

Motivational Factors to Entice A New Generation

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ABSTRACT

The onslaught of the Millennial generation is shaping our world in many ways. The Millennials are an innovative group looking for challenges and the ability to provide help to society. Public service motivation (PSM) connects those with an affinity for service-related characteristics to positions within the public service sector, which includes government and nonprofit industries. This sector continues to grow within the United States, expanding to cover more than one-fourth of the entire economy. The public service industry must consider what it will take to recruit and retain the Millennial generation. Is this generation already a good fit for the public service industry? Research shows that Millennials have the characteristics necessary for high PSM including a civic-mindedness, service-orientation, and a want to contribute to society. With a lack of extrinsic motivators, the public service sector must consider its appeal to the Millennial generation and how to connect them to meaningful, challenging, and goal-oriented work.

Keywords: Millennial Generation, Public Service Motivation, Millennial Innovation

The Millennial generation or Gen Y is quickly taking over the workforce, enticing companies to alter their views on employee motivation. While all sectors will begin to feel the effects of this new generation's preferences and unique perspectives, the public service sector will need to embrace innovative strategies with limited resources to recruit and retain this valuable cohort. This study will examine the characteristics of the Millennial generation, the qualifiers of public service motivation, and consider the overlaps between the two.

THE MILLIENAL GENERATION

Generational differences occur throughout society; these separate generations are defined by the value system shared among people born within a certain period (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). Pew Research Center (2015) segments the workforce into four main generations: the Silent Generation (born 1928-45), the Baby Boomers (born 1946-64), Generation X (born 1965-79) and the Millennial generation (1980-2000). This research will focus on the growing section of the workforce, comprised of the Millennial generation. Every generation experienced events that molded their group's ideals, values, and skill sets. Millennials were raised to be smart, powerful, civic, and moral (Zimmerman, 2010). They experienced scheduled, structured lives, globalism, and extreme acts of domestic terrorism (Raines, 2002). However, this cohort is most clearly defined by two main circumstances: entering the workforce during the Great Recession (Debevec, Schewe, Madden & Diamond, 2013) and the boom of digital media (Raines, 2002).

Due to the Great Recession, this generation witnessed limited job opportunities, greater student loan debt, and delays in economic adulthood activities like buying a home or car, getting married, or starting families (Debevec et al., 2013). They are considered thrifty (Debevec et al., 2013), confident, goal-and-achievement oriented (Raines, 2002), entitled, disloyal, and narcissistic (Hein, 2013). However, the most pervasive description of a Millennial is that they are hopeful (Debevec et al., 2013; Raines, 2002).

Millennials are quickly taking over the workplace. An article by Richard Fry (2015) of the Pew Research Center explains the current workforce breakdown; Millennials recently overpowered Generation X as the "largest share of the American workforce" totaling 53.5 million employees in the first quarter of 2015. Businesses will need to adapt to fit the changing landscape of the market with a majority share of Millennials. What can businesses expect from this innovative group as employees? They are well known for their skills in technology, adaptability, and willingness to take on new challenges (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). In the digital age, this young generation continually connects to others to receive information. Research shows that Millennials overwhelmingly prefer to connect through face-to-face time, but there is a trend towards social media and digital communications (Holt et al., 2012, p.89). Furthermore, Millennials are attracted to workplaces that offer flexibility, a results-oriented work environment, and leadership development for growth (Ware, 2014, p.60). They also seek "stimulation, collaboration, and compensation" (Holt et al., 2012, p.90). This incoming workforce is becoming more demanding on employers to meet their needs, or lose their talent. In a world with retiring Baby Boomers, businesses cannot afford to miss this well-educated and innovative generation.

Businesses can learn to tap into this demographic by understanding what drives Millennials. Kultalahti and Viitala (2014) identify work content, goal setting, feedback, social recognition, monetary rewards, and flextime as motivating factors for this cohort (p.571). Holt, Marques, and Way (2012) argue that, "Millennials are drawn toward challenge as a driving motive for performance" (p.86). According to this study, Millennials are fueled by challenge, potential growth, and making a positive impact (p. 86). Other studies attribute a social cause-orientation (Debevec et al., 2013, p.22) or a desire to do work they consider meaningful (Maciag, 2013) to the Millennials' drive for success. Among their top priorities, Millennials list: "giving back and being civically engaged" (Holt et al., 2012, p.91). This generation is different from others because of the social-orientation and desire to do good that is an identifying factor of this group.

PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

Many of the identifiers specific to Millennials overlap with the key indicators of public service motivation (PSM). Motivation is "anything that affects behavior in pursuing a certain outcome" (Lussier & Achua, 2013, p.81). It can be both extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivational factors come from outside the person or job and include: pay, benefits, working conditions, and relationships (Lussier & Achua, 2013, p.84). Intrinsic motivation derives from within the person through their work. Lussier and Achua (2013) list

intrinsic motivators as, “achievement, recognition, challenge, and advancement” (p. 84). Public service motivation is multifaceted, drawing on extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors to increase engagement with the mission of the organization. Perry and Wise define PSM as, “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions or organizations” (1990, p.368). Other researchers have broadened the definition describing PSM as “a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humanity” (Rainey & Steinbauer, 199, p.23). At the crux, PSM is an internal desire to have a positive impact on society. This type of motivation is typically internal, drawing on individuals’ attractions to the sector of public service. PSM has shaped a new public service sector, now including government and nonprofit organizations (Maciag, 2013; Word & Carpenter, 2013, p.319).

While PSM is typically defined through intrinsic measures, there are some extrinsic drivers towards the public service sector. In the past, pay was comparable or exceeded private sector wages in government positions (1994). Other external benefits of public employment include: paid fringe benefits, paid vacation days and holidays, greater job security, earlier retirement, and paid healthcare (1994). However, with the downturn in the economy, the public sector felt a large hit in these fringe benefits and other incentives to public employment. The freezing of pay and cutting of benefits created challenges in hiring new talent (Maciag, 2013). Maciag also cites the “lengthy hiring process and lower entry-level pay” as obstacles for recruitment (2013). In a study of the performance of employees in the public service sector compared to their level of public service motivation, Condrey found that “extrinsic rewards can actually have a negative impact on the performance of employees with high PSM” (1998, p.576). From 2002 to 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows an increase of 2.1 percentage points of all employment in the health care and social assistance, federal government, and state and local government sectors for 26.7 percent of the United States’ total employment (2013, Table 2.1). At least one-fourth of the United States workforce is employed in a public sector. What is so enticing about the public services sector that continues to draw in new employees?

Perry and Wise (1990) hypothesized that “the greater an individual’s public service motivation, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization” (p.370). They went on to describe three theoretical bases of PSM: rational, norm-based, and affective (p. 368). The rational base represents a want to participate; these individuals are committed advocates (p. 368). Norm-based public service motivation is a desire to serve the public interest (p. 368) and affective PSM is a desire and willingness to help others (p. 369). For ten years, this methodology segmented the main intrinsic motivating factors that encouraged PSM. However, in 2000, four new profiles of PSM motives surfaced: Samaritans, Communitarians, Patriots, and Humanitarians (Brewer et al., pp. 258-260). Samaritans are emotionally involved and compassionate individuals that consider themselves the “guardians of the underprivileged” (p. 259). Communitarians channel a responsibility to public service and their civic duties into their careers; they are often described as prideful and elite (p. 259). Patriots are driven by their need to protect and advocate for others, they feel a strong loyalty to duty and believe they are called to serve on a larger scale (pp. 259-260). Finally, Humanitarians are motivated by social justice issues and societal welfare concerns; they feel a responsibility to the community and a strong sense of citizenship (p. 260). The researchers recognized that the model developed by Perry and Wise was not holistic and that PSM was more complex than just one type of motivation. Together, these four profiles give a bigger picture of the motivating factors that drive individuals towards the public service sector.

The four profiles developed by Brewer, Selden, and Facer detail characteristics that distinguish drivers of intrinsic motivation in public service employees. There are many links to the motivational drivers of the Millennial generation and those that define PSM. Millennials are defined as a group that is “primed to do well by doing good” (Holt et al., 2012, p.91). Furthermore, the researchers describe Millennials’ drive to include: seeking a challenge, making a positive impact, and the ability to help (Holt et al., 2012, p. 86). Maciag points out that, “Millennials desire work they consider meaningful right away” (2013). Like the Samaritan and Humanitarian profiles, Millennials seek out answers to society’s toughest issues with the aim to make a positive impact. They value the ability to help, similar to Patriots, Samaritans and Humanitarians. Furthermore, Raines (2002) describes Millennials as civic-minded, which translates to the Communitarian profile. The want to do good for the community is not just a characteristic of the Millennial generation; however, research shows that this generation prioritizes social-mindedness.

A study conducted by Word and Carpenter displays the relationship between statements related to characteristics associated with PSM and levels of PSM. Within their research, there is evidence that respondents whom identified with the specific statements scored higher on the PSM scale than those that did not. These statements are: "Meaning community service opportunities are very important to me "," Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself" and "Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements" (p. 332, Table A2). All three statements were positively correlated with higher levels of PSM, illustrating the tie between an individual's intrinsic values and their levels of PSM. Millennials epitomize these three statements, reinforcing their value-based motivation to participate in public service. This study relates the importance of values in deciding motivational factors for careers in the public service industry.

Levels of PSM are important because it directly relates to individuals who seek out employment in the public services fields. Perry and Wise (1990) believed that a person's interest in the public service sector was driven by their levels of PSM (p. 370). Those individuals with "high PSM were more likely to indicate that their needs and values fit with public and nonprofit organizations and that they were interested in employment with public and nonprofit organizations" (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 521). PSM is also relevant to businesses of all sectors because it is closely related to "organizational commitment, turnover, job satisfaction, and task performance" (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 509). Kernaghan explains that public service values in all of the organization's management systems can strengthen motivators (2011, p. 9). It is beneficial to even private sector businesses to understand public service motivation and recruit employees with those characteristics because it can positively influence their work culture.

Organizations looking to recruit employees from the Millennial generation with high levels of PSM will find better success if they emphasize service and stability within their organization (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 520). Individuals with high PSM tend to be female, managers, well educated, and involved in at least one professional organization (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 510). Other than the PSM factors already listed, additional motivators of the Millennial generation are: flexibility, quick advancement, a results-oriented work environment, and leadership development (Ware, 2014, pp. 58-60). Recruiting these employees is instrumental in growing a business that will continue to appeal to the largest market share, the Millennial generation.

Retaining employees with high PSM levels centers on providing opportunities for them to engage. According to Kernaghan, employee engagement builds on pride, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (2011, p. 10). Millennials with high levels of PSM will thrive in an organization that provides challenging and collaborative opportunities for them to grow their skill sets, deepening engagement, and increasing their level of motivation (Word & Carpenter, 2013, p. 329). Public service industries have their work cut out for them; with Millennials currently holding a median turnover of 1.8 years (Ware, 2014, p.58) it is imperative to make their job interesting in order to keep them for a prolonged period.

CONCLUSION

The inability to provide above average entry-level compensation and the cut back of generous employee benefits draws the talented, technology-obsessed Millennial generation away from the public sector. However, by appealing to this generation's intrinsic values to do good and create a positive impact, the public services sector can continue to entice and engage Millennials as employees. Research shows that by increasing involvement, employers can positively influence the employee's motivation and efficiency. With no drop in public administration and policy graduate students (Maciag, 2013), public service sectors can reap the benefits of the Millennial generation's sociable, optimistic, and collaborative skills (Raines, 2002). Public service organizations are advised to focus on the intrinsic factors driving motivation: the ability to make a positive impact, help others, and engage in civic activities to speak to the Millennial generation.

It is recommended that further research examine the relationship between the values of the Millennial generation and public service motivation. A large sampling of the Millennial generation would help to determine the validity of public service interests and priorities among this cohort's value-base. While the research field for PSM is growing, there is still the need for additional studies to expand the understanding of the factors that encourage successful public service.

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