



**The Rise of Freelance Work Among Millennials and its Implication on the  
Business Workforce Management**

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## Abstract

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The current global workforce is dominated by the self-sufficient demographic cohort known as Millennials, and they were summoned by the Industrial Revolution. Millennial employees make a diverse working landscape in terms of habits, attitudes, choices, preferences, and conditions. As technology advances, the corporate world also witnessed changes in working arrangements, including the rise of freelance work. It came as no surprise that millennials were drawn to this phenomenon and how it directly impacts the workforce management of the business organization. The objective of this research was to reveal the reasons for the occurrence of freelance work among millennials, and the effects on workforce management of a firm. Knowing why millennials are attracted to freelance work will allow organizations to fine-tune their workforce management. The study was conducted through understanding information from various sources and the utilization of information channels such as books, journals, previous researches and studies, electronic sources, and other print media outlets. The findings revealed that millennials tend to quit their full-time jobs and choose freelance work because of disengagement from business organizations. Millennials are technologically inclined and they highly value the flexibility at work to ensure work-life balance. These were the determining reasons why millennials find freelance work very fitting as the nature of the work is flexible, non-restrictive, and it can be done remotely through computers and other portable devices. From these results, tips and strategies for better workforce management were suggested to the organizations in response to the ever-changing workforce trends.

**Keywords:** Millennials, Freelance Work, Workforce Management

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**Gilbert Ochavillo**

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Acknowledgement.....	4
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 Research Background.....	6
1.2 Research Problem.....	6
1.3 The objective of the Study .....	7
1.4 Scope of the Study .....	7
1.5 Research Significance .....	7
2 Literature Review.....	8
2.1 Millennials .....	8
2.2 Freelance Work .....	9
2.3 Workforce Management.....	10
3 Past Researches.....	11
4 Findings and Conclusion.....	11
5 Recommendation .....	13
6 References.....	14

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Background**

Nowadays, the classification of people is based on the period of the generation that they reached adulthood. Millennial (Gen Y) is a term being associated with the group of individuals reaching their adulthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and they're born from 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019). It is important to know the role of millennials as they are considered to be the most connected generation since they grew up during the pre- and post-internet era. This means that the usage of emails and social media became popular as a new way to communicate during the generation of millennials (Luttrell & McGrath, 2016).

The majority of the employees in many companies are considered part of the millennial generation. Proactive, tech gurus, risk-takers, and confident at work are just some of their distinguishable characteristics (Pappas, 2016). With the advancement of technology and the occurrence of the internet, comes the evolution of working habits and preferences. Many people, including millennials, have come up with alternative working choices that fit different walks of life and they are taking full advantage of it. This is now what is termed as Freelance Work or Freelance Job. It is one that a person works for themselves instead of having to work under the employment of an organization (Reynolds, 2021). Instead of being called an employee, a person doing freelance work is known as a freelancer.

It may be no surprise that a lot of the freelancers are millennials as the majority of the global workforce are from the said generation. Freelancing has become an option for most people because of many reasons. One of which is being able to arrange your working terms and conditions with own clients. The flexibility of freelance work is just one of the many reasons why millennials are drawn to freelancing (Peters, 2020). The industry of freelance work is continuously growing because of the high demand from different business organizations in various industries including those listed in the Fortune 500 (Schulz, 2021).

### **1.2 Research Problem**

In an article from (Upwork, 2019), millennials will be a part of 58% of the future workforce wherein 50% of them are adopting freelance work. The obstacles of freelancing can be seen from both the perspective of millennials and perspective of the business organizations. Due to the increasing popularity of freelance work over traditional employment, there will inevitably be an effect on the workforce of a certain organization.

There are few reasons why business organizations are adamant about using freelancers as part of their workforce. Issues on the level of understanding, preference to invest in people to make them an asset, and unclear work quality are just some of the seen challenges by the companies (Lee, 2021). Other challenges that the company has according to (HumanResourcesOnline, 2019) in using freelancers, are the management of the turnover, engagement issues, and data privacy.

On the other hand, freelancers including millennials see problems with having regular projects, lack of laws that govern them, and weak employment framework (Roy & Avinash, 2020). Adding to the said challenges is that millennial freelancers must be a jack of all trades to sustain having enough work or the regularity of income. Also, another problem is burning oneself out because of the inability to balance life from work due to many projects (Campana, 2020).

The above-mentioned problems must be addressed for both business organizations and millennial freelancers to come up with favorable terms. As more and more millennials are opting to go freelancing work, employers must recalibrate their steps to cater to the needs of the evolving workforce.

### **1.3 The objective of the Study**

The study seeks to find different reasons behind the increasing preference of millennials in doing freelance work over traditional employment and how companies are being affected. With the findings, this study aims to provide information to organizations that may be helpful when it comes to managing their workforce. The study will look at the side of freelance work that attracts millennials while considered to be repelling for the organizations. There will also be a focus on the side of freelance work that millennials may find repelling while organizations may benefit from. Both perspectives will be investigated by this study and steps for successful management and approaches will be recommended.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

In this time and age, employers are very eager to retain the best talents in their companies as part of their workforce. On the other hand, many millennial employees are now seeking jobs that are not that restrictive with the likes of freelancing. This new phenomenon reveals certain aspects that must be addressed to come up with a resolution that will be favorable for both organizations and millennial freelancers. To successfully conduct this documentary research and address the issue, past articles and researches will be reviewed about the key determining words. Search engines like “Google Books”, “Microsoft Academic”, “Google Scholar”, and “Refseek” will be utilized as well as other relevant websites or electronic sources where previous information can be found. Conducted studies from newspapers, books, magazines, journals, brochures, and other forms of print media as a point of sources will also be stated in the references of this study.

### **1.5 Research Significance**

It is an open secret that employee turnover is a major expense for any organization. In line with this, the research could reveal gains that organizations may obtain when it comes to brushing up their workforce management strategies to entice their best millennial talents. The study could also unveil opportunities that employers may have so they can benefit from millennial freelancers not just about the workforce management but as well as revenue generation. Of course, there may also be information that may be beneficial to millennial

employees that they can take advantage of before they decide whether or not to hop onto freelancing. The outcome of this research may also provide mindfulness on the importance of workforce management, career preferences of millennials, job motivations, and other determining factors that may be beneficial in the future of the working environment.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Millennials**

The term Millennials (Gen Y) is related to the generation of people born from the early '80's to mid-'90's. Originally, the term was referred to the coming of the third millennium. Research reveals that the term was popularized by William Strauss and Neil Howe when they published a book called "*Generations: History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*" (Martin, 2017). Currently, according to (Kuligowski, 2021), the generations present in the workplace are Baby Boomers (1946-1965), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and Generation Z (1996-2020).

To better understand millennials in the workplace, millennial professionals are described by (Kane, 2019) as the generation that's technologically inclined, open for discussion, passionate at work, and yet prone to job-hopping. This is primarily because of their curiosity to trying new things and set trends. Millennials are also known for having a strong opinion and they tend to speak out about the challenges of the present times (Montes, 2017). In the same book, it was also mentioned that habits, behaviors, and attitudes molded by the digital revolution are what millennials are offering to the workplace environment. So, it is vital that these characteristics are acknowledged to keep them engaged, attract, and motivate them.

Millennials are often referred to as the offspring of the Baby Boomers or Generation X, and they have witnessed the advancement of technology, changes in the working environment, and the rise of the freelancing economy (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018). The phenomenon of freelancing among millennials is caused by them wanting to have flexibility. According to (Carson, 2016), many millennials are now quitting their 9-5 jobs to make a way for freelance and be able to give room towards achieving more flexible schedules.

Considering the revealed characteristics of millennial workers, it is no surprise that freelancing is very popular among them. They firmly believe that they can work anytime and anywhere, that doing freelance work will give them a better work-life balance, it will make them more connected, and it will prevent them from burning out (Slade, 2018). Although the choice to do freelancing work may be considered as an opportunity for millennials, traditional organizations may find this phenomenon with great effect on their workforce.

The future of the global workforce will inevitably depend on the millennial generation since baby boomers are slowly exiting the workplace setting. And it is vital to know the characteristics of each generation in the workplace for an organization to be able to manage them well. The majority of the global workforce will be



represented by millennials by the year 2025, which is about 43% (Lettink, 2019). This implies that millennial employees will dominate the working space, and organization leaders must learn how to control this generation effectively.

## **2.2 Freelance Work**

The origin of the word “Freelance” dates back to 1820 when the author Sir Walter Scott had used it in his book which was about the independent mercenary soldier who would provide their skills in exchange for money (Laurinavicius, 2021). Nowadays, the term freelance is often associated with non-exclusive employment to a single company. The term has become popular because of the prevalence of the internet, computers, laptops, and smartphones (Amod, 2019). Because of being free-spirited, there is now a rise in millennial professionals considering their jobs as gigs and they are yielding towards freelancing careers over traditional employment (Younger, 2019). In the same article, there was a mention about the nature of freelance work that attracts employees, including millennials to job changing.

According to (MCnicoll, 2020), 70% of the global freelance world are millennials and Gen Z. These are freelancers below the age of 35, and the said number is composed of 82% from Asia alone. The trend is rising and that makes it more difficult for organizations to adopt and manage. Flexibility and independence are the main reasons many millennial professionals are quitting large companies and would choose to do freelancing jobs instead. The said generation would either start their own companies or take advantage of the availability of the projects that will give them more freedom and never settle into full-time jobs (O’Rahilly, 2017). The Gen Y professionals would rather take control of their schedules by doing freelance jobs, being a contractor, or some of them do consulting projects as well.

The traditional employment with 9 to 5 office settings is no longer enticing for many millennial workers due to its inflexibility. According to (Wootton & Grundy, 2018), working with flexible schedules would provide more flexibility towards the personal life of a certain millennial professional, and contrary to their predecessors, millennials value work-life balance highly. More than just receiving paychecks from their employers, having a healthy work-life balance is the ultimate driving force for millennial professionals to go for jobs that are flexible and non-restrictive.

It is indeed true that the only constant thing on this planet is change. With technological advancement, the workplace is consistently changing and it is now totally different from what it was many years ago. Today, it is no longer just the employees that are not loyal to companies, but many organizations are no longer looking to hire employees that will stay with them until retirement (VanDusen, 2019). There are many benefits that both employers and employees may gain from freelancing arrangements. But the obvious one is that it will allow an individual and organization to expand their horizons during this ever-evolving job market. Now, the main

challenge for organizations is how to manage their workforce since the phenomenon of freelancing among millennials is trending upward.

### **2.3 Workforce Management**

Workforce Management (WFM) is defined as an integrated set of processes that an organization uses to maximize the level of productivity and competency of its employees. The said management includes the forecasting of available staff, determining the requirements, and managing the schedules to ensure all-out productivity (Kojic, 2019). Coming up with a solid workforce management strategy will allow a company to maximize workplace efficiency, well handling legal matters, and it will also allow greater engagement to the employees (Calvello, 2020).

In a report done by (Gallup, 2016), it was revealed that the millennial workers doing full-time jobs are disengaged at work. It was explained in the same report that millennials want to work with clear practice and transparent communication, and they want to find jobs that will lead to a well-lived life. Creating a work-life support program is one of the organizational workforce management strategies to achieve a win-win situation for both the employer and employee that will allow flexible arrangements (Rabenu, 2021).

With the rise in the number of millennials quitting their traditional 9-5 jobs as they seek more flexibility, personal days, and remote work option, the turnover rate for skilled millennials professionals has also skyrocketed which directly affects the workforce of an organization. Research conducted by (Ngotngamwong, 2019) shows that flexibility is one of the main drivers for millennial turnover in the workplace. As part of the workforce management strategy, it was cited in another research by (Ngotngamwong, 2020) that providing more flexible time which leads to better work-life balance will help to keep the millennials from quitting their workplace.

The phenomena of freelancing have been a challenge for many organizations because they find it difficult to retain employees in their company which they can invest in, though, they have now easier access to freelance talents who are highly skilled and on-demand (Elena, 2019). To overcome the challenges that were presented by the freelancing economy, many companies have already been including freelance professionals in their workforce strategy (Gasca, 2020). In an article by Stroup (2016), contingent workforce management programs are now being considered by many organizations in response to the increasing number of freelance workers.

The implementation of Blended Workforce is a workforce management strategy that companies are using to accommodate the growing numbers of skilled freelance millennials workers (Meister, 2017). The said strategy is used in which the workforce is composed of freelancers and full-time employees. In a report done by (French, 2017), many companies have adapted to the new trend wherein they combine freelance workers and full-time employees to promote the idea of the flexible role. In the same report, it was indicated that Virgin group

implemented a program in which staff can leave their work anytime and as long as they want, ensuring that the quality of their work is excellent.

### **3 Past Researches**

According to the research conducted by (Pasko, Maellaro, & Stodnick, 2020), employees from different generational cohorts have different perspectives on four aspects; the security of a job, advancement possibilities, work-life balance, and company leadership. The said research aimed to investigate the work preference of millennials as compared to other generational cohorts.

In a study done by (Kongrer, 2018) which aimed to understand how to work with millennial professionals in the workplace, it was concluded that workplace flexibility can be incorporated into the strategy of an organization when it comes to dealing with millennials. Other revelations of the study in successfully managing millennial professionals were freedom and independence, transparency and trust, and innovative working environment, and a conducive workplace with a little bit of humor. Lastly, it was suggested in the research that what attracts millennials are mentorship programs, digitalization of employment, and a warm, friendly working environment. While in other research conducted by (Barlage, van de Born, & van Witteloostuijn, 2019), it was revealed and concluded that organizations and freelance workers may come up with an engaging structure and knowledge sharing space in the freelancing economy. The research also alluded that to achieve such favorable terms, both organizations and freelancers must define the specific tasks, provide a definite list of skills needed, and allow room for growth and improvement for the freelance workers. It was also suggested that organizations find innovative strategies in hiring freelance workers not just based on their expertise, but instead, give them a learning opportunity.

A blended workforce was studied by (Mahato, Kumar, & Jena, 2021) in response to the growing number of freelance employees. There were propositions like the placement of multifaceted activities for freelance workers along with full-time permanent employees. That business organization can leverage this in the future to address the needs for temporary specified skill-sets and scalable operations while they come up with a great balance through a workforce that is flexible and agile. Another research suggested that a blended workforce can be leveraged by organizations to achieve maximum performance among great talents (Chandra, 2020).

### **4 Findings and Conclusion**

The findings from this research reveal that one of the reasons millennial professionals find freelance work appealing is because of the engagement they get out of it. On the other hand, organizations have the option to implement workforce management strategies to retain and attract their millennial employees. Engagement is found to be an important factor in keeping and managing millennials in the workplace. Attracting and retaining are determined by how engaged employees are in their workplace.

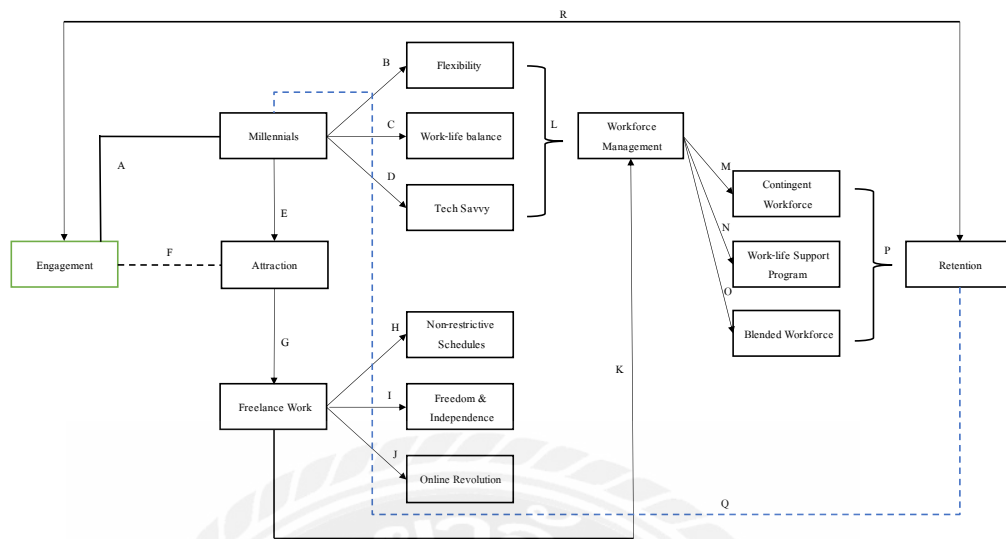


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### 4.1 Elucidation of the Conceptual Framework (Figure 1)

*A) The importance of engagement among millennial professionals (Gallup, 2016), B) Importance of work flexibility for millennials (Carson, 2016), C) Work-life balance as part of the engagement among millennial professionals (Slade, 2018), D) Millennials' proficiency and leveraging on technology to be more engaged while working (Kane, 2019), E) The career attractions or job motivators among millennials professionals (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018), F) The possible relevance of having an engaged working environment in attracting millennial workers (Montes, 2017), G) The attractiveness of freelance work and its influence to millennial generation of employees (Younger, 2019), H) How freelancing provides non-restrictive schedules to millennial workers (O'Rahilly, 2017), I) The freedom that millennials get from doing freelance work and still manage to be engaged (Wootton & Grundy, 2018), J) How online revolution pushed freelancing as a work option to millennials (Amod, 2019), K) Workforce Management Strategies in response to the rise of freelance workers (Gasca, 2020), L) Characteristics of millennial employees that employers must know to effectively manage them as part of their workforce (Kuligowski, 2021), M) The usage of Contingent Workforce Management to adapt to a flexible staffing model (Stroup, 2016), N) The engagement that millennial employees get through Work-life Support Program (Rabenu, 2021), O) How Blended Workforce helps in enticing and engaging millennial professionals (French, 2017), P) Strategizing the workforce management of organizations to retain and attract millennial employees (Meister, 2017), Q) The transformation of the workforce relies on the retention of millennial workers (Elena, 2019), R) Retaining and attracting millennials depend on the engagement they get in a company (Ngotngamwong, 2020).*

## 5 Recommendation

Founded from the information of this research, it is suggested to the organizations that to entice millennials in the workplace, their workforce management should be integrated with strategies that will increase engagement and retention among millennial workers. Organizations may want to start envisioning a workplace environment with both traditional and freelance-type being conjugated together. If not, then companies should ensure that millennial employees will find themselves connected and engaged at work.

Millennial workers are attracted to freelance work because of its non-restrictive schedules, freedom, and its convenience to work on because of the help of technology. Also, millennial professionals value skill growth, learning opportunities, and flexibility more than monetary incentives. Understanding these thoughts and outlooks of millennial employees is one of the steps to help business organizations best engage their millennial workers (Basak, 2020).

Organizations may want to invest more time, effort, and resources in building an engaged working environment that mimics this research's revealed attributes of the freelance economy (Sweeney, Bengue, & Carter, 2019). This is in response to the rise of freelancing work options among millennials, and the growing number of them quitting their 9-5 jobs. This approach will allow companies to be able to eradicate the issues regarding engagement and potentially control turnover intentions. Also, the said approach is one way to ensure that programs that support work-life balance are in place.

Organizations must ensure that the policies and practices will provide ample support to the working habits and values of millennial employees (Cassell, 2017). Employers may also ensure that the engagement problem among millennial professionals is addressed by revisiting and re-calibrating their job descriptions, their employee handbook, policies, and even their contracts. In the same research, it was revealed that millennial workers' retention depends on the affective commitment they get from the employers. Employers may want to consider giving their employees the flexibility they're crying out for. Companies can come up with measures that will provide employees a freelance lifestyle without compromising stability. These are just some of the sample programs that can be considered by business organizations:

- Staff can take a holiday off whenever they wish to as long as the job is done. Quality of work is the main measurement instead of the longevity of the time spent doing the work.
- Alternating the staff workforce to working from home.
- Remote working option and letting the employees work their way as long as the output is qualified.
- Allowing employees to work comfortably either at home, on the road, or in the office.
- Extending holiday leaves or even allowing employees to share their holiday leaves
- Incorporating Blended Workforce

Implementing a blended workforce is another option for organizations to take as part of their workforce management strategy. It is a combination of freelance workers and full-time employees in their workforce. Since the freelance economy will most likely continue to grow, organizations may want to hire freelance employees for alternative or support work. In research conducted by (Vogel, Schaltegger, & Zölch, 2021), some European companies are using a flexible workforce and it was found to benefit the organizations in terms of workload, knowledge gap filling, and idea generation.

More than the strategies, policies, programs, and flexible terms, companies should not forget to ramp up their technological needs should they wish to push in considering an engaged culture in their workplace. Another important aspect to look consider is the styles of the management in the company, the structure of its workforce, and the company behavior in general.

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