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**Mentoring and Retention of Millennials in United Kingdom:  
Experiences and Perceptions**

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## **Mentoring and Retention of Millennials in United Kingdom: Experiences and Perceptions**

### **Abstract**

Retaining millennial employees is relevant today because they make up a higher percentage of workers. Albeit, studies show that millennials have high turnover intentions and mentoring was identified as a valuable tool to them because of its major career and psychosocial development function. Hence, this study examined the experiences and perceptions of 51 millennial mentees within the ages of 21-36, to identify mentoring elements that can enhance their retention. Data was gathered via a questionnaire survey and analysed using basic descriptive statistics. The results suggest that well designed mentoring schemes can support millennial employee retention. However, the mentors' perception was excluded and the small sample size limits generalisation. Notwithstanding, the identified features informed the authors' Millennial Mentoring Model (MMM) which proposes that a voluntary mentoring structure, mentee's objectives, mentor's attributes, mentoring-relational features and a structure for personal and career advancement in the organisation can strengthen millennial retention.

Key words: Mentoring, millennial employees, retention.

**Word Count: 1930**

## **Mentoring and Retention of Millennials in United Kingdom: Experiences and Perceptions**

This paper reports the results of a descriptive study of mentoring and its role in the retention of millennial generation. The purpose was to explore the experiences and perceptions of millennials who have participated in mentoring schemes. The study is relevant due to the high turnover intention of millennials. For instance, Deloitte (2016) showed that about 5133 millennial employees desire to leave their organization before the end of 2020.

Millennials are significant because they make up a larger proportion (70-90 million) of the current workforce (Huybers 2011) and recruiting skilled employees is costly in this tight labour market with inherent skills gap (ONS 2015). The skills gap is created by the advancement of technology and other changes in the business environment which has also increased rivalry and quest for skilled professionals (Ayodeji and Adebayo 2015). This has in turn placed a demand on employees to develop their skills and millennials desire to only remain in organisations that can support their personal and career development (Grotrian-Ryan 2015). Organisations are also seeking to develop employees who would work and add value to the business, not those who would leave with the acquired tacit knowledge. This emphasises the significance of this study in identifying some win-win elements that can support millennials' development and organisations' lower turnover rate.

Certain characteristics of the millennial generation suggest that mentoring could positively contribute to long-term retention. This generation specifically values mentorship (Deloitte, 2016) and views it as a commitment on the part of the organisation (Elnaga and Imran 2013). Hence, the relevance of identifying the features of mentoring which organisations can use to develop and retain millennials. The study shows trends in responses from a small population in UK. Results inform Human Resource practice towards improved retention through targeted mentoring schemes. The data analysis suggests that organisations should promote voluntary or informal mentoring with millennials and train voluntary mentors.

### **Literature Review**

Mentoring is a mutual learning partnership between the more experienced (mentor) and less experienced (mentee/protégé) which is initiated by the building of relationship, to their bonding, growth and final termination when the mentoring goal is achieved (McKimm, Jollie and Hatter 2007). It is either arranged by the organisation or initiated spontaneously by mentors and mentees with mutual benefits (Clutterbuck 2014, Chun, Sosik and Yun 2012). Mentoring is increasingly practiced in organisations; at least 75% of 470 organisations surveyed by the CIPD use mentoring techniques. Some 30% claimed that it is an effective technique that employees value, and 13% intended to institute mentoring (CIPD 2015).

Although there is evidence from extant literature that mentoring programs can have a positive effect on employee retention (Elnaga and Imran 2013, Laukhuf and Malone 2015), few studies have focused on those specific characteristics of mentoring (Kenneth and Lomas 2015) or on the relationship between mentoring programs and turnover intentions of the millennial generation. Millennial employees/Eco Boomers are the current generation of human resources born between 1980 and 1995 (Bramley et al. 2012). They value a friendly coach-like management style, constructive feedback (Theilfoldt and Scheef 2011) and career

advancement (Torrington et al. 2014). Other relevant elements are confidentiality, nurturing, teaching, with the aim of fulfilling the basic career and psychosocial function of mentoring (Clutterbuck 2014).

Retention is so important that 38% of 270 organisations have made it a talent management strategy (CIPD 2015) by instituting work-life balance, increasing job satisfaction and rewards (Deery and Jago 2015). This is because factors such as affordable and accessible development, professional supervision and employee perception of their organisation influences their turnover intention and a high turnover can negatively impact organisational efficiency (Torrington et al. 2014).

The theoretical position of this study is based on the Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura. It involves learning by observing and replicating the actions of others after considering the outcome of the observed behaviours (Blanchard and Thacker 2013). The theory is used to explain mentorship in terms of how the participants relate with their mentors particularly during the learning process.

## **Method**

A review of current literature on mentoring and retention generated the themes for the questionnaire designed with dichotomous questions, multiple choice and Likert scale comprising a range of items regarding experiences, preferences, and perceptions of mentoring. The targeted sample consisted of 101 respondents, informed millennials between the ages of 21-36. The sample achieved a 57% response rate; five questionnaires were not completely filled in, so only 51 questionnaires were used for the analysis. Respondents who volunteered were either mentees or had participated in a work-based mentoring programme within the preceding year. The respondents consisted of males (n=23 45%) and females (n=28 55%); who have worked at entry (n=17) and mid-levels (n=25), some as managers (n=6) and others as supervisors (n=3). Almost all participants (98%) had a university education; 57% had worked for less than three years and 29% had five years working experience in the same company.

## **Results**

The first section of the survey explored millennials' experiences and preferences in mentoring. The results showed that formal and informal mentoring are prevalent in the UK, but 54% of millennials are more inclined to informal mentoring while the traditional type of mentoring is the most valued amongst millennials (78%). No respondent sought to be in an e-mentoring relationship although it was considered acceptable if used as a blended technique. Fifteen percent would consider engaging in peer mentoring and only 7% would prefer to engage in group mentoring and 69% of them want to be nurtured instead of being directly taught.

Respondents indicated that they would consider staying in an organisation that offers a mentoring scheme with experienced, approachable and friendly mentors such that they can build trust/confidentiality. Other features millennials require in a mentoring relationship to support their retention included receiving feedback (12%) and openness (11%). Age (someone older) was the 4<sup>th</sup> ranking mentor trait millennials valued, especially a mentor who

shares some level of similarity. However, gender and the status of the mentor was not highly significant to retain millennials in the organisation.

Almost 21% of mentees preferred a mentoring scheme that supports knowledge transfer; 17% preferred to learn by setting goals; 13% sought to develop self-efficacy and about 12% preferred to learn by observing and reflecting. The median score for the features of mentorship which millennials considered relevant in supporting their retention was having their needs met. Furthermore, millennials perceive mentoring as a useful tool that supports their career development. About 81% are confident about this assertion; 11% are unsure and only 8% strongly disagreed.

With regards to meeting their psychosocial needs, 65% of respondents considered mentoring as a useful tool; 21% were indifferent while only 12% disagreed. All participants strongly disagreed that mentoring had been problematic. Fifty-five percent (n=29) of respondents agreed strongly that mentoring can support their long term (5 years) retention; 35% were undecided while only 10% would not remain for a long term in an organisation due to mentoring. In general, 74% (n=38) of respondents considered mentoring to be a very useful tool in supporting their retention.

## **Discussion**

Findings indicate that whilst mentoring programmes of varying formats are made available to millennials, this population requires distinct features that need to be considered when designing mentoring schemes. The study suggests that the majority of millennials are predominantly experiencing traditional forms of formal mentoring done by a line manager, whereas they would prefer a traditional and informal mentorship characterised by a nurturing style of mentoring. These results support previous claims to the effectiveness of informal mentoring (Kenneth and Lomas 2015, Srivastava and Thakur 2013, Ayodeji and Adebayo 2015, Laukhuf and Malone 2015). This tendency to prefer informal modes of mentoring also implies that millennials may perceive mentoring as more effective if the matching is not based on line-management (Harvard Business Essentials 2004, Clutterbuck 2014, Ayodeji and Adebayo 2015).

Furthermore, the millennials in this study recognized the organisational and personal benefits of mentoring, such as knowledge transfer and retention and perceive mentoring as a beneficial tool for their career and psychosocial advancement (Das and Baruah 2013, McCann and Delap 2015). Moreover, results indicated that by virtue of mentorship impact on motivational expectancy of advancement opportunities (Torrington et al. 2014) and psychosocial well-being (Garvey 2012), mentoring could contribute positively to millennials' retention. Additional findings suggest that the right combination of mentoring features can positively impact millennials' intention to remain in an organisation. Above all, the attributes these millennials associated with mentoring and retention indicate that compatible personalities and a trusting, friendly mentor-mentee relationship with a more experienced mentor are of utmost importance. This result supports O'Rourke's (2003) assertion based on the Social Learning Theory that mentees are particularly mindful of the people they wish to emulate.

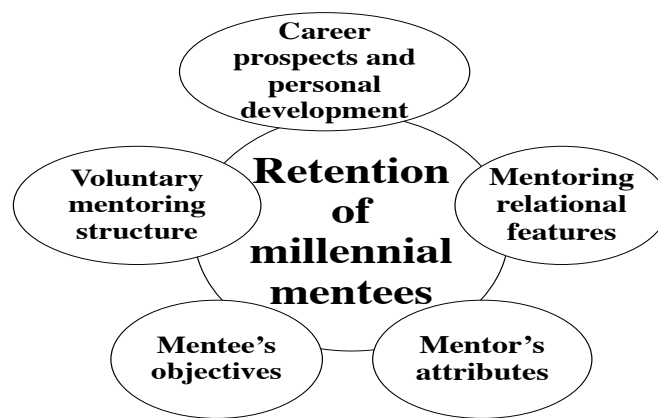
In summary, this study suggests that millennials believe mentoring actually fulfils the major career development and psychosocial functions (McCann and Delap 2015) which would positively enable them to remain in an organisation on a long term. In essence, a

mentorship scheme that does not drive millennials' interest in terms of development may fail to support retention.

### Millennial Mentoring Model

Based on the findings presented here, a Millennial Mentoring Model (MMM) is proposed to explain the features of mentoring that can encourage the retention of millennials in the UK. MMM draws from Clutterbuck's (2014) model of mentorship which states that the mentee and mentor's expectations drive the relationship and its outcome is based on the processes and behaviours they set to achieve their objectives.

Figure 1: MMM



The MMM proposes five basic features that should be present in the mentoring relationship to support the retention of millennials. These are *voluntary mentoring structure*, which entails the mutual participation of both parties who voluntarily seek to learn. The consideration of the *mentee's objectives* in addition to the purpose of the mentoring scheme and the *mentor's attributes* including experience, approachable personality, and other soft skills. Including *mentoring relational features*, such as confidentiality, trust, and feedback. The fifth feature is having a mentoring system that supports *career and personal development* in the organisation (Grotrian-Ryan 2015). Organisations can adopt this model by embedding these elements in their mentoring schemes. However, this model is only a reflection of the UK mentees and does not take into account the views of their mentors.

### Conclusions, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study contributes to Human Resource theory and practice by conceptualising a link between mentoring and retention and exploring factors that could contribute to improved retention of the millennial generation. It recommends that mentoring programs for the millennial generation be designed to allow an informal (personality, affinity-based) approach to mentor-mentee matching and for the formal mentoring process; a flexible approach to goal-setting supported by good planning should inform its structure. Also, since the mentor's

soft skills are particularly important for millennials, it is recommended that mentors should be appropriately trained.

Limitations of this study are foremost the relatively small sample size (n=51). Therefore, findings are not generalizable but offer indications as to where further research is needed. Data analysis revealed that better consistency in the language and organisation of survey questions is needed to improve both the quality of data and to produce a more defined descriptive and useful inferential statistical analysis.

Future studies can examine the correlations between mentoring variables delineated here in larger samples, and retention-relevant constructs such as organisational, affective, and normative commitment amongst millennials and in comparison to other generational clusters. Finally, qualitative study can provide more depth of understanding as to how millennial mentees and mentors experience the mentoring relationship and their perceptions of how it may or may not contribute to long-term retention.



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**Appendix**

**Questionnaire**

Please may I meet you? Simply mark (x) or tick.										
Gender:	Male					Female				
Age:	21-24	25-28	29-32			33-36				
Qualification	Dip/HND	BSc/BA	Masters	PhD	Other:					
Level in org	Entry level	Middle	Supervisor			Manager	Other:			
Years in the organisation	1-2	3-5	6-9			10-14	15 above			
The longest I've worked in an organisation at once:	Less than 1 year	1 year	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 and above	

**Please choose the most appropriate**

- In previous or ongoing mentoring program; your mentor was/is:  
 (A) Boss/supervisor. (B) Online; e-mentor (C) My choice D. colleagues/peers  
 (E.) Mentor to a group (F.) assigned to me by organisation
- What type of mentoring will you prefer the most?  
 (A) Traditional mentoring: one-on-one (B) Peer mentoring: colleagues in mentorship  
 (C) Group mentoring: many mentees to a mentor. (D) E-mentoring: online.
- The form of mentoring I will love to engage in or repeat is:  
 (A) Formal: organised by the organisation with laid down agenda or agreement  
 (B) Informal: both parties chose to engage in the mentorship voluntarily.
- The mentoring style of help that can influence my retention is:  
 (A). Directive; mentor's in-charge of the process by coaching/challenging me  
 (B) Passive/Non-directive: counselling me (C.) Nurturing; guiding and motivating you

**Please choose all that apply.**

- During mentoring, these happen and I maximise/value: (A.) knowledge transfer  
 (B) Been coached to create my own options/choices. (C.) engaging my learning styles.  
 (D.) paying attention and recalling concepts (E.) story telling (F.)Goal setting; motivation  
 (G.) learning by observing, reflecting and reproducing my mentor's behaviour/attributes  
 (H.) Role modelling. (I.) Increase in self confidence. (J.) Rewards
- I value these mentoring features and they can support my long-term retention:  
 (A) Trust and Confidentiality B. Approachable/friendly. (C) Receiving feedback  
 (D) Collaborative (E) Openness/ communication (F) Effective program guidelines

(G) My needs/objectives are understood and considered. (H) Evaluation/appraisal  
 (I) Scheduled Meetings (J) Mentor’s competence/experience.

7. These attributes in my mentor will enable me stay in my organisation long-term:  
 (A) Same gender (B) Opposite gender (C) Someone older (D) Someone younger  
 (E) a colleague (F) status as my boss/supervisor (G) anyone more experienced  
 (H) personality of mentor (I) similarities; culture/background/religion (J)No preference.

**Please tick the option you agree with the most.**

Please select the <b>most</b> appropriate:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. Mentoring has enabled me advance my career prospects; clarified or met my career needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
B. Mentoring has met my personal and social needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C. Mentoring has been more problematic than helpful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
D. Mentoring has/is enabling me to stay long-term	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>