

THE FUTURE OF L&D: FROM A MILLENNIAL EXPERT'S PERSPECTIVE

Last year's session of L&D Talks was one of the most inspiring and compelling L&D events of the year. The speakers were highly qualified professionals who brought me refreshing and innovative insights, directly applicable to my current projects and challenges. For that reason, the email invitation to interview one of this year's keynote speakers immediately caught my attention. I saw it as a way to get even more privileged contact and exchange with one of the keynote speakers! And it sure was ...

Crystal Kadakia is a speaker, author, and consultant on millennial's digitally-driven behaviour and workplace transformation and above all...a millennial herself! Her latest book, *The Millennial Myth*, takes on the five most common myths on millennials – that they're lazy, entitled, hand-holding, disloyal and do not respect authority. She explains how leaders can, by seeing these myths from a different angle, leverage millennial behavioral understanding to create modern, engaging, and productive places to work. The book is much more than just another book on millennials. It gives fascinating and refreshing insights on contemporary talent management, the impact of digitalisation and about how learning & development should organize to meet the cross-generational challenges of today. There were a lot of things to discuss in my interview with a dynamic young woman who had a lot of expertise and a clear, fascinating vision on how organizations should evolve to be able to deal with the future challenges!

Many things have been written yet on millennials, why this book?

A couple of years ago when I was working as an L&D manager, I had to design a program for new hires. I noticed all the fuzz about this generation, very often coming from negative perceptions and misinterpretations of the behaviour of millennials, so I started asking questions to myself, such as: "Why do I do what I do?" and "What makes my behaviour so different from the behaviour of baby boomers or generation X-ers?" To raise my self-awareness, I also started doing quite a lot of research on this topic and speaking with everyone, from executives to managers to millennials. I observed a certain controversy between seeing millennials as 'saviours of the world' or consider them as 'lazy and entitled vegetables.' In my book, I explain how neither of these is the case and they can be seen differently, by using what I call the one coin, two-sides approach.

Although there is a story to tell about each generation gap, it seems that when it comes to millennials, this generation gap is even stronger than the previous ones. What makes this difference?

Each generation is influenced by the socioeconomic context they grew up in. For the millennials, the big impact comes from digitalisation. It is the first generation who have been raised with computers and digital technology. They will be the last generation to remember the world without this. This impact is very high, and above all, digitalisation implies globalisation. It is one, big worldwide event and a shift on a global

level. The generational similarities between millennials surpass the cultural levels. There are more similarities between millennials in, let's say the United States and India than between millennials and baby boomers within the US or baby boomers from the US and India.

How can we look differently to the behaviour of millennials and what is the impact on the way their work environment should be organized?

According to the stereotypes, millennials are lazy, entitled, needing to be hand-held, disloyal and have authority issues. However, reframing these stereotypes by understanding the impact of the globalisation and digitalisation, makes it viscerally clear that millennials look at work and career differently than the previous generations. They want to work where, when and how they want, and they give great importance to productivity and flexibility because it is possible today to honour personal productivity style. Before starting to work, as a student, they often have started building experiences by starting their own companies or managing their public social profiles. When they arrive on the labour market, they are much more entrepreneurial, which might give the impression of being entitled. They are much more driven by purpose and passion than by their pay check. Learning is key, which declares the importance of persistent and immediate feedback for millennials. Traditional



performance review approaches no longer meet their needs. Millennials are compelled to have an impact, want to make a difference, and continuously gain new skills to be able to be part of something bigger and participate in a modern world where change is the new constant.

How should Learning & Development be organized to meet the needs and expectations of the millennials?

Today, L&D often works in a very narrow and structured way. We analyse learning needs but primarily focus on using the tools and methods we have always used. But this does not always deliver the best learning results. Today, because of technology, L&D can take into account the differences in learning style and learning context. L&D should offer a qualified, variety of learning choices from all the available technologies, while still giving employees the choice of how they want to learn, given their situational need and learning style. L&D should shift from controlling and creating content towards setting up an environment where the material is crowd-sourced, in order involve associates and to use resources efficiently. L&D professionals should look at when, where and how people learn and how learning can be provided there. The focus of L&D shifts from organizing training towards facilitating learning. Learning has to come out of the classroom and focus on organization wide capability building instead. I co-lead a workshop for the Association for Talent Development, which I will share a bite-size piece of during L&D Talks. In this workshop, we teach the process for how L&D should be thinking throughout each phase of developing a learning program, or Learning Cluster as we call it. These Learning Clusters provide learning opportunities for employees in three contexts: social, immediate, and formal.

What is the impact of this new way of organizing learning & development on the competencies and role of L&D professionals?

L&D professionals should be much more concentrated on the learner and building expertise in new learning methods. And above all, they should have a strong connection with Information Technology to facilitate learning moments that happen out of the classroom, and build the social network together. L&D professionals should be more strongly connected with the business and deeply understand the challenges of the business. They have to show the impact of the learning activities and teach the leadership how to make learning happen as a part of the organizational culture. L&D needs to play an active, visible role in creating Learning Organizations and shift the measures from classroom attendance to closed performance gaps. L&D managers need to realize their role is often about teaching leadership that it isn't about training as a low priority, but a culture of learning as a competitive advantage.

Coming to the topic of leadership, how would you describe the adequate leadership style that creates the workplace millennials need?

Well, that's what my next book will be about because I do not only want to explain the behaviour of millennials to managers and leaders, I also want to help managers create effective future workplaces. The first and foremost is a leadership style that courageously accepts that digital is remapping behaviour, that this is not a generational problem. A style that is about relearning things you thought you knew and remaining flexible to the future is imperative. Secondly, I strongly believe in a two-way communication. Today's managers should be able to apply a



coaching attitude towards millennials. They should be able to provide perspective on what millennials and Gen Z may need help with because they are digital natives and may not remember a time without the challenges of the constant connection. They may need to help millennials to think through the present moment and give them a broader perspective and create more 'peace' in the way they look at their careers. Managers should be able to admit that as a manager, you also do not know all the answers. This means that strong leadership where the leader owns the truth and never makes a mistake will not match with the current mentality of millennials. It's already apparent via social media and the Internet that everyone is human. People who pretend to be infallible can appear untrustworthy. Leaders need to be transparent and be able to show themselves from their vulnerable side. This is not always in line with the strong performance culture still in place in a lot of organisations.

Why are so many organisations struggling with putting this new leadership style in place, especially creating a constructive feedback culture, seems very difficult?

We are strongly influenced by our old way of looking at performance management and always see a strong link between feedback and performance reviews and rankings. Millennials want to be sure to provide relevant contributions all the time and need immediate feedback to adapt and experiment. Once a year performance reviews are not enough. Not because they are millennial, but because they know change is the new constant. That is the world they grew up in. Unfortunately, a lot of managers still consider the need for immediate feedback as a sign of weakness and uncertainty. The old system with linear career paths and annual performance reviews does not work for millennials. A performance review, if still organized, should rather be a summary of the feedback that has been given the last months and the way the associate has integrated this in his way of working. Every moment of feedback is a moment of performance review and a moment of learning! If they have learned and adapted, they are high performers. It is the people who rarely adapt that organizations should be concerned about!

Crystal's book can be found on Amazon and you can learn more about her work at www.invaticonsulting.com. ■



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