

# Managing Millennials in the African Workplace: What the Millennials Need

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*Increasing interests in organizational implications of millennials amid generational shift within the African setting heralded the need for this study. Adopting an exploratory design, we assess the suitability of custom-made approaches for managing millennials. We inquired to what extent managers understand key needs for managing African millennials, using a tailor-made instrument to collect exploratory datasets from 502 participants at Lagos Business School, Nigeria. We found significant environmental implications as impacting on the behavioral dispositions of millennials. Grounded on the social exchange theory, we hypothesize millennials' need for significant mentoring and coaching through personalized interventions of older managers for optimal functioning.*

*Keywords: coaching, mentoring, millennials, needs, workplace*

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing presence of millennials in the workplace has generated lots of interests amongst scholars of organizational studies, with a specific focus on the changing dynamics and generational shift in the workplace (Anderson, Buchko & Buchko, 2016). While millennials are being recognized as dominating the other generational groups in today's workplace, limited works have been conducted with respect to understanding their needs and preferences, especially within the African context (Pew Research Center, 2015). Recent studies in the annals of literature on generational differences at work show that there seems to be an unwilling desire for millennials to be coached, mentored, as well as learn new things (e.g. Nicole & Sally, 2018).

This is further compounded with the debate on whether millennials prefer to work in teams or not (Lancaster & Stillman, 2010), or even prefer other forms of work schedules and/or processes that are beyond the traditional work approaches (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013). Studies also show that most managers, especially in Africa, described millennials as overwhelmed with issues relating to feedback (i.e. giving and receiving same) than any other generational cohorts (Payton, 2015; Aswell, 2015). Other generalist debates and suspicions among scholars and corporate managers regarding the seemingly problematic characteristics of millennials identify millennials as aversive to criticism (see Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), irrespective of their location of development within the global scene.

The foregoing reveals that managers of these millennials seem unaware of the varying needs and work preferences that are essential for managing millennials (especially within the African setting) (see Caraher, 2015; Taylor, 2010). All these, thus, border on the need to explore the opinions and perceptions of millennials and their managers with respect to their preferences for work, the processes involved, as well as those relationships essential for work outcomes. We, therefore, hypothesize that:

- i. Non-millennial managers possess limited knowledge about what motivates African millennials
- ii. Managers' display of personalized relationships with millennials (via mentorship, quality feedback, etc.) play a significant role in managing them (millennials)

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Millennials have been known by various names, such as Generation Y, coming after Generation X, the Peter Pan or Boomerang Generation, the Internet Generation, Echo Boomers, the Boomlet, Nexters, the Nintendo Generation, the Digital Generation, and the Sunshine Generation, among others (e.g. Main, 2013; Raines, 2002). With these differences in nomenclature, there seem to be divergent views on which age groups make up the Millennials group, all over (Hole, Zhong & Schwartz, 2010). Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) categorized Millennials as representing a group of individuals that are born between 1979 and 1994. In another context, Raines (2002) categorized them as those born between 1980 and 2000; while the current study adopted the most commonly used categorization of the millennial group as comprising those born between 1982 and 2000 (Main, 2013).

### **General Characteristics of Millennials**

Researchers have categorized the millennials as shaped by common historical events, experiences, location and given period (Gilleard, 2004). This suggests that the environment within which these Millennials grew up during their formative years seems to impact their values, attitudes, and behaviors. Hence, millennials are majorly influenced by the trends and occurrences that 'affected them and their Boomer parents, as well as rapid technological changes that heralded their birth, growth, and development (see Burke, Cooper & Antoniou, 2015). They come across as more ethnocultural diverse (Pew Research Center, 2012); and more egalitarian in approach towards women and minority groups within the global world (Broido, 2004; Decoo, 2014; Ng and Wiesner, 2007). They are said to be "sociable, optimistic, talented, well-educated, collaborative, open-minded, influential, and achievement-oriented" (Raines, 2002:25).

Millennials are "digital natives" due to their unique relationship and immersion with technology (Terence, 2018). They are generally seen as "better educated, exposed, inquisitive and opinionated," especially in comparison with previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008b; Leete, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2011b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While they are characterized as they arriving the workplace with higher expectations than any generation before them (Raines (2002), others perceive them as spoiled and entitled (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Twenge, 2006).

### **Millennials in the African Workplace**

Several studies suggest that the millennial generation appears to have significant differences in values, attitudes and expectations regarding work compared to prior generations (Hauw & Vos, 2010). Following this range of diversity, we set out to find out whether this holds valid for millennials within the African descent, given the somewhat peculiar political and socio-economic realities of the African millennials (Cekada, 2012). Whereas a number of studies express mythical debates about the scope and behavioral patterns of African millennials, this study seeks to evaluate their peculiar needs and preferred working relationships (especially with Superiors) at work.

While limited studies have been conducted on millennials within the African vicinity, numerous writers (e.g. Makarov, 2016) argue that African millennials constitute about 37 percent of the world population of millennials, putting Africa as the leading youthful population on the global space. With this, it is conceived that millennials within the African sphere are a much more different group of individuals in comparison to their counterparts worldwide (Chang, 2011), thus, necessitating the current investigation.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

To provide a theoretical explanation for the subject matter, this study draws on the Social Exchange Theory as the basis for explaining the behavioural dispositions of millennials, following the inputs and/or platforms created for them by their employers (represented by management).

### **Social Exchange Theory**

The social exchange theory argues that obligations are generated through a series of interactions between parties in a state of reciprocal interdependence. Following the views of Blau (1964), cited in (Kim, 2014) the Social Exchange theory gives a focal point to see how workers accomplish performance tasks and focus on their organizations through the lens of relationships between them and their organization, usually represented by Managers. Accordingly, relationships evolve into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments, so long as the parties abide by certain exchange rules, which usually involve reciprocity or repayment, such that the actions of one party lead to the response or actions of the other party. In other words, millennials would choose to engage themselves to varying degrees in response to resources received from the organization.

This theory supports the possibility that effectively managing millennials tend to promote their participation in the organization, even to the extent that they feel obligated to exert “extra efforts” in return for these “extra benefits” derived from their organization. Here, quality exchange ensues when both sides esteem the working relationship in view of common trust and mutuality, especially when millennials see an organization’s endeavors toward them as enhancing their welfare and contributing more than expected (see Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). Thus, this theory proposes that when organizations offer employees what benefits them, employees often reciprocate by performing beyond the call of duty (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986).

Hence, grounded on the social exchange theory, the exchange relationship between millennials and managers is said to be ongoing, reciprocal and dynamic (Molm, 2006; Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Blau, 1964). That is, a longer-term of exchange relationship than the general one-time transaction associated with economic exchanges (Molm, 2006). This theory is, therefore, important when examining relationships within an organization, given the amount of dependence of parties (millennials and managers) on each other, while the exchange remains fair and supportive.

The study, thus, hypothesizes the need for managers to exchange their resources, especially time, for mentoring and coaching millennials, to equip them with the requisite skills and knowledge reservoir that is needed for optimizing their individual and collective potentials, especially at the person-specific level of engagement. In this wise, high-quality social exchange tend to occur when leaders are honest, trustworthy, and genuinely concerned about the well-being of their subordinates, including their economic advantages for enhanced performance (see Erdogan, Liden, & Kraimer, 2006; Wayne, Shore, Boomer, & Tetrick, 2002).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Being an exploratory study conducted over 16 months (March 2018 to June 2019), a total of 502 participants (MBA and Executive Programme Students at the Lagos Business School) shared their thoughts on the characteristics, needs, and relevance of Millennials within the African workplaces. Following the need to explore how best to manage millennials within the African context, conceptualizations on questionnaire items were developed with the intent of gaining insights and understanding into managing millennials within the African context. Hence, data for the current study are drawn from a sample of 339 non-millennials (those born before 1982) and 163 millennials, including a total of 25 non-Nigerians. They include individuals from twenty (20) different industries and sectors. The study employs a mix of frequency statistics and content analysis for open-ended responses. The programmes which these respondents attended are summarised below:

**TABLE 1**  
**DEMOGRAPHICS OF PROGRAMMES ATTENDED BY RESPONDENTS AT**  
**LAGOS BUSINESS SCHOOL**

<b>Name of Programme</b>	<b>Participants/students</b>	<b>No of classes</b>
<b>Global CEO</b>	Chief executives of top organizations in Africa	<b>One</b>
<b>Executive MBA classes</b>	Top and middle-level managers of mostly Nigerian companies	<b>Four</b>
<b>Owner-Programmes</b>	Owner-managers of medium-level organizations in Nigeria	<b>Three</b>
<b>Full-time MBA classes</b>	Young MBAs with three or a little more years of work experience	<b>Two</b>
<b>Leadership Programme</b>	Top managers of a leading FMCG in Nigeria	<b>One</b>
<b>Advanced Management Programm</b>	Senior-level managers and directors of Nigerian organizations	<b>One</b>
<b>Senior Programme</b>	Middle-level managers of Nigerian organizations	<b>Two</b>
<b>Human Resource Management</b>	Human Resource Managers of various organizations in Nigeria and other African countries	<b>Three</b>
<b>Leadership Interpersonal seminars</b>	The mix of junior, middle-level and senior managers of mostly Nigerian organizations	<b>Four</b>

## RESULTS

### Demographics of the Respondents

A total of 502 responses were retrieved through the administered questionnaire, out of which 339 were non-millennials. All respondents were actively engaged in the context of the African workplace at the time of the survey. Of the 339 non-millennials respondents, those born between 1966 and 1981 (Generation X) made up the majority of the respondents; comprising 274 respondents (approximately 55% of the population). Sixty-Five (65) of the respondents were those born between 1946 and 1965 (Baby Boomers), (approximately representing 13% of the population). Finally, the study included 163 millennials, classified into senior millennials (i.e. 125 respondents) and junior millennials (i.e. 38 respondents).

While most of the respondents were Nigerians, there were 24 non-Nigerians in the study, including those from Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. Also among this group were four Indians, one Chinese, one American and one European, who lived and worked in Nigeria as at the time of the survey.

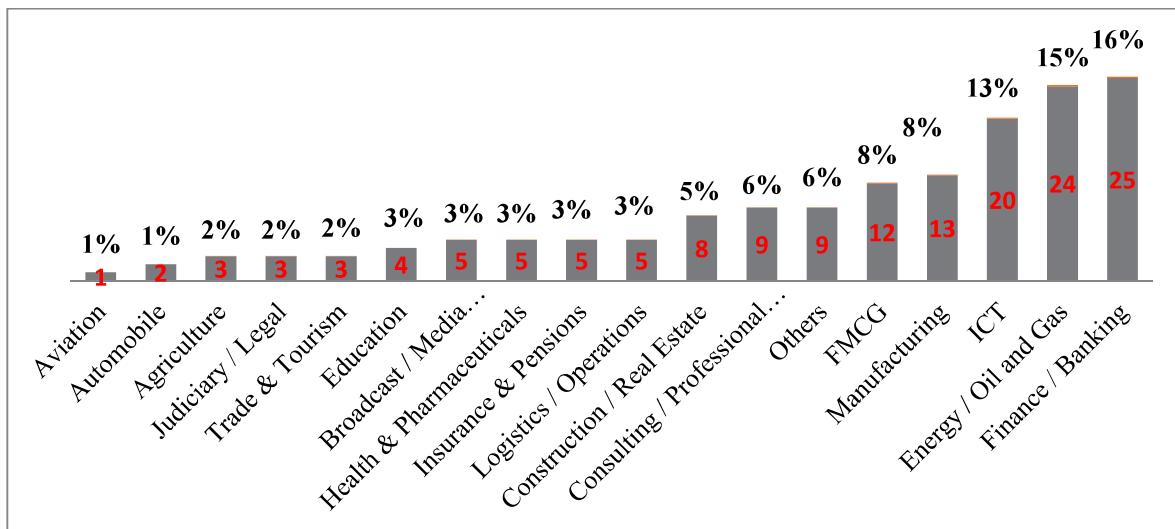
**TABLE 2**  
**GENERATIONS OF RESPONDENTS**

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Baby Boomers (1946 - 1965)	65	12.9
Generation X (1966 - 1981)	274	54.6
Millennials (1982 - 2000)	163	32.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>100</b>

**Industry, Job Roles and Job Titles of Non-millennials Respondents**

The non-millennial respondents were drawn from 18 different industries/sectors in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, ranging from Energy/oil and gas, Finance and Banking, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Agriculture, Education, Aviation and automobile industry, among others. They variously hold different job functions, with the highest frequency of the distribution involved in a range of general management roles. These were mostly Owner-managers, Chief Executive Officers and Directors of organizations, whose responsibilities cut across different job roles. The study recorded 52 respondents involved in Accounts and Finance roles (i.e. 16%); while Operations and Human Resource Management jointly followed with 49 respondents (i.e. 15%), and followed by Sales and Marketing function, which recorded 44 respondents (i.e. 13%), among others. Also, the respondents cover 17 identifiable industries, with Banking and Finance, Energy/Oil and gas, and ICT, respectively topping the list (see Figure I below).

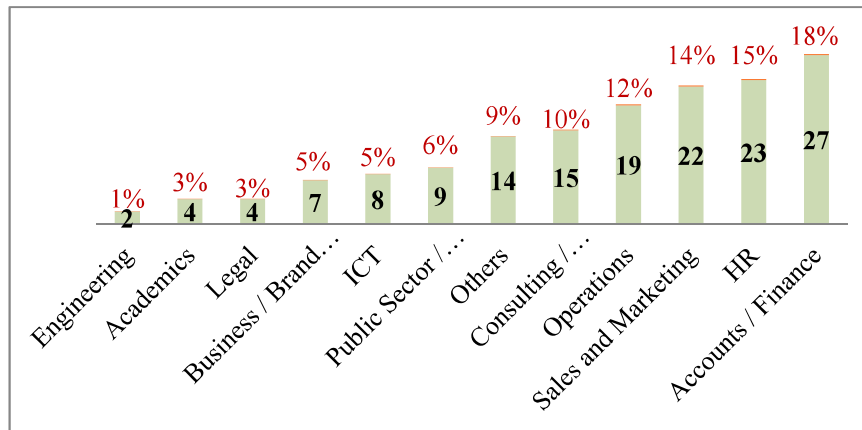
**FIGURE 1**  
**INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION RATE OF MILLENNIAL RESPONDENTS**



**Designation of Millennials**

As seen below, the majority of the millennial respondents were specialized in the areas of Account and Finance, Human Resource Management, Sales and marketing, Operations, among others, as shown in Figure II below.

**FIGURE 2**  
**AREAS OF JOB FUNCTIONS OF MILLENNIALS RESPONDENTS**



### **Current Job Position of Millennial Respondents**

147 millennial respondents indicated their job profiles, out of which were MDs/CEOs (5 representing 3%), Board members (17 representing 12%), and Managers of organizations (47 representing 81%)

### *Respondents' Perception of Millennials*

While all the respondents (i.e. millennials and non-millennials) reported that they currently work with or have worked with millennials in their respective organizations, a slightly different questionnaire was administered to each group (non-millennials and millennials), using a unique set of adjectives and phrases (both positive and negative) in the questionnaire. This requested respondents to indicate as many as possible answer choices that can easily describe the millennials. Also, respondents were encouraged to include personal adjectives and phrases that could be used to qualify millennials, thereby, giving room for adequately capturing their perception. The adjectives/phrases are categorized below:

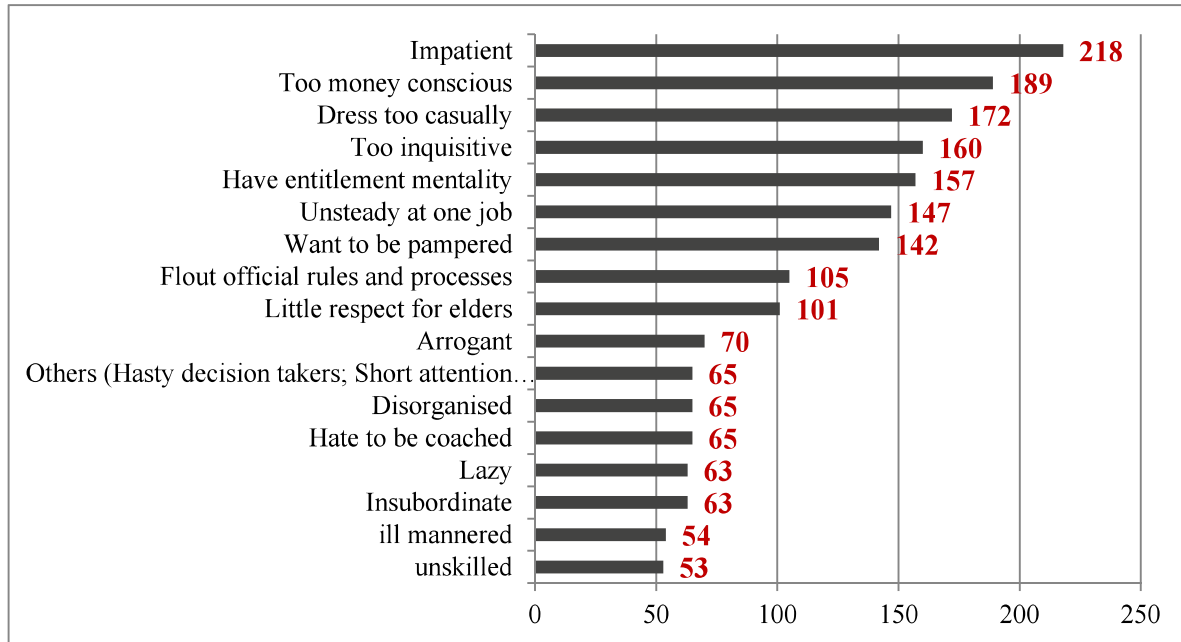
**TABLE 3**  
**GENERAL VIEW OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT MILLENNIALS**

S/N	Negative	Positive
1.	Arrogant	Respectful
2.	Insubordinate to authority	Self-motivated
3.	Too inquisitive	High success appetite
4.	Impatient	Ambitious
5.	Lazy	Digital literates
6.	Having an entitlement mentality	Creative
7.	Hates to be coached	Little money conscious
8.	Ill-mannered	Fast learners
9.	Unskilled	Multi-taskers
10.	Unsteady at one job	Goal-oriented
11.	Flout official rules and processes	Organized
12.	Disorganized	Purpose-driven
13.	Little respect for elders	Hard workers
14.	Too money conscious	Reliable
15.	Want to be pampered	Trustworthy
16.	Dress too casually.	Selfless (Like to volunteer)
17.		Not afraid of challenging tasks
18.		Natural networkers
19.		Thrives on achievement.

**Negative Description of Millennials by Non-millennials**

On the negative side of the list, the survey shows that impatience ranked highest (218 out of 337, representing 65%), followed by money-consciousness (189 out of 337, representing 56%), while others in the top five include: millennials dressing too casually (172 out of 337, representing **51%**); being too inquisitive (152 out of 337 representing 47%), and having the mentality of entitlement (149 out of 337, representing 47%). Interestingly, 53 out of 337 respondents, representing 16% thought the millennials were unskilled, while 54 respondents thought they were ill-mannered, among others, as seen in figure III below:

**FIGURE 3**  
**NEGATIVE DESCRIPTION OF MILLENNIALS BY NON-MILLENNIALS**

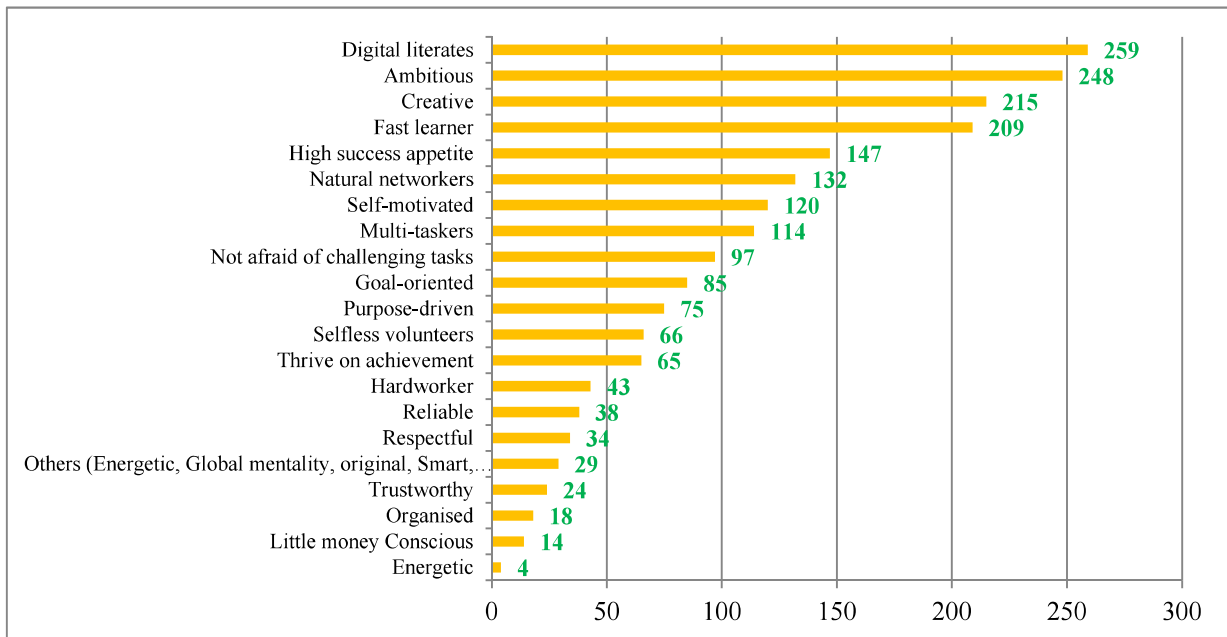


**Positive Description of Millennials by Non-millennials**

Most of the non-millennial respondents perceived millennials as digital literates (259 out of 337, representing 77%), followed by being ambitious (248 out of 337, representing 74%) and creative (215 out of 337, representing 64%). Other positive attributes accorded to millennials by non-millennial respondents include the ability to learn fast (209 out of 337, representing 62%) and having a high success appetite (147 out of 337, representing 44%), as seen in the figure IV below.



**FIGURE 4**  
**POSITIVE DESCRIPTION OF MILLENNIALS BY NON-MILLENNIALS**



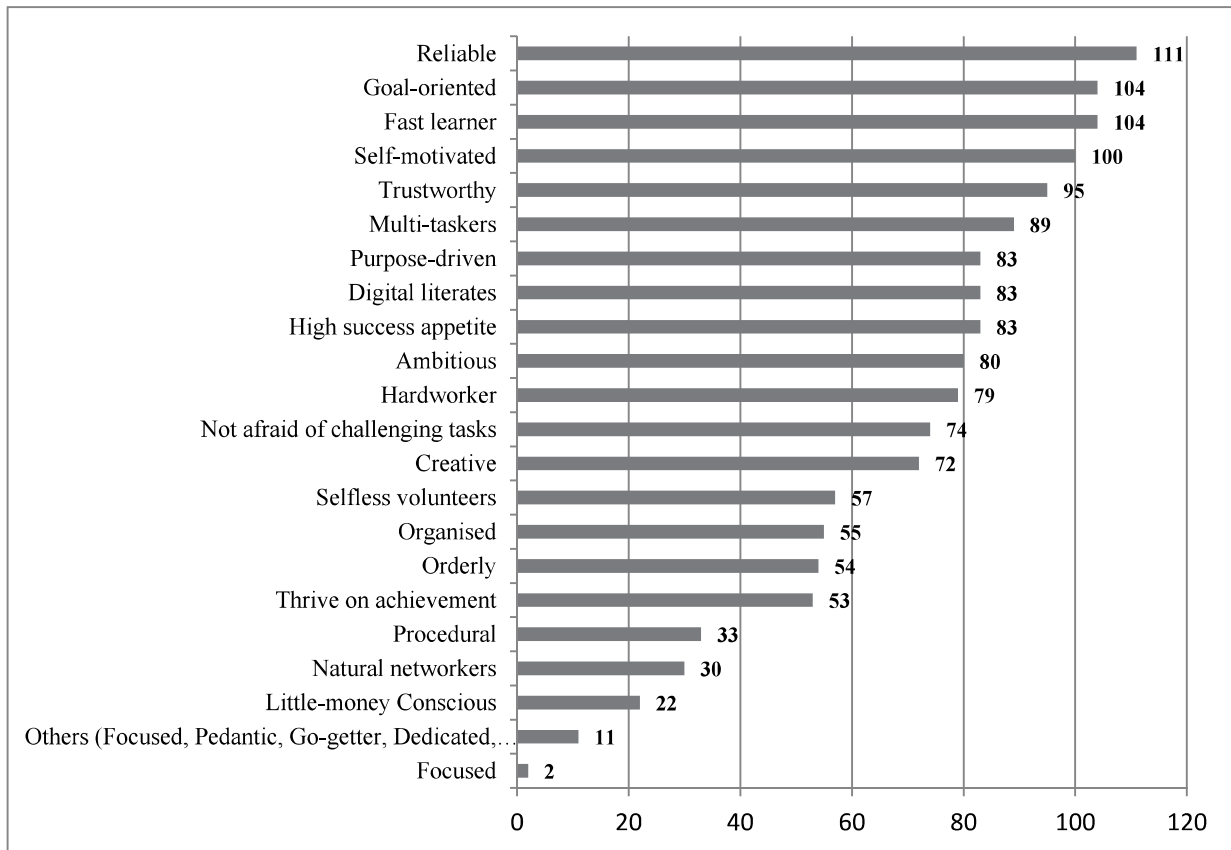
### **Importance of the Millennials in the Workplace**

Non-millennial respondents were asked to rate the importance of millennials in the workplace, identifying a closed-ended opinion within a “true” or “false” option. The outcomes show that non-millennial managers perceive millennials as constituting an important generation in the African workplace. Furthermore, 91% of the non-millennial managers preferred millennials as important assets to their teams and organizations at large. Also, a higher proportion of 92% perceives millennials as bringing more fun and excitement to the office, while 72% opted to rather recruit more millennials, if and/or when allowed to do the same. In the same vein, an overwhelming 91% of non-millennial respondents objected to the view that millennials contribute little or nothing to their organization, while 82% disagreed with the view that millennials are accompanied by problems to their teams and/or organization. This suggests that millennials often introduce more solutions than problems for the organization. In consonance with the above answers, 72% of non-millennials disagreed with the view that they would rather not work with millennials in their teams and/or organizations if given the choice. All the aforementioned are in alignment with some studies (e.g. Bresman, 2015; Yeaton, 2008), indicating the quality and importance of millennials to organizations within the African context. The responses suggest the older managers perceive millennials as dynamic people to have around in the offices and that they come to the office with positive attributes that make them a great asset to the team.

### **The Millennials’ Description – From Self Perspective**

Millennials described themselves with respect to work by choosing from a set of positive adjectives as ranked in the below:

**FIGURE 5**  
**POSITIVE DESCRIPTION OF MILLENNIALS BY THEMSELVES**

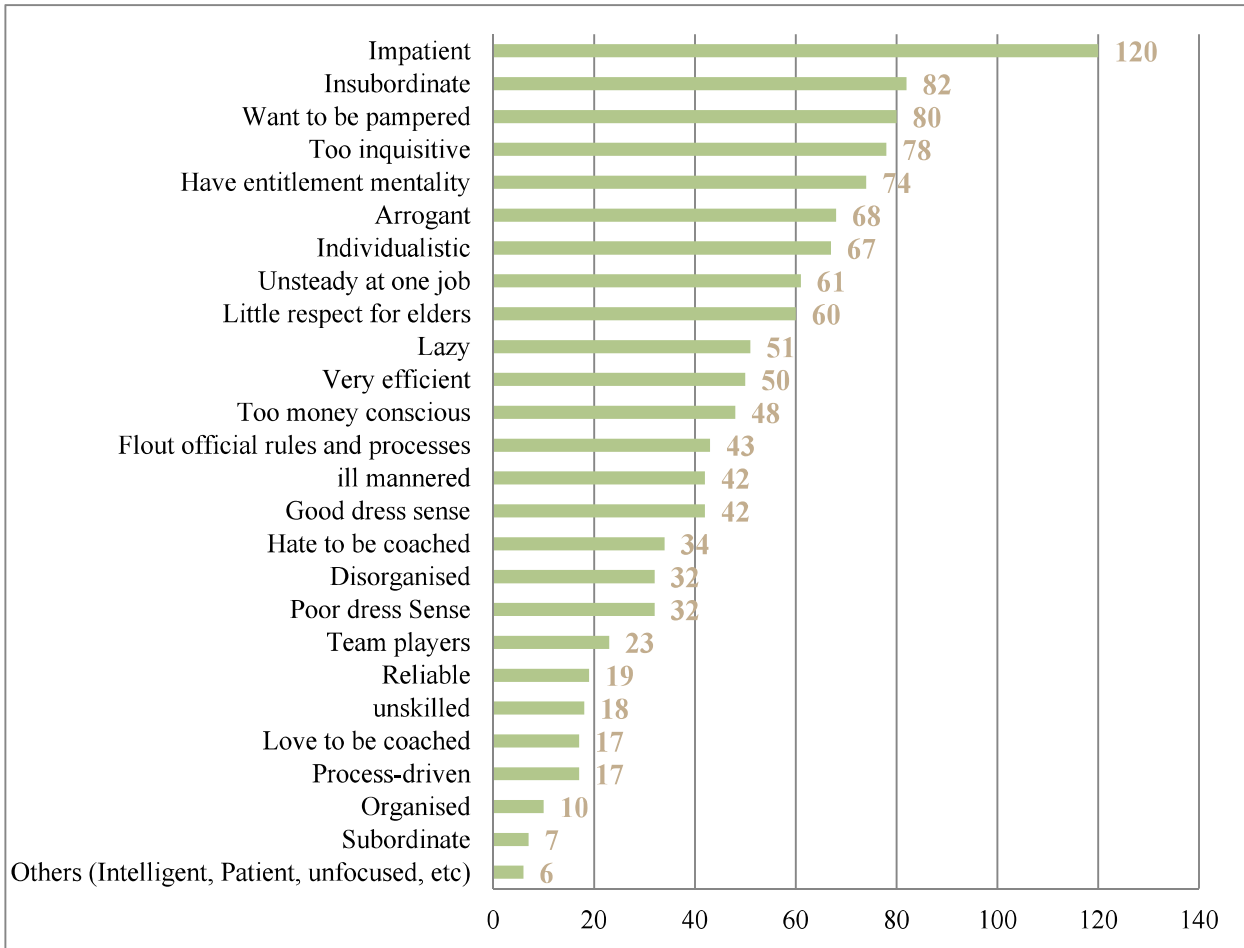


Being reliable was at the top of the characteristics of the millennials according to the millennials themselves. Sixty-eight percent of the millennials surveyed thought themselves as reliable, while 65 percent said they were goal-oriented and fast learners. Other top traits include being self-motivated and trustworthy; being adept at multi-tasking, purpose-driven and having a high success appetite. They also thought they are digital literates, ambitious, hardworking, creative and not afraid of facing challenging tasks.

**The Millennials’ Description – From Others’ Perspective**

To validate the outcomes of Figure V above, millennials were asked to rate the perception of older managers about them, using similar adjectives, in order to establish correlates in their previous opinions. To explore this, millennials were asked about what they thought the older managers think of them in the workplace, using a list of adjectives provided. The result showed remarkable dissimilarities between how the millennials perceive themselves and how they think they appear before their older managers (others), as seen in the below:

**FIGURE 6**  
**HOW MILLENNIALS THINK THEY ARE PERCEIVED BY THE OLDER MANAGERS**



Here, the majority of the millennials do not think that older managers think highly of them. They thought they are seen as impatient, insubordinate, too inquisitive, arrogant, wanting to be pampered and having an entitlement mentality. They also thought they are seen as individualistic (as opposed to being seen as team players), unsteady at one job, having little respect for elders, and lazy. Only 19% of the respondents thought they are seen as reliable by their older managers, compared to 68% of the millennials who perceive themselves as reliable.

The survey, thus, suggests that there exists considerable dissimilarity between how the millennials perceive themselves when compared to how their older managers perceive them.

**TABLE 4**  
**TOP TEN TRAITS COMPARING HOW MILLENNIALS AND OLDER MANAGERS**  
**SEE MILLENNIALS**

<b>How Millennials see themselves</b>	<b>How older managers see Millennials</b>
Reliable	1. Digital Literates
Goal-oriented	2. Ambitious
Fast Learners	3. Creative
Self-motivated	4. Fast Learners
Trustworthy	5. High Success Appetite
Multi-tasking	6. Natural Networkers
Purpose-driven	7. Self-motivated
Digital Literates	8. Multi-tasking
High success appetite	9. Not afraid of challenging tasks
Hard workers	10. Goal-oriented

While the older Managers think of millennials as digital natives and ambitious, millennials see themselves more in terms of being reliable and goal-oriented before anything else. Unfortunately, the non-millennials managers never thought of millennials as being reliable, while being goal-oriented is only cumulatively ranked tenth in the order of ranking. In other words, millennials' views of not being seen as reliable seem to encourage a situation of lack of trust and confidence with challenging tasks and/or their abilities to deliver as expected.

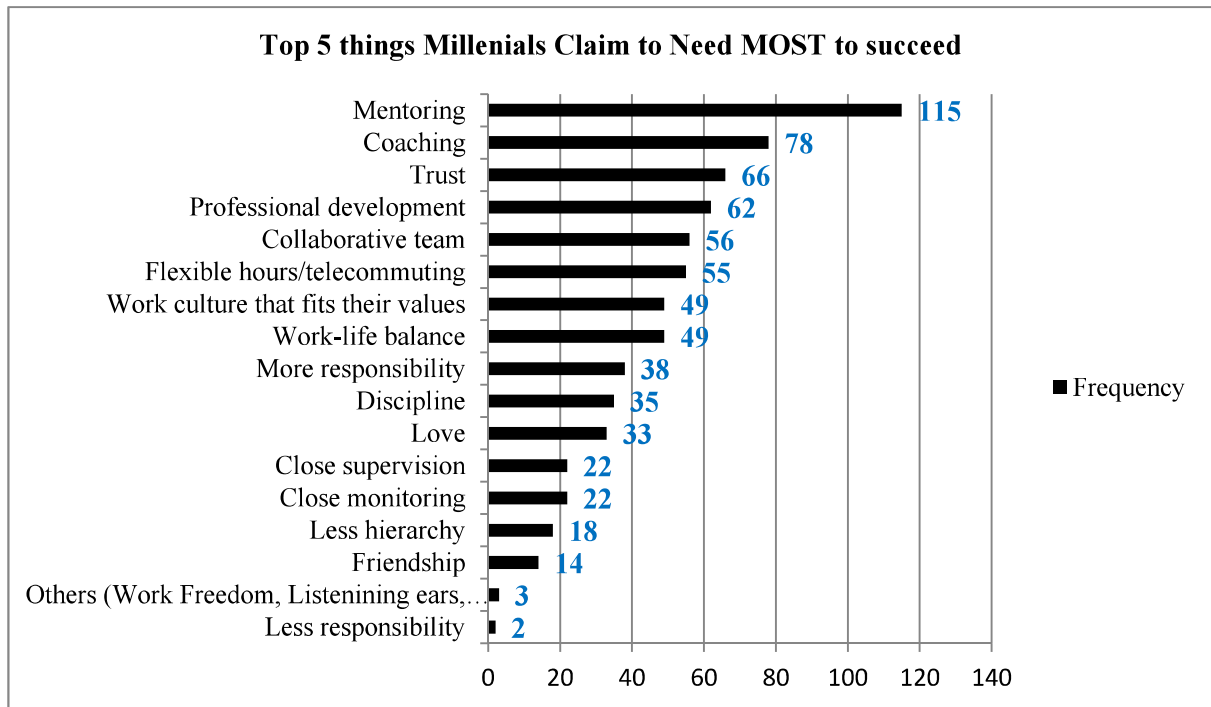
Following the views of Smith and Nichols (2015), when millennials sense the existence of this lack of trust in the workplace, the tendency is to hold back and assume a passive rather than proactive approach to work. Despite older managers perceiving millennials as a great asset to the organization, one then wonders why they do not see them as trustworthy. Could it be that the older millennials do not regard their younger colleagues as old and/or experienced enough to be entrusted with important tasks and responsibilities in the workplace? Could it also be a cultural reality within the African context, where 'the child is never seen to have grown up as long as his parents are still alive'? Hence, the overarching question as to how these millennials can be effectively managed in order to draw the best out of them in the workplace within the African context.

### **What Do the Millennials Need in the Workplace?**

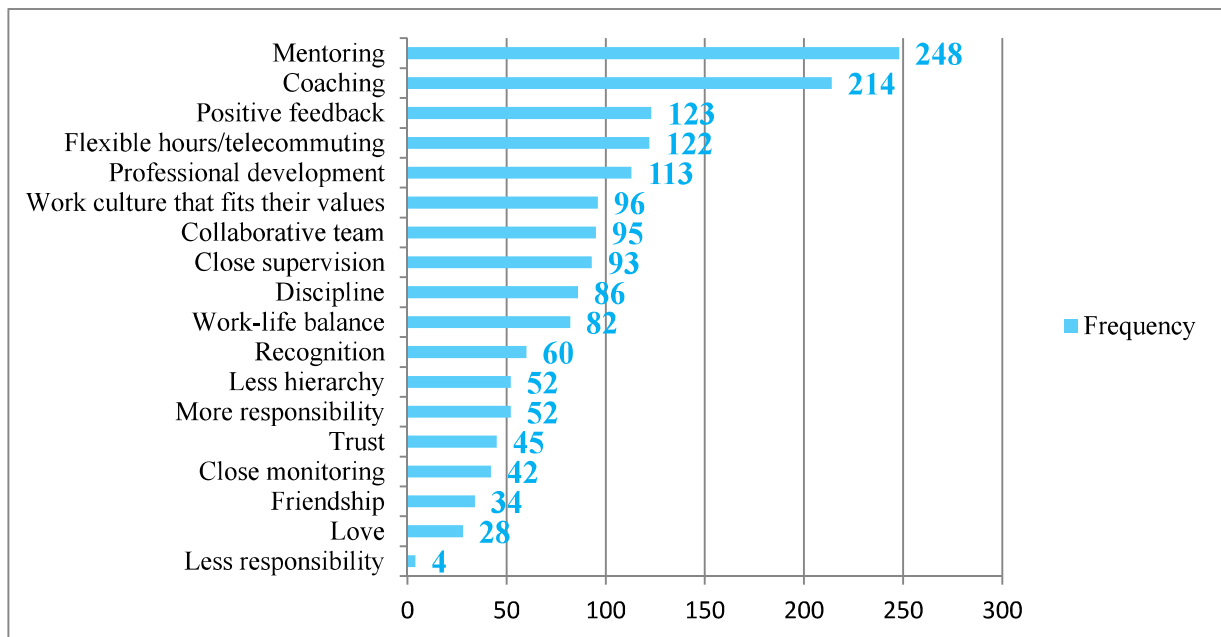
In line with the works of Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar and Kaifi (2012), the current study seeks to draw evidence of convergence in opinions between the older managers and the millennials on what the millennials need in the workplace to be more efficient and perform at their optimal. In this regard, millennials and non-millennial managers were asked to identify the top five top needs of millennials in the workplace. Consistent/deviating with the study of Hauw and Vos (2010), both millennials and non-millennials agree that training and development in mentoring and coaching forms are the most critical needs of the millennials in the workplace. They also agree, though not to the same degree, that they would perform better if they could be allowed to work flexible hours and to telecommute, especially when allowed personal growth. However, while the millennials place a lot of importance on their need to be trusted and be part of a collaborative team, a number of their needs do not seem to be in the same light by the older managers.

In other words, there appear to be more agreements than disagreements between the perception of millennials and their older managers on what the millennials need to be effective in the workplace. Figures VII and VIII below show the perception of Millennials and Non-millennial manager respondents on the top five needs of African millennials in order to aid their successes at work.

**FIGURE 7**  
**RANKING OF WHAT MILLENNIALS SAY THEY NEED IN THE WORKPLACE**



**FIGURE 8**  
**WHAT OLDER MANAGERS SAY MILLENNIALS NEED IN THE WORKPLACE**



## DISCUSSION

Based on the survey result, the top seven needs of millennials in the workplace will be assessed. The justification for this follows the comparison found in the combination of responses derived from millennials and non-millennial managers' respondents on the top five needs of millennials. While considering the divergence in responses between the millennials and non-millennials, all the seven answers that received more than one-third of the total responses from each group were accommodated, including mentoring, coaching, trust, positive feedback, professional development, collaborative teamwork, and flexible work hours and telecommuting. These core needs are elaborated below.

### **The Top Seven Needs of Millennials in the African Workplace**

#### *Mentoring*

Following the views of extant studies (e.g. Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009), millennials come to the workplace with very high, sometimes unrealistic, expectations. They seem to be in a hurry to get to the top and would sometimes appear to be impatient with the system and processes that often amounts to attaining their expectations. But they seem to mean well (see Lancaster & Stillman, 2010; Taylor, 2014; Zemke et al., 2013), and, if given the opportunity, could put on their creative caps and digital skills to maximum effect in the workplace. This is where we suspect the older managers need to come in as mentors, so as to guide and channel their energy and pragmatism to the right effect. Millennials were of the view that managers should be "open-minded, non-judgmental, approachable and interactive". They conceive that "older managers need to think like the Millennials by bringing their thought patterns to their level," and understand that "Millennials constitute a different generation, that has grown in the microwave generation." We, therefore, recommend that organizations adopt a mentoring scheme where millennials, especially newly recruited ones, are assigned to older managers to guide them as mentors and help them navigate their career path. Thus, mentoring starts with understanding (and not condemning) the peculiar characteristics of the millennials (Caraher, 2015). We suggest that leaders and managers, as mentors, need not be the immediate supervisor of the millennial; as it is better the mentor is someone external to the millennial's immediate work unit. This way, the millennial will be able to see the mentoring relationship as a special and distinct one, different from the everyday supervisor-supervisee relationship.

#### *Coaching*

Many millennials come to the workplace with a significant amount of raw skills, but little experience (Waldrop & Grawich, 2011). For some, it may be their first real employment; while others may not have stayed long enough in their previous jobs or were coming from a different industry. Thus, it is suspected that these millennials will inevitably make mistakes (either overt or covert) as they try to adjust to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that accompany the work environment. To allude these claims, some millennials were of the view that non-millennial managers should "be open-minded and non-judgmental; approachable and interactive" and "understand why we work as hard as we do, and do not see the end of the tunnel." They claim that the need for managers to "coach them, challenge them, trust them, allow them to make mistakes and criticize them constructively when mistakes happen." Managers are also expected to "describe the objectives and the tasks including why it should be done, then leave Millennials to determine how best to get it done within timelines."

In support of the views of Hobbs (2017), therefore, it will make sense for supervisors to act as coaches in their relationships with millennials and junior colleagues in the dynamic and complex world of work if they are to expect successes from millennials. Thus, a good coach is expected to be patient, painstaking, and tolerant to mistakes by millennials, given their potentials to be ambitious and overtly exploratory. With this, "their in-and-out of work relationship should be critical".

### *Trust*

Results from our findings rank ‘trust’ as the third most important need of millennials in the workplace, as Millennials seek their greatest attribute in the workplace as “being trustworthy.” This is in line with the study conducted by Sunjansky and Ferri-Reed (2010), showing that Millennials often hold trust issues against the majority of their superiors/managers in the workplace. While our survey suggests that older managers do not perceive millennials as trustworthy, millennials claim they need to know that their managers trust and believe in their dedication to duty and capacity to deliver results, especially within the African contexts. They expressed the need for managers “to learn how to accommodate new ideas and be more willing to enhance changing workplace culture.” They further communicated the need for managers to “have faith in their abilities to deliver results,” and “be patient ... for them to demonstrate their ingenuity at the workplace.”

Hence, they need to know that they can be trusted enough to be a significant part of important decisions in the office, given its significance to their contributions in the workplace (see Caraher, 2015; Saiidi, 2014). When and where this is lacking, millennials would likely withdraw to their shell and give just enough to get by in the organization, and perhaps, until another job comes their way.

### *Positive Feedback*

Studies (e.g. Aswell, 2015; Barnes, 2014; Friedman, 2016) show that many millennials grew-up in environments (e.g. homes and regions) where their efforts are often appreciated than condemned. They have graduated from schools where caning and corporal punishments have been outlawed (Taillieu, Afifi, Mota, Keyes & Sareen, 2014; Lorber, O’Leary & Slep, 2011; Gershoff, Lansford, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Sameroff, 2012). In a sense, they have grown up being appreciated for little things at home, in school and their neighborhood (Aswell, 2015; Granovetter, 1973). Millennials, therefore, approach the workplace expecting similar treatments but are often put aback by the criticism and condemnation from their older managers, following their poor performance and/or behavioural dispositions.

Hence, for older managers to get millennials on their side, we suspect that they should learn to give them feedback in ways that would reinforce their determination to succeed, rather than dampen their morale and psyche. It is suggested that good work should be openly commended as soon as it is seen, while bad work should be corrected privately, and in a helpful manner. In other words, their need for positive feedback may explain why some scholars characterize millennials as ‘entitled or narcissistic’ in disposition (Twenge, 2013), although yet to be backed by empirical evidence. This is the rationale behind the claim of millennials for Managers to be “more open with them.” They also wish that older managers could “see from your view” and “let them use their initiatives,” establishing “room for brainstorming sessions and reward for unstructured but creative ideas that can be refined.” With these, optimal productivity gains are envisaged and enhanced for the millennials and organization at large.

### *Professional Development*

Seppanen and Gualtieri (2012) found that millennials are generally in a hurry; they want to get to the top as soon as they could. This may account for the reason why they swiftly hop from one job to the other, seeking the easiest route to attain that height. While not all millennials hop around, however, some actually stay longer than expected in organizations, given that they see the organization as caring about their personal development. Millennials seek to intimate managers with the need to “empower them and hold them accountable ...this brings out the creativity in them.” Millennials also yearn to be entrusted with “more responsibilities,” and for managers to “communicate more often and honestly.” Accordingly, they surmised that older managers should not to “think Millennials cannot change or do the job... , instead managers should “just point them in the right direction” and “try to understand them, because “Millennials are a jackpot waiting to be uncovered.”

So, it is suspected that organizations that have clear career pathways and robust employee development plans and policies for millennials would be able to easily attract and retain them.

### *Collaborative Teams*

The Millennials claim that they “have different energy levels and operate on a different frequency... It is like a wave; another energy form that needs proper channeling... Older managers should have an approach of channeling such energy in the right direction and not resist them.” This suggests that the needs of millennials seeking to be part of a collaborative team in organizations are significant, given that they are digital natives and natural networkers. It is, thus, suspected that millennials will thrive better if they see themselves as part of a team, where everyone matters and everyone is seen as part of the solution to organizational needs and challenges. This is emphasized with the view of Pew Research Center (2015), indicating the team-orientation of millennials as a result of their upbringing around their contemporaries. Hence, it is recommended that millennials should be part of project teams, and sometimes be allowed to lead such teams, where their creative and collaborative skills would naturally show.

### *Flexible Work Hours and Telecommuting*

An interesting result of this study is that the older managers agree with the millennials on the need to have flexible work hours and work system that allows for telecommuting. The reality in today’s African workplaces, however, is that only very few organizations do this (see Dancaster, 2006). In a city like Lagos, for example, this will be a very attractive option and would save hours usually wasted in the notorious Lagos traffic commuting to and from work daily (see Akuma, 2019). Given the rise in technological advancement, we envisage that work can be carried out without physical presence within the African office settings, except for some specific customer-facing responsibilities. With this, millennials claim the need for managers to “understand that millennials are more goal-oriented than procedural in nature.” Thus, the African mentality of typical 8 am–4 pm or 9 am–5 pm work hour where workers must show-up in the office are becoming extinct, especially when dealing with millennials (see Lancaster & Stillman, 2010; Taylor, 2014).

It is, thus, suspected that a lot can be achieved when millennials are allowed to work at their best time and location. This agrees with the view of (Malloy, 2018; Lawler, 1994), portraying that for this practice to effectively work out, organizations need to refine their performance management systems to ensure that performance is monitored and measured, regardless of where and when work is done (whether on-site or at remote locations during a specific time of the day).

### **Advice for Older Managers on the Needs of Millennials**

We had asked the millennials to give some advice to the non-millennial managers on how they could get the best from them (the millennials) in the workplace.

At the heart of the numerous pieces of advice by millennials was the need for older managers to be patient, accommodating and open to new ideas/ways of working. In some words of the millennials, “Older managers need to learn how to accommodate new ideas and be more willing to enhance changing workplace culture.” Another millennial respondent advised that “older managers need to think like the Millennials by bringing their thought patterns to their level,” This will enable them to cultivate a relationship that allows for better mentoring. From the studies of Malloy (2018), it appears that being a colleague and a friend rather than a boss would work best for millennials. This is because “Bossy older managers will never get the best out of Millennials... They must create a thriving environment for expressions of ideas, innovation, and creativity, without downplaying or relegating Millennials,” as highlighted by one of the millennial respondents. Another respondent puts it more succinctly: “It is never personal. It is just a job... they should stop playing the age card.”

### **CONCLUSION**

This study identifies that millennials have peculiar characteristics and needs in the workplace. It shows that these characteristics are sometimes unclear to the older managers, hence, the need for them to be open and “think like the millennials.” Our study agrees in part with some of the conclusions on the characteristics of the millennials as identified by previous studies (e.g. Marston, 2009; Pew Research



Center, 2007), indicating that millennials are confident and optimistic, team-oriented, achievement-oriented and feel the need to excel. Twenge (2010: 209), advises managers to try and treat millennials as individuals from a distinct generation as theirs.

The study has also attempted to identify the seven top needs of the millennials in the workplace as given by the millennials and partly collaborated by their older managers. These needs majorly include mentoring and coaching, among others such as trust, positive feedback, and personal development.

The study contributes to equipping managers with empirical evidence required for understanding millennials and their needs at work. Grounded in the social exchange theory, the study hypothesizes the need for managers to exchange their resources (especially time for mentoring and coaching millennials) in order to equip them with the requisite knowledge reservoir that is needed for optimizing their individual and collective potentials, especially at the person-specific level of engagement.

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Some issues that may affect the generalizability of outcomes in the current study have been identified and mentioned for consideration in future studies. Firstly, the strict restriction of data collection source(s) to the Lagos Business School may tend to affect the chances of generalizability of findings in the current study. Besides, a limited amount of secondary data sources on managing millennials within the African setting made the review of literature quite tasking. Also, the data collected in the study seems limited with the realization that not all the millennial respondents completed all vital elements of the administered survey, with several void data recorded in the area of respondents' choice ranking of millennials' needs in various categories of questions, number of millennials in teams, job roles, and industries, among others. All these may be because some of them were full-time MBA students and not working at the time, though some were encouraged to indicate their immediate past job history.

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