

Feedback in an Intergenerational Workplace

Julia Coffin, Sarah McGivern, Laurel Underwood-Price, Serena Xiong, and Hilary Zander
SOAN 371A, Foundations of Social Science Research: Quantitative Methods
St. Olaf College

ABSTRACT

Our research investigates intergenerational differences between the Millennial generation of employees and Baby Boomers and Generation Xers in the workplace. We focus on the implications of Millennials' need for feedback in the workplace by examining Millennial students' and workers' past experiences and current preferences regarding type, frequency, and emotional content of feedback in the workplace. Using surveys of alumni and current undergraduate students at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, we examine the self-reported desires and experiences with feedback for Millennials and the older generations' perceptions of these desires in the workplace through two hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that there is a difference between the type of feedback Millennials report best motivates them to improve their work performance and the type of feedback Baby Boomers and Gen Xers perceive best motivates Millennials. Our second hypothesis proposes a difference between the way Millennials react to criticism and praise in the workplace and the way that Baby Boomers and Gen Xers perceive Millennials' reactions to praise and criticism in the workplace. Our findings support both of our hypotheses, and we were able to discern statistically significant differences between the reactions and perceptions of feedback between the older and younger generations.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Ron Alsop (2008) blames it on the trophies. In his investigation of the advent of the Millennial generation in the workplace, Alsop (2008) explains certain attitudes and propensities of this cohort born between 1980 and 2000 according to their collective formative experiences: "When their [Millennial] children didn't receive sports trophies, parents bought their own for their disappointed darlings, sometimes fibbing and claiming they were actually from the coach." While Alsop's discussion is somewhat sensationalized, it provokes relevant discussion surrounding the Millennial generation's introduction to the workplace. As they graduate from college and begin the start of their professional careers, Millennials now comprise a key population of employees in the workplace.

The transition of these individuals into the professional world undoubtedly affects the dynamic of the workplace that includes the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X (Keeter

et al. 2010). Though the topic of Millennials and intergenerational differences in the workplace is a fairly recent addition to the discourse surrounding workplace experiences, our research investigates this topic more thoroughly and is designed to expand the existing body of knowledge. We rely upon these prior contributions as we seek to understand how Millennials' preferences and past experiences affect the type, frequency, and emotional content of the feedback this generation desires in the workplace. In addition to consulting the reported preferences of Millennials themselves, we also examine how these desires are perceived and accommodated in the workplace by the older generations. With the inclusion of these specific considerations, the following body of review and research is situated around the central purpose of discovering the practical implications of Millennials' need for feedback in an intergenerational workplace.

History of Feedback

To understand feedback in the workplace today, it is necessary to examine the evolution of feedback throughout the 20th Century. Feedback first became common in the workplace during the time of the Traditionalist Generation in the 1950s and followed a hierarchical structure from supervisor to subordinate (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). This sort of feedback contained primarily negative content (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). This traditional system of feedback was replaced by a more formal approach to communication between employer and employee in the 1950s (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). Research identified a direct relationship between feedback and motivation, and supervisors and their subordinates began to establish specific goals to work towards (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). In the 1970s, Baby Boomers encountered a system of feedback that had been determined as work-related, reliable, and nondiscriminatory (Anderson 2006).

Upward feedback emerged with Generation X in the 1980s, which allowed the subordinate to provide feedback to his supervisor (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). In the early 1990s, a strong focus on performance emerged due to downsizing and outsourcing, which led

to the implementation of a more holistic, 360-degree feedback method in the workplace (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997). 360-degree feedback incorporates input from supervisors, colleagues, and customers, as well as a self-appraisal component (Anderson 2006).

Feedback's Role in Education

Feedback in the educational system may contribute to Millennials' desire for feedback in the workplace. Feedback in schools is most effective when students specify the areas where they would like to receive feedback, have the opportunity to engage in conversation with their teacher about specific feedback, and are able to assess their own assignments before being given a final grade (Cowan 1999; Micol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006; Gibbs and Simpson 2004). Educators are careful to use negative feedback cautiously and sparingly, as Millennials have demonstrated sensitivity to this sort of criticism (Gibbs and Simpson 2004). For example, Millennials may interpret grades on an assignment to be related to an assessment of their individual worth (Gibbs and Simpson 2004). The extensive process of student-teacher feedback has conditioned Millennials to expect a high quality and quantity of feedback and support in the workplace. This is witnessed by Munro (2010) who found that 78% of new employees expect job feedback to mirror academic feedback.

Popular Methods for Giving and Receiving Feedback in the Workplace: Informal Verbal Acknowledgement, Mentoring, Performance Assessments, and Monetary Incentives

Informal verbal acknowledgement, mentoring, performance assessments, and incentives are all effective tools utilized by organizations to meet Millennials' need and anticipation for incessant recognition and feedback (Hastings 2008). Informal feedback includes both recognition and praise (Gursoy, Maier, and Chi. 2007). Directly pertaining to new employees' responses to informal feedback in the workplace, Munro (2010) found that only 16 percent were fully satisfied and 36% were moderately satisfied. This indicates that Millennials would perhaps be more satisfied with other types of feedback, or that employers must adjust their distribution of informal feedback in order to better satisfy Millennial employees. Meyers and Sadaghiani

suggest Millennials desire frequent, honest, and affirming communication with supervisors (2010); this claim is empirically supported by Solnet and Hood (2011), who found that Millennials value recognition more than any generation previously and desire these types of communication with their supervisors. Gursoy et al. (2007) emphasized that Millennials expect supervisors to know and interact with employees on a personal level.

Performance reviews are key methods for delivering formalized feedback in the workplace (Burlacu 2011). They are primarily used by supervisors as a means to improve the efficiency and productivity of subsidiaries in the workplace (Burlacu 2011). Munro (2010) found that new recruits in the workplace were pleased with performance reviews overall, and only 36% of the recruits asked for changes regarding this type of feedback (Munro 2010).

Mentorship is a developmental tool that organizations use to streamline academia-to-career transitions and meet Millennials' demand for recognition, frequent feedback and distinct responsibilities (Munro 2009; Munro 2010). Mentoring is defined as a positive and influential interpersonal relationship between two employees, in which a senior employee advises and coaches a new employee (Allen 2010). In Munro's (2010) study, a vast majority (85%) of new employees found mentoring to be the most helpful tool in helping them transition to the workplace. Furthermore, on a numerical scale of importance, participants assigned mentorship an 8.2 out of 10 (Munro 2009). In addition, Munro (2010) noted that supervisors are often caught up with long working hours, heavy workloads, multi-tasking, and approaching deadlines, which leaves them little time, if any, to offer a support system for new recruits. Therefore, mentoring programs (institutionalized or informal) are an important way to incorporate new workers into the workplace, given a potential lack of time that supervisors have to devote to novice employees.

Further studies suggest that Millennial employees view pay raises as another important form of motivation and feedback. In her interviews with nurses in Quebec, Lavoie-Tremblay (2010) found that recognition, specifically monetary incentives, was an important motivator

among Millennial nurses. In contrast, a study done by Rawlins, Indvik, and Johnson (2008) found that less than 10 percent of the students sampled viewed potential pay raises as essential in accepting a job. Similarly, Lancaster & Stillman (2002) claim that due to their impatience, Millennial workers are unlikely to be recruited to a company with promises of eventual pay raises and promotions. Because of the mixed results in the studies above, further research is needed on the subject to determine exactly how much of an incentive money is for Millennials in the workplace.

Employer Response to Millennials' Desire for Feedback

It is also essential to investigate how Baby Boomers and Generation Xers respond to Millennials' desire for feedback by implementing organizational responses. It is necessary that organizations evolve and re-shape their policies as this new generation enters the workforce in order to attract and retain employees (Huybers 2011). Companies that do not facilitate such changes risk a high turnover rate (Munro 2009). To retain Millennial employees, organizations may need to expend resources on devoting regular attention to new employees and ensuring that they are connected with an experienced mentor for an extended period of time (Munro 2009). It is ultimately more costly for companies not to change their policies than it is for them to make efforts toward a successful process of attracting and retaining Millennials, even if these efforts include expensive new programs and policies (Munro 2009). The employee replacement process may cost the company more than twice a month's salary of a departing employee, as well as hindering organizational stability (Munro 2009). An increase in certain costs related to attracting and maintaining Millennials may be prudent when considering the costs of replacement.

This assembled literature review has helped to inform our understanding of generational differences in the workplace, as well as provided a larger context within which to situate our own research on feedback in the intergenerational workplace. Our study takes place at a small, liberal arts college in the Midwest. We have attempted to provide a comprehensive background

of prior research related to feedback; however, we would like to acknowledge the lack of research that exists when discussing topics such as employee responses to positive versus negative feedback and psychological factors associated with a desire for and responses to feedback.

METHODS

Our research was conducted in the fall of 2011 targeting three populations: current undergraduate juniors and seniors, recent Millennial alumni, and Baby Boomer/Generation X alumni of a small liberal arts college in Minnesota. Subsequent to completing our literature review, we conducted a focus group with five upperclassmen from the same small, Midwestern liberal arts college at which the research was conducted and spoke with Baby Boomer and Generation X supervisors and co-workers who work closely with Millennial employees. The insights gained from these conversations contributed to the formulation of our hypotheses and the design of our survey questions. We chose to use three web-based surveys, designed on form creator, for each targeted population to gather data due to their efficient and economical capacity for collecting large amounts of data, and for the opportunity they allow to ask questions regarding personal attitudes and beliefs while preserving the anonymity of respondents (Patten 2011). The surveys included multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, list questions, and four-point Likert scales. The surveys for Baby Boomer/Generation X and Millennial alumni was open for a period of eight days, while the current Millennial student survey was open for a period of five days.

The following hypotheses are based on our review of the literature, focus group discussion with current Millennial students, and conversations with Baby Boomer and Generation X supervisors and co-workers.

1. There is a difference between the type of feedback Millennials report best motivates them to improve their work performance and the type of feedback Gen Xers and Baby Boomers perceive best motivates Millennials.

2. There is a difference between the way Millennials react to criticism and praise in the workplace and the way that Gen Xers and Baby Boomers perceive Millennials reactions to praise and criticism in the workplace.

In our first hypothesis, the independent variable is generation (current juniors and seniors, Millennial alumni, and Baby Boomers/Gen Xers) and the dependent variable is the most motivating type of feedback (informal feedback, formal feedback, mentoring experience, pay raise and other). To test this hypothesis, we used a multiple choice question with mutually exclusive responses including, informal feedback, formal feedback, mentoring experience, pay raise or other. If they selected "other," they had space to explain further.

Our second hypothesis predicts that there is a difference between Millennials' reactions to criticism and praise in the workplace and the way that Baby Boomers and Gen Xers perceive Millennials' reactions to praise and criticism in the workplace. The independent variable in this hypothesis is generation (current juniors and seniors, Millennial alumni, and Baby Boomers/Gen Xers) and the dependent variable is self-reported or perceived Millennial sensitivity to praise or criticism. To test this dependent variable, we asked a series of statements dealing with the effects of praise and criticism on Millennials. To evaluate the degree of their response, we used a four point Likert scale which included the responses, "Strongly Agree", "Somewhat Agree", "Somewhat Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree".

While designing our survey questions, we strove to achieve validity, which indicates that our survey questions accurately and clearly measure what we intended them to measure (Nardi 2006). We did this by first creating clear definitions of our central concepts, including feedback, informal feedback, formal feedback, and mentoring. We achieved face validity, which involves asking qualified others if, at "face value," our definitions and survey questions measure our central concepts by consulting our sociology professor and peer researchers (Nardi 2006). We also achieved content validity, which involves making sure that our survey questions accurately measure all aspects of our conceptual definitions (Nardi 2006).

In addition to validity, we achieved reliability, or consistency, among responses by using specific and precise measurements and by relying on the use of a four point Likert scale (Nardi 2006). Likert scales are a useful tool to measure intensity, and help in determining how strongly an individual agrees or disagrees with a given statement (Patten 34). Secondly, we distributed pretests to the students who participated in our focus group, as well as members of our SOAN 371: Foundations of Social Science Research class, asking them to identify any confusing language and ambiguous questions.

Our samples for each of the three surveys were drawn using simple random sampling (SRS), which assigns each unit an equal and independent chance of being selected for the survey and allows us to make generalizations to our sampling frame (Nardi 2006). We used a computer program to randomly select respondents from each targeted population. To determine the sample size of each targeted population, we used Neuman's (2007) standard approach for sampling ratio, which states for a target population of 1,300 individuals, we sample 25 percent of that population.

Creating sampling frames for each target population allowed us to select people who were most pertinent to our surveys. Alumni were only eligible to be surveyed if the Office of Parent and Alumni Relations had their email address, class year, title, employer, and occupational code, and they were listed as currently in civilian employment. We excluded students, member of the armed services, homemakers, retired persons, volunteers, the unemployed, and the disabled. Our Baby Boomer/Gen X alumni survey population included alums from class years 1964 to 2000. After exclusions, this included 9,747 alumni. Our survey was sent to 975 alumni (10%), successfully delivered to 849 alumni, and completed and returned by 126. We sampled Millennial Alumni from class years 2001 to 2011. After exclusions, this included 3,071 alums. Our survey was sent to 600 Millennial alumni, successfully delivered to 513, and completed and returned by 92. We included full-time junior and senior students in our sampling frame and excluded those in SOAN 371 and our focus

groups, students studying off-campus, and students older than typical college age. This survey was sent to 1,295 students. Our response rates for each population were 14.8 percent for Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, 17.9 percent for Millennial employees/workers, and 39.7 percent for current Millennial students. Our surveys had a total of 464 respondents with 66.8 percent being females (310) and 33.2 percent being males (154).

We ensured that both the content of our surveys and the collection of data from our respondents were ethically sound. We designed our questions to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive which allowed respondents to consider a variety of options and to prevent any responses from being inadvertently excluded. Additionally, we carefully considered any biases that might be implicitly or explicitly expressed in our questions and also tested this level of objectivity and clarity by administering think-alouds and pilot tests.

To ensure privacy, the Institutional Research and Evaluation department randomly selected our sample using statistical software and distributed the surveys to each group online. An anonymous email alias was created for each sample, and we further guaranteed the anonymity of participants by assuring them that their responses would not be connected to their names. Only students in the SOAN 371 course and select individuals in the Alumni and Parent Relations department were given access to the survey results.

Lastly, we distributed a cover letter to all participants that outlined the process of giving informed consent, to which respondents consented by logging in to complete the survey. The cover letter also emphasized that participation was voluntary. In order to avoid emotional and mental distress, respondents were able to skip any questions that they did not want to answer and were free to withdraw from participation at any time. We also provided participants with an estimated amount of minutes needed to complete the survey to be respectful of their time.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

H1: *There is a difference between the type of feedback Millennials (Millennial alumni and current juniors and students) report best motivates them to improve their work performance and the type of feedback older generations (Baby Boomers and Gen Xers) perceive best motivates Millennials.*

To address our first hypothesis, we asked Millennial alumni and current juniors and seniors, “Which type of feedback best motivates you to improve your work performance?” and Baby Boomer/Gen X alumni, “Based on your experiences, which type of feedback best motivates Millennial employees to improve their work performance?” In all three surveys, respondents selected from formal feedback, informal feedback, mentoring, pay raise, or other. If they selected other, they were asked to “please explain.”

We combined Baby Boomers and Gen Xers to create the category of “older generation.” Likewise, we combined Millennial alumni and current juniors and seniors to create the category of “Millennials.” Informal feedback was the most frequently selected type of feedback that best motivates Millennials by both the older generation (61.2%) and Millennials (39.0%). Formal feedback was selected 30.9 percent of the time by Millennials and 25.4 percent of the time by the older generation. Mentoring was selected 33.3 percent of the time by Millennials but by none of the older generation respondents. Pay raise was considered the type of feedback that best motivates Millennials by only 13.4 percent of the older generation and 8 percent of Millennials. (Figures 1 and 2)

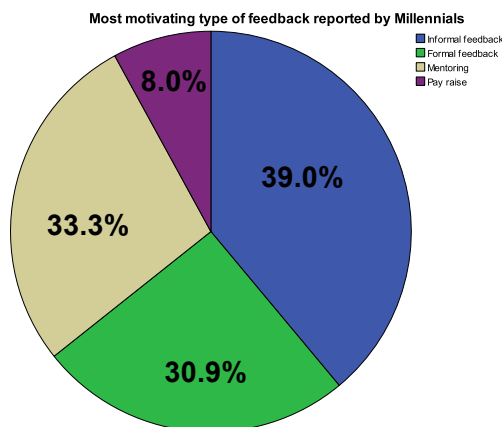


Figure 1. The type of feedback that best

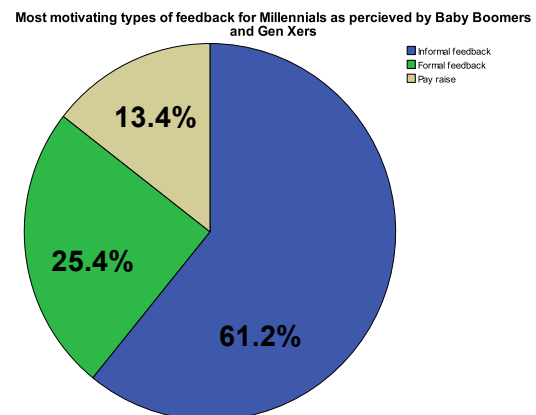


Figure 2. The type of feedback Baby Boomers/Gen

To test our first hypothesis, we ran a Chi-Square test between the older generation's perceptions of the type of feedback that best motivates Millennials and the type of feedback Millennials report as best motivating. From the Chi-Square test, we found a statistically significant difference between both categories at the 0.05 alpha level ($\chi^2 (3) = 27.023, p < .001$). We also performed a Cramer's V test and found that while there is a statistically significant relationship, the relationship is weak ($V = 0.259, p < .001$). (Tables 1 and 2)

Table 1. Type of Feedback that Best Motivates Millennials.

			Generation	
			Baby Boomers/Gen Xers	Millennial Alumni and Students
Type of Feedback that Best Motivates Millennials	Informal Feedback	% in Gen.	61.2%	39.0%
	Formal Feedback	% in Gen.	25.4%	25.0%
	Mentoring	% in Gen.	0.0%	28.0%
	Pay Raise	% in Gen.	13.4%	8.0%
Total		% in Gen.	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2. Chi-Square and Cramer's V tests for Table 1.

	Value	df	Significance
Pearson Chi-Square	27.023	3	.000
Cramer's V	.259	--	.000

We performed a multivariate analysis to further examine our data by running statistical tests with the original uncollapsed variables: Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennial alumni and current juniors and seniors. We found that informal feedback was the most frequently selected type of feedback that best motivates Millennials by all four categories: Baby Boomers (60.9%), Gen Xers (48.9%), Millennial alumni (48.9%), and current juniors and seniors (35.4%). Formal feedback was chosen 28.3 percent of the time by Baby Boomers, 19.0 percent of the time by Gen Xers, 8.9 percent of the time by Millennial alumni, and 30.9 percent of the time by current juniors and seniors. Mentoring was chosen by none of the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, 33.3 percent of the time by Millennial alumni, and 26.0 percent of the time by current juniors and seniors. Pay raise was least selected as the type of feedback that best motivates Millennials by

Baby Boomers (10.9%), Gen Xers (19.0%), Millennial alumni (8.9%), and current juniors and seniors (7.7%). (Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6)

Type of feedback that best motivates Millennials reported by Millennial alumni

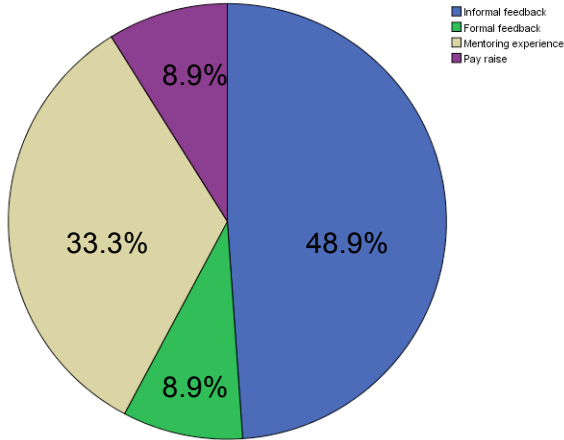


Figure 3. The type of feedback that best motivates Millennials as reported by Millennial alumni.

Type of feedback that best motivates Millennials reported by current students

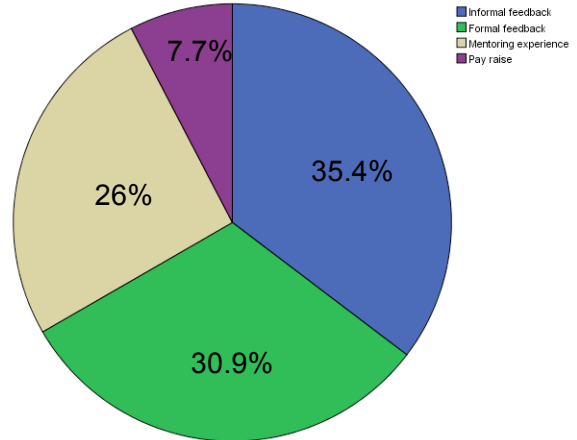


Figure 4. The type of feedback that best motivates Millennials as reported by Millennial students.

Type of feedback that best motivates Millennials as reported by Baby Boomers

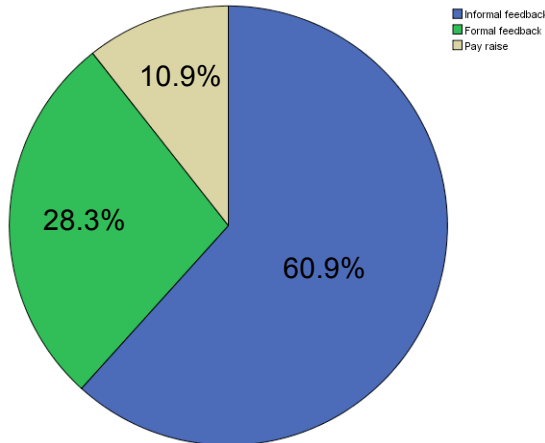


Figure 5. The type of feedback Baby Boomers perceive best motivates Millennials.

Type of feedback that best motivates Millennials as reported by Gen Xers

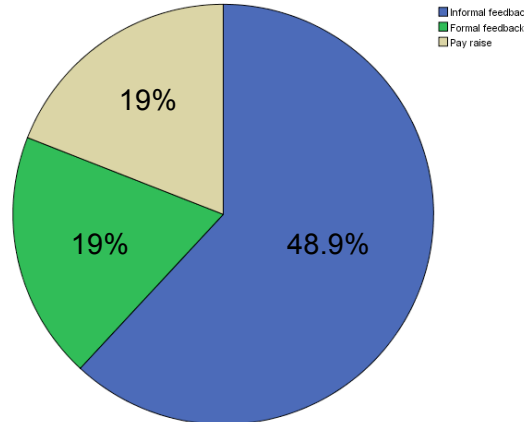


Figure 6. The type of feedback Gen Xers perceive best motivates Millennials.

Using a Chi-Square test, we found a statistically significant difference between the four group's perceptions regarding which type of feedback best motivates Millennials in the workplace ($\chi^2 (9) = 45.762, p < 0.001$). We also performed a Cramer's V test and found that although statistically

significant, the relationship between the variables is weak ($V = 0.195$, $p < .001$) (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Type of Feedback that best motivates Millennials.

			Generation			
			Boomers	Gen X	Millennial Alumni	Millennial Students
Type of Feedback that Best Motivates Millennials	Informal Feedback	% in Gen.	60.9%	61.9%	48.9%	35.4%
	Formal Feedback	% in Gen.	28.3%	19.0%	8.9%	30.9%
	Mentoring	% in Gen.	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	26.0%
	Pay Raise	% in Gen.	10.9%	19.0%	8.9%	7.7%

Table 4. Chi-Square and Cramer's V tests for Table 3.

	Value	df	Significance
Pearson Chi-Square	45.762	9	0.00
Cramer's V	0.195	--	.000

Hypothesis Two

H2: *There is a difference between the way Millennials react to criticism and praise in the workplace and the way that Baby Boomers and Gen Xers perceive Millennials' reactions to praise and criticism in the workplace.*

To test our second hypothesis, we asked a series of five Likert items to the combined categories Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and Millennials (alumni and current juniors and seniors) to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to Millennials' reactions to praise and criticism received in the workplace.

In running frequencies for each item, we found that Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and Millennials tend to respond with differing levels of agreement regarding how Millennials respond to praise and criticism in the workplace. In our first item, *self-esteem increases when receiving praise on a project*, 94.4 percent Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and 97.7 percent of Millennials agreed with this statement. In the second item, *feel more comfortable in the workplace when receiving praise on a project*, 99.1 percent of Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and 94.5 percent of Millennials agreed with this statement. In the third item, *feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project*, 76.1 percent of Baby Boomers/ Gen Xers agreed, and 56.2 percent of Millennials agreed with this statement. In the fourth item, *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project*, 30.8 percent of Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and 80.9

percent of Millennials agreed with this statement. Finally, in the last item, *feel more insecure about work abilities when receiving criticism on a project*, 66.1 percent of Baby Boomers/ Gen Xers and 62.3 percent of Millennials agreed with this statement. (See Tables 5 and 6.)

Table 5. Millennials' reactions to praise in the workplace as reported by Millennials and perceived by Baby Boomers/Gen Xers.

			Generation	
			Baby Boomers and Generation X	Millennial Alumni and Millennial Students
Self-esteem increases with praise on a project	Agree	% within Generation	94.4%	97.7%
Feel more comfortable in workplace when receiving praise on a project	Agree	% within Generation	99.1%	94.5%

Table 6. Millennials' reactions to criticism in the workplace as reported by Millennials and perceived by Baby Boomers/Gen Xers.

			Generation	
			Baby Boomers and Generation X	Millennial Alumni and Millennial Students
Feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project	Agree	% within Generation	76.1%	56.2%
Feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project	Agree	% within Generation	30.8%	80.9 %
Feel more insecure about work abilities when receiving criticism on a project	Agree	% within Generation	66.1%	62.3%

We conducted statistical testing on each item using Chi-Square and Cramer's V tests. In one of the praise items and two of the criticism items, we found statistical significance. In the Cramer's V tests for these five items, we only found statistical significance at the alpha level of 0.05 ($\chi^2 (1) = 4.108, p < .05$) for the item *feel more comfortable in the workplace when receiving praise on a project*. Meanwhile, we found statistical significance at the alpha level of 0.001 for the two following items: *feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project* ($\chi^2 (1) = 13.810, p < .001$), and *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project* ($\chi^2 (1) = 95.608, p < .001$). This level of significance suggests a strong relationship between the two items being measured and the generation variable. (See Tables 7, 8, and 9.)

Table 7. Chi-Square value for *feel more comfortable in the workplace when receiving praise on a project item.*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.108	1	.043

Table 8. Chi-Square value for *feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project item.*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.810	1	.000

Table 9. Chi-Square value for *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project item*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	95.608	1	.000

In the collapsed data, we noticed a remarkable discrepancy between the levels of agreement between Baby Boomers/Gen Xers and Millennial alumni and current juniors and seniors. This could reflect the large response rate from students rather than from Millennial workers. However, when we performed the Chi-Square and Cramer's V tests for the uncollapsed data and uncollapsed generation, we did not find a statistically significant difference. (See Table 10).

Table 10. Uncollapsed response categories and generation for *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project item*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.747	1	.191

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis One

Millennials chose informal feedback, formal feedback, and mentoring to be the types of feedback that best motivates them in the workplace. This finding suggests that Millennials

require a diversity of feedback types in the workplace in order for supervisors to personalize the type of feedback to the individual. One explanation for this need for direct attention to the individual rests in the extensive process of student-teacher feedback that Millennials are predisposed to in the educational setting. As described by Bayer, Braxton, and Eimers (1996) and Gibbs and Simpson (2004), in an educational setting, students are accustomed to clear expectations, prompt feedback, and written feedback. Munro (2010) found that 78 percent of Millennials expect their workplace feedback to mirror their academic feedback, thus, Millennials expect high quality feedback in the workplace.

Pay raise was considered they type of feedback that best motivates Millennials in the workplace by only a small percentage of Millennials and Baby Boomers/Gen Xers. This both challenges and supports our literature review findings. Contrary to our results, Lavoie-Tremblay found that monetary incentives were an important way to recognize and motivate new nurses in Quebec. On the other hand, our findings were elucidated by Lancaster and Stillman (2002), who claim that Millennials are not enticed by pay raise because it does not satisfy their need for instant gratification. The discrepancy in findings could be a result of the limited sampling frame evident in all three studies.

Regarding the Baby Boomers/Gen Xers perceptions of the type of feedback that best motivates Millennials in the workplace, zero percent chose mentoring. This surprising find is understood under the common trend amongst companies to discontinue or not initiate mentoring programs because it is viewed as too costly (Selingo 2011). However Munro (2010) recommends that organizations adapt their policies as Millennials enter the workforce, or they risk high turnover rates, which cost the company more than twice an employees' monthly salary.

Hypothesis Two

As reported in the current literature, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers tend to perceive Millennials as more sensitive to feedback (Spectrum Knowledge and Career Center at Cal State Fullerton 2011). This perception is often perpetuated by Millennials' treatments to excessive

parental praise; the more Millennials were idolized by their parents, the less they were willing to accept a lack of recognition and/or failure (Alsop 2008). Our results suggest that Baby Boomers and Gen Xers do tend to misperceive Millennials' sensitivity to praise and criticism in the workplace. In our item *feel more comfortable in the workplace when receiving praise on a project*, the older generation slightly overestimated Millennials' level of agreement with this statement. In our item *feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project*, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers also overestimated Millennials' level of agreement as well, this time to a higher degree. In the last item where we found statistical significance, *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project*, Millennials demonstrated greater sensitivity to feedback than the older generations anticipated. These differing levels of agreement show that Millennials may not entirely fulfill Baby Boomers', Gen Xers', and the popular media's perceptions of this generation as exceptionally sensitive to feedback. Overall, Millennials may respond more positively to criticism than how Baby Boomers and Gen Xers perceive their responses to criticism (the items that show this trend are *feel discouraged at work when receiving criticism on a project* and *feel motivated to work harder when receiving criticism on a project*).

CONCLUSION

The concluding results of our research lead us to determine that there is in fact a disconnect between Millennials' reactions to and preferences for feedback in the workplace and the older generations' perceptions of these experiences and desires. Our hypotheses claiming that these generations would differ in their understandings of the type of feedback that best motivates Millennials as well as in their estimation of the emotional responses to praise and criticism were supported by our findings.

It must be noted that we faced certain limitations in conducting our research. One limitation was the low response rates for each of our surveys. Our survey for Baby Boomers and Generation X included a response rate of 14.8 percent, our survey for Millennial alumni included

a response rate of 17.9 percent, and the Millennial juniors and seniors' response rate was 39.7 percent. Furthermore, our results can only be generalized to our sampling frame, a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Our research was also limited by financial resources and time. Future research should seek to include a greater demographic of current juniors and seniors and workers as well as Baby Boomer and Generation X employers.

Our recommendations for future research include a longitudinal study of feedback in relation to years in the workplace. Even though our research did not specifically analyze the individual groups within each generation due to time restrictions, we suggest further research and analysis into the nuances of feedback preference and sensitivity within each generation. Our recommendations for practical application of our research include a suggestion that organizations strive to offer a diverse array of feedback types to cater to the many types of feedback that best motivate Millennials. Additionally, we advise these organizations to implement mentoring relationships in the workplace. Our recommendations for institutions of higher education that aim to prepare Millennials for these sorts of encounters in the workplace include a suggestion to organize workshops for the purpose of adjusting Millennials' expectations for the workplace according to what they may reasonably anticipate from their Baby Boomer and Generation X employers. Millennial employees should also communicate their specific desires regarding feedback to their employers and see to what extent these preferences may be reasonably accommodated.

REFERENCES

- Alsop, Ron. (2008) *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Anderson, Neil. 2006. *Handbook of Industrial, Work, and Organizational Psychology Volume 1*. London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Barzilai-Nahon, Karine and Robert M. Mason. 2010. "How Executives Perceive the Net Generation." *Information, Communication & Society* 13(3):396-396-418.
- Boud, David. 2000. "Sustainable Assessment: Rethinking Assessment for the learning society." *Studies in Continuing Education* 22: 151–67.

- Braxton, John M., Mardy T. Eimers, and Alan E. Bayer. 1996. "The Implications of Teaching Norms for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education." *The Journal of Higher Education* 67: 603-25.
- Burlacu, Gabriela. 2011. "Employee Age Differences in Formal Performance Feedback Reactions: Examining the Effects of Perceived Valence, Content, and Delivery." Master's Thesis in Psychology, Portland State University.
- Cowan, John. 1999. *On Becoming An Innovative University Teacher*. London, England: Open University Press.
- Eby, Lillian, Allen, Tammy D. 2010. "The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach." Blackwell Publishing Ltd. West Sussex, U.K.
- Gibbs, Graham, Simpson, S. 2004 "Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning." *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* 1:3-31.
- Gursoy, Dogan, Thomas A. Maier and Christina G. Chi. 2007. "Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 27: 448-458.
- Hastings, R. 2008. "Millennials expect a lot from leaders." *HR Magazine* 53: 30.
- Huybers, Catherine M. 2011. "The Recruitment and Retention of Generation Y." Master's Research Paper, Department of Training and Development, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie.
- Keeter, S., K. Parker, R. Morin, A. Pond, S. Clement, D. Cohn, M. H. Lopez, G. Smith, R. Fry, Wang, and L. M. Christian. 2010. "Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next." Pew Research Center.
- Lancaster, Lynne C. and Stillman, David. 2002. *When Generations Collide: Who they are. Why they clash. How to solve the generational puzzle at work*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Lepsinger, Richard and Anntoinette D. Lucia. 1997. *The Art and Science of 360 Degree Feedback*. San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass/ Pfeiffer.
- Lavoie-Tremblay, Melanie, Edith Leclere, Caroline Marchionni and Ulrika Dreviok. 2010. "The Needs and Expectations of Generation Y Nurses in the Workplace." *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development* 26: 2-8.
- Myers, Karen K. and Kamyab Sadaghiani. 2010. "Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials' Organizational Relationships and Performance." *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 25: 225-238.
- Munro, Carolin R. 2010. "Charting Workplace Transitioning Pathways of Generation-Y Human Resources Practitioners." *Canadian Journal Career Development*. 9.2: 1-2.
- Munro, Carolin R. 2009. "Mentoring Needs and Expectations of Generation-Y Human Resources Practitioners: Preparing the Next Wave of Strategic Business Partners."

Journal of Management Research 2: 1-25.

Nardi, Peter M. 2006. *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods, 2nd ed.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2007. *Basics of Social Research, 2nd ed.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Ng., Eddy S. W., Linda Schweitzer, and Sean T. Lyons. 2010. "New Generation, Great Expectations: A Field Study of the Millennial Generation." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25:281-292.

Nicol, David J. and Debra Macfarlane-Dick. 2006. "Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice." *Studies in Higher* 31: 199-218.

Patten, Mildred L. 2011. *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide, 3rd ed.* Los Angeles, CA: Pycszak Publishing.

Rawlins, Claudia, Julie Indvik, and Pamela R. Johnson. 2008. "Just Wishing And Hoping? What The Millennial Cohort Absolutely, Positively Must Have At Work." Paper presented at the Allied Academies International Conference, April 2-4, Tunica, MS.

Selingo, Jeff. 2011. "Wanted: Better Employees." *Huffington Post*, December 13. Retrieved 17 Dec. 2011. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-selingo/wanted-better-employees_b_1146760.html)

Solnet, David and Anna Hood. 2011. "Generation Y As Hospitality Industry Employees: An examination of work attitude differences." *The University of Queensland*.

Spectrum Knowledge and Career Center at Cal State Fullerton. "The Gen Y Perceptions Study." Retrieved October 7, 2011 (http://campusapps2.fullerton.edu/career/pdf/Gen_Y.pdf).

Twenge, Jean. 2010. "A Review of the Empirical Evidence on Generational Differences in Work Attitudes." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25(2): 201-210.