



Insights into Millennial Employee-Manager Relationships in Thailand: A Comparative Case Study

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Abstract

While significant external concerns, such as COVID-19 and globalisation, have posed challenges to organisations worldwide, the generational gap as a component of diversity management is one of the most pressing issues. Managing relationships between people of different ages, particularly between Millennials and their managers, appears especially challenging. Only proactive organisations can withstand such dynamic competition, while those that fail to apply effective processes and have sufficient awareness of their human resources may lose their capability to compete, particularly during and post the pandemic era. Consequently, the purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate and explore the relationship between these cohorts of two different companies in Thailand in order to gain an understanding of the current situation and identify potential implications for future practises. Ten participants from both companies were selected to participate in one-on-one sessions. Although the research findings eventually demonstrate that the relationship between Millennials and their superiors is healthier in one organisation than in another, the notion of millennial management in Thailand requires further development and implementation. Key concerns are that their supervisors are ineffective leaders who fail to understand the Millennial generation. Potential factors such as business model, and corporate culture are also likely to influence a level of relationships and therefore should be investigated further.

Keywords: *Millennials, Managers, Leadership, Dyadic relationship, Employee relationships*

1. Introduction

The current global COVID-19 epidemic has caused several organisational adjustments, including reorganising human resource management processes, layoffs, company transformation, and a high employee turnover rate (Boiral, Brotherton, Rivaud, & Guillaumie, 2021). Due to the fact that managing workforce diversity, an important but complex issue for contemporary organisations, is a component of human resource practises (Kharroubi, 2021), businesses are obligated to advantageously intensify people management practises to mitigate and enable benefits of a challenge (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), particularly during and after the pandemic era.

Of interest, the generational gap between employees seems to be one of the most important aspects of managing diversity in organisations. In other words, personnel of varying ages are constantly present in most organisations. The difference in age and the development of diverse experience according to their generations (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2018) have a significant impact on their values, distinctive qualities, and work attitudes (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). As diversity in organisations can be treated from a variety of perspectives, employers may consequently need to initiate an effective procedure by examining the relationship health of their diverse workforce.

According to Baker Rosa and Hastings (2018), Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials are currently active cohorts in operating businesses, with Millennials, the youngest generation, comprising those born between 1982 and the early 2000s, making up the majority of the workforce and being seen as the generation most likely to have a significant influence on the growth of businesses (Anderson, A. Buchko, & J. Buchko, 2016). Researchers have found the Millennial generation is fundamentally different from its predecessors due to their distinctive components, including qualities and characteristics such as technology literacy (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2018), curiosity, and enthusiasm (Hanggarawati & Kismono, 2022). Furthermore, Millennials have a high sense of self-esteem, a critical outlook, and an emphasis on personal growth (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010; Cooke, Saini, & Wang, 2014). This generation

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furthermore is adaptable and welcoming to difficulties (Bartczak, & Szymankowska, 2019). The Millennial generation is also known for its intense work ethic and desire to make a difference (Kodagoda, & Wijeratne, 2021).

Although these qualities exhibit positive competencies, Millennials also possess unfavourable characteristics, including inadequate communication and narcissism (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2018), and tend to create challenges for organisations (Martin, 2005; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). In other words, Millennials are typically depicted as "needy" and "high maintenance," according to Thompson and Gregory (2012, p. 240). This generation, particularly at work, requires effective leaders to guide and manage them. To put it another way, this generation desires proactive activities and encouragement to fulfill their expectation. Furthermore, Martin (2005) stated that Millennials need clear alignment and supervision from the managers. As a result, successful leadership and management are critical for achieving their goals, such as job progression and self-development (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Besides, according to Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010), this group necessitates inclusive leadership from their supervisors. In other words, their supervisors should engage them in decision-making, provide them autonomy, and coach them. Giving compliments, direction (Thompson & Gregory, 2012), and constructive criticism of their performance (Kodagoda & Wijeratne, 2021) must also be applied to increase their motivation for self-development.

Consequently, Millennials' leaders must properly handle and manage both this generation's beneficial and negative implications. Leadership, therefore, is a crucial function that should be reinforced in all organisations to guarantee productive people management and growth, particularly among this cohort (Northouse, 2016). However, according to Northouse (2016), owing to the rapid global effects and generational disparities, a complete exploration of the idea of leadership remains difficult and complex. New leadership abilities and qualities are required to address the challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly generational development. To increase employee job performance (Hao, He & Long, 2017), empowerment is one of the growing leadership styles that is crucial in corporate situations (Hieu, 2020). The research of Hieu (2020) presented some ideas for empowering individuals. Leaders should exchange access to information, expertise, and authority in order to inspire and improve employee performance, for example. Furthermore, development opportunities are expected to promote employee engagement. Leaders with authority also need to provide followers with support, acknowledgment, and opportunity to enhance their capabilities. As underpinned by Demirci and Erbas (2010), it is still difficult to analyse the implications of empowerment in organisations, despite the fact that empowerment is touted as the key to fostering effective leadership skills. Therefore, businesses must be aware of this.

Mitllari and Kasimati (2018) highlighted that managers from earlier generations and the same group as the younger generation should understand the peculiarities of Millennials. In order to reap organisational advantages from this generation's characteristics, the study also indicated that young workers should receive greater care from their managers. In actuality, however, the Millennial workforce typically encounters the opposite scenario due to the actions of its supervisors. Notably, many supervisors have an unfavourable opinion of Millennials or a limited understanding of this young group (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2018). It could be due to the negative traits of Millennials or an inability to recognise their true needs. This might result in undesired outcomes such as an absence of dedication to the profession, relationship problems, and a high percentage of turnover (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017; Bartczak, & Szymankowska, 2019).

Aside from COVID-19 and a disruption like globalisation, managing a diversity of ages should, therefore, become obligatory because it can improve the production and efficiency of an organisation (Inegbedion et al., 2020). It is projected that by the year 2030, Millennials will make up a significant proportion of the Thai labour force (Ruangkanjanases & Chenin, 2019). Although Millennials have started to take control of many businesses, especially fast developing businesses, they have been found to be challenging to manage (Ngotngamwong, 2019). The turnover issue of Millennials is one of the challenges facing companies (Ngotngamwong, 2019). Ngotngamwong (2019) found that several factors, including remuneration, relationships with superiors, and company ethos, were the most important for Thai Millennials when deciding to leave their positions. However, one of the most pressing problems, according to the results of the research, seems to be tension between younger and older employees and their superiors



(Ngotngamwong, 2019). Of interest, there appears to be a dearth of research on how Millennials in Thailand view the leadership of their superiors, despite the fact that Millennials have already been investigated from a variety of perspectives. This study gap therefore inspires the intention to investigate the Millennial-supervisor relationships in organisations.

2. Objectives

- 1) To conduct research on the nature of the relationship that exists between Millennial employees and the management in order to develop an insightful understanding of this relationship.
- 2) To evaluate managers' leadership and their understanding of Millennials' unique qualities, from the perspective of Millennials, to identify gaps that may hinder the establishment of healthy intergenerational relationships.
- 3) To provide recommendations for the implementation of a Millennial management system, as a guideline, for corporations to enhance their effectiveness in managing Millennial workforce.

2.1 Research Questions

- 1) Do Millennials feel like they are being led effectively by their superiors?
- 2) To what extent are Millennials distinguished from other generations by their generation-specific characteristics?
- 3) How can the relationship between Millennial employees and older supervisors be improved?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Methodology

The purpose of the research of case studies was to promote awareness of the Millennial generation via an investigation of their interactions with superiors, as well as to improve the effectiveness of organisations' strategy in the midst of a recurring issue, notably COVID-19. Given the advantages of qualitative methods, this study utilised the qualitative approach with a narrative research methodology as the primary strategy to gather and interpret insightful data to achieve the research objectives. Particularly, the semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth information because of the method's suitability for the objectives, which are to investigate and analyse the dyadic relationship between Millennials and managers. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX 7 Questionnaire) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) was accordingly adopted as a guideline to design interview questions for eliciting thoughts pertaining to the research topics as it allowed the researcher to delve deeply into participants' opinions of their connections with their leaders. To collect data for this study, two private Thai organisations that were deemed suitable for the research objectives, and which will be further justified in the following section, were selected as prospective sample groups. Nevertheless, due to the epidemic and travel limitations, the interviews were performed remotely through Zoom Meeting and lasted no more than one hour. According to the narrative approach, after performing the interview, the acquired data were categorised and processed into a basic structure of discussion-relevant themes to narrate the circumstances and incorporate into the finding of each study question. The data processing, however, was performed manually because of a limited number of participants that fit the study's criteria.

3.2 Research Sampling

Two private companies in Thailand serve as case studies for this research. The first case study is centred on a newly established company that uses cutting-edge technology to provide a comprehensive e-commerce platform to its customers. There are several reasons to select this company. To begin, the majority of this company's employees is in the Millennial generation. This covers managers and operating employees. Second, the working culture is fast-paced, necessitating the use of extraordinary abilities in order to meet objectives and exceed the competition. Third, this organisation values enabling empowerment, encouraging its people to carry out their regular jobs with authority. All in all, this firm is likely to manage its people with effective human resource approaches.



Because of its dominant position in the fast-moving consumer products sector, Company B, a well-known international corporation with a branch in Thailand, was also considered in this research. While not quite as dynamic as company A's, this firm's work culture is adaptable enough to meet the demands of a global economy, including changes in customer preferences and technology development. The corporation has made an effort to be more accessible to millennials, despite the fact that the vast majority of its human resources, notably senior management, are older and more experienced to appropriately target primarily mature people. The corporation has recruited recent graduates into its Management Trainee programme as a brand-new key strategic goal, with the expectation that these individuals could become the company's top executives.

Table 1 Participants' Information

Participant	Age	Business	Position	Service Year
1	27	A	Human Resource Operations	4
2	26	A	Logistics	2
3	27	A	Human Resource Planning	3
4	26	A	Training and Development	2
5	24	A	Project Manager	2
6	28	A	Quality Assurance Officer	3
7	26	A	Talent Acquisition Officer	3
8	24	B	Business Intelligence Officer	2
9	24	B	Planner	2
10	28	B	Logistics Planner	2

Source: Interview data

Based on the following criteria (Table 1), ten participants, as a purposive sampling, were recruited from the two organisations to participate in this study:

- 1) Participants were within the Millennial generation's age range, born between 1982 and the early 2000s;
- 2) Participants have worked in the company for more than six months to ensure they have sufficient experience and can provide meaningful information;
- 3) Participants come from diverse teams to represent diverse perspectives;
- 4) As gender is not the primary focus of this research, participants can be of either gender.

4. Results and Discussion

Information was collected from structured interview questions in the areas of generation and leadership as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2 A Demonstration of Interview Questions for Each Research Question

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. Do Millennials feel they are being led effectively by their superiors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about the leadership of your superior(s)? • Have you ever been grateful for what your superior(s) has done for you? • How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor(s)?
2. To what extent are Millennials distinguished from other generations by their generation-specific characteristics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you, as a Millennial, able to contribute to your organisation? • Have you ever felt acknowledged or recognised by your superior(s) as a member of the Millennial generation? • Do you think your superior(s) fully recognise and appreciate your abilities?



Research Questions	Interview Questions
3. How can the relationship between Millennial employees and older supervisors be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you recall an instance when you disputed with a higher-up? • Has generational difference ever caused you problems when dealing with your superior(s)? • In what ways do you feel that your relationship with your superior(s) might be improved?

Source: Interview data

4.1 Finding of Research Question 1: Leadership Satisfaction

'Do Millennials feel like they are being effectively led by their superiors?' is the first research question that seeks to understand Millennials' perceptions of their superiors. According to the literature, effective leaders encourage and empower their teams to achieve common objectives (Newstrom, 2015). Leadership must fulfil the demands of followers, particularly Millennials, in order to achieve high levels of satisfaction as Millennials are considered a demanding generation that requires particular treatment. Additionally, they want their employers to meet the demands by giving them complex tasks, recognition, and offering support and confidence to foster both personal and professional advancement (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). As a result, leaders with a deep understanding of Millennials' expectations are more likely to achieve significant levels of satisfaction from this cohort.

Three interview questions were considered to answer this research question. According to the results from the interviews, the majority of company A was pleased with their manager's leadership. They stated that the supervisors' actions surpassed their wishes and expectations. Furthermore, the majority of them credited a portion of their success to the managers' exceptional leadership characteristics, such as empowerment, mentorship, and teamwork. Those, resembling a minority of them, who believed the leaders failed to display leadership and impress them, on the other hand, highlighted a reason for the manager's failure to promote discussions about personal career prospects.

All respondents from business B considered that their managers were accommodating to a certain degree. The Millennials were provided total autonomy, allowing them to execute difficult jobs autonomously. The participants' displeasure, on the other hand, is a result of the leaders' absence of spontaneous and essential activities to meet their immediate assistance needs, such as mentorship or the ability to handle people management-related issues. During the interview, the participants also noted that the assistance was provided in accordance with a management position's minimal or formal requirements, but that no inspirational and genuine connections were made. Consequently, the respondents viewed their relationships as neutral.

By comparison, it seems that Millennials at company A are more delighted with their superiors' leadership.

4.2 Finding of Research Question 2: Acceptance of the Millennial Generation

The second question, *"To what extent are Millennials distinguished from other generations by their generation-specific characteristics?"*, determines whether or not the company management recognises the Millennial generation. Despite being complex and unpleasant (Thompson & Gregory, 2012), the Millennial generation features a variety of beneficial traits that are distinct from those of prior generations (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2018; Hanggarawati & Kismono, 2022). Apart from the typical characteristics of this cohort acquired from the West, Millennials in Thailand, likewise, desire to progress their professions through practical learning at work (Amornvivat et al., 2014). Therefore, corporations with leaders that ignore this generation's assets may miss out on advantageous possibilities and experience unsettling results (Bartczak & Szymankowska, 2019).

The results of the interviews suggest that the superiors of the interviewees from both businesses had different attitudes toward this generation. All participants at business A believed that their management was familiar with the Millennial generation. However, not all managers were capable of seeing their full potential. In other words, while the majority of respondents stated that their supervisors proactively displayed



knowledge of Millennials as well as their unique potential and desire, one respondent had a moderate belief that her manager failed to see her genuine potential.

All participants from corporation B, on the other hand, claimed that while their superiors were aware of their performance, they never acknowledged the Millennial generation. This middle ground potentially produces a generational divide, especially when Millennials' aspirations for mentorship (Martin, 2005), gratitude, and professional advancement are not acknowledged (Bartczak & Szymankowska, 2019).

According to the results of this research question based on three pertinent interview questions, managers at business A are likely to recognise the Millennial generation more than those at company B.

4.3 Finding of Research Question 3: Approaches to Improving Dyadic Relationship

Despite the fact that disparities, mainly between Millennials and their managers, are likely to cause disturbing results, e.g. high turnover and conflict (Ngotngamwong, 2019; Bartczak, & Szymankowsky, 2019), these findings provide an alternative perspective. The responses to the final question indicate that not all Millennials have encountered difficult situations, such as age-related conflicts with superiors. In other words, the majority of individuals in company A had never experienced such problems with their superiors. Despite this, Millennials at business B expressed difficulties in this area.

As per Thompson and Gregory (2012), Millennials demand proper leadership, including mentorship, empowerment, thoughtful strategy, and progressive enhancement, for their professional development. Self-improvement is another main objective that Millennials, particularly Thai Millennials, are prone to have (Amornvivat et al., 2014). Millennials also expect to get compliments and acknowledgement of their efforts and success (Kodagoda & Wijeratne, 2021). Furthermore, superiors, according to Graen and Schiemann (2013), are expected to adjust their methods of leadership in order to create a supportive working atmosphere for this generation. Because some participants reported unfavourable manager behaviours that contradicted these principles, effective management therefore must be formed to effectively manage this generation for its benefits while avoiding undesirable outcomes (Bartczak & Szymankowska, 2019).

Participants offered useful strategies for improving their relationships with supervisors. Notably, the results of this investigation's reaction were compatible with the literature (e.g. Thompson & Gregory, 2012; Ngotngamwong, 2019; Bartczak & Szymankowska, 2019). This cohort's aspiration includes self-development and successful leadership execution. In other words, effective development programmes for Millennials' advancement and successful Millennial leadership were emphasised.

5. Conclusion

Aside from the fact that Amornvivat et al. (2014) stated that several Thai businesses have recognised this unique cohort and begun implementing strategies to recruit and employ Millennial candidates, the research findings have provided additional insight into the current relationships within two organisations. According to a sampling company's assessment, Millennial management in Thailand still seems to be vague. In other words, both firms' Millennials are still dealing with issues with their managers, based on the study's sub-areas. Table 3 summarises the display of the findings of each research question.

Table 3 Summary of the Research Results

Business	RQ1. Do Millennials feel like they are being led effectively by their superiors?	RQ2. To what extent are Millennials distinguished from other generations by their generation-specific characteristics?	RQ3. How can the relationship between Millennial employees and older supervisors be improved?
A	>	>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving priority to Millennials' growth strategies; • Putting effective leadership tactics into action.
B	<	<	

Source: Interview data. Note: > = Overall response is more positive. & < = Overall response is less positive.



The finding of the earliest research question revealed that business A participants were more delighted with the superiors' leadership than their counterparts in the research. This was due to the supervisors' additional support and pleasant environment. In other words, participants from business A were more likely to develop better connections with their supervisors as a result of preferential treatment outside of the formal contract, e.g. a desire to enhance Millennials in terms of skills and career aspirations. Company A also supplied more pleasing answers in response to the second research question. In other words, supervisors at firm A were more likely to recognise the uniqueness of Millennial generation than supervisors at company B. The final research question was initially explored by assessing Millennials' dissatisfaction and misalignment with the leaders, and as a consequence, participants offered initiatives to improve the quality of the connection. The data suggest that Millennials' overall experience with leaders in business A seems to be more consistent than in the business B due to the leaders' improved knowledge of Millennials, which reduced generational conflicts. Finally, proposals for enhancing such connection were divided into two primary themes: collaboration in personal growth and leadership development.

5.1 Implications of Influencing Factors on the Dyadic Relationships

Despite the fact that both organisations in this research are quite strong in their respective markets in Thailand, the research's findings indicate that there were substantial variations in their human resource management practices, particularly for Millennials. Interestingly, the Millennials at business A were more likely than those at company B to have positive relationships with their superiors. Although several causal factors related to the relationship, particularly leadership issues, have been analysed in the preceding sections, the explanations as to why Millennials in business B appear to possess more difficulties with their superiors are beyond the scope of this research.

As per Shweta Jha and Srirang Jha (2013), similarities in leaders' and subordinates' beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics might affect the quality of their relationships. This might therefore lead to the conclusion that the corporate characteristics and attributes of the individuals in an organisation have also significantly contributed to this discrepancy. Comparatively, business A is a fairly new organisation with almost a decade of expertise in e-commerce operations, whereas company B is more conventional and quite well-established with substantial competitiveness in the market. This also suggests that the majority of firm A's senior executives, likely belong to the Millennial generation, whereas those at business B may be from prior generations or the early stages of the Millennial generation. This setting is likely to be beneficial for firm A's management of Millennials, as executives within or slightly above the Millennial generation, in addition to the implementation of appropriate procedures, have no or the smallest generational gap. They may also establish connections with their workers by having an in-depth comprehension of their employees' demands and managing their subordinates with similar work values. Consequently, the management will often have a deeper relationship with their employees, foster a friendly and supportive work atmosphere, and easily address generational difficulties (Thompson & Gregory, 2012; Shweta Jha & Srirang Jha, 2013). In contrast, with such conditions, business B's executives may require more time to explore and implement new management strategies suitable for Millennials, while preserving the firm's traditional core values, due to the likelihood of age discrepancy and the company's legacy. This will therefore be difficult for managers and Millennials to get along.

Furthermore, as organisational models affect workplace culture and managerial structure (Gibbons & Karmowska, 2020), this implies that the diverse qualities of these firms affect working styles and staff behaviour patterns, including how they interact with customers (Tsai, 2011). For instance, whereas the target customers of business A vary from lower to upper socioeconomic classes, the majority of firm B's techniques are geared toward older clients. Accordingly, working for business B is likely to necessitate a more rigid and consistent approach to interacting with such group of consumers, which may be the norm for leaders of earlier generations but not for Millennials who prefer dynamic ways and likely lack strong communication skills (Bartczak & Szymankowska, 2019). This is expected to result in generational tensions between firm B's managers and employees, which can negatively affect the quality of relationships.



To corroborate these hypotheses in future research, however, it will be necessary to collect further information taking into account the aspects outlined above.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Researchers

In this part, suggestions for outcomes with a broad perspective are provided. The first recommendation for enhancing the quality of this study may be to expand the number of eligible respondents and investigate alternative selection criteria. This could allow an evaluation of additional elements, such as gender, and motives, that influence the research findings. In addition, the selection of businesses for prospective studies shall be redefined. Companies from more diverse industries, and cultures may provide varying results. The inclusion of a variety of criteria might give a more thorough comparison, which potentially leads to more introspective judgements and bolster the representation of the Millennial generation.

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