something for the greater good." (Participant K, Age 30)

Discussion

Overview

The participant's response and the themes uncovered are in line with the findings reported in the past research and reports reviewed above. All participants provided answers based on their understanding and experiences answering all research questions proposed in this study. The researcher found profound information which formed the four emerging themes, namely, organisation culture, empowerment, development and self-actualisation. All participants understood the significance of this study and reciprocated with honesty

Findings

The themes that emerged in this study were related to the research questions proposed in this study.

a) *What are the personal values of the Malaysian Millennials and how important it is for it to match the organization values?"*

Malaysian millennials are value driven and most want their personal values and the organisation values to match. They value integrity and honesty and would only consider working for an organisation that don't match their values only if they are positive values that would help them grow outside of their own skills. They are willing to try to work for organisations that do not directly relate to them as long as they are not bonded to the organisation. However, most Malaysian millennials want to work for an organisation that they resonate with and can contribute towards which brings us to one of the master themes discovered; self-actualisation. This generation of millennials are passionate and want to contribute towards something they believe in. They are often looking at their own purpose and fulfilment which is why I believe this generation is headed or in search of self-actualisation if they have not already found it. They are constantly looking into what they can do and impact with their potential, resulting in a choice of organisation that can provide them with that meaning.

b) *"What does it take to increase the Malaysian Millennials loyalty to the organisation for the next 5 years?"*

As millennials are known to job hop, they were asked what would ensure their loyalty in an organisation and the second theme that emerged was organisation culture. Riding on the findings that millennials are purpose and value driven, they see their organisation as a space where they can build relationships. They want engagement and interaction, perhaps even a bond with their team and like working towards something together. They want an environment that is not rigid, fun, exciting and gives them a sense of balance when they enter the workplace. They also want facilities at the workplace that enables rest or leisure activities and health spaces; showing an emphasis on balance between quality work and play. Suffice to say millennials can give you loyalty if you show them genuine care and form meaningful relationships with them. Welfare is also important to them, so basic benefits such as competitive salary, medical, dental and optometry benefits, travel and transportation allowances as well as sufficient sabbatical leaves encompassing maternity, personal development or traveling for them to not miss out on life. They value work-life balance because most of them spend time outside of work doing something they are passionate about. It could be music, attending interest-based events, art, or socialising. They also want to be part of an organisation that is progressive and technologically advanced in systems and processes as productivity and efficiency has come up, all pointing back to zero-time wastage.

c) *“How would Malaysian Millennials like to be managed and developed in the workforce?”*

The third theme, empowerment is also highly evident in the participant’s responses as they prefer independence, autonomy and being able to make decisions in areas concerning their job on their own with a sense of entrustment by their leaders or colleagues. They prefer minimal supervision as they want to figure things out first or be given a chance to come up with their own proposal based on their understanding of the job and the outcome. At the same time, they want to be able to ask questions when they are stuck by having an approachable mentor or leader. Having the flexibility in time, involvement in decision making and being provided the scaffolding to discover their own strengths and way of delivering the outcomes of their roles provides them with the empowerment they desire at the workplace.

This leads to the fourth theme, development. Millennials have a growth mind-set in which they hope to be continuously learning and progressing in their role or scope. They value feedback and guidance as a form of area of development in which constructive criticism is given to them consistently so that they can improve themselves. They like to be appreciated and recognised for ideas they have come up with or projects they have developed because they spend considerable amount of time, energy and resources doing it and seek affirmation from their leaders or colleagues when it is delivered. They also prefer leadership that is more bottom up with low power distance and a leader that they are able to form relationships with that would help them and the organisation grow.

General Comparison of Findings to Past Research

The four master themes that emerged in this research study is similar to the past research and reports conducted on millennials across the world. Findings were similar to the PwC (2011) study indicating millennials prefer flexibility in the workplace, work importance, recognition and their values to match an ethical organisation. Participants also highlighted leaving organisations when their values don’t match anymore, similar to the study by Hershatter and Epstein (2010); Stankiewicz & Łychmus (2017). Findings also matched the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey as millennials use their own moral compass and values to make decisions and had a focus on sense of purpose.

Similarly, findings match the PwC (2011) report on organisation loyalty and development opportunities but not in supporting leadership ambitions. This research findings indicate millennials focused on relationship building and communication between leaders as well as colleagues, trust and being able to be open about their ideas and in communication. They want empowerment, consistent feedback and flexibility in terms of hours, work-life balance and an organisational culture that is open, low power distance and more bottom up to ensure their satisfaction and loyalty towards an organisation. This is similar to findings by Hershatter and Epstein, 2010 and Myers and Oetzel (2003). Empowerment and flexibility highlighted by participants in this study was also related to organisation loyalty, similar to findings by Carless and Wintle (2007) and Smola and Sutton (2002) with participants citing importance of sabbatical as a benefit for personal development. Location to work was also important, similar to reports by PEMANDU (2016).

Openness in communication and being able to communicate with colleagues and leaders are strong findings in the study that related to satisfaction in the workplace, similar to (Jokisaari and Nurmi 2009; Martin 2005) with regular feedback from leaders (SHRM, 2009).

Findings in this study showed some participants wanting to engage with international counterparts but it was not consistent across all interviewees as reported in PwC (2011).

Unique Findings in this Study

What was unique to the findings in this study is millennials emphasized development and self-actualisation while the Deloitte Survey recipients focused on sense of purpose and little on development. Participants in this study did not indicate preferences to electronic communication but wanted technological advancements in systems and processes to ensure efficiency and faster completion. Maternity leave and sufficient sabbatical for personal interest and education were also unique findings. They also highlighted a need for job rotation, pointing for new tasks and challenges instead of sticking to one. Lastly, findings indicate millennials prefer being developed through feedback and coaching, empowerment in being able to figure things out independently instead of being micromanaged and the importance of the right leader and leadership style which would ensure their loyalty to the organisation.

Limitations

The first limitation is that the participants recruited for this study were narrow that is only urban millennials, ranging from the middle to upper class were used in this study. Their worldview and experiences, different from the rural millennials may affect the findings in this study. The other limitation would be that social desirability bias as the interviews were conducted on a one on one basis with the researcher asking the questions and the participants responding directly to the researcher. Hence participants may have given positive accounts or experiences to appear favourable to the researcher. This may also be further reinforced as the participants were aware they were being audio recorded. Additionally, since they understood the nature of this study, they may have been more self-aware or critical of their responses as they know it would be contributing towards something more significant.

Discussion for Future Studies

Future researchers should conduct a quantitative study or a mixed method design in which statistical methods as well as interview questions would provide more reliability and validity in the findings with a better representative of the population of this study which should include urban and rural millennials.

Other things to be considered include other demographic information such as race, occupation and whether these point to differences in wants, needs and loyalty.

Conclusion(s)

The general findings in this qualitative study show that millennials in Malaysia are similar to millennials worldwide, especially in the way they hope to contribute and be engaged in the workplace. Organisations in Malaysia must reconsider how they recruit and retain talents in the workplace and especially if they could change the way they run their organisations. The most important aspects for organisations to tune in to is helping employees see the big picture and how their role in the organisation would contribute towards something bigger or something more purposeful in their lives. Secondly, expanding on benefits by creating spaces and facilities for employees to integrate health-based activities may promote appreciation, loyalty and productivity in the workplace. An organisation that practices openness in communication with senior management and leaders will also be a positive addition and motivation to millennials. Leadership styles also needs reassessment with a more supportive, open and constructive style being used to develop employees. Lastly, regular check-ins and conversations about where and

how employees could grow needs to be initiated by management, so that employees can see a future in the organisation.

There is so much of emphasis especially in the education industry in producing more future-ready graduates that are ready for the fourth industrial revolution. Plenty is being done on changing the teaching and learning landscape that would produce more quality graduates which is in line with Malaysia's Ministry of Education blueprints. If our quality of graduates are going to increase, so must the quality of organisations especially in ensuring employees needs are also met.

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Appendices and Nomenclature



Figure 1: Thematic Map of Master Themes