



Dynamics of Virtual Work

Working Paper Series

Number 4

Organizational and Job Attribute Preferences of Millennials in the Digital Age

by Asma El Ouiridi, Ivana Pais and Mariam El Ouiridi

The Dynamics of Virtual Work

COST Action IS 1202, *The Dynamics of Virtual Work*, is an international interdisciplinary research network on the transformation of work in the Internet Age, supported by COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology) within the Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health Domain. Chaired by Ursula Huws, Professor of Labour and Globalisation at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK, the Action is managed by a committee of representatives from 30 participating COST countries. Further information about the Action can be found at

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ICTs have had a major impact on the content and location of work. Digitisation of information has transformed labour processes whilst telecommunications have enabled jobs to be relocated globally. But ICTs have also enabled the creation of entirely new types of 'digital' or 'virtual' labour, both paid and unpaid, shifting the borderline between 'play' and 'work' and creating new types of unpaid labour connected with consumption and co-creation of services. This affects private life as well as transforming the nature of work. Because of the gender division of labour, this affects women and men differently.

The changing geography of virtual work and the emergence of new value-generating virtual activities have major implications for economic development, skills and innovation policies. However these are poorly understood because they have been studied in a highly fragmentary way by isolated researchers.

This Action will distil knowledge to enable policymakers to separate facts from hype and develop effective strategies to generate new employment and economic development in Europe. It will bring together experts in the fields of communications, innovation, management, digital media, creative industries, technology, employment, economics, sociology, geography, gender studies and cultural studies to consolidate theory, map this emerging field, support early stage researchers and develop new research agendas.

This Working Paper is one of a series published by the Action in pursuit of these aims.

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Published by

The University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB, UK.

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Abstract

Understanding the organizational and job attribute preferences of job seekers in general is crucial for organizations, for purposes of attraction, recruitment, retention and motivation. Understanding the preferences of Millennials in particular is necessary for employers, in order to create job offers that will interest this generation that is joining the workforce in increasing numbers. This paper is a preliminary narrative review of relevant literature related to the topic of Millennials' organizational and job attribute preferences. This review indicated the need for an updated, theoretically-informed investigation of organizational and job attribute preferences of Millennials, especially in light of the scant attention given to the place of social media access and flexible work arrangements among these preferences.

Organizational and Job Attribute Preferences

Job attributes have a key impact on individuals' decision-making in the employment context. These attributes can impact applicant attraction to firms (Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998) and their job offer decisions (Boswell, Roehling, LePine, & Moynihan, 2003; Powell, 1984; Turban, Eyring, & Campion, 1993), as well as employee-initiated job changes (Grund, 2013).

Previous research has covered a number of organizational and job attribute preferences. In their review of the literature, Montgomery and Ramus (2011) identified the most researched job attribute preferences as being financial factors, opportunities for advancement and growth, type of work, geographic location, organizational values, job security, and people in the organization. These job attribute preferences and others vary based on several individual factors including age (Lacy, Bokemeier, & Shepard, 1983), gender (Bigoness, 1988; Konrad, Corrigan, Lieb, & Ritchie, 2000; Sutherland, 2011), education (Lacy et al., 1983; Sutherland, 2011), occupational prestige (Lacy et al., 1983), commitment to continue work (Lacy et al., 1983), ethnic identity (Combs, Milosevic, Jeung, & Griffith, 2012), domestic circumstances (Sutherland, 2011), occupation (Sutherland, 2011), and family demands (Konrad, 2003), among others. There are also generational differences in the expectations of employees and job seekers from their employers (Lub, Nije Bijvank, Matthijs Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2012). In this paper, the attention is particularly focused on the organization and job attribute preferences of Millennials.

Millennials represent an interesting population of study, both for their expected increasing numbers in the workplace, and for their particular characteristics compared to previous generations, be it in terms of personality features or technological proficiency. This paper is aimed at surveying the academic literature and popular press on what the Millennials want in the workplace and expect from their employers. Understanding the career expectations and organizational preferences of Millennials can help employers create job offers that will interest them (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010), and meeting these expectations can increase their job satisfaction (Kong, Wang, & Fu, 2015). In the following sub-sections, Millennials are first described, and then a brief literature review of their job attribute preferences is presented, followed by an identified gap in the literature, and suggestions for future research venues.

Why Millennial?

'Millennials' is the popular name of the generation born in or after 1980, also often referred to as 'Generation Y'. This generation has been receiving significant attention from practitioners and academics, as indicated by the number of results that searches for the keywords "Millennials", "Generation Y", "Generation Me", and "Nexters" return on popular search engines and other academic databases (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of search results for Millennials-related keywords in popular search engines and academic databases as of November 2015

Search Engines/Databases	"Millennials"	"Generation Y"	"Generation Me"	"Nexters"
Google	14,400,000	3,070,000	218,000	86,900
Yahoo!	8,000,000	2,020,000	165,000	23,900
Bing	7,140,000	1,540,000	124,000	20,900
Web of Science *	92	167	13	6
Ebscohost Databases *	2,309	710	30	9

Proquest Databases	5,983	8,110	269	48
Elsevier's ScienceDirect *	312	184	71	1

*In the Web of Science, Ebscohost, and ScienceDirect databases, search was limited to articles' titles only.

Millennials are expected to make up to half of the global workforce by the year 2020 (PWC, 2011). Members of this generation are often described as self-reliant, independent, and entrepreneurial thinkers (Martin, 2005), as well as being optimistic, cooperative, trusting, achieving, and civic-minded (Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010). Compared to other generations, Millennials demonstrate higher narcissism and self-esteem, and lower need for social approval (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Moreover, Millennials consider technology a sixth sense (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), and are particularly known for their superior technological proficiency (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010).

Academic research on Millennials has covered several topics. For example, researchers investigated and discussed Millennials' information-seeking behaviours (Holliday & Li, 2004; Weiler, 2005), their social media usage practices and motives (Bergman, Ferrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Kilian, Hennigs, & Langner, 2012; Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & Mccarty, 2012), their consumption habits and preferences (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2009; Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009), the influence of social media on their buying behaviours (Pate & Adams, 2013), their responses to cause-related marketing (Cui, Trent, Sullivan, & Matiru, 2003), their attitudes towards Internet-related ethics (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004), and their political engagement (Kiesa et al., 2007), among many other topics.

Organizational and Job Attribute Preferences of Millennials

In the existing body of research on Millennials, only a handful of studies investigated what this generation wants in future jobs and what it expects from employers. Overall, work-related expectations by Millennials, as examined in the existing literature, can be divided into five main categories, namely: work/life balance, good pay and benefits, opportunities for advancement, meaningful work experiences, and a nurturing work environment (Ng et al., 2010). The number and nature of items investigated as job attribute preferences or work expectations were inconsistent across studies (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014), making it a challenge to draw general conclusions from the literature. Table 2 provides a brief summary of selected academic studies and other reports that provided ranked organizational and job attribute preferences of Millennials.

Table 2. Brief summary of academic literature and popular press on the ranked organizational and job attribute preferences of Millennials, in chronological order

Studies by: Author(s), study's focus, date, sample size, location	Order of items
Terjesen et al. (2007), organizational attributes at the application attraction phase, 862, UK.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest heavily in the training and development of their employees. 2. Care about their employees as individuals. 3. Clear opportunities for long-term career progression. 4. Variety in daily work. 5. Dynamic, forward-looking approach to their business. 6. Friendly, informal culture.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Opportunity, in the early years, to move around the organisation and work in different areas/role. 8. Freedom to work on your own initiative. 9. Scope for creativity in your work. 10. Employ people with whom you feel you will have things in common. 11. A pure meritocracy (rewards and promotions based on performance). 12. Opportunity for international travel. 13. Use your degree skills. 14. Widely regarded as a highly prestigious employer. 15. Very high starting salary. 16. Relatively stress-free working environment. 17. Opportunity to work (and live) abroad. 18. Internationally diverse mix of colleagues. 19. Require you to work standard working hours only. 20. A small organization.
<p>Hurst and Good (2009) ¹, Pre-entry job expectations, 193, USA.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enjoyable work. 2. Sense of accomplishment. 3. Good pay. 4. Opportunities to learn new things. 5. Job stability. 6. Opportunities to contribute to company success. 7. Work/family balance. 8. Opportunities for leadership. 9. Well-defined career path. 10. Management opportunities. 11. Prestigious career. 12. Function as part of a team. 13. Opportunities to make a contribution to society. 14. Work-related travel.
<p>Ng et al. (2010), desired work attributes, 23,413, Canada.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities for advancement in position. 2. Good people to work with. 3. Good people to report to. 4. Good training opportunities/developing new skills. 5. Work-Life balance. 6. Good health and benefits plan. 7. Good variety of work. 8. Job security. 9. Good initial salary level. 10. Challenging work. 11. Opportunities to have a personal impact. 12. Commitment to social responsibility. 13. Opportunities to have a social impact. 14. Organization is a leader in its field. 15. Strong commitment to employee diversity. 16. Opportunity to travel.
<p>De Hauw and De Vos (2010) ², psychological contract expectations/employer</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social atmosphere (e.g., good relationships between colleagues). 2. Career development (e.g., opportunities for

<p>inducement expectations, 787, Belgium.</p>	<p>promotion). 3. Job content (e.g. autonomy at one's job). 4. Work-life balance (e.g. respect for one's personal situation). 5. Financial rewards (e.g. attractive rewards packages). 6. Job security (e.g., employment with long-term perspective). 7. Training (e.g., financial support for training courses).</p>
<p>De Hauw and De Vos (2010), psychological contract expectations/employer inducement expectations, 825, Belgium.</p>	<p>1. Career development (e.g., opportunities for promotion). 2. Social atmosphere (e.g., good relationships between colleagues). 3. Job content (e.g. autonomy at one's job). 4. Financial rewards (e.g. attractive rewards packages). 5. Work-life balance (e.g. respect for one's personal situation). 6. Training (e.g., financial support for training courses). 7. Job security (e.g., employment with long-term perspective)</p>
<p>PWC (2011), attractive organizational features, 4,364, Worldwide.</p>	<p>1. Opportunities for career progression. 2. Competitive wages/other financial incentives. 3. Excellent training/development programmes. 4. Good benefits packages. 5. Flexible working arrangements. 6. International opportunities. 7. Good reputation for ethical practices. 8. Corporate values that match your own. 9. A reputation as an employer of the best and brightest people The employer brand. Diversity/ equal opportunities record. The sector in which the organisation operates.</p>
<p>Lub, Nije Bijvank, Matthijs Bal, Blomme, and Schalk (2012), psychological contract expectations from employers, 156, Netherlands.</p>	<p>1. Work atmosphere. 2. Stimulating job. 3. Autonomy. 4. Job security. 5. Task description. 6. Salary. 7. Work-life balance. 8. Intra-organizational mobility.</p>
<p>Derrick (2014), top factors for Millennials when deciding to apply for a job, 1,514, USA.</p>	<p>1. What the company specifically does, sells or products. 2. The company's work culture. 3. The company's involvement with causes. 4. The company's office environment. 5. The company's diversity and HR awards.</p>
<p>Guillot-Soulez and Soulez (2014), job preferences, 592, France.</p>	<p>1. Type of contract/Job security. 2. Atmosphere of work. 3. Distance from home to work. 4. Career path/Advancement.</p>

	<p>5. Salary.</p> <p>6. Type of work (varied vs. routine tasks).</p> <p>7. Hours (regular vs. irregular work schedules).</p> <p>8. Reputation.</p> <p>9. Status (manager vs. non-manager).</p> <p>10. Bonuses.</p>
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Notes:

1. This study particularly focused on the retail industry.
2. In this study, data collection was conducted from matched samples in two waves in 2006 and 2009 respectively.
3. This study particularly focused on the hospitality sector.

Researchers identified different top job attribute preferences by Millennials. These top preferences varied between opportunities for advancement and career progression opportunities (Ng et al., 2010; PWC, 2011) and heavy investment in employee training and development (Terjesen et al., 2007), to work enjoyableness (Hurst & Good, 2009) and job security (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). In the literature, the focus was not always on solely ranking the preferences and expectations of Millennials. For example, Hurst and Good (2009) investigated the association between pre-entry job expectations of Generation Y members and career exploration; and Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007) examined the relationship between the presence of Millennials' preferred organizational attributes in companies and the likelihood for them to apply to positions in those organizations.

While some researchers examined the job preferences of Millennials as a homogenous group, others found that these preferences were heterogeneous within this generation (e.g. Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). Some Millennials seek job security first and foremost, others are career-minded and interested in working for a prestigious organizations that offers career progression opportunities, a third group from this generation wants to achieve work-life balance with regular working hours and a minimum distance between home and work, and a different group of Millennials are easy-going and looking mainly for a pleasant working environment (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). The preferences of Millennials can also vary by gender (Ng et al., 2010; Terjesen et al., 2007), as well as by grade point average, work experience, visible minority status, and year of study (Ng et al., 2010).

Identified gap in the literature

Existing literature on job and organizational attributes did not cover some salient factors for contemporary job seekers (Montgomery & Ramus, 2011). While some authors contributed to covering this gap by including novel factors related to organizational reputation and corporate social responsibility (e.g. Montgomery & Ramus, 2011), other important factors are still missing in the job attribute preferences literature, especially when the focus is on the Millennial generation. Two main missing attributes among the ranked preferences of the Millennials in existing literature are social media access and flexible work arrangements, especially in light of evidence that points to their importance for this generation.

Millennials value social media applications because are an integral part of their daily routines (Cisco, 2011). The results of a study in 2011 showed that about a third of young respondents would decline a job offer from a company that did not allow social media access during work hours and on company devices (Cisco, 2011). In a similar vein, a study found that Millennials perceived higher person-organization-fit with companies whose organizational policies supported social media usage (Cho,

Park, & Ordonez, 2013). While granting social media access might seem axiomatic to Millennials joining the workforce in the digital age, organizational practices seem to be lacking behind. Several reports have in fact showed that banning social media access is still a common practice in organizational contexts. More than one in four organizations surveyed in 2011 and 2012 reported actively blocking access to social media at work (Proskauer, 2011, 2012). The level of restriction of access to social media varies by country and by organization (Cisco, 2010). A report indicated that more than half of the surveyed organizations had social media policies that restricted social media usage during work hours on company issued devices (ERC, 2012).

Several studies also indicated increasing preferences for flexible work arrangements, especially among young employees and job seekers (Adecco, 2015). Firstly, flexibility can be in terms of work locations, and it refers to the possibility of working from home, from a closer branch or office to home, from a co-working space, or on the move (Adecco, 2015). A study indicated that about 70 percent of student respondents preferred such flexibility, because they believed that working in the office was either unnecessary, or needed only for occasional important work meetings (Cisco, 2011). In the same study, around 40 to 45 percent of young respondents indicated that they would choose a job that offered greater flexibility in terms of work locations and devices but with a lower salary, rather than a job with a higher salary but with restrictions on remote working conditions (Cisco, 2011). Secondly, Millennials also prefer flexible working hours, as a study showed that 38 percent of Millennial respondents expected some flexible working hours in their future jobs, whereas 32 percent expected mainly flexible hours (PWC, 2011). In another study, 46 percent of the surveyed students preferred to have unconventional work schedules, based on their conveniences and lifestyles (Cisco, 2011). These two types of flexible work arrangements, also known in existing literature as telecommuting and flextime, have received significant attention from academics since the early seventies. While these work arrangements are not novel, they are probably made easier thanks to the newest development in communication technologies. Therefore, their absence in research on the job attribute preferences of Millennials is surprising.

These studies and reports that examined social media access and other flexible work arrangements do not provide a full picture on the place of these attributes among the other preferences of Millennials. While these attributes seem to have been overlooked in existing academic research, it is likely that they were implicitly considered as part of other job attribute categories such as work-life balance or autonomy.

In summary, this identified gap prompts the need for future research. There is a particular need for a theoretical explanation for the expected place of social media access and flexible work arrangements among the job attributes of Millennials, given the generally limited theory-based research on the work expectations of this generation (Luscombe, Lewis, & Biggs, 2013). Filling this gap will also provide organizations with evidence-based guidance to deal with technology in the workplace in order to attract, retain and motivate Millennials, especially since members of this generation have lower commitment to their employers and higher turnover intentions compared to other generations (Lub et al., 2012).

Conclusion and future research

Existing literature about Millennials' job preferences remains inconclusive, thus raising the need for more research on this topic. This paper highlighted the need for theory-based research on the place of social media access and flexible work arrangements among the job attribute preferences of the youngest generation entering the workplace. Other researchers suggested including more job

attributes in future research on Millennials, namely preferred leader type and leadership style (Ng et al., 2010).

Since contextual factors impact the expectations of the Millennials (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010), more research is also needed in this direction. Paying closer attention to context in future research on Millennials will help avoid mistakenly attributing to generational differences changes that are in reality related to contextual variables (Deal et al., 2010). To be able to disentangle generational effects from other factors, such as age and life stages, longitudinal approaches are encouraged in future research (Deal et al., 2010).

In conclusion, further Millennials-focused research will help prove whether this generation is genuinely different in the way it views and interacts with the world of work (Levenson, 2010). Nevertheless, as Cennamo and Gardner (2008) pointed out, while it is important to continue research on generational differences in the workplace, it is also crucial to acknowledge commonalities between employees of different ages and experiences.

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