Chapter 15
Millennials:
Understanding and Attracting Them to Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The Millennial generation (Gen Y) will comprise half of the global workforce by 2020 and three-fourths of the workforce by 2025. With limited career and growth opportunities in many sectors, many higher education aspirants are looking to reskill themselves in the field of management. The challenge is that this generation has a very different value orientation than that of the previous generation (Gen X). Therefore, understanding the learning attitudes and attributes of this generation could provide useful insights into the strategies that might be effective in the admission selection process. This chapter surveyed 560 students recently admitted to the management institute in and around Delhi region to assess their learning motivations. The results show that the students were very confident in their ability to participate and perform well in the course. They were attracted to the teaching methodologies and networking opportunities. The close interaction between the students, peers, and faculty was one of the main sources of motivation for them to join the institute.

INTRODUCTION

Businesses are instrumental in advancing the global development goals through the way they operate, develop new business models, invest in communities, innovate, and collaborate. Building the next generation of managers and business leaders who can deliver on these goals is an important responsibility of business schools. For this accessing the right talent pool to mold and train remains essential. Generation Y (Gen Y, those born between 1982-2000), or millennials as they are called, have now begun to enter the workforce as well as higher education institutions. It remains very important to this generation to become

a leader or a manager, with the younger millennials keen on coaching and mentoring as part of a leadership role[1]. For many, the limited career and growth opportunities in technical sectors, motivates them to reskill in the field of management for their career progression and better pay packets. A much smaller proportion of the potential students aspire for management education for the sake of entrepreneurship.

With the student mobility and number of education providers increasing, there has been a growing global focus on student selection process. Also, each generation of students appear to bring with them a different set of attitudes and attributes influencing their choice of institution of learning. The challenges for institutions of higher education in this environment are two fold. On the one hand industry estimates are that this generation will comprise half of the global workforce by 2020 and three fourths of the workforce by 2025 thereby making the education of this generation particularly important. On the other hand, the student group entering higher education institutions has a very different value orientation than that of the previous generation, Gen X (Cogin, 2012), thereby requiring a relook at the process followed in selecting from this group of potential students to various higher education courses. Existing research lacks in its guidance on how to deal with this challenge.

Different cognitive as well as non-cognitive selection processes for admissions have been used by various institutions for different programs. While cognitive methods have been very popular in the student selection process, at the same time research on non-cognitive measures in the selection process has yielded positive results. The challenge remains in measurement of these skills.

Academic research suggests that in order to effectively educate this generation of students, tools need to be adapted to their needs and expectations (Sojka and Fish, 2013, Pelton and True, 2004, Kazeroony, 2012, Bernhard 2012, Wissema 2009). Challenges institutions face today are attracting more highly-qualified students and supporting cultural diversity (Veritas Prep, 2009). Also career readiness, long term perspective, digital content and individualized learning present further difficulties (Smith and Sandvik, 2012).

Given the different orientation of the millennials, this chapter intends to investigate and develop a model that meets candidates' requirements in terms of their teaching/learning expectations. As such the traditional marketing strategies may not be sufficient to attract the right applicants. We expect the study to provide valuable guidance to marketing strategists of business schools in creating the effective messaging to be communicated to potential millennial students.

BACKGROUND

One of the distinguishing characteristics' of the millennials is in their use of "technology as a sixth sense" (Alexander and Sysko, 2013). Millennials are considered natives to technology, while members of other generations, irrespective of their proficiency with it, are, at best, viewed as immigrants to technology (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). According to Alexander and Sysko (2013), Gen Y demonstrate two contrasting set of characteristics of hedonism, narcissism, and cavalier work ethic and this generations preference for idealistic values and vision, loyalty towards individual managers and their willingness to work hard. At the same time they expect virtually immediate rewards and recognitions.

Stratton & Gibson (2007) posit that millennial students possess many unique qualities that fall in two categories – ones that are a delight and others that are a challenge for educators and educational institutions. Both set of qualities bear implications for educators at all levels. They find millennials to be motivated and respectful, followers of structured rules who have grown up in protected and sheltered

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