The Jung and the Old - Workplace Personality Traits of Millennial Sales Professionals: An Empirical Comparison of Jung Typology Profiles of Millennial and Non-Millennial Sales Professionals

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Abstract

Millennials (persons born after 1977) have just recently begun to enter the workplace and by most estimates currently make up about ten percent of U.S. employees. Companies will increasingly rely on the skills and competencies of this age cohort as more mature workers exit the workforce. Businesses should be focused now on the preparation of younger generations to fill such voids. This is especially true for business functions, like sales and marketing, which serve as vehicles to company success by providing external focus on the development of profitable relationships with customers and collaborators alike. In order to ensure appropriate educational and training mechanisms are in place for Millennial sales and marketing personnel, it is important to understand possible differences between their personalities and/or cognitive styles from those of older workers. This research concludes that there are stark differences between age cohorts and discusses their implications and suggestions for subsequent research.

Introduction

While the 1990s were viewed as an exceptional decade for U.S. commerce, the past decade has been significantly affected by volatile business conditions. A bleak economy, fuelled by a slowly recovering stock market and high unemployment, has threatened the survival of businesses and individuals alike. The number of people vying for available jobs remains considerably high as companies turn to downsizing of the workforce as a business survival strategy.

The age group known as Millennials (or Generation Y) surely views this as an obstacle to success. According to a recent Pew Center Research report, about 50 million or two thirds of these individuals are currently between the ages of 18-29. Many are entering a job market where they must compete with more experienced, jobless workers for employment or replace mature, knowledgeable personnel confronting retirement. In fact, it is estimated that about 38 percent of working-age Millennials are unemployed or out of the labor force and that about 10 percent have recently lost their jobs; more than any other age cohort (Samuelson 2010).

These adverse economic conditions have allowed countless Millennials to devote time toward furthering their education. Recent research has shown that instructors face the challenge of rethinking how to facilitate learning for this age group. Considine, Horton and Moorman (2009) proclaim that it is important for educators to find ways to link the technological world that Millennials live in with the classroom we expect them to learn in. This is especially true for sales and marketing courses taught at colleges. The sales and marketing functions are looked upon as externally-oriented functions charged with building bridges between firms and their customers. Many of the tasks that ultimately must be performed in related jobs require relationship and problem-solving skills during face-to-face or telephone interactions, in addition to computer-based interactions. Thus, course design must consider how to prepare this first generation who have lived their entire lives immersed in information and communication technologies, with those potential customers whom are older and have had to accept the increased infusion of new technologies; and then decide if, how and where to apply it.

Organizations should also look at this scenario in reverse. In anticipation of an economic turnaround and the ability to increase hiring of Millennials, firms should expect to develop training programs geared to the learning styles of their younger employees. Twenge and Campbell (2008) concluded that there are critical distinctions in each generation which reflect the cultural underpinnings of an individual's upbringing during a specific time period when generations bond through the distinctive experiences of their developmental period. Additionally, personality types play an important role in the development of sales training programs (Manna and Smith 2004). In order to ensure appropriate educational and training mechanisms are in place for Millennial sales and marketing personnel, it is important to understand possible differences between their personalities and those of older workers.

This research is a pilot study that uses the Jungian theory of personality to gain insights into the differences in learning styles between Millennials and other age cohorts. The analysis of key findings is based on survey results gathered from over 1000 individuals.

Literature Review

Anecdotal evidence abounds about the differences among generations (Ott et al. 2008; CBS News 2008; Tapscott 2008). Such studies have described casually observed attitude, work ethic, training needs and performance differences among age cohorts. Although this body of work has received national press and visibility in the business community, it has been widely criticized for its lack of rigor.

A perusal of business scholarly literature provides more in-depth insights into generational differences. For instance, after an extensive review of business literature, Guest and Shacklock (2005) found expertise, experience, and developed skills as recurrent themes used to explain the advantage of hiring older workers. A separate survey of marketing executives rated 55-65 year old sales representatives higher than their Gen X and Gen Y counterparts along critical dimensions such as the capability to meet sales objectives, overall customer and product knowledge, company and client commitment, and creativity in problem solving (Kaplan 2001). Moreover, the results of another study revealed that the older salespeople were more productive than younger salespeople in the insurance industry (Landau and Werbel 1995).

The role of personality became integral to business research after several meta-analyses on the validity of personality testing for hiring decisions were published (Barrick & Mount (1991). Subsequent research by Endler and Rothenstein (1997) offered a detailed perspective on the evolution of the personality construct in marketing. Adler (1994), for instance, concluded that that there is no single sales personality; as companies use a myriad of constructs on personality tests, singly and in combination, to hire new sales representatives as well as to evaluate current staff.

More recently, Deeter-Schmetz and Sojka (2007) examined the theoretically-grounded personality trait—need for cognition—and found that it was related to the self-reported performance of sales representatives. This particular trait has been linked to problem-solving and thinking tendencies which are central abilities to developing successful buyer-seller relationships. Studies have shown that the cognitive or thinking style of salespeople is related to their ability to employ an adaptive (or more customer-oriented) selling style (McIntyre et al. 2000). Related research also has indicated that certain thinking styles may have a "multiplier" effect for salespeople when coupled with high levels of general mental ability (Verbeke, et al. 2008). An additional body of research has associated Jungian personality types with certain workplace skills—sales presentations, problem-solving and consumer segmentation (McIntyre, Meloche et al. 1995; McIntyre, Roger et al. 1993; Morris et al. 2006).

Jung was a theorist who saw personality conveyed using four underlying cognitive processes—sensing, intuiting, thinking, and feeling (Jung 1971). The sensing and intuiting dichotomy captures how one processes information, while the thinking and feeling dichotomy measures how one makes decisions based upon processed information. Thus, four typologies exist that take into consideration one's style of thinking or cognition. These four categories include sensory thinker (ST), sensory feeler (SF), intuitive thinker (NT), and intuitive feeler (NF).

Such typologies are what Cron et al. (2005) had in mind when they developed a knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) framework to be used for salesperson training and development. These researchers suggested, however, that using such a framework requires first uncovering what it should accentuate and how it will meet the needs of salespeople during different career stages. The section that follows focuses on the application of Jungian personality dimensions to different generations of workers to investigate their different cognitive needs.

Method and Findings

Data were collected from 1087 respondents working in marketing and sales (337 Millennial and 750 Non-Millennial) using the Jung Typology Profiler for the Workplace™ (JTPW™) (HumanMetrics Group 2010). All respondents either had completed or were in the process of completing a post-secondary degree. The average age of the Millennials was 26 years old while the average age of Non-Millennials was 43. Furthermore, Millennials in the sample were 53% male and 47% female while the Non-Millennial sample split was 52% male and 48% female. All respondents completed the JTPW™ instrument between 2006 and 2009.

The survey instrument measured Jungian personality dimensions associated with respondents' cognitive style: how they processed information (sensing or intuition) and how they used the information processed to make decisions (thinking or feeling), as discussed in the literature review. Two other Jungian traits were also measured. These capture how one expresses energy (extraversion or introversion) and how one perceives information (judging or perceiving). This instrument scores the four Jungian personality constructs using 90 multiple choice questions anchored by a 5-point Likert scale. Each dichotomy ranges from +100% to -100%, where +100% and -100% are the opposite poles and 0 is the borderline. The resultant scale is 200 units long.

Answers to questions pertaining to ten other behavioral indices were obtained using a scale allowing ratings of 0% - 100%. Nine of these indices scored distinct respondent abilities on conscientiousness, rationality, empathy, sociability, communication, vision, self-control, resourcefulness and assurance. The remaining variable, power, took into account the combined effect of the resourcefulness and assurance indices.

The data analysis was conducted using Excel to sort and tabulate and SQL Server 2005 to analyze the data. It included the analysis of significance of differences between Millennials and Non-Millennials for each JTPW index based on Student t-statistic ($P<0.05$), and the significance of the difference between occurrences of NFs and NTs in Millennials vs. those in Non-Millennials, based on chi-square test ($P < 0.01$).

An examination of results indicated that Millennial and Non-Millennial marketing and sales personnel differ in several aspects of personality (Table 1). Although both groups had relatively strong expressions of intuition, or how they processed data, there appeared to be a contrast in their overall cognitive styles. Millennials were more likely to have an intuitive-feeling style while Non-Millennials were more likely to have an intuitive-thinking style. (The ratio of NF to NT styles among Millennials was 3.9 while in Non-Millennials this ratio was 1.6. The significance of this difference measured $P< 0.01$).

Table 1. Jungian Dichotomies – Thinking Styles Marketing and Sales

	NF	SF	NT	ST	NF/NT P<0.01
Millennials	71%	8%	18%	2%	3.9
Non-Millennials	54%	6%	33%	4%	1.6

As previously mentioned, the thinking versus feeling dichotomy pertains to how one makes decisions based upon processed information. As feelers, Millennials like to study people, how issues and causes are related to people, as well as work with personally stimulating materials that align with their values and rely upon allegory, metaphor and/or decision heuristics to affect outcomes. They are considered to be very expressive when sharing ideas, thoughts or questions; and also find comfort in participating in free-ranging discussions for connection building. Non-Millennial thinkers, on the other hand, were deemed less emotive when presenting their ideas, thoughts or questions. They expressed a preference to communicate using logically-developed and analytically-rich dialogue as a means to persuade or negotiate when selling.

Millennials also scored significantly higher than others on Jung's extraversion variable (P=0.041). This coincided with the additional finding during the examination of the behavioral indices (Table 2) that this cohort had more sociability (Soc) expectations than Non-Millennials (P=0.0020). Additionally, the former group displayed stronger communication (Com) skills (P=0.0017), empathy (P=0.0022) and self-control (P=0.0195) than the latter group. No significant difference existed for six other behavioral indices determined from the survey.

Table 2. JTPW™ Behavioral Indices – Average % Marketing and Sales

	Com P= 0.0017	Soc P= 0.0020	Emp P= 0.0022	S-c P= 0.0195
Millennials	75	69	63	70
Non-Millennials	66	60	55	62

Key Implications

The dynamic and increasingly competitive marketplace requires firms to quickly adapt and implement business practices that support their success and survival. As the primary conduit between companies and their customers, salespeople must garner the knowledge, skills and abilities to facilitate this process. Cron et al. (2005) proposed that organizations give due consideration to reassessing their current training and development programs, as one-size-fits-all training programs should no longer be a norm. The authors proposed a training framework comprised of task-related, growth-related and meta-related knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs).

Task-related KSAs are centered on what is needed for a salesperson to sell their companies' offerings. This not only includes obtaining product/market/company knowledge, but also drawing out analytical/cognitive/emotive abilities. The high extraversion and social expectations of Millennials, as found in this research, bode well for them possessing the emotive capacity needed to develop good customer relationships. However, this group has also grown to rely on computer-based communications and learning more than others. This should not be ignored. Different training programs seem warranted to address this issue as well as draw out analytical and cognitive competencies based on the feeling nature of Millennials versus the thinking nature of Non-Millennials.

Growth-related KSAs focus on training for adaptability and more global tacit knowledge rules of thumb. The above discussion of findings revealed that Millennials prefer to focus on people,

causes and issues. Yet, successful problem solving requires both initial strategies and the alternatives gained through the study of data and the ideas of others. These characteristics are more prevalent in other Jung cognitive styles than the intuitive-feeler style that largely characterizes Millennials in the above analysis. Companies might want to consider training methods that help to build up such elements.

Meta-KSAs are connected to the personality underpinnings associated with self-management and self-development skills. This, in itself, requires an orientation toward learning and self-assessment. Some personalities prefer a passive learning orientation based on experience accumulation. Other personalities are better suited for deliberate learning built on active cognitive processes. Cron et al. (2005, p. 127) suggested that "a learning orientation more geared toward active rather than passive learning may be the most important meta-KSA to train". This fact integrates well into the current research findings. Specifically, Millennials were shown to rate higher on extraversion which has been found to be positively tied to a preference for active learning (Offir et al. 2007). Specific training programs may be needed to address the continuous self-improvement of personnel based on their learning propensity.

Limitations

The pilot study nature of this research does not attempt to discern the root cause for the observed differences between Millennials and Non-Millennials. This limitation does not, however, undermine the key implications which simply result from the fact that important differences do exist between the two groups.

Similarly, the study does not address the question of whether and how the participants' styles might change over their lifetimes. Future research should focus on understanding differences that might exist at specific ages or during different stages of the life cycle.

Conclusions

Further inquiry is needed to understand whether different training alternatives are warranted for marketing and sales professionals due to distinct cognitive and behavior differences found between the Millennials and Non-Millennials and uncovered in this study. Such research could be valuable to workplace productivity as well as have a positive effect on the revenue streams of corporations.

Most scholarly literature about the role of personality in sales hiring or performance has not grappled with the issue that one age group appears to have a predominance of personality type and thinking style that is markedly different from another. Past studies have indicated that sales performance is enhanced based on certain personality types, traits, thinking styles and levels of mental ability, but has stayed away from the notion that a relatively consistent set of these are common in different age cohorts.

Both scholars and practitioners would agree that optimal functioning of the sales department will continue to be vital for organizational competitiveness and survival. As such, all companies are challenged to continuously search for more effective ways to improve the quality of their training and development programs as well as meet the diverse needs of personnel. This may require the development of training materials and programs for Millennial sales personnel that differ from those used with Non-Millennials, including the development of role-

play scenarios for sales and marketing Millennials that highlight adaptation to Non-Millennial cognitive styles. Additional research is needed to determine if differential outcomes result from such Millennial-specific training.

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