

# MILLENNIAL LEADERS AND CROSS- GENERATIONAL WORKPLACE CONFLICTS

*A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN MANAGEMENT*

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*Abstract*

The purpose of this research proposal is to examine the different resolution styles exhibited amongst millennial leaders in response to work place conflicts. Over the years, studies have shown that the percentage of millennial leaders (persons born between 1982- 2002) are on a steady incline. Although, there are several barriers that may contribute to higher placement amongst millennials, there are several management skills that may be affected as a result of an undeveloped managerial team. In this research, I seek to examine not only the influences of workplace conflicts, but further more examine resolution styles amongst millennial leaders, and lastly to improve organizational comradery. Six interviews were conducted in order to further analyze conflicts, resolution strategies, and ways to improve employee relations. I analyzed the interviews using a three-stage qualitative analysis as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Saldana (2009).

*Keywords:* Millennial, Workplace, Leadership, Conflict, Resolution styles, barriers, resolution strategies, employee relations

The author acknowledges she completed this assignment in the spirit of the Trinity Washington University policy regarding academic honesty and plagiarism.

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## Introduction

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“For the first time in history five generations will be working side by side, and whether this multigenerational workplace feels happy and productive or challenging and stressful is, in large part, up to the boss” (Knight, 2014, p. 1 ). The five generations include Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (aka Generation Y), and future Generation Z spanning a period of over 50 years. Overtime there has been much speculation about the work ethics, and learning styles of cross generational employees. “Stereotypes about millennials born between 1979 and 1994 depict them as self-centered, unmotivated, disrespectful, and disloyal, contributing to widespread concern about how communication with Millennials will affect organizations and how they will develop relationships with other organizational members” (Myers, 2010, p. 225). Although stereotypes are based on opinions, it is those negative opinions of others that often results in workplace conflicts.

Similar to change, conflict is one of the very few things that are impossible to eliminate. How well managers resolve conflict in the workplace can affect business productivity, employee morale, and ultimately retention rates. However, through experience, and trial and error it is often understood that in order to coexist one must learn how to resolve conflict rather than ending it. Diversity in the workplace can bring about new ideas, increased intelligence, as well as robust worldviews; however, it is important for employees to be optimistic and embrace those differences. When left unmanaged, conflict in the workplace can be problematic. Effectively leading a cross-generational workforce can be a difficult task. An Executive Briefing Series (EBS), written by Boston College Center for Work and Family, highlighted organizations best practices emphasize the importance of promoting supportive culture that respects workers and acknowledges and appreciates their differences (Rikleen, 2016).

According to D.C. Government Public Body of Employee Information as of December 2016 D.C. Government employed approximately 36, 624 employees, from over 80 different agencies (D.C. Gov. 2016). With such a booming labor force, a minimum wage of \$11.50, \$4.50 more than the federal limit, D.C. has a steady flow of diverse applicants. In addition to its higher pay scale, a 2015 census report disclosed that 71% of residents of the District of Columbia are between the ages of 18- 64, making an even more diverse workforce ( U.S. Census, 2015).

Cross-generational workplaces are becoming the norm for organizations all around the world. As a result, it is often difficult for management to fairly resolve conflicts. This is intensified when management personnel are also millennials. Undoubtedly, millennial managers may have the requirements for the job, but do they have they experience necessary to manage and decrease workplace conflicts? “Millennials are the first generation in history to have been immersed in

technology throughout their lives, which will have a significant impact on the way they will communicate as leaders (Rikleen, 2016). Due to preconceived notions of millennial work ethics, and values, it is often difficult for millennials to gain the trust of patience of cross-generations employees.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In this research, I seek to learn how millennial leaders make sense of their role as managers of cross-generational workplaces. More specifically, I investigate how they confront and cope with conflict in the multi-generational workplace.

If millennials leaders are entering the current workforce and lacking critical competencies, then strategies must be developed to better prepare them for leadership positions, thus they will be able to effectively lead and manage across generations in the workforce. There are several recommendations for developing millennials into leadership roles which includes initiatives to foster mutual support an understanding, collaborative discussions that foster innovative thinking, and appreciation of Diversity (Rikleen, 2016).

### **Objective**

The purpose of this study is to expand on previous research that seeks to examine millennial leaders and how they manage conflicts in the workplace. The researcher plans to deliver strategies to help reduce conflicts, as well as help make workplace environments more desirable for employees. Based on the findings, the researcher will identify problems in the workplace, and develop possible solutions using both content analysis, and interviews. As a result of this research managers will be better able to manage conflicts in the workplaces.

### **Research Questions**

I developed the following research questions to investigate the research hypothesis and its validity. By reviewing these questions the researcher will gain a better understanding of the causes and effects of cross-generational workplace conflicts.

#### **Research question one**

Are millennial leaders able to adequately manage cross-generational conflicts in the workplace?

By examining millennial leaders and their ability to effectively handle conflicts in the workplace we are better able to recommend theories to help increase morale, encourage cohesiveness, increase productivity, and make workplaces a more desire environment. All of these factors can be affected if leaders are not able to manage conflict effectively.

### Research question two

Does age or experience limit a manager's ability to resolve workplace cross-generational conflicts effectively?

For the purpose of expanding this research, it is important to explore the notion that age, and experience does, or does not affect a manager's ability to resolve workplace conflicts effectively. If age is one of the greatest difficulties, further research will implicate workplace resolutions more specifically in regards to age.

### Research Design

"More than one-in-three American workers today are millennials (adults ages 18-34), and this year they surpassed Generation X to become the largest share of the American workforce" (Fry, 2015, p. 1). The percentage of millennials in the workforce is increasing however it is important to ensure that those who are in managerial positions are fully prepared for the task at hand. This research proposal attempts to review some of the barriers facing millennial leaders, and provide possible resolutions to conflicts management. For this study, the researcher will collect data using a qualitative interview strategy.

Interviews are an intricate part of research because they provide in-depth information pertaining to participant's experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Turner, 2010). There are several systems to conduct interviews that will allow the researcher to obtain quality information. In this study interviewing participants provides the researcher with first hand experiences directly related to millennial leaders, and their effectiveness of management in the workplace. It also gives the researcher an opportunity to ask feedback questions that may further assist research. Interviewing employees will be very beneficial to this study, and allow the researcher to meet and interview D.C. Government employees across multiple departments. Small samples will be used to conduct research in this study, and is common in most qualitative analyses. Although there are no specific rules when determining a suitable sample size in qualitative research, participants are purposely selected in order to best help the researcher understand the problem and research questions (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher will meet with 6 participants who are over the age of 21, and who are employed in the D.C. Metropolitan Area. Interviews will be conducted at a D.C. Public Library of the participant's choice. Participants will be offered water, and a light snack. In order to collect data, the researcher will use both content analysis, and conduct interviews. Conducting interviews

incorporates first hand experiences of participants. Participants will be asked a series of open-ended and semi structured questions.

Open-ended questions are important for interviews for several reasons; it allows the participant the opportunity to critically think about experiences, they ensure that participant's responses are free of persuasion, the researcher is able to collect more data, and the researcher is better able to access participants. Due to the uncertainty of the responses when conducting interviews semi-structured questions are always important, and allots the researcher the opportunity to explore further ideas, concepts, and theories. Both methods are important, and are critical to the interview process and the collection of data.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

The assumptions of this study are that conflict in the workplace will never be completely eliminated, and there will always be some degree of struggle. Also, the assumptions that people have about millennials may change, and stereotypes can be reversed as a people gain more knowledge of millennial leadership, and resolution styles. The limitations of this study are that the duration of this project is one semester long and the researcher may have to reduce some information in order to complete the assignment in the specified time period.

### **Participants**

In fulfillment of this research proposal, I will seek a voluntary sample of DC Government professionals over the age of 21 (who are legally able to give consent), who are employed in the Metropolitan area. Although there is a large sample of employees who will meet this criterion, for the purpose of time; I will interview 6 participants, selected at random.

Participants will be recruited from the internet, by means of social media including (Instagram, Facebook, and Linked In). A sample informed consent document will be made available with an attempt to eliminate participants that may not feel comfortable with the process (participants who don't sign the informed consent form may not continue). Arrangements will be made with potential participants to conduct interviews at one of the 26 D.C. Public Libraries, of the participant's choice.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent is one the most important parts of any research that involves human interaction. It is an ongoing process and must be collected prior to any informative exchange between participants and the researcher (OHRP, 2016). The researcher will make announcements via social media, and



create flyers with the intent to introduce the research to interested participants. This allows participants an opportunity to understand the purpose of the study, as well provides background knowledge to participants prior to giving consent.

Each research participant will be notified of their rights both verbally, and in writing to avoid any misconceptions. Participants have the right to withdraw consent from the study at any time, and the researcher will explain why the research is being done, what participants could benefit as a result of participating in this study, and how private information would be kept safe (OHRP, 2016). Participants will be given a copy of their consent form, as well as a copy of participant's rights.

With research comes risk, however it is the job of the researcher to reduce the chance of risk to its participants. In this study, there will be no risk of physical harm to participants. However, participants, of District Government agencies, may encounter risk if using their name, and agencies for the purpose of research. In order to reduce this risk to participants the researcher will use aliases to protect the identity of all participants. For example, an employee at D.C. Public Schools will be Jane Doe an employee at D.C Public Schools.

### Theory

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In this section, the researcher will evaluate barriers facing millennial leaders, and how they manage cross- generational workplaces. In addition, a model will be created in order to determine the severity of those barriers and how if any do they affect business productivity.

### Theory of Competition and Cooperation

In the workplace, there are often beliefs that millennials are inconsistent, temporary, and incapable of properly managing cross-generations. It is believed that not only are millennials inexperienced, but they lack the necessary skills required to properly manage conflict. Contrary to the beliefs, millennials and older workers have many of the same goals which include (1) making a positive impact on the organization, (2) help solve social and or environmental changes, and (3) working with a diverse group of people (Pfau, 2016, p. 2).

The theory offered in this study suggests that conflicts in the workplace occur when cross-generational employees are unable to come together and work as a unit. It is these differences that create challenges in the workplace. This problem is often intensified when millennial leaders are thrown into the mix. Cross generations often reject millennial leaders due to what is assumed to be lack of experience, age, lack of trust from employees, and gender. In today's society, cross-generational workplaces are unavoidable, likewise conflict will often occur. With a current workforce

that includes four generations, diversity will always be prevalent. However, because of these differences conflict generally occurs, and when not properly resolved, productivity is decreased.

Using the cooperation model will help to understand the process involved in cooperation and competition, the effects on work relationships, and the factors that contribute to developing either of the two. Together, managers, and employees, make up a team, and it is important for managers and employees to be on one accord.

“It is important to understand that the theory cannot serve as a “cookbook” for a practitioner in the field of conflict resolution. It is a general intellectual framework for understanding what goes on in conflicts and how to intervene in them” (Deutsch, 2006, p. 31).

One of the first to develop insight into the beneficial consequences of cooperation as an academic enquiry was Morton Deutsch” (Dixit, 2004). The cooperation model is used to determine which direction a person would take in an effort to resolve conflict. The cooperation model is based on two factors cooperation, and competition. The Cooperation Model further suggests that there are two separate outcomes (positive or negative) that would occur as a result of choosing one of the two factors. When cooperative measures are taken, the outcomes tend to be positive, thus creating a win/win situation, however when a negative course of action is selected the outcome can be dangerous and can affect workplace relationships, and eventually productivity (Dixit, 2004).

### **Cooperation**

When managed properly both cooperation and competition have the potential to be influential to a team or organization. Healthy cooperation can help employers to transmit ideas, and skills to one another in a productive way, and often learning takes place. Characteristics of cooperation include effective communication, fewer difficulties communicating with others, ideas are verbalized, and group members are attentive to one another (Deutsch, 2006). In the working environment cooperation is a great way of bridging the gap, between members of cross generations and allows employees an opportunity to have their voices heard. As a millennial leader cooperating with employees can build trust, and allow for smoother communication amongst diverse people. Conflict decreases as a result of positive cooperation.

### **Competition**

In contrast, a competitive process often has the reverse effects. In an article written by Deutsch (2006) states that “The competitive process stimulates the view that the solution of a conflict can only be imposed by one side or the other, which in turn leads to using coercive tactics such as psychological as well as physical threats and violence. Often in competition there is a notion of right

and wrong, in other turns one person leaves a winner and the other a loser. The winner often feels superior, while the loser often feels inferior, and less than. When not managed properly, competition in the workplace can become detrimental to the vision and mission of the organization as a whole. Certainly, humans are competitive by nature; however, it is imperative to distinguish between constructive competition and destructive competition. In the workplace, it is the manager's duty to regulate healthy competition. In healthy competitive relationships, the loser still wins, because he/ or she is able reflect and receive guidance from the winner, as well receive advice on what to do different the next time around. "The most important implication of cooperation-competition theory is that a cooperative or win-win orientation to resolving a conflict enormously facilitates constructive resolution, while a competitive or win-lose orientation hinders it" (Deutsch, 2006, p. 32).

### Theoretical Construct

There are several barriers affecting millennial leaders, and their effectiveness in managing cross generations. Through better trainings, and understanding of cross-generations, millennials may be able to better manage multi-generations in the workplace, hence becoming better leaders. Utilizing the Theory of Cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 2006) to investigate the research problem may shed light on factors that contribute to conflicts in the workplace. Thus, managers may use different tactics to decrease workplace conflicts, and gain cooperation from cross generational employees.

### Cooperative

**Effective communication:** There are two common types of communication, non-verbal, and verbal. Non-verbal communication includes the use facial expressions, body language, proximity, and gestures, to transmit information. Verbal communication uses words, to communicate. Ideally, both are used for effective communication. According to Deustch (2006), when effective communication is exhibited ideas are verbalized, group members are attentive to one another, members accept the ideas of others, and are often influenced by them, and there are fewer overall differences in communicating with, or understanding others. Effective communication is present in cooperation.

**Willingness to operate as one:** In order to accomplish organizational missions, and goals, it is imperative that team members are willing to operate as one. Operating as one is important because it brings together the strengths of each individual entity, for the better good of the whole. In an organization willingness to operate as one starts with management and should be replicated throughout. It is then, even though conflict, that resolution is created, and abided by. When employees are willing to operate as one, conflict decreases, and although it may not be that competition will cease, fair actions for resolving conflicts are recommended.

**Positive outcomes:** According to Deustch's Theory (2006), when there is cooperation, positive outcomes are more likely to occur. When two or more people work together the need for cooperation increases. Differences in opinions, ideas, ethics, and knowledge can create chaotic working conditions. It is necessary that employees learn to cooperate for the greater good of the whole. Positive outcomes are usually the result of goals, objectives, and our visions that have been accomplished.

### Competitive

**Lack of trust in employees:** Although competition is not always bad, it brings a different kind of energy into the work environment. In a competitive environment communication is impaired as the conflicting parties seek to gain advantage by misleading the other through use of false promises, disinformation, and lack of honesty (Deustch, 2006). In this kind of work environment employees are less likely to work together, due to the need to win, thus creating or increasing the likelihood of conflict. In today's workforce, there are several generations working side by side each day. This means different skills levels, different viewpoints, as well as different experience. For millennial leaders, it is important to decrease competition, in order to build trust in employees, and more importantly in the organization. When conflict occurs, and there is a lack of trust, employees will often resolve conflict themselves, which may or not be the appropriate way.

**Individualistic views and goals:** When in competition there are usually two or more parties who each compete against one another. In the end one person comes out a winner, and the other a loser. Judges, or spectators often choose a side, and the results are announced. It is this concept that helps to explain the idea of competition in the workplace. When there is competitive tension in the workplace, employees are more focused on their individual achievements, views, and goals, instead of team, and organization. If every employee, including managers, had their own agenda, it will be almost impossible to meet the needs of every employee, thus organizational productivity will decrease.

**Negative Outcomes:** "The competitive process stimulates the view that the solution of a conflict can only be imposed by one side or the other, which in turn can lead to using coercive psychological tactics and physical threats of violence" (Deustch, 2006, p. 27). When employees and employers develop a more competitive approach there is a higher likelihood for negative outcomes. These negative outcomes include low performance, low morale, lack of trust in employees, individualistic views and goals, and less collaborative efforts.

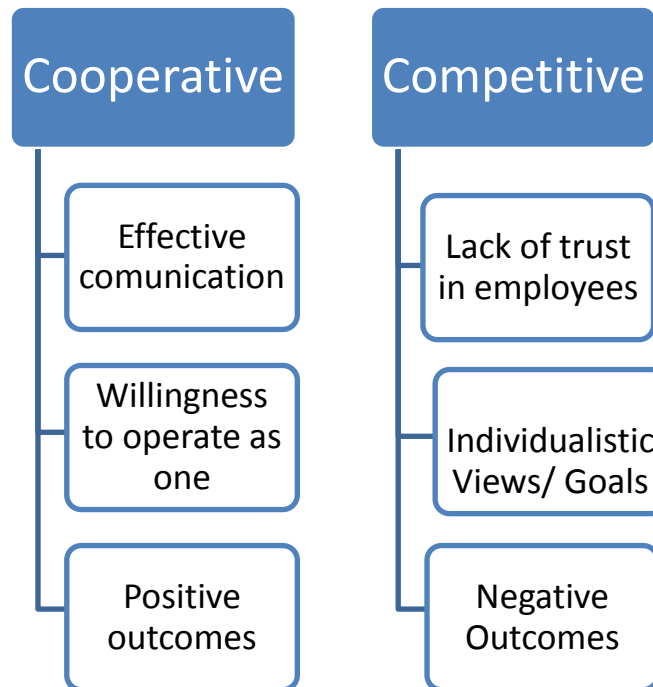


Figure 1. Deustch's cooperation-competition model as the theoretical model.

## Analysis

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In this section, the researcher will discuss the methodology of the data results. The researcher also intends to answer the research question that was developed in the introduction chapter of this paper. Coding is important in qualitative studies. It is important to understand that “Coding is not just labeling, it is linking; it leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all of the data pertaining to that idea” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137).

### Data Analysis Strategy

After conducting the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews, and notes using the three-stage coding model. The three levels of coding that the researcher used are Taxonomy, axial coding, and triangulation. The first level coding develops taxonomy, and is commonly referred to as *initial coding*. “Initial coding involves breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and then comparing the similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Using this method, the researcher manually reviewed the transcript selecting key words, and phrases. The researcher then placed those key words, and phrases into categories, from which common themes were created. Lastly, brief notes were taken of each category. The second level of coding is *axial coding*. Axial coding helps the researcher in analyzing, and organizing data from the first level of coding. It is here that the researcher will examine relationships between those

categories or themes (Saldana, 2009). The third level of coding used to analyze data is *triangulation*. In this last coding cycle, the researcher determines the validity of the final data from taxonomy (initial coding), and axial coding by comparing it to the participants' responses.

## Participants

The data collected for this qualitative study consisted of six (6) participants. All participants' names have been changed to protect their rights and privacy; pseudonyms will be used throughout the study. Although the researcher requested to have all interviews administered in person, two (2) interviews were conducted over the phone, and four (4) interviews were conducted in person. The demographics for this study were the following: gender- three (3) males, and three (3) females; race- four (4) African Americans and two (2) Mixed- African American, Native American, Irish, and Caucasian and African American/Hispanic; age- all participants are over the age of 21. All of the participants are current D.C. Government employees. During the interview process participants were called by pseudonyms of their choice to protect their identity.

**David:** is a biracial male who relocated to the D.C. area when he was 10 years old. David has worked for D.C. Government for 4 years, and plans to continue in the future. David has a Bachelor's Degree in English, and is currently a Technician. In his current position, David implements programs to increase community engagement for teens, and adolescents. Although, David enjoys his job he is currently seeking a promotion, and career growth. He has applied for different positions with his current agency; however he has not been offered a new position despite his above average performance appraisals. David has only worked for one D.C. Government agency.

**John:** is an African American male who does not live in or around the D.C. area. John has worked with D.C. Government for 2 years, and commutes back and forth each day. John currently is a Family Service Team Specialist, and his current role is to build and sustain academic oriented relationships with families. John has a Bachelor's Degree in Communications, and a Dual Master's Degree in Leadership, and Counseling. John has over 10 years of experience working in both education and counselling fields. John plans to continue in his role. John has only worked for one D.C. Government agency.

**Lauren:** is an African American woman who is a D.C. Native. Lauren is a Part- Time Associate for D.C. Government. Lauren has both a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree. Lauren has been employed with D.C. Government for 4 years and plans to continue in the future. Lauren has a full-time career; however, she enjoys the flexibility of her part-time job and the ability to make extra money. Lauren has only worked with one D.C. Government agency.

**Taylor:** is a biracial woman who is a D.C. Native. Taylor has been employed with D.C. Government for 1 year. Taylor has a Bachelor's Degree, and is unsure if she would like to continue her education. In her current role Taylor works with teens, and adults to help them become college and career ready. In her current role, Taylor expressed that her environment is chaotic, stressful, and is often disorganized. Taylor never imagined that she would be working in her current field; however, she accepted the position because it was an increase in pay. Taylor has only worked with one D.C. Government agency, and is unsure how long she will remain in her position.

**Rachel:** is an African American woman who is a D.C. Native. Rachel has been employed with D.C. Government for 3 years. Rachel has a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, and has started a Master's Program in Cyber Security. In her current role as an Attendance Specialist Rachel provides services for families, and builds partnerships with community organizations. Rachel loves her job; however, she may soon be forced to look for employment due to budget cuts. Rachel's plans are to continue her career with D.C. Government; however she is concerned that she may not have enough time. Rachel has been employed with one D.C. Government agency.

**Thomas:** is an African American Male who is employed with D.C. Government. Thomas is a Technician, and has been in his current role for 4 years. Thomas is currently a part time employee; however, he enjoys his current position, and his goal is to stay long-term. In his current role, Thomas is responsible for providing customer service, managing materials, and providing resources to the public. Thomas does not have a degree, and does not wish to further his education in the future. Thomas has been employed with 2 D.C. Government agencies, for a total of 8 years.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

In this section, the researcher will discuss the methodology of the data results. The data in this research was developed from the interviews with participants. The researcher will discuss the primary coding, secondary coding, and final coding phase. During this stage the audio recordings and notes were converted, and analyzed by the researcher in that an appropriate amount of information was included for each participant.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a very important part of qualitative analysis. “In assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research, it is important to back up and ask what kinds of questions or problems qualitative research is designed to address (Merriam, 1991, p. 52). In order to ensure that data is credible it is imperative that the researcher pre-codes after each interview. Precoding assists the researcher in maintaining the words and phrases that stands out. It is also an important task for the researcher to monitor the tone of the interview in order to determine the validity and credibility of participant’s responses.

## **Initial Coding**

Taxonomy coding, also known as initial coding is the primary coding level. “Initial coding is breaking down of qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). In this level the researcher was able to identify key words from the data, group them together, and develop categories for each. The categories resulting from this analysis included negative work environment, workforce planning and development, qualities and characteristics, positive attitudes, and roles and responsibilities.

### ***Negative work environment:***

While evaluating the interviews, the researcher realized that many of the words stated, and described by participants described negative work environments. The participants who experienced negative work environments appeared to be less engaged and motivated. It is important to analyze these negative emotions, when determining effectiveness of management in cross-generations. Participants shared similar opinions as to what were the causes and effects of negative emotions in the workplace. Participants specifically mentioned that negative emotions occur when managers fail to manage conflicts, personality conflicts, stress, frustrated employees, lack of support, and when directions are not clear. Although there may be more contributors to the causes of negative emotions, these were among the most commonly stated.

### ***Workforce planning and development:***

Another topic that was developed as a result of participant’s responses is workforce planning, and development. There were many participants who were concerned with the ways in which ideas, and planning was established. Participants often explained that these were issues that concerned them, and that were very important in the workplace. Planning and development serves as a blueprint for employees and stakeholders.



### *Qualities and characteristics:*

The third category developed from participants' data is qualities and characteristics. During the interviews, each participant described characteristics of their managers, and coworkers to describe the severity of workplace conflict. The quality and characteristics of the person appeared to have an effect on the ways in which they managed, and or handled conflict. When participants were asked to describe specific qualities and characteristics of their managers, and coworkers the responses varied. While some described very positive qualities, others described negative qualities of individuals. One participant, Rachel mentioned that she doesn't feel comfortable asking specific people for assistance because of their attitudes and or qualities. She would much rather figure out the problem herself, which can have an effect on her ability to perform her job at the best of her ability.

### *Positive attitudes:*

The fourth category developed was positive attitudes. Positive attitudes, and emotions are usually tied to the "why" aspect of a person's behavior. It is quite natural that the more engaged employees are, the more likely they are to perform at a higher level. Each participant stated several keywords, and phrases associated with positive feelings, and emotions. During the interviews Taylor specifically mentioned that although her current environment is disorganized and at times chaotic, developing personal, family oriented relationships with some peers has helped her in many ways. One participant, David mentioned that his current manager is very helpful, and is a great person to work with; because of this David feels more comfortable asking for help, and it helps keeps the line of communication open.

### *Roles and Responsibilities:*

The fifth, and final category transcribed from the data collected in interviews is roles, and responsibilities. Each of the 6 participants explained their roles, and responsibilities as having an effect on the relationships in the organization. There were several key words, and phrases mentioned during the interviews that were associated with the roles and responsibilities of employees in the workplace. One participant, John mentioned that coming in he was unsure of what his roles and responsibilities were. He was never fully trained; however, he quickly caught on by asking questions, and observing the work of others.

Table 1. *Examples of taxonomy coding from keywords to categories.*

| Key Words and Phrases  | Resulting Category                 |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Fearful, stressful, weak, chaotic, environment. distrusting, awkward, powerless, hectic, dishonest, confrontational    | Negative work                      |
| Goals, budget, values, environment, resources, mission, details, communication, funding, team                          | Workforce planning and development |
| Creative, enterprising, head-strong, transparent, open, approachable, productive, trustworthy, cooperative, innovative | Qualities, and characteristics     |
| Happy, content, challenged, motivated, helpful, team-player, reasonable, supportive, optimistic, accomplished          | Positive attitudes                 |
| Duties, expectations, objectives, quotas, outcomes, regulations, team, rewards, demands, vision                        | Roles and responsibilities         |

### Themes

There are five (5) categories that were developed from the primary coding level. Those categories are negative work environment, positive attitudes, qualities and characteristics, roles and responsibilities, and workplace planning and development. The researcher then used those categories to develop themes. The two themes are team culture, and operations.

#### *Team Culture*

Transcribing data from interviews are one of the most important strategies in qualitative research studies. It is important for the researcher to maintain the words, and meanings that are stated during the interview process. The researcher developed this theme, by linking similar categories that had a reoccurring theme. Negative work environment, positive attitudes, and qualities and characteristics, although important, deal with the individual attitudes, beliefs, and values, of employees, hence creating a team culture (good or bad). While interviewing David he stated that “my colleagues are very cooperative, everybody here works together. I gravitate towards cooperative people. When we all work together things run more smoothly” (David, 2017). Keywords from this phrase were initially coded under positive attitudes, and then lastly coded under team culture.

#### *Operations*

The second theme developed is Operations. This theme was developed by linking the last two categories together which are roles, and responsibilities, and workforce planning, and

development. Although they both have different meanings, and obligations, both categories relate to the overall operations of the workplace environment. While interviewing John, he stated that “initially my colleagues started out as more team oriented, all trying to reach a common goal; however, things became more individualized as budget cuts became more of a reality”. Keywords and phrases were abstracted from this statement, and categorized. Categories were then linked to develop themes. The theme developed for the above categories is operations.



Figure 3: Categories and themes resulting from the initial coding

**Axial Coding**

While coding the initial stage, there were two themes that became apparent. Those themes are team culture, and operations. The second level of coding used in this research is axial coding. “The purpose of axial coding is to strategically reassemble data that were “split” or “fractured” during the initial coding process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.124). The researcher used axial coding to examine the relationships between themes developed in the first level coding. After reviewing participant’s interviews and responses the researcher was able to identify themes. After identifying themes, the researcher then looked for similarities in those themes. The researcher used axial coding to cross compare the data collected during the interviews. Next, the researcher developed an axial to create categories related to effectiveness in managing cross-generational workplaces. Lastly, a memo was created to assist the researcher in the third level of coding.

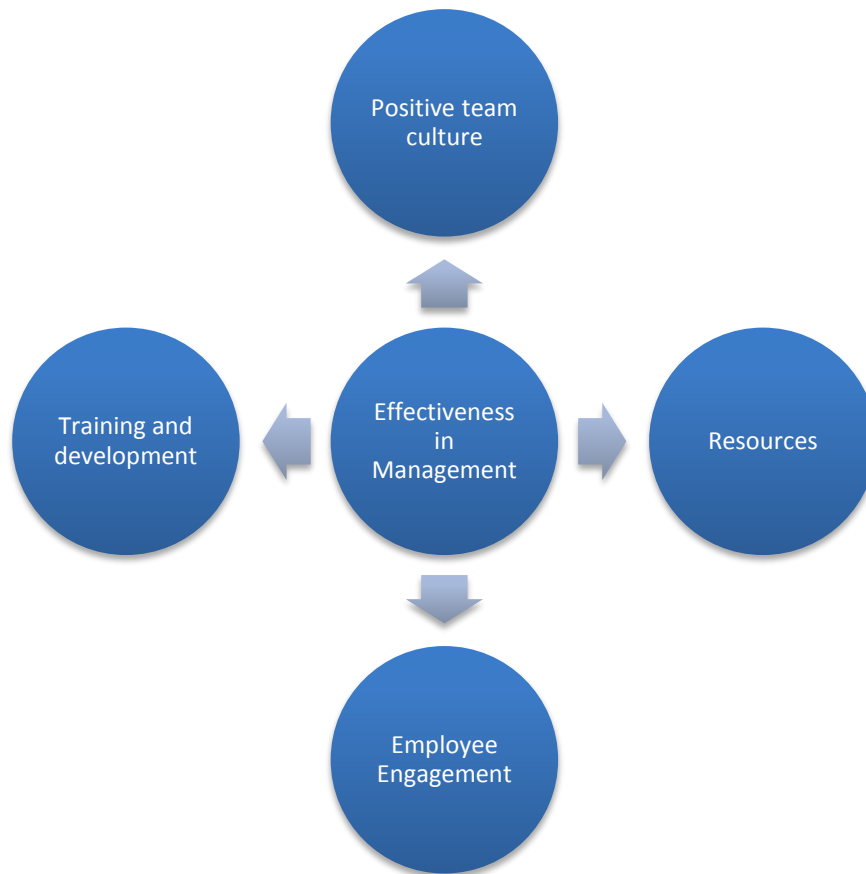


Figure 4. An example of axial coding

### *Effectiveness in Management*

Effectiveness in management is important, because it dictates the direction in which the company or organization needs to go. It helps to develop a baseline for making decisions, and strategic planning. After developing research from both interviews and data analysis the researcher was able to identify four themes. The four themes are resources, employee engagement, positive team culture, and training and development. All four themes are critical components in order to be effective.

### *Resources*

Ensuring that employees have the tools to be successful is one of the most important roles for managers. If employees do not have adequate resources, they are more likely to fail. It is also just as important for managers to have proper resources in order to become effective managers. It is the company's responsibility to make sure that these needs are being met. When proper resources are available to employees and managers, they are more likely to achieve goals, both personal and organizational. From responses collected during interviews, six of six participants explained that having proper resources available could decrease some of the workplace conflicts.

### *Employee Engagement*

It has been proven several times that engaged employees are more likely to perform effectively. Although this may look different for different organizations, some common tactics are related to pay, promotions, health and wellness benefits, and the work climate. In an interview with Lauren, she stated that; "I enjoy my current position however, my manager has a great impact on my feelings. She works hard to maintain a relationship with her employees and makes us feel comfortable discussing any conflict we may have. In turn I feel a little more relaxed, and at ease" (Lauren, 2017). It is impossible to appease everyone however, when employees are engaged they are more likely to give their personal best, even through difficult times. After analyzing responses from participants, the researcher concluded that the participants that were engaged in their workplace explained having less conflict.

### *Positive team culture*

Similar to employee engagement, having a positive team culture is important to effectiveness in management. In an interview with David he stated that, "My current millennial leader is amazing! He tries to accommodate everyone, and although he sometimes falls short, we understand. He brings us together, and facilitates an environment in which we are able to embrace our differences"

(David, 2017). Creating positive team culture starts with the manager; however it is most effective when it is embraced by all team members.

### *Training and Development*

Last, but not least training and development are one of the leading contributors to work place efficiency. When employees are fully trained, they are able to make informed decisions, and are more effective in their skill. It is the role of the manager to ensure that employees are fully trained, and it is equally important for managers to be trained as well. An effective manager, can build effective employees. In cross-generational work places, managers must understand the different needs, learning styles, and abilities of their workforce in order to determine which training, and development services to incorporate.

### **Triangulation**

The third level of coding used to analyze data collected is triangulation. In this level of coding the researcher used both of the previous levels of coding to develop a more complex understanding of categories and themes. In this process, the researcher reviewed the original data, made a connection between the two, and ensured that each component was properly coded. Revamping and altering the categories helped the researcher to ensure that the correct categories were assigned. In the first level coding, there were initially eight (8) categories, however after carefully reviewing the keywords and phrases, they were placed into five (5) solid categories. In the initial coding cycle, the researcher had “feelings” as one category, but after carefully revisiting the data, this category was broken down into two categories which are one (1) negative work environments, and two (2) positive attitudes. During the second coding cycle, the researcher struggled to determine the correct factors contributing to effectiveness in management. For example, the researcher initially assumed that most employees would have more negative assumptions of their millennial leaders; however research suggests that millennials leaders want the same thing that other leaders want which is often stability. Although their approach to management may be different, from their cross-generational counter parts, millennial leaders seek to handle workplaces conflicts, and many participants felt they were treated equally.

### **Discussion**

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The findings from the Data Analysis Strategy revealed that there is no evidence to suggest that millennial leaders are not as effective in managing cross-generations in the workplace, nor does any evidence suggest that they are less effective in managing conflict. It has been proven that millennial

leaders may adapt different management styles, however each case differs from one another, and it all depends on factors related to the profession, environment, and individual experience.

### Research Questions

In this section, the researcher will respond to each of the research questions, which were developed to investigate the research hypothesis using both content analysis and interviews.

#### Research question one

Are millennial leaders able to adequately manage cross-generational conflicts in the workplace?

Yes, millennial leaders are able to manage cross-generational conflicts in the workplace. From the research and data collected the researcher determined that contrary to popular beliefs, millennial leaders have the same goals, skills, and desires as their cross-generational counterparts. Although their management styles may often differ, they work toward resolving conflicts equally. For example, John, a participant in the study, indicated that “In the beginning, I was distrusting of my millennial leader. Her hands-off approach, made me feel uneasy, and it was quite different than what I was used to in the past. I associated her laidback approach to lack of motivation” (John, 2017). Later in the interview John stated that, “My manager’s management style, although different, is the best for my team. She trusts in our ability to meet deadlines, and acknowledges the fact that we are a diverse group of people with specific needs. I trust in my manager’s ability to manage conflicts in the workplace” (John, 2017). One of the most important concepts to take away from this research is that, different doesn’t equate to being wrong. Many times, people fear, and reject the unknown; millennials may have a unique approach to managing conflict in the workplace, however they are fully capable of being effective leaders.

#### Research question two

There is no evidence to suggest that age has an effect on a manager’s ability to resolve cross-generational workplace conflicts. There is a correlation, however between experiences and a manager’s ability to resolve conflict. Naturally, the more experienced, and or trained a person is with handling specific issues, the more likely they are to develop resolutions. It is important to note that correlation does not indicate a causal relationship. During an interview with Lauren, she stated that “I have had several managers of different age, and experiences, all of which had different management styles. Although, while some millennials fall victim to trying to be liked and appease everyone, others were very effective in doing their job, it just depends” (Lauren, 2017). In another interview with David he stated that “My previous millennial leaders were more hands off, they trusted

the people they employed to handle things on his own, he would step in and could handle things when need be, but in a more hands-off approach” (David, 2017).

### Conclusions

After collecting research from both content analysis and interviews the researcher concluded that millennial leaders have many of the same desires as others. These desires include making a positive impact on the organization, working with a diverse group of people, helping to solve social and environmental challenges, gaining financial stability, and doing work that they are passionate about (Pfau, 2016). Millennials may have different ways of managing conflict in comparison to cross-generational managers; however different strategies should not be interpreted as wrong. Many participants described their millennial leaders as having a more laissez-faire approach to conflict, and allowed their employees a chance to resolve the conflict before stepping in. Participants also explained that their managers knew when to intervene. It is important to understand that adequate conflict resolutions strategies may differ depending on the environment. Effectiveness in management is important, because it dictates the success of an organization. It is also important for HR personnel to ensure that policies and procedures are followed in order to avoid discrimination, lawsuits, and negative press.

Overall, cross-generational workplaces are inevitable. Workplaces will always be composed of people of different ages, races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations; however, it is important for employees to embrace differences and not make swift judgments. Millennials as well as other employees must work together and continue to find conflict resolutions. Although conflict will never be eliminated completely, strategies should be put in place to help reduce it. In support of Morton Deutsch's theory of Competition and Cooperation (2006), management should focus on creating more cooperative work environments. Cooperation has a more positive impact on the work environment. In an interview with John he stated “I am only as good as my leader” (John, 2017). This is important in understanding the power in leadership. One great leader can produce several great followers; however, one corrupt leader can destroy an organization. All employees must be trained and taught proper skills and procedures in order to increase effectiveness in the workplace.

### Recommendations

Recommendations for this research would include one, implementation of mandatory cross-generational trainings to assist with conflicts amongst the groups, and two mentorships partnering cross-generational employees to decrease conflict. D.C government is a huge workforce, and not narrowing down to a specific agency may have a bias of the results. There are agencies that may have a higher percentage of millennial leaders, which may have an impact on cross-generations. In



this proposal, the researcher interviewed six participants from two D.C. Government agencies. If this study is replicated, the researcher should consider this potential bias.

The first recommendation is ***mandatory cross-generational trainings***. Although there are several mandatory trainings in reference to diversity, participants in this study denied having trainings to assist with interacting with cross-generations. As we learned throughout the proposal, there are 5 generations of employees working today, which is slightly different from the past. Employees must be trained in this area. Different age groups may adapt differently, including the ways in which they receive information. Having cross generational trainings will assist with strategic planning for managers by assisting with determining what is best for specific employees. For example, having trainings using modern technology may be a distraction for older employees, who may or may not understand how to fully utilize them. This may seem like a small issue, but it could create bigger concerns. The cost of trainings are often expensive for employers, and the goal of having them is to help develop, and educate the employee; however if employees aren't learning and implementing learned material, the cost of training then becomes a loss for the employer. Developing trainings in this area will benefit managers, and employees, and help make work environments more desirable.

The second recommendation is creating ***mentoring partnering cross-generational employees*** in D.C. Government. Although, some agencies in D.C. Government may offer mentors, it should be available for every agency. Not only does this mandate cross-generations connectedness, it allows employees and managers an opportunity to interact with others more freely. In addition to mentorship programs for employees there should be management programs available to entry level employees. Although, D.C. Government have programs for example Certified Public Manager (CPM), this program like many others are geared towards current managers, and not those who are seeking management positions. The goal should be to help build employees from the ground up, meaning from entry level positions to senior level management. This will help to monitor and track employee development, help ensure that participants have work experiences, as well as job training, and adequate education.

### **Implications**

There were some implications in this study that if improved could enhance and, or further research. One, for the purposes of time, the researcher only interviewed six participants. In the future, more participants should be included in the study. In addition, future researcher may want to select a specific agency to research. D.C. Government as a whole is a broad population, and more effective results could have been extracted with a smaller population. In addition, it may have been beneficial

to interview millennial leaders, as well as employees in order to compare and contrast results. If D.C. Government agencies were to adopt these recommendations, employees may have more desirable workplaces, higher employee engagement, and lower turnover rates. Also, managers would be better trained at handling conflicts in the workplace, and identifying the needs of cross-generational employees.

### Summary

The purpose of this research proposal was to examine the different resolution styles exhibited amongst millennial leaders in response to work place conflicts. The researcher explored over 15 articles, and interviewed 6 participants from D.C. Government to help develop a better understanding of the problem. Initially, the researcher was bombarded with articles describing the stereotypes of millennial leaders. However, after more specific research there were several articles that explained this phenomenon more clearly. After defining the problem, the researcher then developed research questions that would assist in explaining the problem. Developing research questions were important and gave the researcher direction. Next, the researcher searched to find the theory. Ultimately, the theory of Competition, and Cooperation by Morton Deutsch (2006) was chosen. After completing the theory section the researcher completed the analysis. This section was one of the most important sections as the researcher had to transcribe data, while maintaining the voice and words of the participants. There were three levels of coding used for this research; they were initial coding, axial coding, and triangulation. The last section completed was the discussion. In this section, the researcher discussed the findings, recommendations, and implications.

The researcher learned that contrary to popular beliefs, age alone have no impact on manager's level of effectiveness. Experience however has more of a correlation with a manager's ability to properly manage others. More specifically the quality of experience is most important, in comparison to length of employment. Lastly, it is important to understand that every good worker isn't a good leader. Being a leader comes from within, one can be given the skills to assist with managing more effectively, but the desire to lead cannot be taught.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

# Participants Needed for Research



Seeking volunteers to participate in a study regarding millennial leaders and cross-generational workplace conflicts.

As a part of the study participants will be asked to take part in an interview which is expected to last between 30-45 minutes. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study please contact:

La Juan Williams

MSA Human Resource Management

[Williamslaj.students@trinitydc.edu](mailto:Williamslaj.students@trinitydc.edu)

Trinity Washington University

School of Business and Graduate Studies

## Appendix B: Informed Consent

### Millennial Leaders and Cross Generational Workplace Conflicts

#### A Qualitative Analysis of Effectiveness in Management

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project, which will add to the (knowledge of, or practice of conflict management. The findings or results this study will help fulfill the requirements for a Master of Science Administration at Trinity Washington University. I am under the supervision of my faculty advisor Dr. Kelley Wood.

**Participation:** I will ask you to participate in an interview.

**Privacy:** Your participation in this study and your responses is confidential. In the study, and the resulting paper, you will be known by a pseudonym if I refer to you. This document and any notes or recordings that might personally identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a secure place that only I will have access to. Only the faculty advisor, and myself, might know who has participated in this study. Three years after the completion of this research study all personally identifying information will be destroyed.

**Risk:** The researcher foresees minimal risk to participants as follows,

- No risk of physical harm
- A potential for minor emotional discomfort, depending on the topic of the study and questions posed, or responses sought. If you experience discomfort, you may choose to skip questions or to withdraw from the study. If you experience discomfort beyond the time you participate in this study you may contact the faculty advisor (contact information is below).
- No social, economic, or legal implications are expected. It is recommended you do not share the specifics of your responses or your participation in this study with others. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality throughout the study.

**Benefits:** Assisting the researcher in completing their degree requirements and contributing to the general knowledge related to this research topic are the only expected benefits. There is no direct benefit and no compensation associated with this study.

*Signature page*

**Millennial Leaders and Cross Generational Workplace Conflicts**

I understand I may withdraw from this study at any time. If I have any questions or concerns regarding my participation in this research study I may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Kelley Wood or the BGS Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees the ethical practice of research involving persons conducted at the Trinity Washington University School of Business and Graduate Studies. By signing this document, I understand the following,

- I understand what it means to participate in this study.
- I understand my rights as a participant in this study, which the researcher has explained.
- My participation is confidential, including all information I share, and I will be known by a pseudonym if referred to in the study.
- I am indicating that I consent to participate in this study, that I am at least 18 years of age, and I am eligible to participate in this study.

I may retain a copy of this document for my own records.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number, Email Address, or Postal Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation,

La Juan R. Williams, Candidate

*Master of Science Administration, Human Resource Management*

Email Address: [williamslaj@students.trinitydc.edu](mailto:williamslaj@students.trinitydc.edu)

Research Supervisor: Dr. Kelley Wood

(202) 884-9640, or [Woodke@trinitydc.edu](mailto:Woodke@trinitydc.edu)

BGS Institutional Review Board

(202) 884-9640, or email [BGS@TrinityDC.edu](mailto:BGS@TrinityDC.edu) with **BGS IRB Questions** in the subject line.

## Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument

### Interview Questions

**Demographic Questions:** These questions are being asked in order to ensure that each participant meets the criteria of the research and to provide demographic information for future analysis.

1. What is your gender?
2. Which of the following best describes your classification?
  - a. Millennial: Born 1981-1997
  - b. Generation X: Born 1965- 1980
  - c. Baby Boomer: Born 1928-1945
  - d. Traditionalist or Silent Generation: Born 1945- and Before
3. Out of the following categories, which best describes your current career level?
  - a. Entry level (Students, recent College graduates, or those with less than 2 years of experience)
  - b. Mid-Career Level
  - c. Supervisor or Manager
  - d. Owner
4. How many years have you been employed with the District of Columbia Government?  
Probe 1: Have you worked for more than 1 DC Government Agency? If so, how many agencies?

### **Professional Experience:**

5. How would you describe your workplace environment?
6. Would you describe your colleagues as cooperative or competitive?
7. Which style do you gravitate towards?
8. How would you describe your current managers?



9. Describe your current or previous experiences with millennial leaders?
10. How do you feel millennial leaders handle conflicts?
11. If you were involved in a workplace conflict, describe the steps you would take to resolve it?
12. Are you and the others you work with more likely to feel as if you are a family or close-knit group, or as individuals accomplishing your mission?
13. Are you and the others you work with likely to plan for or expect positive outcomes, or negative ones?
14. Does \_\_\_\_\_, (the millennial leader) express trust or distrust of you and your coworkers?
15. Does \_\_\_\_\_, the millennial leader allow or encourage you and your coworkers to express individual viewpoints or goals?

This concludes the interview. Thank you for your participation, if there are any questions, or concerns, please feel free to contact me via email at [williamslaj.students@trinitydc.edu](mailto:williamslaj.students@trinitydc.edu) . If there are any additional questions regarding this research please contact BGS Instructional Review Board at (202)884-9640, or [BGS@Trinitydc.edu](mailto:BGS@Trinitydc.edu).