Organizational Commitment and Turnover Intentions of Millennials: Using Reverse Mentoring as a Social Exchange Tool

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Abstract

The advent of millennials and aging of workforce resulted in change in the way managers of organizations work. As per media reports, the millennials are least committed whereas more self- focused, enthusiastic and target oriented. Therefore, instead of retaining this agent segment, organizations must pay attention to keep them committed. Based on this stance, HR department must devise some effective strategies which will increase organizational commitment of millennials. This study proposes that reverse mentoring technique can be used to increase the commitment level of employees. The current study aims to empirically validate the stance that millennials are least committed task force and reverse mentoring technique will help to increase their organizational commitment and decrease turnover intentions. Convenience sampling technique is used for the sake of selecting sample. Data is collected from 206 employees of banking industry by using survey method. The results of study depict that millennials are least committed taskforce and their willingness to participate in reverse mentoring program will increase their organizational commitment and decrease turnover intention. Implications and future directions are also provided at end of the study.

Keywords: Millennials, Organizational Commitment, Reverse Mentoring, Social Exchange, Mediation

Introduction

Aging is one of the most widely felt issues in developed countries, while the developing and emerging economies are out flown by the excess of the young workforce (Riekhoff et al., 2020). This has led to a labor shortage in various parts of the world and brain drain in others (where there is an excess of the labor force or opportunities are scarce) (Wae-esor, 2021). In view of this labor shortage researchers have proposed that older workers are valuable assets and organizations must devise strategies to keep these workers engaged at their retirement ages. Owing to this leadership gap, employers are trying to investigate different means for keeping this valuable workforce engaged at their post-standard retirement periods (Degbey et al., 2021). Additionally, firms are also looking for young talent that is more technology-centered and willing to learn e.g. millennials: workforce having birth between 1982 and 2004 (Pew, 2010), that has entered the workforce in bulk. The first batch of Millennials who entered the workforce emerged in the summer of 2004, and by the end of 2025, they will capture 75% of the workforce (Galdames & Guihen, 2020). Due to a small number of Gen X, and the frequent retirement of baby boomers, this task force has gained scholarly importance for academicians as well as practitioners (Forbes, 2015). Despite the fact that millennials have undergone some criticisms of being arrogant, careless, annoyed, and discontented, they are more prone to technological advancements, have strong communication skills, and can effectively adapt to ongoing changes at the workplace (Lee et al., 2020). Hence the importance of this task force can't be ignored.

Therefore, the organizations started realizing the impending benefits of this task force. In some studies, millennials are also referred to as "job hoppers" as they give prioritize a number of career paths. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Hence, it is quite a challenging task to retain millennials who gave preferences to multiple jobs over Boomers who have vast experience of working with similar organizations (Eddy, Schweitzer, & Lyon, 2010). These challenges resulted in a large number of dismissals, indecisive economic conditions, and pay cuts (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). During the past decades, both these generations have been researched, but still, there is paucity in determining rigorous HRD practices for meeting the changing needs of the labor market.

Owing to media reports the millennials are the least committed generation to their employees, as well as organizations, put empirical support to this claim is penurious. For HRD professionals devising new strategies and tactics, for keeping boomers engaged and millennials committed was a great challenge (Fenandes & Machado, 2021; Mohezar et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to propose some strategies which enable HRD professionals to keep baby boomers engaged and increase the commitment

of millennials. Among various HRD practices, one of the practices of much attention is the concept of reverse mentoring, the concept that was first launched by former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch (Frey, 2021).

In reverse mentoring, the mentor is usually younger than the mentee. Therefore, reverse mentoring enables older employees to gain extensive knowledge from their young counterparts, compared to traditional mentoring where the mentor is usually older than the mentee, and knowledge is transferred from older employees to younger ones (Gadomska, 2020). This is an inverted type relationship where new employees are paired up with senior ones to increase their technical knowledge and to keep millennials committed (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). However, it must be noticed reverse mentoring is not age-dependent, it is always cross-generational. The rationale behind the reverse mentoring concept was to impart the latest technological changes to senior employees. Previous researchers have found positive and beneficial impacts of reverse mentoring techniques both at an organizational level and individual level (Frey et al., 2021; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Considering the positive outcomes of reverse mentoring, and based on the social exchange theory, the current study proposes that reverse mentoring will act as a novel strategy to keep millennials committed and reduce their turnover intentions. Up to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a dearth of academic literature that has focused on the ways of commitment and reducing turnover intentions of millennials in tandem. But few of the recent studies have called for investigation for creating a situation that would be a win-win for all age cohorts at work (e.g. Browne, 2021; Tomlinson, 2020).

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Reverse Mentoring

This new paradigm was first launched by former CEO of Jack Welch, of General Electric (Frey, 2021). This is an inverted type of relationship where new employees are paired up with senior ones to increase their technical knowledge and to keep Millennials committed (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). It must be acknowledged that reverse mentoring is not age-dependent, it is cross-generational (Harvey et al., 2009). It is only fruitful if one junior employee having knowledge is willing to share and work with senior managers, hence it gives an opportunity to older employees to learn something new from junior ones (Tomlinson, 2020).

In this novel, the practice has been popularized in both academic and corporate settings (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). Some renowned organizations like Procter & Gamble, General Motors, the University of Pennsylvania, etc has

implemented this practice. Further, we will be negligent if we miss determining how the reverse mentoring relationship benefits the Millennials being mentors in their appreciation, professional respect, satisfaction, improved morale (Harvey et al., 2009). The motive of this study is to determine the commitment level of Millennials by engaging them in a reverse mentoring relationship.

The Millennials as Youngsters and Baby Boomers as an Aging Workforce

The individuals born between 1982 and 2004 are known to be millennials. It is believed that "Millennials were preceded by Generation X (those individuals born between the mid-1960s and the early-1980s), Baby Boomers (those individuals born between 1943 and the mid-1960s), the Silent Generation (those individuals born between 1925 and 1942), and the Greatest Generation (those individuals born between 1901 and 1924) (Pew 2010). Millennials are followed by Generation Z (Horovitz 2012)." Another definition state that Millennials are those born between 1979 and (Smola & Sutton, 2002), "the Millennials as new entrants are also known as "Slackers," "GenY," "Trophy Kids, "Echo Boomers," "Nexters," "Digital Natives," and "Net Gen". "They are the children of the Boomers and are reported to hold different values, attitudes, and beliefs for their parent's generation (Eddy et al., 2010)." Whereas individuals born between 1946 and 1964 are those who are born during or after World War II (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Millennials are the largest cohort who had larger impacts on main life fronts such as business, economy, and society. They are mostly self-oriented, competitive, focused, deep thinkers, and challenge-oriented people (Gursoyet al., 2008; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). They are also in search of opportunities for personal advancements, learning new things, and freedom from pressure (Chen and Choi, 2008).

Organizational Commitment & Turnover Intentions

Organizational commitment was originally defined as one's involvement and identification with the organization and its goals (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Organizational Commitment as a psychological state of an employee's relationship with the organization is categorized into affective, continuance, and normative commitments (Allen & Meyer, 1990), where affective commitment refers to one's emotional attachment to his or her organization and the degree to which that person identifies with, is involved with, and enjoys membership in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Normative commitment refers to a feeling of obligation to remain with an organization (i.e., I feel I should stay), and is thought to develop from the process of cultural and organizational socialization, where the norm of reciprocity is invoked (Wiener, 1982). Finally, continuance commitment is based on the perceived costs associated with leaving an organization (i.e., I need to stay)". Despite having the vast literature on

organizational commitment limited number of studies determines the generational differences in normative and affective commitment. Only one study Patalano (2008) validates these claims that comparing Gen X, Millennials are least Committed. Similarly, as the turnover is a mounting issue and millennials are more prone to leave jobs for personal accomplishments and gains the issue of turnover of millennials has gained the attention of researchers (Holtschlag et al., 2020; Ivanovic & Ivancevic, 2019).

Millennials and Reverse Mentoring

Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) the study addresses how reverse mentoring will act as a novel strategy to increase the organizational commitment of millennials. The basic premise of social exchange theory is that relationships are maintained or terminated on benefits to cost ratio. Settoon et al., (1996) stated that in organizations social exchange occurs at two levels; a) exchange between organizations and employees; b) exchange between employees and supervisors.

Reverse mentoring also take place at two levels, where at the first level, it represents the relationship between employees and their organizations. They feel contented while engaging in reverse mentoring programs and in return support organizational goals. Whereas the second level represents a relationship between mentor and mentee. At this level, a young mentor will always be willing to participate in a reverse mentoring program whereas an old mentee wants to learn the latest technological tools and participate in developmental training (Browne, 2021). It has been observed that older employees are often ignored by employers by not allowing them to participate in developmental training programs (Tomlinson, 2020). Based on these circumstances, the current study assumes that organizations must invest in reverse mentoring programs which are cost-effective and useful for both millennials (mentor) and baby boomers (mentee). This program enables boomers to improve their personal, technological skills. On the other hand, it results in an increase in the organizational commitment of millennials.

Further, Reverse mentoring can be perceived as organizational support (POS) by baby boomers and Millennials, only if they believe that their organization value their abilities, competencies, and expertise and participating in this program will enable them to prosper, develop and elevate their abilities and expertise (Yang et al., 2021). According to Raza (2020) when a leader works on improvement of the organizational culture and provides an environment where employees may engage in helping others, knowledge sharing, and supporting their peers the culture of support comes into existence that creates positive effects on the workplace.

Millennials, Reverse Mentoring and Organizational Commitment

Previous studies found that millennials are quite different from other generations because of their unique traits and values assigned to them at the workplace (Howe & Strauss 2000). They are considered high achievers, but accountable. They are multi-taskers, team-oriented, flexible but pressurized for their goals (Kaifi et al., 2012). Besides, that they are the least committed, arrogant, annoying, and less contented task force. They also have frequent career jumps in their life. they shift their jobs every 10 to 18 months (Nolan, 2015).

These trait differences force academicians and practitioners to pay attention to this generation. Therefore, it is quite challenging to retain this task force and increase their commitment. It has been observed in various studies that reverse mentoring programs will lead to positive outcomes for organizations and millennials. This novel practice has been popularized in both academic and corporate settings (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). Previous researchers investigated than the extent to which employee perceives that organization values their beliefs, contributions, knowledge, and skills seem to have a higher level of organizational commitment (Eisenberger, 1986). Now the question is that how millennials' participation in reverse mentoring programs engenders a perception of organizational support which in turn will increase their organizational commitment? As stated earlier, that reverse mentoring is a technique in which a junior employee is paired with the senior employee to teach updated technological knowledge (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). When millennials (mentor) perceive that their willingness to participate in the reverse mentoring program will be positively recognized and evaluated by the organization then they feel more committed toward their organization. Previous studies depict those millennials have high needs of recognition, approval, and affiliation at their workplace. Therefore, their willingness to participate in the reverse mentoring program as a young mentor to boomers who have higher positions at work will address their recognition, increase their self-esteem, build a sense of belongingness which ultimately leads to greater commitment.

The relationship between reverse mentoring and commitment could be assumed on the basis of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which proposes that exchange between parties starts from one party doing something favorable to the other, while the recipient gets indebted and tries to reciprocate the party offering favors. Thus the urge makes the recipient pay the other party back, thus an everlasting exchange starts between interacting parties. Considering the theoretical premise, it is assumed that when the organization offers an opportunity of reverse mentoring to millennial employees tend to consider it a form of favor from the organization and get indebted and often reciprocate by showing positive workplace attitudes (e.g. commitment). Hence the following hypothesis is assumed:

H$_1$: Millennials' participation in reverse mentoring increases their organizational commitment.

Millennials' Reverse Mentoring, Organizational Commitment and Turnover Intentions

Millennials have undergone some criticisms of being arrogant, careless, annoyed, and discontented, they are more prone toward technological advancements, have strong communication skills, and can effectively adapt to ongoing changes at the workplace (Lee et al., 2020). But still, an important task force that cannot be ignored as by the end of 2025 they will capture 75% of the workforce (Galdames & Guihen, 2020). Therefore, the organizations started realizing the impending benefits of this task force. In some studies, millennials are also referred to as "job hoppers" as they give prioritize a number of career paths. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Hence, it is quite a challenging task to retain millennials who gave preferences to multiple jobs over Boomers who have vast experience of working with similar organizations. (Eddy, Schweitzer, & Lyon, 2010). These challenges resulted in a large number of dismissals, indecisive economic conditions, and pay cuts (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). During the past decades, both these generations have been researched, but still, there is paucity in determining rigorous HRD practices for meeting the changing needs of the labor market.

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H$_2$: Reverse mentoring reduces the turnover intentions of millennials

Past literature also highlights that committed employees consider their organizational goals at the personal level, thus showing a high level of ownership towards the organization (e.g. Labrague et al., 2018). The turnover intentions are reduced when employees feel a sense of belongingness with the organization which is an outcome of positive organizational factors and personal resources

(Albrecht & Marty, 2020), as reverse mentoring is a form of support from organizations and millennials may consider it as a source of resource, it is expected that their commitment would be high while their turnover intentions would be below. Church et al., (2018) also found that commitment employees tend to display their commitment by involving working activities, showing ownership towards the organizational goals and consider themselves responsible to achieve those, thus they tend to stay with the organization for long. Thus, the following hypothesis is assumed:

H₃: Commitment and turnover intentions are negatively related

As employees consider reverse mentoring as an exchange offered the organization and feel indebted to reciprocate positively (Blau, 1964) through positive workplace attitudes (e.g. Cismaru & Iunius, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), it is obvious that they would display a high level of a commitment which is found to influence employees' turnover intentions negatively (e.g. Albrecht & Marty, 2020; Church et al., 2018; Labrague et al., 2018), it is assumed that commitment can mediate this relationship:

H₄: The relationship between reverse mentoring and turnover intentions is mediated by the organizational commitment of millennials.

Research Design

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique of Study

This study was designed to determine the commitment level of millennials in the service sector of Pakistan's economy i.e., the banking sector. As banks offer a conducive environment where one can expose his personality dimensions, millennials prefer to work over there. Furthermore, through observations, it has been observed that this sector is employing millennials in the majority (Elian et al., 2020). This sector is the best segment of the business that can provide a true and fair amount of information. So, the target population was millennial (born between 1982-2004) employees of the banking sector of Pakistan. The researcher selected six banks on the random basis and user convenience and snowball sampling to collected data from those banks. The sample size of the study was not known to the use of this sampling technique was also supported. Furthermore, the sample size was determined by multiplying the number of items by 10 ($27 \times 10 = 270$), thus 270 questionnaires were distributed using online tools (i.e. google forms). Only 249 useful responses were received, but out of the 43 questionnaires were filled by employees belonging to either general X or boomers, thus were not considered for analysis, and only 206 responses were used for analysis purposes.

Description of Instrument

Seventeen items scale developed by Kapoor (2013) was used to measure reverse mentoring with sample item "I am invited to help others in enhancing their knowledge about new technologies". Cronbach alpha of this scale was 0.82. Organizational commitment was measured by using six items scale developed by Chaudhri (2012) covering sample items like "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" and had a Cronbach alpha of 0.93. The questionnaire was designed by using five-point Likert Scale where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= can't decide 4= agree, and 5= strongly Agree. Turnover intentions were operationalized by using three items scale of Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991), which consists of items like: "I want to leave the organization".

Data Analyses

The data of the study was collected from millennials working in the banking sector. The banks were located in Lahore. The majority of the respondents were male (61.50%), having a university degree (89%), with less than 2 years' experience in the bank (56.50%), with total work experience of <5 years (65%), involved in mentoring (64%) and had regular interaction with mentee (54.5%).

Before testing of hypothesis, the data were analyzed for descriptive, correlation, and reliability analysis the results of which are shown in table-1. The table shows that all the measures are reliable as all the tabulated values are greater than the standard value (0.779 – 0.901 > 0.70). Furthermore, all the measures were operationalized at five points scale and the mean scores are close to the average score or central point. The correlation results show that reverse mentoring is positively related to organizational commitment (r=.301, p<.01) and negatively related to turnover intentions (r= - .117, p<.01). These results highlight that H1 and H2 is supported. It is also evident that organizational commitment and turnover intentions are negatively related (r= -.349, p<.05), thus H$_3$ is also supported. Based on these results I approached with regression analysis for hypothesis testing.

Table 1
Descriptive, Reliability & Correlation Analysis

Variables	Descriptive	Cronbach's Alpha	RM	OC	TI
RM	3.31 (1.024)	.779	1		
OC	2.99 (0.795)	.804	.301**	1	
TI	3.34 (0.893)	.901	-.117**	-.349*	1

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table-2 reveals the results of reverse mentoring, commitment and turnover intentions, where it is evident that reverse mentoring positively influences millennials commitment level (β =-.351, $p < 0.01$), and negatively predicts their turnover intentions ($\beta = -.402$, $p < 0.05$). These results are in-line with the assumptions of the study thus H1 and H2 are supported. It is also evident that commitment and turnover intentions of millennials is negatively related ($\beta = -.183$, $p < 0.01$), thus H3 is also supported.

Table 2
Reverse mentoring, employee commitment and turnover intentions

	Coefficient	t	*p* (Sig.)
RM – OC	.251	4.013	.000
RM – TI	-.402	3.983	.021
OC – TI	-.183	3.056	.001

The results for mediation analysis are shown in the table-3, where it is clear that the direct path is significant at $p = <0.05$, ULCI = -0.5671 and LLCI = -0.3404. It is also clear that the indirect effect is also significant at coefficient = -0.1053, ULCI = -0.1093 - 0.0341, thus proving that reverse mentoring reduces millennials' turnover intentions and organizational commitment works as a partial mediation between this relationship.

Table 3
Mediation analysis

	Co-eff	T		ULCI	LLCI
Direct effects (RM-TI)	-0.402	3.983	021	-0.5671	-0.3404
Indirect effects (RM-OC-TI)	-0.1053			-0.1093	-0.0341

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to empirically investigate the propositions made by the media and popular business literature that the millennials are least committed to their organizations and being arrogant, careless taskforce, they also have high turnover intentions and to propose that whether reverse mentoring technique will help to increase the commitment level and decrease turnover intentions of this multi taskforce. The results of the study are aligned to proposed hypotheses. It was revealed through empirical testing that millennials are least

committed taskforce. The result supported the findings of Patalano (2008), who claimed that millennials are least committed taskforce. Further the study determined that willingness of millennials to participate in reverse mentoring technique will build their perception that organizations value their expertise, and competencies which in turn will increase their organizational commitment. The results of study are aligned to previous studies who determined the positive and significant impact of reverse mentoring program both at organizational and individual level (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). It is the first study to determine the quantitative association between reverse mentoring program and organizational commitment. In some studies millennials are referred as "job hoppers" as they give prioritize number of career paths. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Beside that being an arrogant and careless generation, they tend to have high turnover intentions. Hence, it is quite a challenging task for organizations to retain and decrease turnover intentions of millennials. The results of study found that reverse mentoring technique helps to decrease turnover intentions of millennials. The study results are aligned to findings of some researchers who found positive and impeding benefits of implementing reverse mentoring technique at workplace (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020). Further the study found that a committed employee has fewer turnover intentions. The study results are parallel to the findings of some previous studies who also found negative association between commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Elian, 2020).

Hence, implementing reverse mentoring program at workplace, helps HRD professionals to increase commitment of their employees which eventually will decrease their turnover intentions, but specifically related to Millennials-the enthusiastic taskforce. This technique was put forth by various renowned organizations like, Procter & Gamble, General Motors, University of Pennsylvania who found positive impact of reverse mentoring on employee related outcomes. Further, results depict that 64% reverse mentoring program is being conducted in banking sector of Pakistan that's why 32% Millennials who got an opportunity to participate in reverse mentoring program are more committed and their commitment level is indicated by their total tenure with their organization which is 2-5 years which eventually will help to reduce their turnover intentions The success of reverse mentoring program is owed to clearly laid down objectives of the program and continuous feedback on the outcome of the mentoring program. It can be concluded that the process of reverse mentoring program leads to better environment in organization.

Implications

The propositions offered in this study have significant implications for the human resource development professionals. Firstly, the study helps professionals to design and implement an effective reverse mentoring program which helps to

decrease generational gaps between multigenerational workforce i.e., baby boomers and millennials. Secondly, it is evident that millennials which is a multi-tasking workforce have different needs and values that need to be countered by organizations. Therefore, to increase organizational commitment and to decrease turnover intentions of millennials, it is an obligation of HRD professionals to address their needs and recognize their values, skills, and competencies. The current study provides professionals with a novel framework of implementing reverse mentoring program which allow millennials to teach technological skills to boomers who are at high positions, that eventually will increase their organizational commitment and ultimately decrease their turnover intentions. Thirdly, reverse mentoring technique proposed by the study helps baby boomers to keep intact with updated technological tools, which will help them to adapt their behaviors as per technological changes at workplace. Furthermore, the study implies HRD professionals to understand dynamics of social exchange underlying the process of reverse mentoring both at organizational and at individual level. Last but not the least, in order to keep millennials committed and to reduce the turnover intentions, the study recommend managers to devise clear and concise career paths which allow millennials to remain focused, dedicated and committed. Further, successful implementation of reverse mentoring program helps managers to build strong, positive work environment in which millennials and other generational taskforce working can effectively share their knowledge, skills and abilities with each other. Resultantly, it will increase both individual and organizational performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

Beside number of implications, the study is not devoid of limitations as well. First, the study is limited to one generation i.e. millennials whereas it can also be conducted to determine engagement level of Boomers and Generation X. Second, limited sample size makes the generalizability of study difficult. Hence, future research is directed to increase the sample size to make it generalizable. Third, the study targeted banking sector only, whereas it can be replicated in other sectors such as educational, telecommunication, hospitality, and hospital. Fourth, the study is cross sectional in nature, hence, the results may differ after sometime. however, to have better underpinning of results the study can be performed at different time intervals. Fifth, the study used organizational commitment as a single dependent variable. Future research can use other DVs such as perceived organizational support, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intentions to have a holistic picture of this study. Sixth, the study hasn't considered the impact of age norms, and other demographic variables on different generations. The future researchers can consider age norms and other variables as well to have a better understanding of said phenomenon. Seventh, the study used single method for the sake of data collection. Mixed method studies should also

be implemented in the future. Last but not the least, the current study is context specific, however, the results might differ if conducted in different context, culture and industries.

Conclusion

With the increasing popularity of millennials in Pakistan's population, they hold a crucial role in the future of Pakistan's economy, as they are experiencing population bonus. In today's highly technology oriented and competitive business world, it is difficult to effectively manage demographically diverse workforce. i.e. millennials. Therefore, HRD professionals must understand how to retain this taskforce and what factors motivates and drive this multi-generational taskforce to work whole heartedly. In the given context, the study proposed that reverse mentoring will act as a novel strategy in retaining and motivating this workforce. This study is one of the first attempts to determine the impact of reverse mentoring as a win- win situation for two diverse taskforces i.e. baby boomers and millennials. Overall, the research analyzed the quantitative association of reverse mentoring to turnover intention through an underlying mechanism of organizational commitment.

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