

the workforce of tomorrow



Summary

The Millennials are our workforce of tomorrow. This generation of young people are growing up in a world full of rapidly advancing technology and in a culture where instant answers and speedy communication are the norms. At the same time, workers of all ages are being inundated with ever more advanced standards of technology, from the iPad to the tablet to cloud computing.

We ask how these two separate factors will combine to shape the workplace and the workforce of tomorrow, asking just what will Millennials expect from their work place, if indeed they will work in what we would describe as an office. We find that the workforce of tomorrow will expect a vibrant and flexible working environment, where social networking performs a vital role at the heart of office communications. All forms of the latest technology are welcomed in a diverse work place which respects different life styles and cultural beliefs.

The Millennials

Generation Y, the Millennials, are currently age 16-24. These young people are used to multi-tasking and have a multicultural, non-hierarchical point of view. The Millennial generation is the most technologically adept to date and will become the boardroom leaders of 2025.

For Millennials, traditional working systems are simply not appropriate. The interactive, fast-paced world they have grown up in differs widely from either that of the Baby Boomer Generation or Generation X who precede them. Heavy internet users, these youngsters are already used to interfacing on a vast number of digital platforms, have a collaborative web culture and are even content creators. Just looking at sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Piczo, Second Life and Wikipedia is indicative of this fact.

Millennials tend to be peer-led and make decisions based on what their peers would think rather than their core values. They were born into the Knowledge Economy and brought up in the digital world. As such, even from a young age Millennials are able to collaborate, share work practices, show initiative and rapidly access, create, exchange and transform information. They work on different levels: one-to-one in the form of email, which they see as rather outdated, or SMS/text messaging, personal in the form of blogs and MySpace and collaborative in the form of mash-ups, message boards and wikis.

Technological Advancements

Since the advancement of the computer in the workplace in the early 1960s, technology has usually spread from work to home. Now, however, technology is evolving at such an astonishing rate that the opposite is true. In fact, both people and technology are changing rapidly. At the same time, social networking continues to advance at lightning pace, with Facebook now having some 800 million users. 75% of the Millennials we will see in tomorrow's workplace now have a social profile, whilst 93% of them are regularly online.

In order to ensure that the workplace keeps abreast with technological advancements, we need to understand firstly that the reign of the PC is no more. 450 million people now access the internet using their mobile devices. 64 million tablets were sold around the world in 2011 and the tablet sector is estimated to be valued at £74 billion by 2015. In fact, vice president and principal analyst with Forrester Research, Ted Schadler, stated he expected tens of millions of tablets would be used in workplaces across America by 2015.

The speed of the change in this digital economy has been rather overwhelming, but there's much more to come. The relationship between the web, TV and mobile for instance is in but its infancy, argues Mark Curtis of Flirtomatic, a mobile social networking service. Apps for Android and Apple devices are also increasingly powerful tools and facilitators of social and professional change. It's astonishing to note that as many as 100,000 apps are already in use in many workplaces. Then there is the question of the Cloud. By 2016, nearly half of all Chief Information Officers are expecting to operate their infrastructures and applications via the cloud, creating many new working possibilities, as well as collaborative, flexible and efficient computing models.

How the Millennials Want to Work

Clearly, the rapid change in technology, and the fact that we are facing a future where many young people will have a very different view of working life, means that office life needs to change. So just how will the Millennials want to work?

Firstly, Millennials want to work in organisations that support their own values. They will, after all, view "working" and the "work space" as an extension of themselves. The workplace they choose to spend the majority of their time either in or connected to will need to support their beliefs and to be an open and accepting place. Different points of views and lifestyle choices must be accepted. Creativity will also need to be appreciated.

It is essential that senior leaders tap into the creativity and freedom embraced by Millennials. There are indeed already some examples of successful and forward thinking companies doing just that. For instance, Disney Core and McKinsey & Co use internal wikis to share the combined knowledge of their workers. Such an open and informal communication style is perfectly suited to the needs of the Millennials and these companies should be praised for recognising that on most occasions, formal communication styles simply aren't appropriate anymore.

As the Millennials are so used to new and innovative gadgets, having lived through the rise of the mobile phone, iPhone, iPad and tablet, they will expect to see new technology consistently embraced in the workplace. This will mean workplaces using cloud computing, investing in a wide range of devices and generally being open to change rather than sticking to tried and tested technology.

How the Workplace Needs to Change to Embrace Millennials
Millennials will see work as a verb, not a place. Open, flexible working spaces need to be adopted. Forget the outdated workspace of the private offices, empty video conferencing areas and meeting spaces which are never used. This kind of cellular, stratified workplace does not foster interoffice connectivity. A predominantly corporate model will no longer apply to the next generation of workers.

Work places instead need to focus on becoming vibrant, welcoming spaces appealing to a wider group of people. At the same time, repetitive tasks should be farmed to sophisticated machines to perform, allowing the Millennials the chance to apply what they know instead.

In terms of technology, creating an effective internal social networking system is one way by which a company can appeal to Millennials. Balancing IT freedoms and boundaries will attract and retain young employees. Social networking, instant messaging and corporate training podcasts should all be embraced.

Conclusion

The Millennials can be defined as knowledge rich communicators completely in tune with the many digital platforms which inundate the technological world. Alongside the rise of the new, digital workforce, we see rapid advancements being made in the world of technology.

In order to be fully prepared for the Millennials and for technological advancement, workplaces need to offer workers the choice between working at the office or working remotely. The workspace needs to be open, welcoming and vibrant in order to attract fresh talent. At the same time, it should embrace new technology at every turn, whilst also incorporating features of social networking in the work process.

Clearly, there is much to be done in order to be ready to welcome the workers of tomorrow.

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