MENTORING MILLENNIALS

in an

ASIAN CONTEXT

Talent Management Insights from Singapore

PAUL LIM *and* ANDREW PARKER

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Mentoring Millennials in an Asian Context: Talent Management Insights from Singapore

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Prior to joining academia, Paul spent 10 years in marketing, specialising in the area of Brand Management. His work has taken him to the advertising, social work, tourism and fast moving consumer goods industries. He has worked for companies ranging from non-profit organizations to small medium enterprises and multi-national publicly listed companies in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Canada and the United States. His last position in the private sector was managing Singapore's business operations for the subsidiary of a publicly listed Malaysian company.

His research interests lie in individual resilience, mentoring millennial leaders (Gen Y) and multi-generational leadership. He teaches courses in leadership, ethics, negotiation, conflict management and human resources management at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. He believes that these topics are vital in preparing leaders to navigate through current and future societal challenges. Paul also speaks on issues related to human capital management at conferences and organizations both locally and internationally; providing thought leadership in the local and regional media.

Outside of work, Paul is a faculty representative with the Committee for Diversity and Inclusion at SMU. He is also a founding member of a charitable foundation for underprivileged children. An avid sports fan, Paul enjoys running, tennis, golf, swimming and CrossFit. He also loves exploring new places and cultures and has travelled and trekked to more than 40 cities, towns and villages in over 20 countries.

Paul possesses a Doctorate in Business Administration (People, Organizations and Society) from French business school, Grenoble Ecolé de Management (France); an Executive MBA from the Helsinki School of Economics (Finland); and completed his undergraduate degrees in Commerce and Economics at the University of Toronto (Canada). He has also trained with Harvard Law School's Program on Negotiation (USA), obtaining a certificate to train negotiation in the organization.

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Andrew Parker is Professor of Business at the University of Exeter. His research uses the lens of network theory to better understand problem solving processes, innovation, knowledge transfer, turnover and performance within organizations. He has conducted social network analysis research in over 70 multinational organizations and government agencies.

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His research has appeared in Science, Journal of Management Studies, Organization Studies, Journal of Applied Psychology, Management Communication Quarterly, M@n@gement, Social Networks, Sloan Management Review, Organizational Dynamics and California Management Review. He is the co-author of The Hidden Power of Social Networks. He received his PhD from Stanford University.

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Preface

It was over a dinner gathering with some colleagues from the fast moving consumer goods industry that probably provided seed for this book. Over dinner, the seasoned professionals took turns complaining and expressing bewilderment at how challenging it was for them to manage their young hires – young being below the age of 30. I remember taking in all their comments and then chimed in that instead of being negative about them, we should seek to understand them. This gave way to more ridicule and predictions that such efforts would be in vain. However, I left that night determined to find a way to gain insight into the minds of millennials and to explore how mentoring affects their attitudes towards work.

We fear what we do not understand. Often times, we fail as a result of fear due to inertia, apprehension or a sheer lackadaisical attitude towards an area that we do not understand. At times, we perceive we know better. In reality, most times we are too clouded by our pride or do not even realise the existence of our blindspots due to ignorance. At a recent human resources practitioner conference, one professional innocently posed a question to a renowned academic on how she should handle millennials. To the surprise of many attendees, this academic shot back and claimed that enough has been said about millennials and that we should move on to other topics in the field of human resources. Although much might have been said or written about millennials, the truth is that many experienced individuals continue to find the generation gap too wide for them to bridge. Many simply do not know what makes a millennial tick.

I sincerely hope that this book will provide some insights in your journey in understanding a new and exciting generation. Even as I share my thoughts and findings, I am reminded that the more I learn, the more I discover I do not know.

Paul Lim

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To my family, my wife and three children, two of which I had during the course of writing the thesis, I am grateful for your never ending support and encouragement during the many dark days of hiding from the sun in order to complete my writings.

To the OBHR faculty at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University, I am indebted to how you all have provided me with the conditions and advice to progress in my academic journey.

I would also like to thank OCBC Bank and the team at OCBC Campus for allowing me access to interview mentors and protégés of their MentorMe programme. It was a joy to see great formal mentoring practices put into place. To the mentors and protégés who took time to speak with me, I am grateful for your insights and I have learned much.

Last but definitely not the least, I am humbled by the finished work of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whose provision for this opportunity and His empowerment to see it to the end has opened my eyes to things previously unseen.

Finished.

Paul Lim

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My co-author and doctoral dissertation supervisor, Andrew Parker, and I wrote this book with the intention of sharing findings from my doctoral dissertation on the topic of mentoring millennials and how it affected turnover intentions in Singapore. As the book progressed over the months, we realised the increasing interest that was generated among middle and senior managers. Middle managers were interested in becoming better mentors. Senior managers wanted to know what could be done to initiate or improve their mentoring programmes. Along the way, the first author got to know people at OCBC Campus and was highly impressed with their efforts in starting up their formal mentoring programme.

The following sections will see us contextualise the purpose of this book and how we wanted to study if mentoring could help decrease turnover and turnover intentions. Chapters 2 and 3 will take you through the theories of generational cohorts and how millennials differ from other cohorts. In Chapters 4 and 5, we will discuss theories on mentoring and employee turnover and how they affect human resources decisions. For the more academically inclined, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 will cover the details of the research study, analyses and recommendations that resulted from it. The book will then move towards a more practitioner angle in chapter 9 with practical advice for those who are starting their journey as mentors and for those who wish to improve in their mentoring skills. A case study chapter is also included on OCBC Campus' approach in starting their own mentorship programme for OCBC Bank. Lastly, we attempt to look into the crystal ball and share our views on generation Z and how we can look forward to mentor and work with them.

We hope that this book will help you in being a better mentor. Ultimately, we are all in this for preparing and equipping the next generation for the world to come. We believe they will need all the help that we can give. It is in our interest to help them succeed. This book hopes to do just that.

Context of Study

Free markets dictate that individuals have the right to move between organisations in search for better remuneration. While employees have the right to leave

an organisation, high employee turnover may be detrimental to any organisation, resulting in challenges to its administration costs, productivity and functions (Fang, 2001). Amongst the millennial (aged between 19 and 38 in year 2019) generational cohort (Duchscher & Cowin, 2004; Guha, 2010; Kupperschmidt, 2006), their turnover in organisations is more than those from other generational cohorts (McGraw, 2013; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009; Wan Yusoff, Queiri, Zakaria, & Hisham, 2013).

The implications for high levels of employee turnover can be damaging to the organisation (Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005). High employee turnover has been shown to lower organisation morale and productivity, reduce shared experiences amongst colleagues, minimise institutional knowledge, hamper communication and put a financial strain on the organisation (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011). In Singapore, a survey conducted among private sector businesses estimates that up to 150% of a highly skilled employee's annual salary can be spent to find a replacement (SHRI Research Centre, 2010). If millennials are leaving the organisations faster than allowing organisations the opportunity to contribute to building their careers, it will undoubtedly hurt their career prospects and adversely affect organisations and businesses in their efforts to improve organisational performance (Shaw et al., 2005). Interestingly, a survey in Singapore found 64% of respondents placed the 26 to 30 age group as the segment that faces the highest possible turnover (SHRI Research Centre, 2010). In Singapore, this is an area of concern for many organisations (Choong, 2013; Robert Half, 2013). Industrial practitioners commonly provide anecdotal advice to mitigate the outflow of millennials from organisations (Spykerman & Wee, 2012; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009; Zolkifi, 2011). Advice might range from giving the millennials whatever they want; to the opposite end of the spectrum where they should not be treated any differently from other generational cohorts.

Millennials make up a substantial part of the workforce in Singapore; and their high turnover behaviour is of concern to organisations. In Singapore, generation X and the millennials amount to 60% of the workforce with 32.4% of economically active residents below the age of 35 (Ministry of Manpower, 2010; Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Singapore, 2010). The implications of a generational cohort that moves easily between organisations can be significant for the affected organisations.

Studies in the United States have shown the link between mentoring and lower turnover or turnover intentions (Laband & Lentz, 1995; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Many benefits to the organisation and positive work outcomes for the mentored protégé have also been established (Burke & McKeen, 1997; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). It is in this context that this study seeks to discover the effect that mentoring has on turnover intentions in Singapore. Many practitioners have been strongly advocating the use of mentoring in the work place (Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011). In academia, most research revolves around the effectiveness of a mentoring relationship in the areas of psychosocial functions – activities which directly relate to the protégé's career advancement; and career development functions – activities that influence the protégé's self-image and competence

(Chao et al., 1992). Several studies have been done to link mentoring to employee turnover or turnover intentions (Laband & Lentz, 1995; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Payne & Huffman, 2005). However, outside of the United States, there are few studies conducted in the area of mentoring (Allen, Eby, Obrien, & Lentz, 2008). This research project responds to such a call to provide non-United States–based studies.

In Singapore, common wisdom has it that employee turnover is attributed to labour shortages and negative employee attitudes on the job; with human resources managers being at a loss as to how they should overcome this challenge (Khatri, Chong, & Budhwar, 2001). One approach is to utilise studies on employee turnover done outside of Asia, adapting their findings into a Singapore context. However, due to differences in cultural practices, industries and socio-economic settings, there is a question of how applicable and effective such studies would be to Singapore and Asia (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Khatri et al., 2001). One of the few studies conducted in a Singapore context, Khatri et al. (2001) looked across the industries of retail, food and beverage, marine and shipping; and concluded that the age of an employee was not a major factor in predicting turnover. While this study did not cover mentoring, it highlights the opportunity for a study to be conducted on how mentoring affects millennials and their views on turnover in the organisation.

The Singapore experience is by no means representative of Asian millennial behaviour. While there are similarities found in Singapore millennials and their counterparts in the United States and China (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Singapore, 2010; Yi, Ribbens, Fu, & Cheng, 2015), using Singapore as the context for this study brings about certain unique characteristics of the Singapore workforce. To begin with, Singapore has a much lower unemployment rate of 2.8% when compared with the global average of 6% (World Bank Group, 2013b). For those below the age of 30, the rate stands at 4.5% but drops to 1.6% for those between the 30 and 39 age range (Ministry of Manpower, 2015a, 2015b). These rates are relatively low when Singapore millennials are compared with their counterparts from the United States (15.80%); France (23.70%); United Kingdom (20.30%) and China (10.1%) (World Bank Group, 2013a). The low unemployment rate suggests that Singaporean millennials have better job options and opportunities when considering whether to turnover or not – a rather unique situation when compared globally. Additionally, jobs favoured by Singaporeans tend towards the PMET (professionals, managers, executives and technicians) jobs or white-collar jobs. Given the competitiveness of the job market for millennial employees, insights from this study will help organisations make better decisions when crafting millennial recruitment and engagement policies. Through the course of this study, additional insights were also gleaned. These insights might seem counter-intuitive to managers from older cohorts. However, since the release of the initial findings, we have subsequently validated them with students and older millennials already in the workforce. This gives us the confidence to present these findings to the reader, in the hope that they might provide insights or reinforce what the reader already knows.

Summary of Terms and Definition

For the convenience of the reader, the following are a summary of terms and definitions that will be used in this book. Further explanation will be detailed in the respective chapters devoted to each topic.

A generational cohort describes a group of people who go through generally similar experiences as they grow in tandem, going through shared events during their growing years (Mannheim, 1972; Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Singapore, 2010).

The terms 'baby boomers', 'generation X' and 'generation Y' are used for simple identification of the generations – baby boomers (born 1946–1965), generation X (born 1966–1980) and generation Y or millennials (1981–2000).

A mentor is a superior or more experienced colleague, who ensures that the junior colleague is given guidance on work or life issues; or counselled on his or her personal well-being, in order to help the organisation achieve the end goal of accomplishing assigned tasks (Kram, 1985). As such, the junior employee who is being mentored is defined as the protégé (Kram, 1985). 'Non-mentored' then refers to those employees who do not receive mentoring of any form, whether formal or informal. While these definitions restrict mentors and protégés to being in the same organisation, studies do make provision for mentors and protégés who do not work together in the same organisation (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2010). We will similarly extend the definition of mentor and protégé to those who may not work together in the same organisation.

A supervisor is defined as a person formally empowered with supervisory duties over one or more employees, often in the form of a team. The supervisor is responsible for the team's efforts towards achieving organisation deliverables. An employee is a person who has non-supervisory duties (unless mentioned otherwise), is supervised by the supervisor, and contributes to the team's efforts towards achieving organisation deliverables.

Turnover involves the employee actually leaving the organisation, whereas a turnover intention involves the employee showing instent to resign, which may not lead to actual departure from the organisation.

Chapter 2

Generational Cohorts

Defining Generational Cohorts

A generational cohort describes a group of people who go through generally similar experiences (see Fig. 1) as they grow in tandem, going through shared events during their growing years (Mannheim, 1972; Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Singapore, 2010). The focus of this research is on the millennial generation in Singapore. Generational cohorts share memories that are specifically identifiable as a result of age groups, major life events and major changes in society's social fabric at important developmental milestones (Kupperschmidt, 2000). The theory of generational cohorts is distinct from the traditional idea (Costa & McCrae, 1999) that individuals alter their outlook, views, attitudes and values as they age. In generational cohort theory, every generation may be influenced by a host of different sources ranging from societal culture to world events to parents. It is observed that such cohorts possess prominent values that differentiate them from other cohorts who grew up in different time periods (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). These values that are possessed by each generational cohort tend to remain within oneself in life and are used as references points when subsequent life experiences require interpretation (Scott, 2000). Being members of the same cohort with shared historical and social experiences can restrict the cohort members to a limited range of possible experiences. While this suggestion might be seen as a stereotype, each cohort is seen to be programmed to react to situations with similar ways of thinking and reacting when presented with a similar situation (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007). It is the differences in their specific cohort life experiences and reaction to situations that clearly differentiate cohorts from each other (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998).

Traits of Generational Cohorts

According to Wyatt (1993), when significant events take place such that it alters the thought process of a group of people in a similar age range, we can then deem it a generational cohort. Six characteristics are put forward to determine a
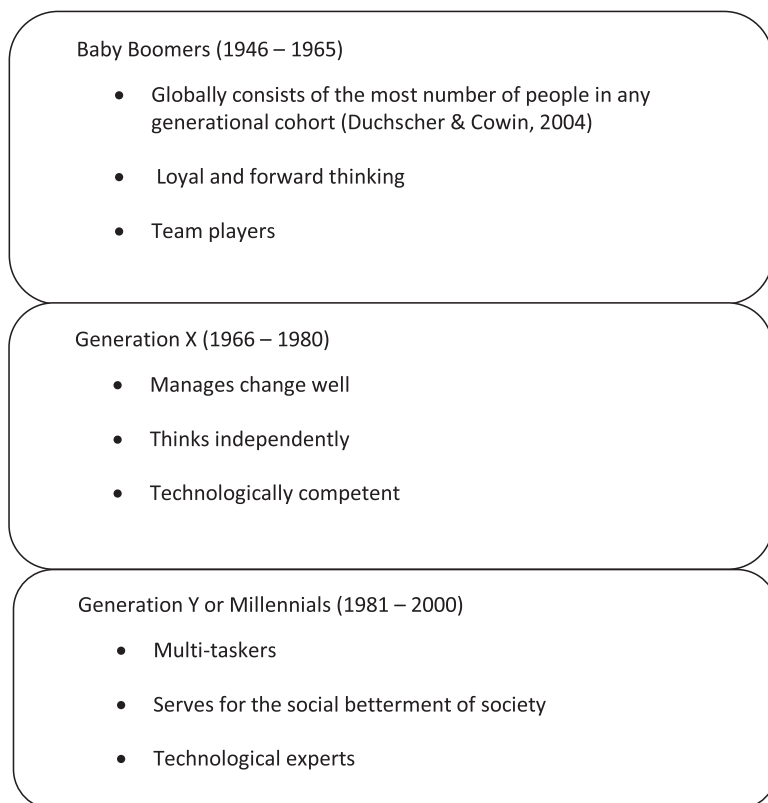
Baby Boomers (1946 – 1965)

- Globally consists of the most number of people in any generational cohort (Duchscher & Cowin, 2004)

- Loyal and forward thinking

- Team players

Generation X (1966 – 1980)

- Manages change well

- Thinks independently

- Technologically competent

Generation Y or Millennials (1981 – 2000)

- Multi-taskers

- Serves for the social betterment of society

- Technological experts

Fig. 1.   Summary of Traits across Generational Cohorts. *Source*: Adapted from 'Harnessing the potential of Singapore's multi-generational workforce' (Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Singapore, 2010).

generational cohort. The first of the six characteristics is defined by an event that is traumatic and readily develops a person's character. An example of this is the terror attack on 9–11 and a war that involves one's country. The second is a major change in distribution of resources within the society, often as a result of demographic changes. An example of this is when a large influx of migrants enters society resulting in a re-allocation of resources and jobs. The third is a period in time that links the cohort between success and failure. The Great Depression or more recently the Great Recession is an example of this. Fourth is the beginning of a sacred space that retains a strong collective memory among the cohort like Woodstock in the United States. Fifth is the rise of prominent leaders, heroes who empower impetus and voice as a result of their work. We see this happen when President Barack Obama was campaigning for his first presidential election where

young people felt highly engaged and motivated to support his campaign. Lastly is the common recognition of prominent people who work together, supporting each others' work. Generation X would identify with Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. To the millennials, we find examples in Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin of Facebook. Any of these characteristics, once fulfilled, can help define a generational cohort from another. In some cases, more than one characteristic may apply to the generational cohort.

There are a variety of studies that propose various periods in history as belonging to a particular generational cohort (see Table 1). Generations in the United States are usually known as the baby boomers (1946–1964), generation X (1965–1980) and the generation Y or the millennials (1981–2000) (Duchscher & Cowin, 2004). It is important to note that important historical and developmental events may only be specific to certain countries and not to others. While generational cohorts are found in every society, the events that shape them and the age groups they belong to might differ. What this means is that different histories, cultures and global locations may shape different generations differently. For instance, in China, generations are determined by decades. One is identified by their birth decade – 'Born in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s' (Yi, Ribbens, Fu, & Cheng, 2015). Yi, Ribbens, and Morgan (2010) proposed the following terms and explanations to define Chinese generations – the cultural revolution generation (1961–1966) who experience extreme poverty in their growing years; the social reform generation (1971–1966) who went through major economic development in their youth; and the millennials (1981–1986) who are a result of the state-enforced one child policy, limiting urban families to a single child. One area that Yi et al. (2010) failed to explain is why the generations exist only in gaps of five years. Which generation then should those born outside of the five year period belong to (for instance, 1968)? This is not explained. However from these studies, we can appreciate that while generation cohorts exist globally, their definitions can be different as a result of events specific only to certain countries.

Researchers have proposed a variety of 'Birth Years' to define the time period that a generation is born in (see Table 1). For the purpose of this paper, we propose the following birth years and the rationale in line with Singapore's context:

Table 1. Birth Years of Generational Cohorts.

Term	Birth years		
	Kupperschmidt (2006)	**Duchscher and Cowin (2004)**	**Guha (2010)**
Baby boomers	1944–1960	1946–1964	1944–1960
Generation X	1961–1980	1965–1980	1961–1980
Generation Y or millennials	1981–2000	1981–2000	1981–2000

'Baby Boomers'

For Singapore, the Second World War ended in 1945. Singapore subsequently achieved independence from Malaya in 1965. The birth years for this generation are between 1946 and 1965.

'Generation X'

Singapore achieved independence as a nation in 1965. Given the consensus among researchers in Table 1 that this generation's birth year ends in the year 1980, the birth years for this generation is between 1966 and 1980.

'Generation Y' or 'Millennials'

Given the consensus amongst researchers as seen in Table 1, we define millennials as those born between 1981 and 2000.