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The Young Millennial Corporate Experience: Using a Positive Psychology Framework to Impact Future Organizational Culture

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Abstract

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Keywords

Comments

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania

Advisor: Kimberly Torres, Ph.D.

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USING A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY FRAMEWORK TO IMPACT FUTURE

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

In this final paper for course DYNM668, I will lay out the framework, theoretical underpinnings, and research objectives for my qualitative research study which aims to understand the young millennial experience at work. This paper will provide a foundation of current research, why I have been drawn to explore this topic, and what this research will add to the current literature. As humans, work is a substantial part of our adult lives; having a fundamental understanding of work and its role in an individual's life is essential to helping people (Flores & Ojeda, 2009). Understanding how people can best work and live is critical to enhancing personal wellbeing, performance at work, in life, and benefits the health of our society (Flores, Ojeda, 2009). With millennials now the majority age group in the workforce (Gallup, 2016), I want to better understand a younger subset of this generation's motivations for staying within an organization and explore the role that prioritizing employee wellbeing and utilization of strengths plays within organizational commitment in order to positively impact and reshape the future of organizational culture.

Keywords: *Organizational commitment, employee wellbeing, positive psychology, millennial, corporate culture, company loyalty, COVID-19, The Great Resignation*

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of young

millennials, a subset of the generational cohort born between the ages of 1985-1996

(Adkins, 2019), in the workplace and what contributes to organizational commitment. I

am personally drawn to this research because of my own experiences as a young

millennial in corporate America. In addition, I am certified in Applied Positive

Psychology and have been particularly interested in how the study of human flourishing

can be used to attract and retain top talent within organizations. I am motivated to help

organizations understand how to keep employees like myself loyal, engaged, and healthy.

My experiences with burnout, barriers to career development and disengagement have led

me to study the experiences of other young millennials and whether there are

organizations that are successfully retaining and engaging this age group. This research

aims to provide insight on how organizations can reshape their culture to improve the

lives of the largest growing generation in the workplace. All respondents are between the

ages of 23-32 years within the professional class, defined as liberal elites, best educated

middle classes and public sector professionals' (Garland, 2001). Moreover, all

respondents have at least a 4-year college degree and 3+ years of experience in the

workforce post-college, holding a full-time white-collar job.

Background

Currently, millennials make up half of the global workforce (PwC, 2011) which

will increase to 75% by the year 2025 (Deloitte, 2014). Gallup estimated in 2016 that

55% of millennials are disengaged at work (Gallup, 2016). Of those actively disengaged

millennials, 47% strongly agree that they planned to switch jobs within the next 12 months, compared to 17% of engaged millennials (Gallup, 2016). In an annual Millennial Survey, Deloitte reported 38% of millennials would quit their current job within the next two years if they could, and that number rose to 49% percent in 2019 (Deloitte, 2019). About a quarter of those saying they are open to leaving their current organization within two years also reported leaving their last employer within the past 24 months as well (Deloitte, 2019). The top reason for young millennial near term exits include financial dissatisfaction, lack of opportunities to advance/lack of learning development opportunities, not feeling valued, and lack of flexibility or work-life balance (Deloitte, 2019). However, when looking at employment opportunities, millennials rated training and development and flexible working environments over financial benefits (PwC, 2011). Looking at companies that are doing well in attracting and retaining top millennial talent, Google and Apple have very innovative organizational cultures and management styles that enable flexibility and provide feedback often, which aligns with what millennials have reported they are seeking (PwC, 2011).

The problem I am identifying is a lack of organizational commitment within millennials that differs from other generations. There is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment when looking at turnover rates (Harter, 2009). The connections between job satisfaction and organizational commitment with productivity and turnover have an important and practical value to most organizations (Harter, 2009). Improving employee engagement is seen as one of the best ways to reduce turnover (Wigert, 2018). Concurrently, there is a strong connection between employee engagement and wellbeing; research shows that engaged employee have higher

levels of wellbeing (Robison, 2012). Organizational psychologist, Adam Grant, believes focusing on improving employee wellbeing is actually more meaningful than solely employee engagement (Grant, 2020). Wellbeing includes a more holistic measurement of quality of life, not just concerning work; it includes having a sense of purpose, support, autonomy, and psychological safety which is beneficial to both the employee and the bottom line for organizations (Grant, 2020). Because prioritizing wellbeing is a cornerstone for positive organizational psychology, I will be assessing the young millennial corporate experience to help organizations optimize human functioning in the workplace (Donaldson & Ko, 2010).

Current research on millennials involves survey data that explores three domains: turnover, work-life balance, and employee engagement; however, there is limited work on the distinction between young vs. old millennials and the use of employee strengths as a means to evaluate organizational commitment. Looking at company loyalty through the lens of employee wellbeing and utilizations of strengths is a key entry point for a nuanced understanding of the young millennial generation. There is substantive research on the correlation between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, and turnover within organizations (Harter, 2009) as well as substantial research on the characteristics of millennial workers (PWC, 2011).

Millennials most commonly work in the following industries: technology (Deloitte, 2014) healthcare, wholesale and retail, manufacturing, and professional/business (Allison & Mugglestone, 2014). Not only are millennial professionals getting more selective about the businesses they work for, they're also looking deeper into the values of these companies, which means businesses need to

become familiar with what millennials are looking for, and adapt (Alton, 2017).

Specifically, millennials want an organization that takes part in corporate responsibility,

has strong diversity, equity and inclusion and work-life balance culture (Alton, 2017).

Millennials also want to be contributors; their ultimate goal is to find a job they find

meaningful, that fuels their sense of purpose (Gallup, 2016). They want personal

development and on-going feedback from their managers, who coach them and dial up

their strengths, instead of managing their weaknesses (Gallup, 2016). Millennials want to

be engaged emotionally and behaviorally and connected to their jobs with high levels of

wellbeing (Gallup, 2016). When working out of an office, millennials want amenities

such as a cafeteria, wellness facilities, rest areas, and a coffee bar (CBRE, 2016). They

prefer these offices to be located in central locations such as a city or large town and

consider 30 minutes a tolerable commute (CBRE, 2016). If organizations cannot meet

the expectations of millennials, this generation has proven they are willing to switch

organizations (Atlantic, 2014). According to Deloitte's annual millennial survey,

millennials want to work for organizations that foster innovative thinking, develop their

skills, and make a positive contribution to society (Deloitte, 2014). Companies that are

successful in attracting and retaining top millennial talent, such as big tech companies

like Google or Amazon, create cultures that innovative, enable flexibility and encourage

managers to provide feedback often, all things that match what millennials report they are

looking for (PwC, 2011).

Research shows employee satisfaction, engagement, and wellbeing levels are

positively correlated with business outcomes such customer satisfaction, productivity,

profit, employee retention (Harter et. al, 2002). Millennial workers who report high levels

of holistic wellbeing, which is composed of purpose, social, financial, community and physical wellbeing, outperform millennials who are physically fit but otherwise lacking in the remaining areas of wellbeing (Gallup, 2016). Research suggests employees with high levels of wellbeing are more resilient during hardships, less likely to call out of work last minute, and have better job performance compared to employees with low wellbeing (Wolf, 2019). If millennials are disengaged, an organization's profitability, productivity, and innovation will suffer (Gallup, 2016).

There are major cost implications on business and the U.S. economy if organizations ignore the importance of employee wellbeing (Wolf, 2020). In 2016, 21% of millennials changed jobs within the year, which was more than three times more than other generational cohorts (Gallup, 2016). Gallup estimates that turnover due to millennial disengagement costs $30.5 billion annually in the United States alone. In 2016 it was estimated that millennial disengagement in the workplace costs the U.S. economy $284 to $469 billion annually in lost productivity (Gallup, 2016). In terms of physical wellbeing, 50% of people in the U.S. alone have a musculoskeletal condition caused by the way we sit while working all day which costs $213 billion each year in healthcare and lost productivity (Wolf, 2020). According to Gallup's latest Wellbeing Index, 70% of millennials experience at least some burnout with their job (Gallup, 2020). Wolf (2020) contends that leaders who prioritize employee wellbeing are also simultaneously promoting a culture of engagement, which results in many positive personal and business outcomes, such as higher physical and emotional wellness for employees, higher job performance, and lower burnout and turnover (Wolf, 2020).

Understanding millennial behavior is important for shaping cultures into workplaces that are healthier and safer for the employees. Engaged employees who love their work and what they do, those who are in workplace cultures that advocate their natural strengths and talents, and those who are thriving in many of the wellbeing elements are significantly less likely to have high stress. (Asplund, Leibbrandt, & Robison, 2020). If organizations want to keep employees engaged, productive, and overall healthy, it is critical that they understand their needs and adapt accordingly.

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to understand the young millennial experience in corporate America, in attempts to benefit the health & wellbeing of workers, as the millennial generation grows into 75% of the working population over the next 5 years (Deloitte, 2014). Understanding how people can best work and live is critical to enhancing overall wellbeing and performance at work, life in general, and the health of our society (Flores & Ojeda, 2009). This research will ultimately provide insight on individuals' understanding of work and where millennials sit within this framework.

In this work, I aim to further explore the role that employee wellbeing and utilization of strengths at work plays into young millennials' organizational commitment. To do so, I draw upon previous positive organizational psychology research, which inhabits the scientific study of human flourishing to enhance the experience of work (Reiter-Palmon, Illies, & James, 2009). Much of the extant research on millennial employees does not distinguish between older and younger millennials, who have different values, attitudes, & behaviors in the workplace (Singal, 2017). Most of the

previous research has focused on employee engagement and turnover, while my research will examine employee wellbeing and the utilization of strengths in their organization. My research seeks to further shed light on the distinguished experiences of young millennials in the workplace while evaluating whether the prioritization of employee wellbeing and utilization of strengths impacts organizational commitment (e.g., See Harter, 2009; Gallup, 2016; Grant, 2020; Robison, 2012). My specific research questions include the following:

RQ1: What is the current millennial experience in the workplace and what do organizations have to do to keep Millennials engaged and loyal?

RQ2: How does the current understanding of millennials in the workplace and research on human flourishing compare to real-life experiences?

RQ3: Are companies meeting the demands of millennials or have they accepted that millennials will walk away if they aren't satisfied?

Capstone Outline

In Chapter 2, I review all sources and literature used as a basis of understanding the current landscape of millennial experiences in the workplace. This literature includes articles, journals, and videos pertaining to organizational behavior, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and positive psychology, and viewing organizational dynamics through an appreciative framework. This is in attempts to understand the framework that supports employees working at their best.

Chapter 3 includes the methodology I used to explore millennial experiences in the workplace, and the role that strengths and wellbeing play in organizational commitment. After recruiting individuals to interview, I created a quantitative survey

through the Qualtrics platform, to ensure all respondents meet my sample criteria. This survey captures basic demographic information, as well as baseline satisfaction measurements regarding their current employment. Then I was able to schedule a 60-minute Zoom call for the remainder of the interview with 14 unique respondents. During this interview I asked questions about their experiences in the workplace and the factors that influence organizational commitment.

Next, Chapter 4 includes a full analysis of the data and empirical findings relating specifically to my research questions. My findings suggest that organizational commitment is dependent on feeling a sense of purpose, while still having substantial flexibility. This chapter also includes additional factors that influence organizational commitment and explores underlying motivations that respondents mentioned when it comes to job-hopping.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the meaning and implications of my research findings surrounding millennial experiences in the workplace and factors that impact organizational commitment. My findings reveal the importance of key components, such as flexibility, autonomy, and feeling a sense of purpose or passion amongst ones' work. This chapter also discusses how organizations can continue to emphasize wellbeing, along with integrating a strengths-based approach to positively impact organizational commitment. In this chapter I also review the limitations of my research.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, I conclude with reiterating the relevance and importance of exploring young millennial experiences in the workplace and how this insight can help shape corporate culture. Furthermore, I discuss how this research can be expanded upon

and provide recommendations for organizations when attracting and retaining young

millennials.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Who & Why Behind Young Millennials

Currently, millennials make up over 50% of the global workforce, which will increase to 75% by 2025 (Deloitte, 2014). Millennials as a generational cohort are loosely described as being born between the years of 1980-1996 (Gallup, 2016). There is reason to believe a new generational cohort is emerging within the wide millennial age-group as a result of momentous events that have occurred since 2008, such as the Great Recession (Debevec, Schewe, Madden, & Diamond, 2013). For this research, I am narrowing down the sample age group to those who are currently 23-32 years old, which I am calling 'young millennials.' Older Millennials, born around 1988 or earlier, have lived substantively different lives than Young Millennials, who were born around 1989 or later, as a result of being at different developmental stages (young adults vs. early adolescents) when internet technology and smartphones infiltrated society (Singal, 2017). As young millennials were in their formative years during the financial crisis in 2008, this shaped their differing preferences, attitudes, and behaviors (Meredith and Schewe, 2013). Before the recession, older Millennials typically had secure employment options upon college graduation (Singal, 2017). Younger millennials differ in ways such as delaying financial independence from their parents, compared to older millennials who have mostly started families on their own, purchased homes, and have been in the workforce for several years (Debevec, Schewe, Madden, & Diamond, 2013). In terms of technology, younger millennials tend to use different social media platforms such as

Snapchat, and have truly grown up in the digital age, compared to older millennials who had to learn this technology similar to older generations (Singal, 2017).

Each generation is unique. One of the best ways to enable employees to perform at their best is to fully know their characteristics on a cultural level, so we can better understand and respect generational differences (Fishman, 2016). Generational characteristics forever impact values, attitudes, lifestyles, and priorities due to the historic events experienced during formative years (Fishman, 2016). According to research on retaining and motivating top talent in the workplace, organizations should create an atmosphere that aligns with the work values of future employees (Dick, 2019). While there are many similarities between the generations, such as desiring a financially rewarding job with opportunities for career advancement (Dick, 2019), my research specifically focuses on young millennials as it is directly related to my own experiences in the workplace. I was motivated to do this research to explore whether my experience fits in with larger trends across others in my age group. Conducting this research during COVID encapsulates the rapid change occurring with remote work, as well as within the hierarchies of traditional and remote organizations that strive to thrive and recover from The Great Resignation (Pineda, 2022; Sull et al., 2022; Whitaker, 2022). This research directly applies to the emerging dynamism of how organizations are beginning to adapt to millennials unique work worldview. I am only studying young millennials to get a sense of their emerging experiences as they become a greater percentage of the workforce.

According to the Strategic HR review journal, these are the unique qualities of the millennial generation: they expect companies to understand their real-life needs, they want a profession with a purpose, they see themselves as part of a group and not just as

individuals, they need instant feedback and praise, and they like high-tech environments since they grew up in the digital age (Fishman, 2016). Millennials also emphasize self-development by searching for opportunities to learn and grow, with the goal of rapid career advancement rather than life-long employment; they want to make the most of the opportunities provided in the workplace (Özçelik, 2015). In terms of career development, millennials want to work for organizations that have frequent opportunities for skills development but want the autonomy to plan their own careers (Özçelik, 2015). The millennial generation also strongly values flexibility and freedom to get their work done (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). In order to attract and retain millennials, organizations need to allow for flexibility such as the ability to work from home (Özçelik, 2015). For this research, I am interested in studying the perspectives of younger millennials as that is not only more relevant to my own experience, but it sheds light on a younger generational cohort that is infiltrating the workforce as emerging leaders.

<u>What is positive organizational psychology (POP)</u>?

Positive Organizational Psychology (POP) has emerged from the growing field of Positive Psychology which aims to enhance the experience of work (Reiter-Palmon, Illies, & James, p. 663, 2009). POP is defined as "the scientific study of positive subjective experiences and traits in the workplace and positive organizations, and its application to improve the effectiveness and quality of life in organizations" (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). The new approach of focusing on what's already working well and using strengths instead of improving weaknesses, fosters resilience which brings restorative power to the workplace (Souders, 2020). Positive psychology research provides insight and approaches for enhancing organizational and employee functioning and wellbeing

(Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011). Wellbeing in the workplace

includes having mental and emotional support, feeling a sense of purpose, personal

development and career growth opportunities, financial stability, and making meaningful

connections (Erb, 2022). This is important because work is a central component of daily

life and because it overlaps with so many other parts of life, psychologists believe that

having a fundamental understanding of work and its role in an individual's life is

essential to helping people (Ojeda & Flores, 2009). The goal of POP is to understand

how we can be at our best at work and identify what creates work environments where

we feel vigorous and functioning at an optimal level (Souders, 2020).

Previous research shows the linkage between job satisfaction and job

performance, however, there has been a shift in researching the impact of job satisfaction

on wellbeing (Wells, 2009). It is estimated that adults spend one quarter to one third of

their waking hours at work; because of this, work-life balance has become the mantra for

employees and the relationship between life satisfaction and job satisfaction has become

a focus of research (Wells, 2009). Research has confirmed that while there is mutual

influence in both directions between job satisfaction and life satisfaction, people's

wellbeing has been found to have a greater impact on their level of job satisfaction (Judge

& Watanabe, 1993). There is a plethora of research that shows how positive psychology

can be used to improve organizational effectiveness, employee well-being and the world

of work (Donaldson & KO, 2010). Current applications of POP within the workplace are

utilizing strengths, authentic leadership, increasing psychological capital as well as

inducing a flow state at work (e.g., Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011;

Harter et al., 2002; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Hodges & Clifton, 2004). This research

shapes the future of organizations in valuing how to bring out the best of others and organizations, including increasing happiness, life and work satisfaction, resilience, flow, meaning of life, self-efficacy, optimism, and hope (Flores & Ojeda, 2009). However, there is a lack of research on the specific intersection between POP and the needs and interests of millennials in the workplace. Millennials are a unique generation with a desire to have a meaningful life and do purposeful work (Gallup, 2016). I want to explore how the science of positive psychology, prioritizing employee wellbeing and the utilization of strengths in the workplace shows up within the young millennial experience and whether it affects organizational commitment. Understanding this can identify opportunities for organizations to reshape their culture to better support the health and wellness of their employees.

Within POP there are elements of the Humanism framework, which is an ethical philosophy and approach that emphasizes both personal development and our moral obligations as humans to thrive as individuals and to create societies in which all people can flourish (Hancock, 2019). The humanistic idea is to care about others and strive to make the world a better place. This is easily applied to business through management, leadership, and culture that helps employees find fulfillment in work and in their lives, while making the world better through their business (Hancock, 2019).

Corporations with a humanistic approach are known to care for employees as a whole person are attracting top talent, which becomes a crucial competitive advantage (Hancock, 2019). Their employees have stronger connections to the company, which improves engagement, and thus productivity, profitability and loyalty. Their people perform better during ordinary times and are more resilient during disruptions. People

with thriving wellbeing simply do better in life. And companies with thriving employees do better business (Brim & Robison, 2020). Additionally, it is possible to be engaged at work, but struggling in life. According to Dr. Adam Grant, one way to build wellbeing is to focus on strengths. Employees whose managers focus on their strengths are immensely more likely to be engaged than are those who are only managing weaknesses (Witters & Agrawal, 2020).

<u>What are Strengths Based Organizations (SBOs)?</u>

One of the best examples of POP is in Strength-Based organizations (SBO). A SBO enables individuals to identify their strengths, while actively seeking out ways to use and develop them; managers know and understand the strengths of their employees and support them in utilization and development of their strengths as well; finally, the organization is equipped with the tools, processes and expertise required to support this (Page & Carter, 2009). The extant literature provides evidence that strengths-based interventions can increase organizational effectiveness and employee well-being (Donaldson & KO, 2010). Some of the benefits include decreased turnover and increased employee engagement, hopefulness, and life satisfaction (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). It was also discovered that employee engagement is significantly linked to business outcomes such as profitability, turnover, customer satisfaction, and more (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Other studies arrive at increases in positive psychological capacities such as hope, subjective wellbeing, and confidence (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). In addition to increased wellbeing and engagement, using a tool like the Clifton StrengthsFinder, which is an online measure of personal talent that identifies areas for individual's greatest potential, results in desired behavioral change (Lopez & Ackerman, 2013). Managers

who create environments in which employees are able to make the most of their talents have more productive work units with less employee turnover (Lopez & Ackerman, 2014). Studies also show that strengths-based development increases self-confidence, direction, hope, and altruism in college students (Lopez & Ackerman, 2013).

Retention, Turnover, & Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment describes an "employee's loyalty to or psychological connection to the broader organization" (Harter, 2009). In 2016, research found that 21% of millennials changed jobs within the year, which was more than three times more than other generational cohorts; however, research suggests millennials are looking for organizations to give them compelling reasons to stay loyal, they just are not afraid to leave to find what they're looking for (Gallup, 2016). Since the spring of 2021 roughly 33 million Americans roughly quit their jobs, causing record high turnover rates in many industries (Rosalsky, 2022). This phenomenon has been coined, "The Great Resignation;" moreover, some view this time period as "The Great *Renegotiation*," due to the fact that there are many open positions and employees have the power to be choosey (Rosalsky, 2022). Not only are white-collared professionals transitioning to remote work, but The Great Resignation of 2021 has concretely revealed the desires of many millennials to question how they find meaning in their employment and make decisions to leave or stay that are categorically different from past generations (Cook, 2021).

Turnover due to disengagement is costly. Gallup estimates that for millennials alone, this costs organizations $30.5 billion annually across the United States. Research on workplace turnover states almost 50% of millennials would leave their job within the next two years (Deloitte, 2019). Of those open to leaving their current organization, 25%

had switched from their previous organization within the past two years as well (Deloitte, 2019). The top reasons for millennial turnover includes dissatisfaction with compensation, lack of career advancement and growth opportunities, lack of flexibility or work-life balance, and not feeling valued (Deloitte, 2019). Although compensation is important, millennials rank career growth and flexible working environments higher than financial benefits when looking for new career opportunities, (PwC, 2011).

Looking at companies within corporate America who are doing well in attracting and retaining top millennial talent, Google & Apple have very innovative organizational cultures and management styles that enable flexibility and provide feedback often, which aligns with what millennials have reported they are looking for (PwC, 2011).

There is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment when looking at turnover rates (Harter, 2009). The connections between job satisfaction and organizational commitment with productivity and turnover have an important and practical value to most organizations (Harter, 2009).

Employee engagement vs. employee well-being, is there a difference?

Employee engagement is defined as the involvement with and enthusiasm for work (Harter, 2009). An engaged employee is "fully occupied in his or her work through physical and intellectual involvement and emotional enthusiasm" (Harter, 2009). Engaged employees are both physically and mentally connected to others and the endeavors of the organization (Harter, 2009).

Wellbeing can be defined as flourishing mental health, as the absence of illness does not equate to mental health (Gallagher, 2009). Americans who report having high levels of wellbeing miss fewer days of work, are less likely to suffer from a diagnosable

mental illness, have closer and stronger relationships, have fewer chronic diseases, sleep better, and generally have better psychosocial functioning than those with moderate or low levels of wellbeing (Gallagher, 2009). Low well-being and mental illness both appear to contribute to cardiovascular disease (Gallagher, 2009). Those who report higher levels of happiness and well-being report improved outcomes at work, with family and friendships, and health (Gallagher, 2009).

Employee engagement is seen as one of the best ways to reduce turnover (Wigert, 2018), which includes a focus on employee wellbeing. Research on burnout found employees are less likely to have high stress if they work in a culture that advocates for their natural strengths and talents, and are prioritizing their wellbeing are significantly less likely to have high stress (Asplund et al., 2022). In a study from 1984 to 2011, organizations that made the 100 Best Companies to Work for in America outperformed their peers' stock returns by clos to 4% annually (Edmans, 2012). Research suggests employees with high levels of wellbeing are more resilient during hardships, less likely to call out of work last minute, and have better job performance compared to employees with low wellbeing (Wolf, 2019). High levels of individual wellbeing positively impact corporate performance; thriving employees are a clear net positive on the bottom line. So much so that wellbeing is suggested to be a core aspect of organizational strategy (Brim & Robison, 2020). Research on employee wellness shows engaged employees report higher levels of wellbeing (Robison, 2012) In a study from Gallup Business Journal, engaged workers were significantly more likely to say that their employer offers some sort of flextime policy, or that engaged employers work slightly more hours than actively to moderately disengaged peer employees (Robison, 2012).

Ultimately, employee engagement and employee wellbeing go hand-in-hand and neglecting to address either within organizations is costly. In 2016 it was estimated that millennial disengagement in the workplace economy $284 to $469 billion annually in lost productivity (Gallup, 2016).   In terms of physical wellbeing, it is estimated that poor employee health in 2019 cost employers $575 billion (Blackman, 2019). Investing in employee wellbeing is something leaders cannot afford to overlook, considering the major cost implications ignoring wellbeing as on business and the U.S. economy (Wolf, 2020). According to Gallup's latest Wellbeing Index, 70% of millennials experience at least some burnout with their job (Gallup, 2020). Wolf (2020) contends that leaders who prioritize employee wellbeing are also simultaneously promoting a culture of engagement, which results in many positive personal and business outcomes, such as higher physical and emotional wellness for employees, higher job performance, and lower burnout and turnover. (Wolf, 2020). Research shows that there is a 48% greater likelihood that employees with low engagement and wellbeing will leave the company. Gallup reports 55% of millennials are disengaged. If millennials are not thriving in their wellbeing, they will struggle in life, affecting how they perform as citizens, consumers and employees (Gallup, 2016). If millennials are disengaged, organization's profitability, productivity, and innovation will suffer (Gallup, 2016). If companies want to strengthen millennials' engagement, they must recognize what defines and drives this generation's ideal experience (Gallup, 2016).

What does current research say about millennials in the workplace?

Millennials most commonly work in the following industries: technology (Deloitte, 2014) healthcare, wholesale and retail, manufacturing, and

professional/business (Allison & Mugglestone, 2014). Not only are millennial professionals getting more selective about the businesses they work for, they're also looking deeper into the values of these companies (Alton, 2017). As a result, businesses need to become familiar with what millennials are looking for, and adapt (Alton, 2017). Specifically, they want their organization to take part in corporate responsibility, strong diversity & inclusion, work-life balance, to be a part of a greater mission, feedback & growth, and engagement and purpose (Alton, 2017).

Millennials want to be contributors; their ultimate goal is to find a job they find meaningful, that fuels their sense of purpose (Gallup, 2016). They want personal development and on-going feedback from their managers, who coach them and dial up their strengths, instead of managing their weaknesses (Gallup, 2016). When working out of an office, millennials want amenities such as a cafeteria, wellness facilities, rest areas, and a coffee bar (CBRE, 2016). They prefer these offices to be located in central locations such as a city or large town and consider 30 minutes a tolerable commute (CBRE, 2016).

There is substantive research on the correlation between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, and turnover within organizations (Harter, 2009) as well as substantial research on the characteristics of millennial workers (PWC, 2011). According to Deloitte's annual millennial survey, millennials want to work for organizations that foster innovative thinking, develop their skills, and make a positive contribution to society (Deloitte, 2014). Current research on millennials involves survey data that looks at three domains: turnover, work-life balance/ flexibility, and employee engagement; however, there is limited work on the distinction between young vs. old

millennials and the use of employee strengths as a means to evaluate organizational commitment. Looking at company loyalty through the lens of employee wellbeing and utilizations of strengths is a key entry point for a nuanced understanding of the young millennial generation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Overview

The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of young millennials within corporate America. Wellbeing has been found to have a greater impact on level of job satisfaction (Judge & Watanabe, 1993) and strength-based approaches have proven to increase productivity, lower turnover, and improve customer loyalty (Harter et al., 2002). I explore the role that prioritizing employee wellbeing and utilization of strengths plays within organizational commitment, for millennials, the largest growing generation in the workforce (Deloitte, 2014). I have defined organizational commitment as an employee's loyalty to and psychological connection to their organization (Harter, 2009).

I conducted 14 virtual in-depth qualitative interviews with young millennials ages 23-32 years old, on Zoom, the video conferencing platform. The purpose of this method was to thoroughly explore young millennials' nuanced rationale for selecting the positions they work in regarding their engagement and commitment. I created a formal, open-ended interview guide which will be used for all interviews with research respondents. The information that I have reviewed thus far has led me to the following hypotheses:

H1: When young millennial employees are able to utilize their strengths and feel their wellbeing is a priority within their role/ organization, they will have stronger organizational commitment than those employees whose wellbeing is not prioritized nor are strengths utilized.

H2: The more that young millennial employees are able to have a flexible work environment, regardless of prioritizing wellbeing or the utilization of strengths, they will be more committed to the organization, compared to those without flexible work environments.

Improving employee engagement is seen as one of the best ways to increase organizational commitment (Wigert, 2018). Concurrently, there is a strong connection between employee engagement and wellbeing; research on employee wellness shows that engaged employees have higher levels of wellbeing (Robison, 2012). Understanding how people can best work and live is critical to enhancing personal wellbeing, performance at work, in life, and benefits the health of our society (Flores, Ojeda, 2009). As millennials continue to enter the workforce in large numbers, it is important to uncover how their behaviors and attitudes are shaping the future world of work (PWC, 2011). Understanding the young millennial corporate experience will hopefully better equip organizations to reduce turnover and increase employee satisfaction and company loyalty, as this generation becomes dominant in the workforce (Gallup, 2016).

My second hypothesis includes flexible work environments as this is a factor that has been linked to employee engagement (Robison, 2012). To explore this further, I designed a qualitative interview guide informed by the research of Harter (2009); Clifton & Hodges (2004); Donaldson & KO (2010); Judge & Watanabe (1993) and others to help dissect what contributes to organizational commitment, such as satisfaction, motivation, meaning, purpose, and willingness to switch organizations. Additionally, I referenced new articles (within the last year) in journals, such as Gallup Business Journal, and

insight from Organizational Psychologist Adam Grant to help tie in new developments in virtual work.

<u>Self as the Instrument</u>

As I developed my research questions and conducted my literature review, I had to acknowledge how my experiences in the workplace affect my assumptions and hypotheses. In addition to my interview guide, I was also an instrument in my research. The awareness of my own role as the researcher, known as reflexivity, was critical in helping me avoid any biases during the data collection process (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16). As a young millennial who had recently left an organization because of the culture, I had to suspend my beliefs about what contributes to organizational commitment when speaking to my interviewees. I intentionally bracketed personal experiences and perspectives I have of the workplace if they did not mention it. I could not let my previous experiences cloud my ability to hear their experiences, especially if it contradicted what I felt to be true. I was intentional about staying within the confines of the intended research objectives and formatted interview guide.

<u>Data Collection Through Survey & Interview</u>

In attempts to gain background information on respondents and confirm eligibility, I created a 25 question, brief 10-minute survey using the Qualtrics platform. This recruitment survey included 12 demographic questions that inquired about your current role and employment history. I included 13 Likert-scale questions pertaining to employee engagement and satisfaction at the end of the recruitment survey so I would have close-ended data to compare against the qualitative data collected during the interview. To maximize understanding of my respondents' experiences, the remainder of

the interview included open ended questions within my interview guide so the individuals could elaborate on their true feelings in regard to the research topics.

My sample includes 14 respondents who have at least a 4-year college degree, currently employed full-time, and have been in the workforce for at minimum 3 years. I only interviewed those who are currently in entry to mid-level positions, who are working as an independent (those who are not married and without children). I specifically focused on interviewing young professionals are poised to successfully climb the corporate ladder, who have at least a four-year college degree (Garland, 2001); of the 14 respondents, only one holds a professional degree and one additional respondent is in the process of receiving a master's degree. What does it mean to the corporate mainstream as millennials exit and enter positions with the priority of being engaged and committed to what they do and how they work? This has been my experience since my college graduation in 2015. Contrary to other young millennials I know, I recently left my job as a Market Research Manager after five and a half years; this was the only position I had held post-college. My rationale for finally leaving was not feeling like my own strengths were being utilized as well as feeling disconnected to my work.

I recruited respondents through convenience sampling methods (Lavrakas, 2008), starting with my personal social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, as well as the UPenn MSOD Listserv and word of mouth. I conducted interviews over Zoom, as in-person was not an option during the pandemic and respondents were spread across the United States.

My background in qualitative research helped design this study. I was able to create my interview guide with the help of Dr. Torres and classmates' feedback within class DYNM668. I first started by creating an outline of different topics I wanted to hear about from my respondents. Including background on their current employment, level of satisfaction, utilization of strengths in the role, whether their organization supported their wellbeing, and other questions that elicited a description of the organization culture.

During each interview, I used my intuitiveness to synthesize participants' perspectives and thus connect with them on a personal level. Because I used a convenience sampling method, I was familiar with all respondents prior to the interview. This made building trust and rapport relatively easy. The interviewing process, although structured, was conversational in approach so that participants could share topic-related insights, attitudes, and beliefs at will. This intuitiveness gave way for my receptivity. I was able to learn from my participants' experiences, to challenge my own thoughts on how the prioritization of strengths and wellbeing on the workplace affects organizational commitment.

I used a standard qualitative interviewing methodology and the grounded theory approach for data analysis. (See the appendix for full interview guide). This process included the transcription of interviews, writing field notes, and coding transcripts. Throughout the interview process, I began pulling together themes using analysis methods such as open and axial coding techniques created by grounded theorists (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967). While my personal experience was top of mind, I was intentional about using bracketing to analyze each respondent's experience objectively and uniquely, while suspending my own assumptions and biases (Tufford & Newman, 2010). I also

created an excel sheet to organize and analyze my interview. This approach allowed me

to the identify of common themes, outliers, and best practices to consider when

developing recommendations for organizational commitment.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

As we enter year two of the pandemic, employee wellbeing is as relevant as ever. This research comes at an important time as we evaluate how the impact of COVID-19 continues to affect the workforce. Work-from-home mandates as an attempt to decrease the spread of disease have caused organizations to adjust and shift from their normal ways of working, which will likely have impact on workplace culture far exceeding this pandemic (Mehta, 2021). During Spring of 2021, more than 30 million American employees left their jobs, which set an all-time record (Sull et al., 2022; Rosalsky, 2022). This phenomenon has been coined, "The Great Resignation;" Business leaders are struggling to make sense of the factors driving the mass exodus and are looking for ways to hold on to valued employees (Sull et al., 2022). Furthermore, According to Upwork's Future Workforce Report, the remote work projections have been increasing since the start of the pandemic; they project 40.7 million American professionals will be fully remote in the next five years, which has increased by 6% since November 2020 (Ozimek, 2021). This research predicts that fully or partial remote workers will represent 48% of the entire American workforce by the end of 2021 (Ozimek, 2021).

Even before COVID-19, employee turnover rates have been steadily increasing for more than eight years (Maurer, 2018). Experts predict turnover will increase significantly in 2021 as there has been a pent-up turnover demand due to hiring freezes and employees putting off job searches mid-pandemic (Maurer, 2021). According to a conservative estimate by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, each exiting employee costs on

average $13,996 to replace (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). Not only is turnover costly financially, but it negatively influences productivity, workplace safety, and morale (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). Gallup estimates millennial turnover costs the U.S. economy $30.5 billion each year (Adkins, 2019). Understanding the factors that contribute to retention is critical for employers to get ahead of the consequences of high turnover.

Recent research on combatting the consequences of dissatisfaction in the workplace has uncovered the urgent need to find better ways to retain millennial employees and keep them satisfied in the workplace. The research title even coins millennials as "the job-hopping generation" (Hassan et al., 2020, p. 1); however, there is reason to believe these young employees are only willing to leave the organizations that are not meeting their expectations (Atlantic, 2014). Surprisingly, millennials have similar job tenure to Gen X, when comparing both generations from the same ages (Fry, 2017). This can be explained through millennials having higher levels of education, compared to Gen X; more education is typically associated with longer tenure (Fry, 2017). Among 25 to 35-year-old workers in 2016, 38% of Millennial men and 46% of Millennial women had completed at least a bachelor's degree. Comparatively for Gen X in 2000, they had significantly lower levels of educational completion rates: 31% of male 25 to 35-year-old workers had finished college, as had only 34% of female workers. (Fry 2017). However, millennials have a unique perspective about the workplace; it is more about career exploration than climbing the traditional ladder; societal expectations have changed. It is now acceptable for millennials in their 20s to figure out what they want to do, which means job-hopping to explore multiple industries is expected (Fallon, 2021). Because millennials now comprise most employees in the 21st century workforce (Deloitte, 2014;

Gallup, 2016; Fuscaldo, 2021), it is important to explore what circumstances encourage them to switch organizations and the factors that contribute to their company loyalty.

<u>Who Are the Young Millennials?</u>

Of the 14 respondents in my study, 50% self-identified as male and the other 50% self-identified as female (See Figure 1). I made efforts to recruit and interview an even split of men and women to ensure a representative sample. The ages ranged from 25- 29 years old with the highest percentage (79%) of young millennials being between the ages of 27-29. The lowest percentage (21%) of young millennials sampled was 25-26 (See Table 1).

Figure 1. Gender Demographics
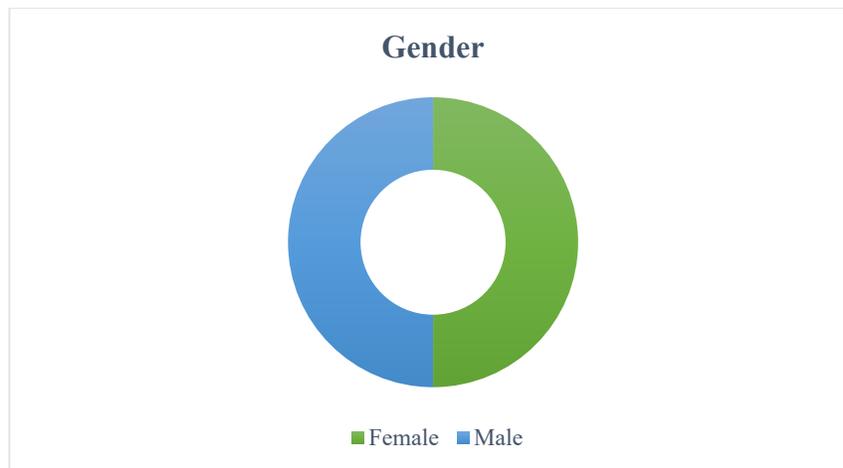
Table 1. Respondents' Age

Age	25	26	27	28	29	Total
# of Respondents	1	2	4	4	3	14

<u>Most Common Industries for Young Millennials</u>

My sample includes individuals who worked in a wide variety of industries, however the most common was Tech (43%). It is no surprise that Technology is a very millennial-heavy industry, as this generation grew up with technology and are extremely tech-savvy (Fuscaldo, 2021). The other industries represented included Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals, Hotel & Food Services, Media, Government & Public Administration, Legal Services, Scientific/Technical Services, and other (with 7% for each). This is consistent with practitioner research on millennials which finds the most common industries millennials work in include technology (Deloitte, 2014) healthcare, wholesale and retail, manufacturing, and professional/business (Allison & Mugglestone, 2014). Since millennials have grown up around technology (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009), it makes sense why Tech is the most common industry for millennials (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Industries of Working Millennials
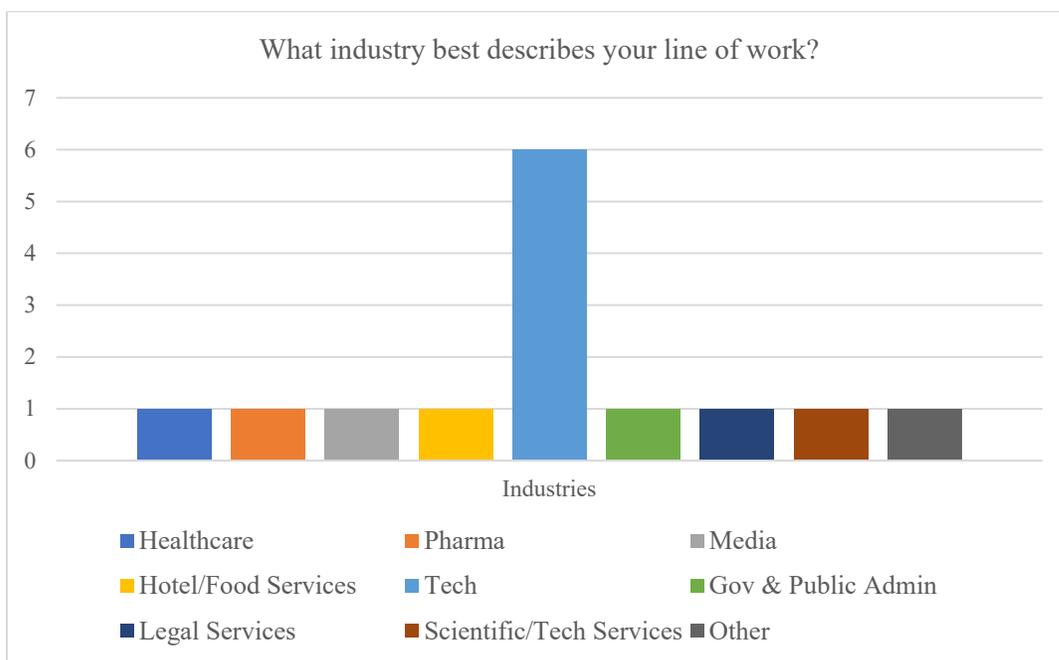
Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be described as how happy or content an employee is with their job, which is also associated with greater life satisfaction (Haar et al., 2014). Research suggests that there is a strong correlation between high job satisfaction and retention, as well as inverse correlation between job satisfaction and turnover (Rehman, 2012). Gallup reports only 29% of millennials are engaged in their work. Another 55% of millennials are not engaged at work, while 16% are actively disengaged, which is quite destructive to an organization (Adkins, 2019). Out of 14 respondents in my sample, six of them (43%) reported they are extremely satisfied with their current job. Three respondents (21%) reported feeling moderately satisfied with their job. Two respondents (14%) reported feeling slightly satisfied, two respondents (14%) reported feeling slightly dissatisfied, and one respondent (7%) reported moderate dissatisfaction. Of the nine respondents who reported feeling extremely and moderately satisfied in their current roles, seven respondents (78%) reported they had no intention of leaving their organization for the foreseeable future. VC, who works as a software engineer for a big tech company mentioned, "I really like what I'm doing now and have the ability to switch teams if I want down the road… I don't have any plans to leave this organization for a while."

As discussed in the last chapter, this chapter takes a closer look at respondents' responses regarding their overall experiences in the workplace and some of the leading factors that contribute to organizational commitment from a young millennial perspective. These statements were reinforced by the two emerging themes from my interviews which are: young millennials are willing to switch companies to work on

something they feel passionate about or that gives them a sense of purpose; and, to stay loyal to a company, organizations must foster flexible work environments while creating clear paths for career growth (PwC, 2011), or they will likely ultimately switch organizations.

For example, TE, a sustainability consultant who has been in his role for over two years, feels a sense of purpose working in the climate industry, however he has always longed to work in the US Government. Despite really liking his organization, he plans to go back to school full-time to receive a degree that will most likely lead him to switch industries to fulfil his passion.

> If I didn't have a strong desire to go back to school, I absolutely couldn't see myself just staying here continuing to work in this space, and potentially finding like one of the partner organizations that works on a particularly interesting piece of this that I might want to go work in. But I think I'm, I've always been a little bit more interested in kind of the US government.

From my work, I've learned that it is also important to acknowledge common characteristics of this generation and understand how outside factors may be shaping their experiences in the workplace. Millennials have often been criticized by older generations as needing to be coddled or needing things to go their way. Their behavior perhaps can be attributed to common parenting styles such as being overly involved and excessively protective when they were children (Sharma, 2020). In contrast, the same research suggests how millennials were parented also may be due to overcompensating from growing up with parents who were hands off and sometimes neglectful (Sharma, 2020). Understanding how many millennials were parented may provide context to their behaviors and decisions-making as working adults. This is likely a key aspect of how millennials hold their world view on work now that they are of age. While this is an

important piece of understanding millennial behaviors, for the purposes of my research I focus on aspects of my respondents' adult lives that shape organizational commitment.

Compared to Gen X, millennials appear to be much more idealistic and optimistic (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009); this may explain why millennials often seek out new job opportunities, as opposed to staying in the same career long-term. Millennials grew up with the internet; they know how to solve problems with a smaller learning curve compared to generations that came before them and therefore have been labeled a multimedia and multitasking generation (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009). Millennials are also often depicted as more flexible, have a more positive attitude, and more team-oriented compared to previous generations, however they are far less loyal to their employers (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009). One common reason millennials switch organizations is often feeling like the only way to achieve higher growth or engagement potential is by leaving one position for another (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009). Millennials crave work-life balance and a path for growth, however and are loyal when a company is meeting their needs (Fuscaldo, 2021; Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009). However, millennials have shown they are willing leave a company if another one offers them better opportunities for learning, growth, or work-life balance (Fuscaldo, 2021).

When I spoke to MS, she had recently started at a new digital media firm; she has switched companies every three years or so, because she felt like this was the only way to advance her career. Similarly, in my interview with MR, even though she mentioned a lot of aspects that she really likes about her organization, she feels like ultimately, she will have to leave companies for better financial and professional growth opportunities. NG confirmed these sentiments as well.

I had to move to do better for myself. I was promised more for over a year at [my previous organization] and got a promotion, but it just felt like it was just a title change and a bump in compensation for the work I had already been doing for a while. In my head, in order for me to gain more responsibility and keep learning/growing I had to make the move. I was content with what I was making at [my previous company] at the time I left too. I didn't think I was going to be making more. It was more about going somewhere else where I would feel like I was doing different things after 3.5 years of doing the same work.

When we spoke, NG had been at his new job for a few months; he left his previous organization because he was unable to get promoted or receive the professional growth opportunities, he needed to advance his career and industry skills. The new company almost doubled his salary and awarded him a manager level role that he would not have been eligible for if he had stayed at his original company. These examples confirm that the desire to advance in one's career both financially and professionally is more easily attainable through switching organizations.

"It gives me a sense of purpose"

Throughout my research, feeling a sense of purpose in one's role or feeling passionate about the industry they work in was the driving factor for organizational commitment for my interview respondents. One interview that stood out was with SW, who has been in his role for eight years. He started as an intern in college and has been promoted consistently throughout his time there. SW explained that the work he does makes him feel important and gives him a sense of purpose. Feeling like the work he is doing is important has contributed to his desire to stay at that company. Similarly, other respondents who felt passionate about a different industry were less satisfied in their current roles and therefore were willing to switch organizations in the future. AY, who was working in industrial and fabrication equipment sales at the time of her interview, talked about his desire to feel more passionate about what he is selling.

> I'm just not that motivated to sell what my company is offering... I'm really interested in solar, so I've been looking for sales jobs in the renewable energy industry. I believe in clean energy and if I can sell and be a part of that movement, I'll feel better that it's no longer just a 9-5 and a paycheck, the job actually has a purpose to it.

This finding is consistent with current practitioner research that indicates that millennials want to work for organizations with a mission and purpose that they find meaningful (Gallup, 2016, Deloitte, 2019). This was a common theme for those respondents that are satisfied in their roles and are committed to staying with the organization.

However, those that did not feel a sense of purpose or connection to the type of work they were doing, did not express strong loyalty to their company. Looking at the respondents who reported a sense of openness towards switching organizations, the most common driver was lacking a sense of purpose in their current industry. One respondent, MS who had recently switched organizations explained:

> I knew, just the way the industry is going, where my passions lie, that I need to get out of that industry… I think being passionate about the product is something that I now value about my work

Many respondents (64%) mentioned that although there are many positive aspects about their job and company, ultimately, they are looking to switch industries to do work they feel more connected to. Common industries include sustainable energy and pop culture (e.g., music and entertainment). For example, when talking to BB she mentioned that she is drawn to a particular industry and had been looking specifically for organizations where she could be learning what she wants on the job, instead of having to read about what she's interested in outside of work.

> The sustainability or just cleaner energy industry has always been of interest. In previous years, I would work outside of my day-to-day job to try to learn more about sustainability, but I did not have great resources… now I have a whole library of resources across the industry and a lot more information to learn and

become an educated person in this field…I'm given the time to spend learning and allowed to work on my passion which feels a lot more focused now.

Since BB wanted to combine her passion for sustainable energy with her project management and sales experience, she was willing to take a pay cut for the experience to grow within the industry.

"I get to work the way that I want to work"

For the millennials I interviewed, the second major driving factor in terms of job satisfaction and company loyalty is flexibility. Flexible working conditions include location, designated hours, and types of projects. In terms of being flexible with location, most often this pertains to the ability to choose when you want to be remote vs. being in the office. One respondent, MR, works for a small consulting firm, described as having a very flexible working environment, which was one of the aspects she highlighted about liking where she worked. She lives and works in a metropolitan area, but many people on her team often traveled to clients (prior to the pandemic). There is a high level of trust in the environment because employees are allowed to come in when they want and to work remotely, as needed. MR explained:

> We have a flexible work policy. You're allowed to work remote if you want. If I didn't have any in-person client meetings, I could work from home any day that I want to. But most people actually like to come into the office. Just because it was kind of fun, especially if you have big team meetings or anything, but I would usually work from home like one or two days a week before COVID.

Alternatively, LC, who lacks flexibility to work remotely as a production associate at a political advertising firm, expressed her frustration about not having that opportunity at her current position. As a 25-year-old working in the suburbs of D.C., LC worked for a company who insisted on younger employees coming into the office, even during the pandemic. She had been at this company for three years and works in a role that while

might be easier to do in person with others in the office, LC expressed that she was also

capable of succeeding in her role from home. Seeing many of the older and more senior

employees get to work remotely during the height of the pandemic made her realize that

she was frustrated with the lack of locational flexibility and began to look for other jobs.

Prior to the pandemic, LC was slowly realizing that she needed to look for other

opportunities. She saw others with flexibility and wanted that for herself as well; she

ended up landing a fully remote position for that reason.

> Half of the people are working from home, and they're doing that successfully, including my bosses, etc. It feels like they have an aversion to letting people work from home, especially someone in my job, because they're used to us coming in. But then on the other hand, the others working remotely are all doing it perfectly fine. So, that definitely adds to a little bit of frustration because it just doesn't make sense why they really want some people to come in. So, I feel like there isn't flexibility.

Not only do the young millennials in my sample see their peers with flexible work

environments, but because of the pandemic, corporate norms are now changing, and more

flexible/remote work options are possible. According to the Pew Research Center's

report on how Covid-19 has impacted the workforce, in December 2020, 71% of

Americans who had the capability to do their job from home reported that they are

working remotely all or most of the time (Parker et al., 2020). Because of the increasing

presence of remote work, pushing employees to go back into the office or taking away

locational flexibility can motivate them to leave; the implications of bringing employees

back to the office full-time is risky for employers considering the acute talent shortage

workplaces are experiencing (Bendor-Samuel, 2021). Research on 'Why Millennials

Quit' from the Journal of Property Management, reveals that millennials expect

companies to be flexible enough to allow them to have moderate autonomy in making

their own schedules. Hoffman reports, if millennials have no say in their workdays, that's a red flag (Hoffman, 2018). Looking at the various degrees of flexibility reported amongst my respondents, those who have the freedom to decide where they work, when they log in, and what types of projects they get to work on are the most satisfied in their current roles and mentioned they are less inclined to switch organizations. This finding is consistent with current research on where millennials want to work (Hastwell, 2021; Bendor-Samuel, 2021; Hoffman, 2018). Another respondent, MP, specifically exclaimed that "having the autonomy to do whatever I want, when I want, works really well." Prior to the pandemic MP worked in the office occasionally, but mostly dictated his own schedule. He has since moved to another urban city on the East Coast, MP was granted approval to work completely remotely, despite the potential of his old office opening back up. Previous research on the unwritten set of expectations between millennial employees and their employer has shown that millennials look for reciprocal flexibility around working hours and a good work-life balance as desirable factors for staying with an organization (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). Flexibility and work-life balance were showcased when talking to TE about his freedom to take time off.

> There's a lot of flexibility and understanding around our personal lives. Like if you've got something that's happening it's fine to just take the day off. It's a British company so we have 40 days of vacation, and I like to use all of my vacation. I'm actually taking all of the next week off, and not going anywhere just because that was the week that I didn't have too much work and could just take it off.

Flexibility alone, however, does not fully contribute to long term organizational commitment. Despite having flexibility in her current role, one respondent, BB who works as a sales manager feels underutilized within her current team. She does not feel challenged or that she is growing professionally.

> In my current organization, I can kind of log in whenever I see fit. My role is very much based on what I'm able to do, so there's not really anyone who relies on me. And so that's kind of nice if I'm having a bad day there's no stress, there's no expectations.

In her commentary, BB appreciates the flexibility, but it comes at a cost of not feeling motivated. Similarly, AY enjoys his fully remote role, but he was not passionate about the industry he was working in which led him to find a new job.

> I really enjoy working from home and don't think I would fully give up this flexibility, I'm just not motivated to sell industrial equipment. I'd rather be selling solar panels and have slightly less flexibility… I just don't feel challenged or fully utilized in my current role. In a future role I would give up some of the autonomy, meaning I'm okay with having expectations around work hours, as long as they're flexible to me when I needed them to be.

Ultimately, since he is used to the flexibility, he will not want to give that up completely to go into an office full time but is willing to be flexible himself with the demands of a job he cares more about.

"I don't know what my strengths are to be honest with you"

A key part of my original hypothesis was that the utilization of strengths would positively impact organizational commitment. However, throughout many interviews, it became apparent that most millennials don't formally know what their strengths are. Respondents discussed what they liked about the role and what they thought they did well; it was not clear whether utilizing one's strengths in their role had a measurable impact on their organizational commitment. The current research on strengths states, "the evidence points to easier and more effective momentum, whether in relation to performance or to growth, when people are working from a basis of strength," (Linley & Lopez 2009, p.960). Once strengths are identified, a person can thoughtfully determine how to fully utilize them (Asplund & Lopez, 2009). Further research on organizational

commitment should explore in more detail whether awareness of ones' strengths has an impact on organizational commitment when those strengths are being utilized (e.g., Suharto et al., 2019; Sorenson, 2014).

Moreover, I originally hypothesized that perception of an organization caring about your wellbeing will positively influence company loyalty, as measuring employee wellbeing is more meaningful than employee engagement (Grant, 2020). Employee wellbeing can be defined as, "the overall satisfaction and happiness of an employee in the workplace and includes the concepts of job satisfaction, job-related mental strain and job-related depression" (Wong et al., 2021, p. 5). This was measured through evaluating attitudes & behaviors at work, career aspirations, and cooperation with colleagues (Wong et al., 2021, p. 7).

Wellbeing includes the quality of our lives holistically, not just during working hours. Wellbeing is dependent on our sense of purpose, support, autonomy, and psychological safety (Grant, 2020). This is consistent with the findings that young millennials are driven to have a sense of purpose and autonomy in their work. Having flexibility does contribute to perception of wellbeing but wellness perks or health benefits such as offering paid sick leave/wellness days and gym stipends did not significantly impact organizational commitment. It's possible that people have gotten accustomed to these benefits, so they see them as the norm and not as a perk. Building positive and healthy relationships at work, which includes open communication, trust, and respect has been proven to contribute to employees' physical and mental wellbeing (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). There is complexity around building trusting relationships in the

workplace; employers with trusting relationships give their employees the autonomy to get their work done with flexibility, because they trust that it will get done.

<u>Factors that Lead to Turnover</u>

Ultimately, young millennials are open to the idea that switching organizations could provide them with more opportunity, including a possible title change, salary bump, or new sought-after learning experiences (Deloitte, 2019; Gallup, 2016). It is not uncommon for young millennials to have worked for three or four different employers over the past few years (Fallon, 2021). My research identified the feeling of being overworked as one of the biggest drivers towards leaving an organization for the 14 young millennials I interviewed. The confounding variable here is the level of acceptance of how much energy and time is needed to get the job done or advance in your career. For example, two respondents reported using their current roles as steppingstones to later advance their respective careers. AR mentioned,

> It's hard because there's not really the types of jobs in the industry that I would want straight out of school; you have to get the training experience first. Every job posting is like, three to five years at a big firm. So, this is kind of a steppingstone.

Similar sentiment from working in a different industry, entering a job with the mindset that it's going to be difficult from a work life balance standpoint sets them up for only planning on being there in the short term. MS stated,

> The perception of joining this company was that it was going to be a lot of work, like I feel like the employees I interviewed with kind of made that really clear, like...it's not a nine to five job, it really is a lot of time and effort and energy, and the work life balance can be difficult. So, accepting this job with that mindset put a time frame artificially in my mind that I will try to ride it out four years for my stocks to fully invest.

This means they are willing to accept other factors like lack of flexibility, feeling overworked and undervalued, that may have caused others to leave their organization. Acknowledging that their current role is a steppingstone signifies the willingness to eventually switch organizations due to their current company not meeting all of their needs or interests.

> It's not just that I want to have a good lifestyle and have the right type of work, and opportunities to grow, it's like, I want to do those things in a subject matter and industry that I'm more passionate about.

Ultimately, the most common reason reported from my 8 respondents regarding willingness to leave an organization, is to follow one's sense of purpose.

Factors that contribute to Company Loyalty

While millennials are often described as the "job hopping" generation (Gallup, 2016; Adkins, 2019), there are several factors that impact a young millennial's willingness to stay committed to an organization. According to Gallup, the top five things millennials look for in their jobs are opportunities for learning and growth, quality of manager, quality of leadership, having an interest in the type of work, and opportunities for advancement; they also want to feel their work is worthwhile and that their efforts are being recognized (Gallup, 2016; PwC, 2011). Millennials are far less loyal to their employers compared to previous generations. While Generation Xers show high levels of commitment to their companies, the first loyalty is to themselves and their careers (Reisenwitz, & Iyer 2009).

To further understand these factors, in my interview guide I included questions identifying the different aspects of millennials' experiences at work, to better understand whether utilization of strengths and prioritizing wellbeing impacted company loyalty (see

Appendix). This included asking questions regarding their use of strengths in their role, whether they felt like their organization cares about their wellbeing and addressed obstacles and opportunities toward advancing their career. The majority of my respondents reported that flexibility was critical for long term commitment to an organization for 93% (13 out of 14). In comparison, lack of remote work flexibility contributed to leaving an organization. Although some companies are making long-term plans to continue embracing remote work in larger numbers than before the pandemic (Ozimek, 2021), my research does not distinguish the influences of the pandemic towards the desire for flexible working environments. However, now that millennials have experienced remote work for nearly two years due to Covid-19, they report wanting to continue flexible work arrangements, instead of returning fully to 9-5 in the office (Hastwell, 2016). Previous research on how millennials work and live has found that millennials are not willing to sacrifice life for work (Gallup, 2016; Kadakia, 2017). My research reveals that 71% of my interview respondents will leave or have left organizations because of lack of flexibility or the autonomy to make those decisions. Specifically, MP mentioned:

> People are just going to go leave and get paid the same amount or more if my company told us to go back to the office and I want to work remotely; the company in our building right below us has already said, you can work indefinitely remote, so they will be like, alright, come work for us.

In his commentary, MP contended that his willingness to stay at his organization was related to his strategy to leverage his role to become fully remote.

> I think I also want to say because I have carved myself a very unique position within what my company does to the point where I could leverage it this year to make them allow me to go fully remote, which is not a thing, our company does normally.

Subsequently, 79% of respondents (11) mentioned having clear path for career development has a strong influence on their company loyalty. SW, the respondent who has been at his company the longest explained that his promotion path is clearly labeled, and he has proof, based on experience, that his company will follow through on their promises to promote him and advance his career development. Comparatively, MR, who also works at a consulting firm, felt that her career path was not clearly identified; this situation thus made her less likely to report her intention to stay at her current organization long term. Even though MS & MR work in different industries, their stories are similar in that they expect to need to leave an organization to go or get the financial reward expected with a promotion. Most respondents (93%) stated that they are either highly monetarily driven or would be persuaded by financial incentives to stay committed to an organization. SW mentioned, "So the growth was specked out, and you kind of bought on to the idea that you can make a lot of money. As long as you stick it out." The financial reward is a big reason keeping him in his current role.

Ultimately, not feeling purposeful or passionate about the work outweighs 64% of respondents' desire to switch organizations and industries completely. Respondents like AY & BB both decided to recently leave their previous organizations to work in the sustainable energy industry which they had long been passionate about. Some (29%) acknowledge of interview respondents that the only way to advance developmentally or financially is by switching organizations. Research suggests that young millennials will have a dozen or more jobs by the time they hit their 30s (Fallon, 2021). Specifically, NG mentioned leaving his previous organization allowed him to almost double his salary, an opportunity that would have been impossible if he stayed. While one way to incentivize

employees to stay is rewarding them with promotions and financial incentives, the

millennial generation appears to values transparency and work-life balance over salary

and title – many will choose flexible hours and the ability to spend time with family and

friends over a high salary (Fuscaldo, 2021).

Comparatively, young millennials in roles with perceived flexibility in terms of

working location, hours, type of task have strong satisfaction and commitment to their

organization. In some cases, flexibility did outweigh the potential to make more money

elsewhere.

> I feel like it's going to be a little bit more flexible as well so I go back and forth on
> leaving versus staying- do I think I could go somewhere else and like make more
> money? Yeah, but I don't know if the exponential growth would be as quick as
> where I'm at now.

However, flexibility alone does not guarantee company loyalty. If one does not have

flexibility, they must be compensated significantly to remain loyal to an organization in

the short run; significant compensation is tied with the feeling of being overworked

which is not sustainable for long-term organizational commitment. This was especially

true for AR, a young millennial who works for a big urban law firm. He described his

company's culture as toxic largely due to the high expectations to be working around the

clock to meet the demands of their clients. AR works significantly long hours most weeks

and often weekends. For him, the salary has justified the flexibility for the time being.

> I make a good amount of money, which you would have to in order to live this
> lifestyle…It's a churn and burn [culture]. They're not particularly interested in like
> employee retention, in general… The answer is always 'yes' to what anybody
> asks…they don't care about their people, it's just an avenue towards making
> money and focusing on the business in the product which is your time.

Without flexibility, my respondents reported prolonged company loyalty with financial

incentives, but ultimately flexibility is the barrier for long term organizational

commitment. Those respondents who justified staying with an organization for the short-term, described their current role as a steppingstone for ultimate career advancement. Regarding long term organizational commitment, AR who has little to no flexibility and a non-sustainable work-life balance stated,

> I'm invested in this firm, so long as I can leverage the platform to find my next opportunity. I regularly and applying for jobs and looking at job boards…. Every person I talk to that's in my cohort is always like, 'what jobs are you looking at? How much longer are you going to stay?' Nobody is talking like they want to be here for the long term, like that's not a conversation.

Millennials are a unique generation with a desire to have a meaningful life and do purposeful work while maintaining a work life balance (Sharma, 2020; Gallup, 2016). Millennials also want to work to have a purpose; they want to work for organizations that foster innovative thinking, develop their skills, make a positive contribution to society and/or contribute something to the world; they want to be proud of their employer (Deloitte, 2014; PwC, 2011). Similarly, my research found a strong predictor of company loyalty as sense of purpose or passion: 43% of respondents shared that they were interested in or willing to switch organizations to work in an industry they are passionate about.

The young millennials in my sample who have a high sense of company loyalty also require a sense of purpose or fulfillment in the work that they are doing. SW, who has been in his role for seven years shared, "I like that I got to travel [in my role], because I felt like it gave me purpose." Even if flexibility and financial incentives are present, lacking purpose or passion in the role will be a driver for switching organizations and industries. Those who feel like the work they are doing is important indicated that they are more likely to stay committed to that organization because they are more

connected to their work. Millennials support companies that align with their values; many

will not hesitate to leave those organizations when they disagree with companies'

business practices, values, or political views (Deloitte, 2019). Social class may

contribute to the ability to leave one job without the security of having another lined up,

however this is not necessarily the case for my respondents. My respondents talked

about leaving a job for another one they had lined up. For example, TE expressed having

all these factors and feeling lucky to work at his current company.

> The biggest piece is that I really like is working on climate. I feel like it gives me
> a sense of purpose for everything that's going on, like a North Star knowing what
> I am doing is going to make a difference… I have much more autonomy to make
> my own decisions now, which I think is really nice…it's pretty flexible… I'm a
> night owl, not an early bird. And a lot of times I may not really start working until
> 10AM, or not get a ton [of work] done in the early afternoon, but I can then work
> from 7-8PM, or even 10-11PM. I like having the ability to do that when I need to
> get stuff done when it works for me. I know when I work best and just doing that
> is a really nice piece of why I like this job. And that's encouraged / acceptable.

Largely, having flexibility in addition to feeling purpose at work, with fair

compensation, and room for career development are the key factors that commit to

company loyalty.

<u>Wellbeing in the Workplace</u>

Previous research shows the linkage between job satisfaction and job

performance, however, due to the rise in research on the scientific study of human

flourishing, positive psychology experts are focusing on understanding the impacts of job

satisfaction on wellbeing (Wells, 2009). It is estimated that adults spend one quarter to

one third of their waking hours at work; because of this, work-life balance has become

the mantra for employees and the relationship between life satisfaction and job

satisfaction has become a focus of research (Wells, 2009). Research has confirmed that

while there is mutual influence in both directions between job satisfaction and life satisfaction, people's wellbeing has been found to have a greater impact on their level of job satisfaction (Rehman, 2012; Judge & Watanabe, 1993). According to Gallup's *State of the American Workplace* report, even prior to the pandemic, millennials have a greater demand for wellness perks, compared to previous generations; especially during the coronavirus era, employees want their organizations to be partners in their wellbeing. (Brim & Robison, 2020). To test this theory, I included specific questions in my interview guide about the perception that their company cares about their wellbeing, to better understand their work experiences and whether this may have an impact on organizational commitment. My interview guide is located in the appendix for reference.

Most respondents (79%, 11 out of 14) reported that they do believe their organization cares about their wellbeing. This means they trust that the leadership cares about them as people, and value the initiatives and effort they are putting in to show employees they care. Wellbeing initiatives mentioned by my respondents include a monthly gym stipend, relationship manager/coaching, manager support, paid sabbatical/ flex time off, etc. However, this did not appear to be as strong of an indicator of whether a millennial was committed to an organization as I originally anticipated. High levels of individual wellbeing positively impact corporate performance; thriving employees are a clear net positive on the bottom line. One respondent, SW, who plans on staying and investing in his career, expressed that he does genuinely believe his company cares about his wellbeing; and he has both a coach and Relationship Leader (RL) who are both in his corner supporting him. SW shared,

> My RL is awesome. She really cares about me. She wants people to do well, and
> she wants me to be successful. She does everything in her power to help me get

promoted and [she] also helped me give back in the community to volunteer too. And then my coach helps me navigate the firm but also helps outside of work, what makes you happy. It's really nice to have two different sounding boards supporting me.

Having a supportive supervisor, mentor, or coach who cares about their wellbeing positively impacts organizational commitment.

Utilization of Personal Character Strengths

Based on the extensive research on the utilization of strengths and how it positively impacts performance and wellbeing (Page & Carter, 2009), I hypothesized that being in a role that utilized their strengths would have a strong impact on company loyalty. In my research, 43% (6) respondents believe their current role utilizes their strengths; however, 29% (4 respondents) expressed that they don't fully know what their strengths are. This identified an opportunity for further research and possible intervention to look deeper into whether increasing awareness of strengths will have an impact on job satisfaction in addition to company loyalty. Utilization of strengths turned out to not have as much of an impact as I had hypothesized. More tied to organizational commitment than the utilization of strengths, is the internal growth opportunities. These have been specified as the ability to switch teams or department, or how possible it is to be promoted. When discussing internal growth opportunities, 71% of my respondents reported being able to move around the organization or eventually able to get promoted. SW who works for a big consulting firm, expressed having a clear path towards getting promoted. He mentioned,

> They lay everything out in front of you, so you know the steps are of how you're going to get to the next level. You start as an associate, then you get to senior associate, then manager, senior manager, director, and partner.

Those that were in organizations with room to grow or switch around internally reported

feeling more engaged with a stronger willingness to stay at the organization. For

example, VC, who works at a large tech company, can find other jobs on different teams

and her current managers will support her in getting promoted or finding the right role for

her. She mentions,

> I was doing that for a while, probably six months, and then, I went up to get promoted and knew once I get promoted, I'm going to switch to a different team where I can do more of the things that I want to do…We know we're going to be set up for success. My manager one day asked, 'how's your job satisfaction' and I was like, 'it's really low, I really don't like the work that I'm doing.' and he was like, 'Well, what do you want to do?' and I told him I wanted to do more hands on work so he said 'Oh actually this one team is opening up a bunch of roles that sounds like you can do exactly what you're saying you want to do and it should be a really easy transition for you. It's a really easy sell and it would be really easy for me to make happen.

VC's sentiment showcases the research on utilizing strengths in business because it

highlights the importance of nurturing the skills of the individual and supports their

willingness to try new things if they are not content in their current role; this also

maximizes team effectiveness. Teams that operate under strength-based management are

more engaged and in turn are more productive (Asplund, 2009).

Relationships at Work

Millennials need the support from peers and superiors to understand

organizational perspectives and socialize effectively (Naim & Lenka, 2018). Having

good relationships at work with either peers or supervisors were important to all 14

(100%) of my respondents. MP who works as a technical recruiter stated,

> I can honestly say…I actually like every single person that I would have to be in or have to interact with… actually the people have a huge part to do with [wanting to stay]. I mean, for me personally growing my career.

Another respondent, MR, who works as a consultant shared,

> A lot of my co-workers are actually my good friends, my bosses too like we will be able to hang out and not talk about work and have a good time which is something that I really love about it. Just like the relationship between people I think is huge.

Having close friends with similar interests was only important to about 43% of respondents because they enjoyed having personal relationships. Others mentioned that it did not bother them that they did not have close friends at work. Ultimately, having good relationships is important for organizational commitment, however, not a complete deterrent from switching organizations in the long term. AR also mentioned that he has close friends at work, however due to factors discussed earlier, we know he is still not interested in long term organizational commitment:

> I actually have like a lot of close friends from work and we all pretty much interned together as summer associates while we were in graduate school. We come in as a class of 60 and that's a pretty like social experience, more so than developmental but it creates strong bonds and now we use each other for help /as resources.

As discussed, there are many factors that contribute to feeling committed to an organization. Young millennials want to feel engaged and passionate about the type of work that they do, while still having the flexibility and autonomy to work the way they choose. If companies want to stay ahead of potential retention issues, they will want to pay attention to the types of factors that are causing young millennials to look for new opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has also helped to accelerate the normalcy around flexible working schedules, which is most likely here to stay whether employers like it or not.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted during the global Covid-19 pandemic, which has been a pivotal time for the world to pause and rethink about the ways we work. Recent data reveals that 40 million Americans left their jobs voluntarily in 2021 as a record number of employees reevaluated where and how they want to work (Pineda, 2022). While my research focuses specifically on young millennials, it's worth noting the large turnover trend that is happening amongst all generations. According to Ashley Stahl, a career expert with SoFi, "92% of American workers said the pandemic made them feel like life is too short to stay in a job they are not lit up about." Employers across the board are facing such high turnover from burnout that they must start looking at root causes to keep talent (Pineda, 2022, p. 1).

In only three years from now (in 2025), millennials will comprise 75% of the global workforce (Fry, 2018). It was important for me to choose a subset of the American workforce and focus specifically on young millennials to see how their experiences and mindset are leading the way in the workforce. I focused on those who were making individualized decisions about their career; I excluded executives and those with families to eliminate the influence that others may have on their decision to stay or leave an organization. Without those potential cofounding variables, I was intent on capturing individuals' motivations directly relating to work experiences, without any outside factors.

This capstone is particularly relevant and important to me as it took place during my own career transition. I was motivated to leave my job after five years, due to feeling like my strengths were not being utilized and my organization did not prioritize wellbeing like they should. Even without a job lined up, I felt like leaving my previous job to pursue a master's degree was a better choice than staying at a job that I knew was not the right fit for me. I was drawn to study the young millennial corporate experience as a means to navigate my own career. I could not help but wonder, was it just me who felt this way? I did not know it at the time, but I was a part of the mass exodus in the workforce. Thousands of other people came to similar conclusions that they were done putting up with certain demands from employers. According to research on talent optimization, the Predictive Index Report (2022) states, "Workers are tired and frustrated. They're realizing time is their greatest and scarcest asset, and they want to make the most of it. So, they're reassessing why they work—and quitting to find what truly drives them" (Predictive Index, 2022, p. 2). The term Great Resignation validates my own experiences that I was not alone in feeling like I had to leave my current job to find something more fulfilling.

This research was also motivated by my background and interest in positive psychology, the study of human flourishing. Positive Organizational Psychology (POP) emerged from positive psychology which aims to enhance the experience of work (Reiter-Palmon, Illies, & James, 2009, p. 663). The goal of POP is to understand how we can be at our best at work and identify what creates work environments where we feel vigorous and functioning at an optimal level (Souders, 2020). Understanding how people can best work and live is critical to enhancing overall wellbeing and performance at

work, life in general, and the health of our society (Flores & Ojeda, 2009). My goal for this research to shed light on how we can better shape the workforce help young millennials flourish at work.

As POP is routed in a generative approach to expand on what's working well, I wanted to specifically explore the role that employee wellbeing and utilization of strengths at work plays into young millennials' organizational commitment. I personally felt that if my previous organization had enabled me to build upon and utilize my strengths daily and they focused their culture on wellbeing, I would have been loyal to that organization for a longer period of time. My experiences in the workplace helped me shape my hypothesis for my research to address which factors actually impacted a young millennials' willingness to stay with their company. I wanted to test whether those factors similarly impacted other young millennials levels of organizational commitment.

Ultimately, what I found is that an organization who prioritizes wellbeing can look very different to many people. Most did not value the traditional wellness benefits a company might offer, such as a gym stipend or granting numerous sick days. Instead, wellbeing showed up in the form of having a supportive manager, and having career growth opportunities, and especially having the flexibility and autonomy to do one's job to the best of their ability.

The endemic is going to influence these factors as well. Although it's too soon to tell how this will all play out, there is not a one size fits all approach to strengthening organizational commitment. However, the respondents in my research who are the most committed and engaged in their jobs feel passionate about the work they are doing and have enough autonomy and flexibility within their corporate culture. It is no secret that

employee turnover is costly; In 2019, it was estimated that American businesses collectively lose $1 trillion every year due to voluntary turnover, that can be avoidable (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). The cost of replacing just one employee can be as great as two times that employee's annual salary; this means a 100-person organization with an average salary of $50,000 could spend $2.6 million on turnover and replacement fees (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). As the pandemic and technological advances continue to take shape, organizations must adapt and embrace remote and flexible work structures (Mugayar-Baldocchi et al., 2021). Organizations must acknowledge that the changing dynamics of the workplace require them to invest seriously into new physical spaces and adopt hybrid structures; not doing so will inhibit employees balanced productivity, well-being, and a sense of connection in the evolving future of work (Mugayar-Baldocchi et al., 2021).

We have to recognize we are a part of a moving target that is now amplified by the pandemic ebbing and new human-centered initiatives that are markedly changing what our workforce looks like as well as its capabilities. Even though my research is exploratory, organizations are still moving to revise or to create places inclusive to all. Organizations must adapt and their ethos/missions must change.

According to a survey conducted to assess the 100 top companies by Great Place To Work, organizations such as Cisco, Hilton, Salesforce, and Accenture rose to the top of the list by prioritizing employee wellbeing, inclusion, purpose, listening and deep care for their employees, both in and outside the office to counteract the Great Resignation (Great Place To Work, 2022). From Chapter 4 we see specific examples of how sample members consider work life balance and professional commitment. The organizations

that are rated the best place to work understand retention and engagement is about more than financial incentives.

Prior to my interviews, I could not have clearly articulated how different aspects of wellbeing show up in the workplace, but having a boss show they are invested in your development was more influential for strengthening organizational commitment as opposed to utilizing one's strengths.

The current research on strengths in the workplace includes strengths measurements and interventions, which is what my research was missing. Gallup's StrengthsFinder is a tool used to help people identify their strengths, because they recognize people often take their most powerful talents for granted or may be unaware of what their strengths are (Sorenson, 2014). Because most of my respondents did not fully know their strengths, it was hard for them to evaluate whether this was a factor in keeping them in their jobs. Having the opportunity to learn and grow was a more prevalent factor. I believe I could have better evaluated the impact strengths have on one's commitment to their organization by conducting an interventional study. Using a strengths-based intervention would inform respondents of their strengths and better orient to evaluating whether they are utilized in their current role and whether that impacts their commitment to their organization. I chose to interview people with the assumption that people already knew their strengths; if I chose to administer a strengths-identifier test prior to my research, I could have selected those that did know their strengths to see how that impacted organizational commitment.

Furthermore, this research began during the beginning of the pandemic. As the months continued, more research has surfaced about how COVID-19 impacts the

workplace. As I completed my interviews and analysis across the span of multiple months, more research was continuously available to help shape my findings, adding context to the data (Mehta, 2021; Sull et al., 2022; Whitaker et al., 2022). I could not have predicted how factors like a global 2-year pandemic and The Great Resignation (Rosalsky, 2022) would have influenced this research. The pandemic alone has forced many to reevaluate the ways they work and prolonged quarantine affected wellbeing worldwide (Mehta, 2021). Prolonged quarantine was shown to increase levels of loneliness, depression, stress, anxiety, and a decrease in the level of life satisfaction (Ruggieri et al., 2021). There is more of an opportunity to explore how COVID-19 has impacted wellbeing in the workplace and how businesses can continue to prioritize employee wellness once the disease finally ebbs, and a (new) sense of normalcy returns.

My prior experience with qualitative market research also was a benefit when designing my capstone. I was able to use a convenience sampling method, a non-random recruitment tactic to access respondents' convenience to myself as the researcher (Lavrakas, 2008), which allowed me to quickly secure 14 interviews, however, because they were all people in my personal network, my research is comprised of a largely homogeneous sample (93%) of young, white millennials. Future cross-sectional and longitudinal research should explore the differences in experiences with a more diverse sample. Further research would benefit from a longitudinal model, to evaluate the experiences of young millennials over a longer period. This would uncover more data regarding organizational commitment long-term and could highlight industry specific retention trends. Current longitudinal research focuses solely on the impact of employee wellbeing overtime, without the influence of strengths-utilization (Lamb & Kwok, 2016).

Studying young millennials helps shed light on where to focus organizational effort. Over the past six months, one in every five employees quit their jobs (Predictive Index, 2022). Companies that have the best odds of combatting high turnover recognize the value of their people and put them in environments where they thrive (Predictive Index, 2022). Conducting my research during a global pandemic where many were forced to work remotely opened the door for people to start to question whether they were happy with the demands their employer placed on them. In a recent a segment on *60 Minutes,* Chief Economist from Linked, Karin Kimbrough states, "The pandemic brought that moment of reflection for everyone, what do I want to do, what makes my heart sing… If not now, when?" (Whitaker et al., 2022).

Remote work has increased to 48% amongst the entire American workforce since the end of 2021 (Ozimek, 2021). This is a pivotal time to continue to evaluate how workforce trends evolve as mask restrictions end, vaccines have largely become mandated to enable us we reach more of a sense of normalcy post-pandemic. Chief Economist at LinkedIn, Karin Kimbrough reported,

> Pre-pandemic, 1 in 67 jobs were remote. Now it's 1 in 7. Companies realized if they want to attract candidates, they need to meet employees where they are now. Workers are demanding autonomy and flexibility in their work schedules, employers have to respond. If you're an employer that won't work with your employees to be flexible, then you're missing out. You just have to.

Given the impact of the pandemic, companies now face an acute talent shortage (Bendor-Samuel, 2021). With shortage of workers, it increases the power that employees now have; they expect their demands to be met and they are willing to leave jobs to find what they're looking for. The work shortage, however, will not last forever; the ratio of supply and demand will continue to change overtime (Bendor-Samuel, 2021). I am interested to

see how workforce trends continue to evolve and how that ultimately affects recruiting and retention strategies.

   Millennials are not much different than other generations when it comes to what they want in the workplace. Finding meaning and purpose in one's work is something many people strive for and often don't find immediately upon entering the workforce. Utilizing ones' strengths at work is something all generational cohorts can do as well. Researchers have found that you are more likely to have positive experiences at work if you are using at least four of your signature strengths (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). One best practice is for organizations to incorporate the Values In Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths into their onboarding process. The VIA Character assessment focuses on identifying the strengths in other that make the good life possible; the test includes 24-character strengths organized by 6 core virtues valued by moral philosophers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Warren & Donaldson, 2017). Signature strengths are positive traits that a person owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises; positive psychology research suggests that identifying signature strengths and using them in everyday lives can lead to a psychologically fulfilling life (Seligman et al., 2005). Other best practices include: celebrating success by creating processes to recognize and value employee contributions; prioritizing relationships at work by building connections between managers, individual staff and teams; actively talking about organizational goals, values, and culture to help employees connect with meaning and purpose in the work; and finally invest in your people's growth and development to make them feel valued (James Cook University, 2021).

Conclusion

Further research should be done with multiple generations in the workplace to see if these trends are more specific to young millennials or descriptive of those both older and younger. Overall, this capstone was successful in exploring millennial experiences in the workplace and the factors that contribute to organizational commitment. As millennials and younger generations continue to infiltrate the workforce, it's important to understand how the needs and experiences of employees are changing to identify the impact it will have on businesses. This experience opened my eyes to the struggles with organizational commitment even outside of the young millennial cohort. Feeling connected to one's work is something many people strive for their whole lives, and I am committed to helping shape the future of the workforce.

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APPENDIX

MELISSA CRASTNOPOL
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University of Pennsylvania

Oral Consent Form

The Young Millennial Corporate Experience:

Using a Positive Psychology Framework to Impact Future Organizational Culture

Principal Investigator/Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kimberly Torres, Department of Organizational Dynamics
Student Investigator/Graduate Student: Melissa Crastnopol, Department of Organizational Dynamics

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of young millennials in the workplace and what contributes to organizational commitment. I am specifically interested in learning more about 1) your role in your current organization; 2) comparative experiences within previous organizations; 3) your perception of current organization's culture; 4) your relationships at work; 5) engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation; and 6) and your overall connectedness to the organization. This research is connected to requirements for graduation within the Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Kimberly Torres is the faculty advisor and principal investigator for this project.

Procedures: By consenting to be part of this research, you agree to participate in a formal, audio-recorded interview, lasting no more than one hour. This interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time, using Zoom. In light of security concerns related to Zoom, all meeting links will include a password and meeting ID; to prevent possible encroachment, meeting links will only be sent to individuals in private emails. Zoom

meeting links will not be posted on any social media sites or listserv. Respondents will not be able to join the meeting until I sign them in. With respondents' consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. If you prefer that our conversation to not be recorded, I can take notes instead. I have a list of questions that will serve as a guide for our conversation.

Benefits/Risks: This is a research study; therefore, there will be no direct benefits to you from participation in the study. It is hoped that this research may influence and reshape corporate culture in a way that is a better fit for the growing majority generation in the workforce. There are minimal risks to you from taking part in this interview. The risk is accidental disclosure of private information. However, every effort will be made, within the limits of the law, to safeguard the confidentiality of the information you provide. Only your initials or pseudonym of your choice will appear on the interview transcript and no one other than myself, Melissa Crastnopol, will know your true identity. No identifying information related to respondents will be referenced at any point in time throughout the course of this research. Should I plan to continue this study at a later date, the data from this research will be de-identified, and could be stored and distributed for future research.

Withdrawal: You may choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer and are free to terminate the interview at any time. Should you decide to terminate your interview and/or involvement in this study, I will destroy all related information, including written notes, audio transcripts, and consent forms. You will not be linked to my research in any way thereafter.

Confidentiality: No one, except the Student Researcher, Melissa Crastnopol, will know your real identity. You understand that all information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential, except as may be required by law. If any publication results from this research, you will only be identified by your initials or the pseudonym that you choose prior to the interview. All transcriptions, recordings and notes from our conversation will be securely located on my password-protected computer. Your initials or pseudonym is the only identifying information to be included on the transcript and notes. Consent forms will be kept in a secure location; I am the only person who will have access to this information. Because of the confidential nature of the research, there will be no witness to consent procedures; I will administer oral consent.

Subject Rights: If you wish to have further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Director of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania by telephoning 215-898-2614. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction. You have read and understand the consent form. You agree to participate in this research study. Answer affirmatively if you agree to participate in this research study.

University of Pennsylvania
Interview Guide
The Young Millennial Corporate Experience:
Using a Positive Psychology Framework to Impact Future Organizational Culture

Lead in:
       Hello, my name is Melissa Crastnopol, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania. In preparation for my final Capstone project, a course requirement to graduate from the program, I am completing this research study. My research focuses on the experiences of young millennials in the workplace and the factors that contribute to organizational commitment.
I am drawn to this research because of my own personal experiences as a young millennial in corporate America. My experiences have provided me insight to the struggles faced by young millennials as they navigate the workforce as aspiring leaders. I am particularly interested in understanding real world experiences of young millennials in hopes to influence and reshape corporate culture in a way that is a better fit for the growing majority generation in the workforce. I am conducting confidential interviews with young millennials within corporate America to better understand their experiences in the workplace. Having an understanding of the young millennial experience in the workplace can identify opportunities for organizations to reshape their culture to better support the health and wellness of their employees.

To gain a better understanding of your specific experience, I would like to ask you about 1) your role in your current organization; 2) comparative experiences within previous organizations; 3) your perception of your current organization's culture; 4) your relationships at work; 5) engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation; 6) and your overall connectedness to the organization. This interview study is being conducted under the guidance of Dr. Kimberly Torres at the University of Pennsylvania. Your initials or pseudonym of your choice will appear on the interview transcript and no other than myself, Melissa Crastnopol, will know your true identity. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Do you have any questions?

Okay let's start…

Section 1: Employment background

First, I would like to begin with some background on your role and organization.

- Could you please describe your current role –what do you actually do in this role?

    i.   Were you hired into this role or here due to promotion?

   ii.   How long have you been in this role?

- What does a typical workday look like for you these days?

- What are some things you like about this role?

- What are some things you dislike about this role?

- How would you describe your relationship with your manager?

   i.   Can you describe/tell me about your relationship with your direct manager?

   ii.   Probe: How long have you reported to her/him? How much time do you spend interacting with him/her? Etc. How does this relationship impact your feelings about work?

- How do you interact with the rest of the team?

   i.   What are your relationships like with your teammates? Are they similar in age to you?

   ii.   Who else do you interact with on a daily basis? What are those interactions like?

- Do you have any close friends at your organization? (Elaborate from screener question about having a best friend at work) Has this impacted how you feel about your work?

- In your opinion, how has COVID impacted the business/ working environment? –

   i.   How would you describe your current level of engagement/commitment to the company/their position?

   ii.   How, if at all, have your feelings about work changed by being remote full-time?

Section 2: Employee satisfaction & Motivation

I would like to hear a little about how satisfied and motivated you are feeling in this role.

- Could you tell me a little about whether you consider there to be flexibility in your role? Please explain. What does flexibility mean to you?

- Do you feel you have enough freedom to decide how you do your work?

    i. Is the culture very hands on? What kind of autonomy do you have over your schedule?

- Are you/have you experiencing any burnout?

    i. If so, what do you think that's from? How has it affected your motivation? Engagement in your current role as well as future positions you may be looking into.

- What drew you to your current role? Has it lived up to your expectations? (Probe: Why).

- In the recruitment survey, you rated your job satisfaction at a _____ what contributes to this?

- How long do you plan on staying at this organization and why?

    i. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

- Are there any frustrations or pain points you are experiencing within your role or within the organization?

    i. What do you wish was different?

- What does the promotion process look like at your organization?

    i. Does your relationship with your manager affect this?

- Explore culture of organization

- Are employees able to seek out other roles that are more in line with their career development?

- What kinds of leadership opportunities are there at your organization?

  i. Are you seeking these out to participate? Why or why not?

- What kinds of company perks or benefits are there?

  i. Do you use or take advantage of these benefits? Why? Why not?

- How about informal social activities after work? Do you attend these?

  i. Are these activities important for social networking, etc.?

  ii. Do these activities contribute to your engagement at work? If so, how?

  iii. Has COVID impacted your desire or ability to engage in social activities?

- Do you feel like you are a good fit within the organization and the organization is in turn a good fit with your own values as well?

  i. *Is this job/ company in line with your personal beliefs/ purpose?*

- Do you have the opportunity to grow within your organization?

- Do you feel like you have the opportunity to improve your skills?

- How does the organization acknowledge or prioritize employee wellbeing?

- Corporate responsibility programs?

- Diversity & Inclusion?

- Do the needs of the business and the needs of the people hold the same weight within the organization?

Section 3: Meaning & Purpose

Next, I would like to explore whether you find the type of work you are doing

particularly meaningful.

- Do you find your work meaningful? Why not or how so?

- What are the mission and values of the company you work for?

  a. How often are these values lived out in the work day-to-day?

- How important are your company's mission & purpose to you personally?

i. Do you relate to/ believe in the company's overarching mission/purpose?

- Are you doing work that you find personally and professionally

  meaningful?

- Where do you derive satisfaction from? Do you have any side projects that

  you are working on that you're passionate about- gig work or work on the

  side?

Section 4: Exploring Wellbeing & Strengths

Finally, I would like to discuss the use of your personal strengths within your current

role.

- What do you consider your strengths to be; How are you able to use your

  strengths at work?

  a. How often are you able to use your strengths, or what you do best at

  work?

- Does your organization value/prioritize employee wellbeing?

- Do you have the ability to reshape job responsibilities that are more in-line with your strengths?

- Do you have opportunities to move within the organization to do more of what you're interested in?

- How does your organization interpret or accommodate employee needs?

- What are some unique characteristics of the company you work for?

- Do people seem happier and more productive compared to employees in your last organization? (If no prior org. ask if people are happy and productive in general)

- What does good/success at your organization look like?

Section 5: Conclusion & Final Comments

Do you have any final comments or questions about this research?
Thank you for your participation. It is greatly appreciated. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Please feel free to share my contact information with other young millennials working within corporate America who may be interested in participating as well. (Prompt: share my contact info with the respondent as necessary)