

# Losing Talent on Day One: Onboarding Millennial Employees in Health Care Organizations

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## Abstract

This action research study explores millennials' experiences with onboarding programs in their health care organizations. Findings suggest that current onboarding programs are generally inadequate and may have a negative effect on retention. Health care organizations appear to be behind the curve regarding onboarding trends. Findings also suggest a potential concern of poor culture where onboarding is inadequate. Further, a quasi-appreciative inquiry approach provides indication of what health care organizations might consider including in onboarding programs.

*Keywords:* Employee onboarding, millennials, healthcare organizations, and employee retention

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“Although I was originally *über*-excited about the job, and even though it took me five months to find the right position, by the end of my first day there, I knew instead of celebrating that evening, I’d begin my hunt for a new job,” said a member of the study regarding her first Fortune 50 corporate position. “I was shocked that there was no pre-boarding...none, like zero,” she continued as she explained her experience with her organization’s employee onboarding, “but I was more shocked at the onboarding process. Worst I’ve ever seen and I’m in HR. They lost me on day one,” she concluded (Research Participant 11, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

At a time when corporations are trying to save money by outsourcing employee orientations and onboarding activities, this quote serves as a solid representation of the connections millennials are making between corporate onboarding and the work experiences they can expect during their tenure.

As the United States continues to recover from economic recession, the transition of generational talent is taking place simultaneously, resulting not just in diverse skill sets, but also in different ways of thinking about and interpreting work and job expectations (Pike, 2014). Part of the transition in this economic recovery is a shift in the work force. Millennials have surpassed baby boomers regarding generation population, and they are flooding the labor market, with more than a million millennials entering the workforce annually (Petrucci, 2017). It is expected that approximately 40 percent of the United States workforce across industries will be millennials by 2020 (Lykins & Pace, 2013), and they have very different expectations of their employers than any previous generation (Petrucci, 2017), and a different perspective on organizational loyalty.

Some of the key contributors to employee job satisfaction and retention include the way employees are brought in, introduced, trained, and acculturated into an organization. The purpose of this paper, in the face of these changing times in the U.S. workforce, is to examine the experiences and to better understand the expectations of millennial health care workers as it pertains to their organizations’ employee onboarding programs.

## **On Millennials and the Changing Work Force**

Based on socio-cultural learning theory regarding thinking, people are what they have been exposed to. Thus, having grown up in a period where doing is more important than knowing, where learning more closely resembles computer games than logic, and where technology is a way of life rather than a tool, driving around-the-clock connectivity, it is no shock that millennials' brains are wired differently with different thinking patterns compared to previous generations (Marangione, 2017; Weinbaum, Richard, & Jenny, 2016). Likewise, this generation approaches learning and employment based on different values.

Despite commonly heard grumbling and stereotypes regarding millennial work ethics and capabilities, the research shows that the majority believes that this generation, as a result of their upbringing with technology and ease of information access, is "wired" differently from older generations, with their brains configured for multitasking (Anderson & Rainie, 2012). Furthermore, they do not suffer the numerous notable cognitive shortcomings of previous generations as they cycle quickly through personal and work-related tasks. This results in more adept and agile learning and gathering of information, partially because of skills related to effectively searching and accessing collective intelligence via emerging technologies that millennials have grown up with. These learning behaviors and cognition generally produce positive outcomes (Anderson & Rainie, 2012), showing the aptitude and high yield potential of the growing millennial workforce.

The twenty-first century, and the current period of economic recovery, brings with it the introduction of increased numbers from this generation into the workforce, and in a time of profound economic, demographic, social, and technological upheavals, on a global level, that critically impact society and organizations. The change is inherent and organizations must have strategies to deal with these changes—strategies that can address behavioral change, skill development, integration, and organizational change (Marangione, 2017), including understanding the needs and values of this young generation of talent. Thus, as the nation continues to recover from recession, high-performing, talented employees

and prospects are placing higher emphasis on job satisfaction and organization-person fit (Pike, 2014). While organizations still need to recruit the best and brightest, the rapid change in today's industrial environment does not permit companies the luxury of just letting their employees settle in and figure things out, nor are the new employees looking for that type of environment. They want to be active, productive, and involved (Ferri-Reed, 2013). They are community-conscious, team-oriented, optimistic, open to change, and adept at technology (Marangione, 2017). Organizations across healthcare industries, among others, must thoroughly examine how they will authentically assess and develop learning (Marangione, 2017) to meet the learning styles and needs of this young generation of professionals. Two means of ensuring thriving and surviving of this talent pool in this changing and challenging environment arise through essential human resources (HR) functions within the traditional talent acquisition organization. These two key functions are candidate onboarding and talent retention. Onboarding programs have emerged as the means by which organizations can get new employees on board and productive quickly, as well as a means of measuring organizational fit (Ferri-Reed, 2013; Pike, 2014).

## **Employee Onboarding**

Finding the right talent for an organization is critical, so companies and their HR departments invest considerable resources in finding, recruiting, hiring, and relocating talent, but for some reason do not spend a similar effort at making sure these employees are properly onboarded. As a result, talented new-hires with tremendous promise sometimes exit their new organizations within months (Krasman, 2015), and many decide to do so after spending only days with the company.

During the first few days, weeks, or months in new positions, employees are introduced and oriented to their new companies through onboarding programs. Onboarding is a critical process in talent management and is vital for high levels of performance, job satisfaction, and reduction of staff turnover (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). The overriding goal of employee onboarding is to introduce employees to the organization, its people, and to orient them on "how things are done around here."

The hope is that this approach instills pride in their new affiliation (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). The newly hired colleague views the new employer in much the same way as a new relationship—cautious, optimistic and in a state of hyper-observation. It is this early period of the employer-employee relationships that organizations impart first impressions on new employees. If done the right way, onboarding can lead to happy and productive employees (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). It should be a formal, established, and orderly process that develops well past the first week, and often up to a year from arrival.

Nevertheless, not all onboarding programs are equal. In fact, they differ drastically from company to company, and many HR departments, managers, and practitioners do not understand what onboarding should entail (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). Instead of welcoming and fostering organizational joining (Miller & Katz, 2014), organizations spend onboarding trying to indoctrinate employees into their organizational culture. Unfortunately, this molding of new talent can send the wrong message (Nobel, 2013), because it has the potential to promote conformance to and adoption of the local culture, values, practices, and identity, and potentially downplay or withhold individuality, innovation, and employees' own identities (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; 2013b). This can cause internal strife within new employees, and these types of indoctrinating socialization practices can cause inauthentic behavior, which can rapidly become emotionally, psychologically, and culturally depleting and cause workplace dissatisfaction (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013) for new employees. To avoid this, leaders need to engage employees, and this deep engagement should begin in the early stages upon employee arrival to the organization, encouraging self-identity, perspectives, and individual strengths (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013).

The objective of onboarding new employees is to establish long-haul, high performance relationships between them and their new organizations (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). However, depending on how onboarding occurs, it can affect not only performance, but also the long-haul, long-term aspect of the relationships, and cause early attrition.

## **Employee Retention**

On average, the expense of replacing a separating employee can range from 20 to 250 percent of that employee's annual salary (Cascio, 2000; Petrucelli, 2017) in addition to the lost institutional knowledge and cultural factors that cannot be easily calculated. Thus, it makes sense for employers to want to retain effective staff. This is no secret, and businesses are realizing today that they face significant challenges with regards to retention of young talent. Approximately 20 percent of millennials change jobs annually, and nearly 30 percent of all employees aged 18 – 34 have reported that they expect to be in new jobs in the near future (Adkins, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017). Retention efforts are traditionally seen as more challenging in HR when compared with onboarding, particularly considering the numerous external and internal forces that prompt employees to remain or attrite. These forces include not only pay and rewards, but also power dynamics, leadership style, advancement potential, learning and development, diversity and inclusion, connections to social impact, and overall organizational culture (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015; Coldwell, Billsberry, Meurs, & Marsh, 2008; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Deery & Shaw, 1999; Griffith, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009; Ismail, 2014; Kleinman, 2004; Liu, Cai, Shi, & Fang, 2013; Nadeem & Henry, 2003; Ramlall, 2004; Ribelin, 2003).

Company loyalty, a factor counted on by many managers, is a figment of organizations' imaginations—a residual left from twentieth-century manufacturing organization cultures that rewarded longevity and commitment. Today, web-based tools such as Glassdoor®, Indeed.com®, LinkedIn®, and others provide job seekers rapid access to the job market—inclusive of advanced compensation analytics not available on the public domain just a generation ago, as well as reviews of working hours, benefits, company culture, among other information. It is a different era, and it is not uncommon for millennial workers to view company loyalty from the opposing view, that companies should be loyal to their employees instead of the traditional employee loyalty model. Steady paychecks and nine-to-five schedules are no longer truly enticing mechanisms as millennials are

interviewing potential employers and asking “what can your company do for me?” (Petrucci, 2017) It takes much more to retain talent, especially within a steadily improving economy, and a qualified, enthusiastic, and competitive but negotiation-prone talent pool. Many of the aspects that drive talent to stay or leave depend on how the employees are greeted, treated, trained, and entertained, and much of that occurs early in the job. In essence, an engaged and satisfied millennial workforce begins with a comprehensive and up-to-date onboarding process (Krasman, 2015).

### **Employee Onboarding and the Potential Effects on Retention**

Although studies are limited, the literature does show that there are direct and indirect links between onboarding and employee retention. Effective multi-stage employee onboarding helps assist employees to integrate into the organization and join the organization’s culture, and when orientation and socialization processes are well planned, retention may be improved (Chapman, 2009). Onboarding and socialization is a pivotal stage of the employer-to-employee relationship (Nobel, 2013) and leader-member exchange, and it is an excellent opportunity to foster new employee self-expression and innovation. This shift early in the employee cycle, particularly during onboarding, has been shown to result in high performance on day one, and an increase in employee retention (Cable, Gino, & Stats, 2013b). Understanding this is critical as the baby boomers head towards retirement (Chapman, 2009) and millennials become the largest generation in the workforce.

## **Methods**

### **Research Methodology**

This study was performed by way of action research, combining inquiry with action and critical reflection (Dick, 2002), providing an opportunity for us to explore what’s going on in health care organizations employing millennial talent and answer some complex questions that address real issues regarding talent acquisition and management in health science workplaces today. This action research study was conducted using an inductive-qualitative research approach. A modified

interpretive phenomenological assessment was performed, using written questionnaires, in order to complete this investigation. The questions included a quasi-appreciative inquiry approach in order to determine millennial elements of ideal onboarding programs. Individuals that fell within the millennial generation age group were asked to complete a three question survey regarding their experiences with employee onboarding programs in their current or previous positions. The questionnaires were distributed through the Academy of Interdisciplinary Health Science Leaders (AIHSL) to the member distribution list of 564 active professionals.

### **Study Participants**

The survey was distributed to all AIHSL members. The request was made for all individuals that are active in AIHSL that fall within the millennial generation age group to complete a three question survey and return it to the AIHSL administrator who redacted any identifiable information prior to delivery of the data to the researchers. The response rate was 21, or 3.7 percent of the total member population, and the completed questionnaires were provided to the researchers as blind data with no indication of participant identity. The purpose and interest in this research was focused on the general status of health care organizations hiring millennials and how the millennials they are hiring perceive onboarding processes in those organizations, and to understand millennials’ experiences, desires, and expectations from onboarding programs as they enter and progress through the workforce.

### **Action Research Questions**

The following survey questions were posed to the study participants.

1. What is your age at the time you are completing this survey?
2. In your current or immediate-past workplace, what was your experience with and perception of the employee onboarding process, including pre-boarding? What worked and what did not work for you?
3. If you were going to begin a new job next week, what would you like to see from your new employer in the employee onboarding process?



## Data Analysis

For the first question, the goal was simply to identify the age ranges of the respondents and to ensure that they fit within the millennial generation criteria. The request distributed to the academy membership prompted responses from individuals born between the years 1981 and 1998. We used basic descriptive statistics to identify range, mean, and median of millennials who responded.

For the second question, we collected and reviewed direct quotes as they refer to respondents' experiences related to onboarding at their health care organization workplaces. We sorted the data to ensure that it was relevant to the question, and then, in order to be fair to the research process and report the essence of the participants' experiences, we provided direct quotes as data findings before providing interpretive commentary. Not every quote collected in the research was used because numerous responses gave accounts of similar experiences and others were not relevant.

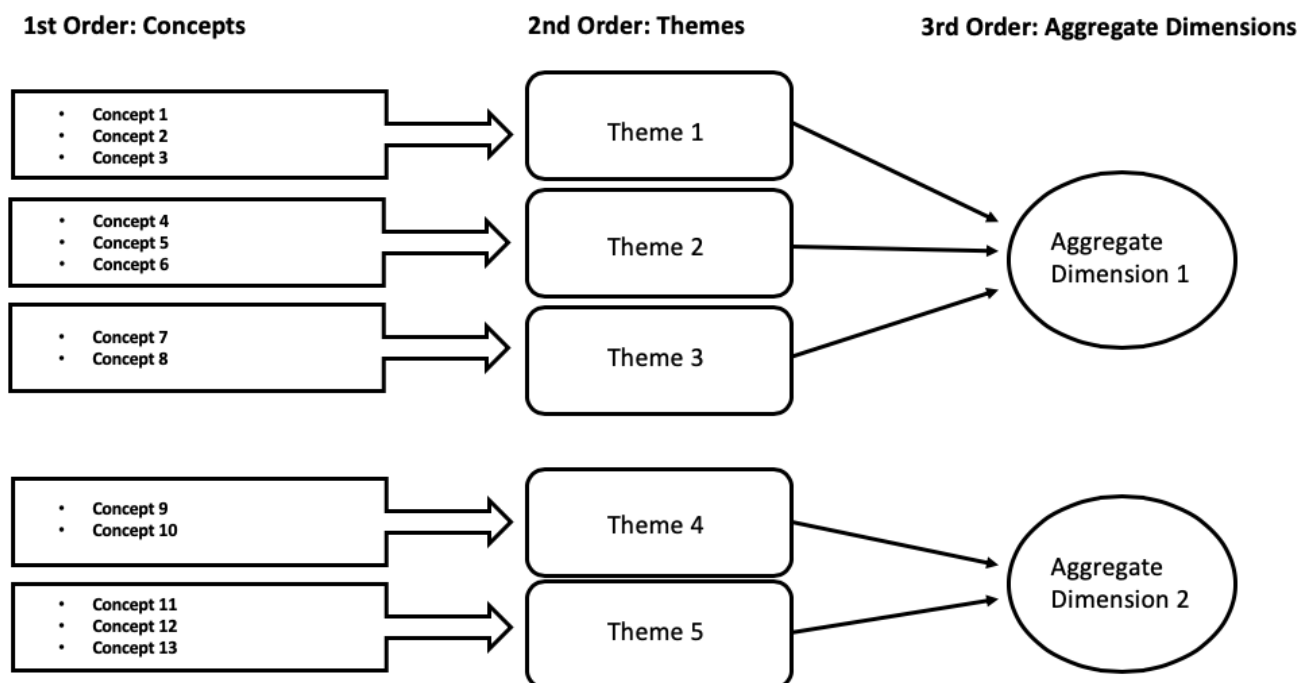
For the third question, we coded and sorted the data using a tabular approach, identified common themes, and thereafter interpreted the results. A modified Gioia methodology was used for thematic analysis, categorizing the results

regarding onboarding wants and needs into first order concepts, second order themes, and aggregate dimensions (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

The Gioia Methodology uses a three-pronged data structure, as provided in the diagram in Figure 1. Using the Gioia method, first order analysis is used to identify the concepts collected from participants. This step adheres to participants' statements to begin making some semblance of similarity that allows data sorting. Second order analysis begins making sense of those sorted concepts, and further sorts them into themes. This is where interpretation and theorizing begins to occur. The next step, separated here into a third order, is to analyze the themes for potential distillation into aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012).

Because the Gioia Methodology was designed for and is normally used in grounded theory study, the data using this method is normally further translated to discover theory. This action research is not a grounded theory study. Nevertheless, the modified Gioia methodology was used for good reason. Quantitative research has a venerable history, particularly in being revelatory (Gioia et al., 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, qualitative methods have received a plentitude of

Figure 1. Gioia Methodology Structure of Data Analysis



criticism, and many times rightly so, regarding adequate justification of assertions. Gioia et al. (2012) provides the sorting and coding capability that allows us to configure our data into a sensible tabular representation of how we processed the raw data to useful themes and meanings—a vital component in demonstrating transparency and rigor in inductive research (Gioia et al., 2012). This is the reason that we have chosen to partially use this method for our qualitative approach—in order to be systematic, structured, transparent, and rigorous in exhibiting and interpreting the dynamic phenomena experienced by our participants.

## Results and Discussion

### Participant Demographics

The initial question of the survey only addressed age, to ensure that the participants are representative of the millennial generation. The request distributed to the academy membership prompted responses from individuals born between 1981 and 1998. The age range for the participant group was 21 to 36 years old. The mean age for the sample group was 29.8 years and the median was 30 years.

### Perceptions of Employer's Onboarding Processes

The written responses were read and separated based on thematic trends that exist in the text. The participant responses fell into numerous categories, including comments that were related to retention, pre-boarding, lack of onboarding, inadequate onboarding, organizational culture aspects, positive responses, and emerging technologies. The comments were sorted, and can be found in the appropriate sections below.

**Retention comments.** Although we did not anticipate responses specifically related to employee retention, numerous comments in the participants' statements directly quoted or at a minimum alluded to the likelihood of near-term resignation. Some of the quotes collected, related to both onboarding and retention, are displayed as follows.

“Worst I've ever seen, and I'm in HR. They lost me on day one.”

“Although I was originally *über*-excited

about the job...by the end of my first day there, I knew...I'd begin my hunt for a new job.”

“Then again, I don't plan on being here long enough to be a manager.”

“I should've known within the first week after starting that things here would always be hostile. I should've trusted my gut. Time to go.”

“Onboarding? Let's just say I'm searching for a place that actually has one.”

“I wouldn't have taken this job. I would've gone with the other offer.”

“Onboarding was 2 weeks. I've been there 7 months. That's 6 ½ months too long. Hope that answers your questions.”

“I was there just under a month and gave notice a couple days ago to go to a company that's more tech savvy.”

“That's just kind of how this place is. It's a job, and I'm happy to have it, but the orientation that I had here pretty much speaks loudly and accurately about my place of work. It's a job...”

Although these comments don't all necessarily indicate that the employees are currently leaving their positions, they allude to the cultures in their organizations, their job dissatisfaction, and their intention or at least thoughts about finding new opportunities. A few of the comments directly indicate that employees are actively seeking other employment, and several of the comments state that they realized this during onboarding, or at least during the first few weeks or months of employment with their current organizations. Furthermore, the fact that the questionnaire did not ask anything about job retention or seeking other opportunities, but did ask specifically about employees' experiences with their organizations' onboarding programs, and yet the replies at least hinted at job-seeking, tells us a few things. First, it alludes to the connection between

onboarding and retention. Second, it is possible that these comments confirm the research findings that show that millennials change jobs more frequently (Adkins, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017). Nevertheless, these comments at the very least inform us that a solid group of millennial participants are unhappy with the onboarding processes in their current or immediate past organizations.

**Pre-boarding comments.** One important part of an employee onboarding program is pre-boarding. When individuals find new jobs, the offers are often met with great enthusiasm and new employees are eager to begin work and find out more about the company that they will be working for. This can be achieved through information searchers on the internet, but often transpires by way of telephone calls from managers, HR representatives, and future co-workers. Other potential pieces of pre-boarding programs may include benefits packages, documents and forms that need to be completed, letters of introduction, virtual tours, among many other potential resources. During this research, the numerous comments provided below indicate study participants' potential displeasure with the pre-boarding elements of their onboarding programs.

“I was shocked that there was no pre-boarding....but I was even more shocked at the onboarding process.”

“The only thing I would've hoped for was a little preparation before I arrived.”

“My boss called me to tell me where to be on my first day, but that was it. That, and HR giving me notice that I had to bring two forms of ID for my I-9 thing.”

These comments make it evident that at least a good number of the health organizations these millennial participants work for lack adequate pre-boarding processes, potentially supporting the idea that HR programs do not spend equal effort on onboarding as they do on recruiting and hiring (Kumar & Pandey, 2017).

“I had another employee call me, but there

was no real information before I got there. I tried to find it myself, but their Facebook and LinkedIn are really bad. Also, I couldn't find active blogs about what the company's doing. I wanted to know more before I started, but it was hard to find.”

In addition to the subjects' statements that identify that pre-boarding was either inadequate or not evident, this respondent also alluded to the question of technology and electronic distribution of corporate information to employees. This participant's statement supported that being raised with continuous exposure to digital media and continuous access and interaction; millennials have been shaped regarding how they evaluate what they consider timely and relevant information (Marangione, 2017). This is evident in this statement regarding availability of corporate information in social media. In this case, it was made in reference to provision of information after hire, but prior to beginning work, which is the pre-boarding phase.

**No formal established onboarding.** It appears that the bulk of the sample population making comments regarding their experiences had suggestions, recommendations, or complaints regarding their organizations' onboarding practices. In addition, a few comments clarified that their organizations did not have organized onboarding programs. Furthermore, the manner in which their statements were written implied emotions of displeasure and dissatisfaction with the lack of onboarding or their organizations.

“Onboarding? Don't make me laugh! There wasn't one...”

“I had a new-hire orientation to select medical and dental, but that's all. But there was no assigned mentor, no packet or checklist of things for me to complete during my first few days or weeks. I work in patient safety, and they just put me to work. I basically had to learn how to do everything myself.”

“There wasn't really a formal onboarding. I mean, there was benefits orientation with HR, but there was no really standardized



format for preparing me to be a manager of nurses at my current clinic. It was kind of trial by fire.” Every person that comes in has a different check in. Formally, I think actual onboarding doesn’t exist.”

“Honestly, I don’t think the company I work for ever heard of onboarding. I was welcomed, given a 45 minute walking tour, introduced to the office staff, set up with E-mail and internet, and a means of contacting the IT help desk, and given a manual. That’s it.”

These comments from millennial health care professionals identify a lack of formal onboarding development within health care organizations. They indicate that there is generally a benefits orientation, but no real onboarding process, or at least no formal process. Two responses elucidated their experience of lack of onboarding in their comments regarding just being thrown in to begin work in a “trial by fire” fashion, with little guidance. This is concerning when individuals hold critical positions, such as patient safety, as indicated in one of the comments. In general, these comments from millennials are consistent with the existing literature, further illuminating that organizations, despite all of the time and effort spent on recruiting and hiring, do not spend a considerable effort at making sure the employees are properly onboarded (Krasman, 2015), and that perhaps many HR departments, managers, and practitioners truly do not understand what onboarding should entail (Kumar & Pandey, 2017).

**Onboarding inadequacy.** In general, the vast majority of the comments returned in the questionnaires were negative with regards to onboarding experience, and most had to do with inadequate or incomplete onboarding. Numerous replies by participants were similar regarding inadequacies and generally had to do with short, outsourced, online, and orientation-type benefits reviews.

“Everything was outsourced. How can an external company introduce me to my new company?”

“I was used to a month-long orientation, being in the military for 8 years. The entire orientation here was packed into 2 hours. I didn’t even know what to make of it.”

“Onboarding. That’s an interesting term. I wasn’t onboarded, I was oriented. There was a tour and a description of my benefits, and that’s all. And even that wasn’t great.”

“My Director thinks that Orientation and Onboarding are synonymous. Nope!”

“Everything was about benefits. It was all about the gym, the medical and dental and vision insurance...life insurance and 401K...they’d already recruited me at that point, so why recruit me again...?”

“There was no real onboarding, no orientation except an hour long online benefits training. But they did introduce me to all of my co-workers and people I’ll deal with on a regular basis. Really, anything I need I go to our Admin Assistant or I ask one of my co-workers.”

Several participants made mention of having to begin work almost immediately after arriving, with little onboarding, training, introduction, or guidance, and the comments make it evident that the employees have struggled or have been displeased with this phenomenon. These practices are directly at odds with the purpose of onboarding programs in that the organizations did not orient their employees on how things should be done and reportedly do not provide adequate direction.

“I’ve been there for 6 months and still don’t know what I’m doing...”

“I’ve had just one one-on-one meeting with my boss in 5 months of employment.”

“I know that when I manage people, I’ll not do onboarding the way they do it here. They kind of just throw you to the wolves.”

“I wish I had a better opportunity to meet

more of the C-Suite folks since I have to provide them with patient reports regularly and I don't really have a lot of understanding of what their expectations are. I just follow what my predecessor did."

"Onboarding was just OK. The process exists, and I know what the department was trying to do, but PT/OT here is so busy that onboarding, while well-intentioned, just kind of tapered off as everyone became busier. It's what I experienced at my last clinic too."

Furthermore, there were several statements made regarding inefficiencies during onboarding, including unnecessarily redundant practices that were identified to form perceptions of dishonesty and feelings of irritation and frustration. Common HR missteps include things like asking new hires for information already provided multiple times previously or offer letters quoting information that is inconsistent with expectations or agreements made during the extension of a verbal offer—and many more. In each instance, the perception held by the new colleague may be that the internal talent team is somewhat decentralized and do not communicate regarding people and processes (Longenecker, 1997). These practices are displayed on the following experience descriptions.

"The job I applied for and was offered was not the same as it was when explained to me during onboarding. The job description was about half of what I got when I arrived. I wouldn't have taken this job. I would've gone with the other offer. I regret it."

"When I applied for the job, I provided a resume, and then had to fill out online forms that required the same information. Then, on my first day at work, I had to complete an online form with practically the same information again. What a waste of my time. How hard is it to integrate these?"

#### **Comments regarding corporate culture.**

Although it was not part of the questionnaire or the research design, numerous comments relative to

onboarding brought out concerns directly related to organizational culture. The peer-reviewed literature discusses the role of onboarding partially being about introducing the new employees to the corporate and team culture and to help them become adjusted to it, as well as organizational fit, which has a great deal to do with the culture (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; Ferri-Reed, 2013; Pike, 2014). However, the reported experiences, as witnessed in the comments below, point to employees' discomfort speaking openly, hostile work environments, threatening or toxic leadership, and potential dishonesty. One employee even mentioned a complete loss of motivation in his organization.

"Perhaps it's up to me to reach out, but I'm not really certain about rocking the boat. I don't really know what the corporate climate's like there regarding these kinds of things."

"...working there's not like onboarding, it's more like waterboarding. I should've known within a week of starting that things there would always be hostile."

"As soon as they began, it was us, us, us. It was all about the company, and they started to basically tell me how to feel, what my values and beliefs should be, and how proud I should be. I quickly found a lot of corporate zombies walking around repeating company catch phrases. It's exhausting trying to keep up with it, especially because it's not genuine"

"My boss criticizes me and my initiative but never taught me or sent me to training on how to use the software."

"Orientation was fine. I was motivated. Too bad the leaders don't practice what they preach. It was all lip service. Motivation GONE!"

These research subject statements are indicative of an organizational culture dangerous to morale and teamwork, and threatening to employee retention. This is critical, because

workplace culture is often posited as the central piece of an organization design (Jamieson, 2017; Shufutinsky 2018) and because studies have, for decades, consistently exhibited the connection between workplace culture, job satisfaction, and talent retention (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; Coldwell, Billsberry, Meurs, & Marsh, 2008; Deery & Shaw, 1999). The fact that millennials are recognizing workplace culture problems and seeing them during their onboarding does not bode well for those organizations regarding retaining those talented employees.

**Comments regarding emerging technology and sustainability.** As seen not only through the literature, but also through the lived experiences of the authors, the millennial generation has grown up with and is generally capable in the use of technology, particularly mobile devices, as well as online forms, applications, documents, and information searches and retrieval (Anderson & Rainie, 2012; Marangione, 2017; Weinbaum, Richard, & Jenny, 2016). With that said, it makes sense that the new-hire employees of this generation are not only more comfortable with technology, but are also socially conscious regarding their community and societal impact and sustainability (Liu, Cai, Li, Shi, Fang, 2013; Marangione, 2017) and would thus prefer to have their onboarding and work materials in electronic rather than hardcopy format. Thus, it was not surprising to find a few similar comments from people who work in different organizations that revealed the sentiments provided in the following quote.

“Onboarding was ok. I got the documents and everything I needed, but everything was given to me in a folder or a binder. It’s the 21st century! Why am I being given 23 binders where I need to flip pages through paper manuals instead of it all just being available online? Who wants to waste the time flipping through when you can just search and find the answers digitally? A waste of paper too.”

**Positive experiences.** Although many of the comments provided were negative, there were several participants that praised the onboarding programs of their employers. Positive onboarding

experiences at least anecdotally align with good places to work. Although our results exhibited numerous complaints or observations regarding what young health care workers expected to see, there were a few that were upbeat about and satisfied with the onboarding they received from their employer.

“It was excellent...before it started...I received a packet in the mail with all of my benefits information and insurance selections. I also received some electronic training to complete before starting. The company even included the two hours of pre-start training in my first paycheck. My boss called me twice to see how things were coming along in preparation for the job, especially because I was relocating to New York from Boston. I also had two co-workers call me and talk to me about the company, about their jobs and challenges they experience, and quite a bit about what my job will be. On my first day, I had a great tour of the hospital and understood where I’d be working and what my shift would be. From there, my shift supervisor took over and showed me the ropes. I love that about where I work now. The people I work with are great and they help each other out. I don’t know if this is a formal onboarding, but I don’t have a lot of complaints. My boss cares about his employees, and we all care for one another. Best place I’ve worked so far.”

“My company had a really strong new employee orientation. The whole thing was set up around about 3 months. I started working on the first day, but everything from meetings, to trips to other sites, to reviews of all of the programs, and introductions to all of the customers I support were gradually introduced to me. I wasn’t overwhelmed or under-challenged. It was everything I needed to streamline into the team of people I work with. I can see working there for years and years like my mom did.”

These positive responses take a very

different tone than the majority of their cohort of research participants. Of particular interest in these comments were descriptions of positive culture, positive bosses, and teamwork, and especially statements that indicated an employee's desire to remain with the company directly after mention of a strong, positive onboarding experience.

The reality is that it is no longer grandad's or dad's workplace orientation. It is not adequate to simply gather the group in one large classroom, bombard them with benefits information and a memorized motivational speech, and put them to work (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Times have changed and continue to change, and millennials have different expectations from their companies, and from onboarding processes.

### **Perspectives on What Onboarding Programs Should Include**

In addition to the perspectives that the research subjects shared regarding their experiences in their workplace onboarding programs, the research took a quasi-appreciative inquiry approach in a question that sought to understand how we can create an exceptional organizational onboarding program. For the purpose of addressing this functional research aspect, participants answered a question regarding what their ideal onboarding programs would include. We used a modified Gioia method to provide a tabular representation of the aggregate dimension categories for what millennial health care professionals wish to see in employee onboarding programs (Table 1). The categories aggregated from the data include (a) the need for effective pre-boarding, (b) thorough onboarding planning and execution, (c) information transparency and availability, (d) need for involvement of high-touch, teaching-style managers, (e) strong professional development programs, (f) innovative and functional workplaces and tools, and (g) inclusion of social justice aspects.

**Need for an effective pre-boarding program.** As seen in Table 1, this aggregate dimension stems from remarks on questionnaires that exhibit the idea from the participants that there are numerous things they would want to see as part of an onboarding program prior to actually showing up for day one on the job. This included pre-start communication from the hiring manager

as well as co-workers, provision of documents and forms that could be completed prior to arrival to streamline check-in, a 30-day tentative onboarding schedule, and potentially receiving basic new-hire training after the position has been accepted, but before arriving on day one. It is apparent from the questionnaires that millennials are seeking a means of getting a jump start when it comes to their new positions, and these are some of the avenues that they recommend they can get a head start through, including a thorough and effective pre-boarding process as part of the onboarding program.

**Onboarding planning and execution.** Onboarding could potentially include all of the necessary elements, but without an effective plan, it can become disorganized, waste time, and frustrate the participants, not to mention interfere with the completion of the items required. The first part of the research study exhibited the results of poorly planned and incomplete schedules. For that reason, it is no surprise that the millennials that participated in the research indicated that they believe that ideal onboarding would come with schedules, timelines, and long- and short-term plan for what is to be accomplished during the onboarding period.

**Information transparency and availability.** As described in the aggregate dimension entitled "*Need for an effective pre-boarding program*," the study participants made it apparent that there are benefits to having access to certain information before beginning their work on day one. The participants expressed a desire for information that would help them get a jumpstart, such as lists and definitions of common company jargon and acronyms, an organizational chart, a list of stakeholders with whom they may be interacting, and a clearly defined job description to help them understand at least some of their daily operations before they step foot in the door. Also, participants believe it is critical for them to have transparent access regarding the status and health of the company that they are going to work for, so that they have somewhat of an understanding regarding the situations they are walking in to.

**Need for high-touch, teaching-style management and leadership.** Although it has been commonly argued in primary and tertiary sources of literature that leadership and management are not the same thing, for the purpose of this paper



Table 1

*Coded Construction of Questions 3 Data using Tabular form of Gioia Methodology*

First Order: Concepts	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order: Trends	3 <sup>rd</sup> Order: Aggregate Dimensions
-New manager should call new employees -Co-workers should call employees	Pre-start communication with the team	Need for an effective Pre-Boarding Program
-Required documents, forms should be provided in advance -Have blogs, Facebook, other social media	Pre-start company information and required forms provided	
-Basic training can be provided before start -Description of first 30 days expectations and training should be provided in advance	Training and knowledge expectations provided pre-start	
-Short-term & long-term plan for integration -Schedule for entire onboarding	Onboarding Schedule	Onboarding Planning and Execution
-Tour of facility -Meeting schedule for staff, leaders, clients	Onboarding tour and interview schedules	Information Transparency and Availability
-List of company acronyms -Company-specific jargon	Company-specific hacks should be provided	
-Information regarding status of the company -Info on corporate health, performance	VUCA information should be transparent	
-Job description available immediately -Should immediately get list of stakeholders -Org chart should be provided upon to arrival	Position-specific information should be shared upon arrival	
-My role, clearly defined -Detailed and accurate job description -ID of my place in the organization	Ensure job understanding and no role ambiguity	
-Regular constructive feedback -Direct communication -Management open to feedback -Managers that teach and train	Direct manager interaction and feedback during onboarding	Need High-Touch, Teaching-Style Management and Leadership
-Weekly coffee chats or tea times with boss - Need weekly or bi-weekly 1:1 -Management open-door policy	Regular and routine meetings with the manager	
-Routine evaluations during first 6-12 months -Normal assessment and advice for improvement early in the job	Regular manager evaluations of Onboarding Performance	
-Colleague mentorship program -Buddy system during onboarding -Assignment of a peer-advisor	Strong Peer Mentorship Program	Strong Professional Development Program
-Need a senior mentor and career mentor -Mentorship program at management level	Strong Leader Mentorship Program	
-Clear professional development plan -Training and education plan and timeline -Planned and detailed on-the-job-training -Inter-departmental internships	Strong Educational and Learning Programs	
-Career path options and roadmap -Promotion timelines -Descriptions of promotion requirements	Career positions, roles, and promotion information	
-Innovative learning methods -E-learning, M-learning, S-Learning -Phones, tablets pre-loaded with necessary contacts, apps, remote access, forms, etc.	Use of Technology for work and training	
-Business cards, placards, ergonomic furniture ready on first day -Internet, E-mail, phone access upon arrival	workstation supplies ready for access and use	Innovative/Functional Workplace and Tools
-Explanation of company impact on society - Description of volunteer opportunities -Intro to local community programs	Corporate interaction and impact on the surrounding area(s)	Social Justice Aspects
- Reduction of manuals and paper forms -Explanation of sustainability	Environmental	



we are examining them in a manner identifying individuals in positions of power and direction over other members of organizations. Leadership is critical to many people in their decisions to remain in a company. It is a well-known and common saying that people leave their managers, not their jobs. Leaders play a critical role in onboarding new employees. Onboarding, as seen in the literature and as exhibited in the findings, is a great deal more than an orientation session and can last for months and often up to or beyond a year. The data exhibited in Table 1 displays that millennial employees desire management to be involved, communicate regularly, and provide mentorship and guidance. They believe that leaders should have one-to-one meetings routinely, providing feedback on performance and advice for performance improvement. They also believe that managers should have an open door policy to employees and be open to feedback themselves. Furthermore, beyond just meetings, feedback, and advice, the participants made a point to state that leaders that have a teaching-style, and teach employees, rather than those that are authoritarian and harshly critical, are preferred and sought after. In short, millennials in health care organizations are seeking out high-touch, teaching-style managers.

**Strong professional development programs.** Professional development is critical for performance, continuous improvement, learning, and productivity. This can include classes, coursework, organizational learning, formal training, on-the-job training, mentoring, coaching, and other methods (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Smith, 2006). Millennials find professional development no less important, and they understand that they will need to develop and increase their skills and knowledge in order to move into leadership and management positions in the future (Brack & Kelly, 2012). This is why the study participants made use of the questionnaires to discuss their desire for professional development, and to annotate that professional development should not only take place during the lengthy onboarding process, but that it is expected and should be carefully and strategically planned. They expect a robust professional development plan that includes peer and leader mentorship, training courses, classes, and career and succession planning.

It is understood that professional development is critical for employee retention (Baker, 2010).

**Innovative and functional workplaces and tools.** One of the most important aspects for productivity and performance is a functional workplace. Everything from ergonomics, proper placement of equipment, office supplies, and technological tools can make work easier and can affect employee productivity and reduce potential for workplace injuries (Arvanitis & Loukis, 2009; Generalis & Mylonakis, 2007). Technologies continue to emerge in great diversity, including workplace communications platforms, software innovations, and learning and development tools. Comments made by research participants call for improved use of technology as part of the onboarding process. These statements support the literature that shows that having grown up with advanced technologies, including mobile devices, at their fingertips and their continuous adaptability to constantly emerging and improving tech capabilities (Marangione, 2017; Weinbaum, Richard, & Jenny, 2016) is an important aspect to address in hiring, onboarding, and retention.

Mobile learning is not a new concept, having been discussed in information systems and organizational development realms for well over a decade. This is a means by which an organizations training can be completed practically anytime, anywhere, with the help of mobile devices, such as smart phones and smart tablets (Keskin & Metcalf, 2011). Because mobile devices can be carried anywhere, and these are the technologies this generation has grown up with, it makes sense that millennials implore their organizations to implement or enable mobile technologies for learning, and use m-learning and s-learning for corporate training, including onboarding.

Furthermore, functional workplaces include office, lab, and clinic furniture that is ergonomically built and ergonomically positioned to potentially improve productivity. Also, when employees know that their company cares about their health and safety, which makes for improved morale, which can affect how employees see their onboarding processes and their employers in general. Likewise, office or lab equipment and supplies can affect this, and the research participants supported this in their statement that organizations should have business

cards, pre-packaged and pre-loaded iPads, and other necessary items ready upon arrival. Thus, employers should seriously consider including ergonomic workstations, high tech solutions, and materials and supplies as part of onboarding programs, including the use of emerging technology for corporate training.

**Social justice aspects.** Millennials are increasingly conscious about their communities and the world, including environmentalism and sustainability (McAnelly, 2015; Smith, 2010). They're community-conscious and social justice-oriented (Marangione, 2017) and are aware of ethical concerns with how business is conducted, with the development, distribution, pricing, and safety of pharmaceutical products, and are active in organizations' environmental and sustainability issues (Mboga, 2017).

A few statements in the research data support the literature trends regarding millennial interests in social justice concerns. Numerous individuals expressed the level of significance of social justice, and believed that it is important that their companies, during onboarding programs, provide thorough explanations of community impact, volunteer opportunities, and benefits of corporate programs on society. There were comments regarding recycling and transitioning from unnecessary use of paper to electronic media. Additionally, the participants desired corporate explanations of sustainability initiatives during employee onboarding.

### **Study Limitations**

This study was performed to understand the experiences of a select grouping of millennials in the healthcare industry. Sample size is a study limitation. Though 21 participants is generally adequate for qualitative research (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2010; Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2004) and the study results provided rich data around the experiences of the millennial employee study population, the nature of qualitative methods do not afford the ability for the findings to be generalized to the broader millennial population without further research. Although the sample size and research methodology used provide specificity regarding millennial experiences, and insights can be pulled from the findings, expanded qualitative study and

quantitative research is necessary to test sensitivity and determine generalizability.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

We believe the findings are interesting and potentially impactful and recommend that similar studies be performed across industries, beyond health care, and that additional qualitative methods be used for understanding and discovery of substantive theory regarding millennials' experiences and positions pertaining to onboarding programs. Furthermore, we recommend that a quantitative study be designed and performed on a robust sample population to understand and determine the generalizability of these findings.

### **Conclusion**

The peer-reviewed literature indicates the criticality of employee onboarding programs, and their importance to performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and even employee retention. As the generational transition in the workforce occurs, the practices, behaviors, values, and beliefs of the workforce is changing as well. We sampled 21 millennial health care employees regarding their experiences and perspectives on organizational onboarding programs. Experiences of the millennial employees in a multitude of health care organization settings varied. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents were transparent in their criticisms of their organizations' onboarding programs, elucidating problems such as lack of or poor pre-boarding, inadequate onboarding, poor planning, cultural problems, inefficiency, and onboarding programs not being technology- or sustainability-conscious.

Commenting on what they would expect from top-notch onboarding programs, the millennial participants had numerous desires and recommendations that fell into a few aggregate categories including effective pre-boarding programs, thorough onboarding program planning and organization, corporate information transparency, high-touch teaching-style managers, strong professional development plans, innovation, and social justice and ethics.

From the experiences of the authors, the peer-reviewed literature, and this action research

data, it is evident that the likelihood of a firm retaining employees may be dependent upon (a) innovative behavior-fostering adaptive systems, (c) clear articulation of career growth planning and opportunity, (d) a targeted learning & development platform that is also repeatedly administered to combat knowledge loss and provides guidance, advice, and mentorship, (e) integration of emerging technology, (d) social and community impact, (e) a positive and engaging organizational culture, and (f) a collaborative and diverse spectrum of perspectives that enrich group output. The research also strongly supports, from the millennial perspective, the existing literature that links organizational onboarding programs with talent retention. The evidence gleaned from the rich phenomenological data collected during this research study supports the extent literature.

Both the positive and the negative experiences described in the data are rich with information that can be useful to organizations in determining the needs in their onboarding programs. The necessities exhibited in the collected data are aspects that foster and define employee engagement, showing that engagement is something strongly sought after by young talent. This study indicates that onboarding programs that do not contain or exhibit such aspects result at a minimum in attitudes that appear to be heading to poor retention, and definitively poor outlooks on the organizations. The responses support the literature, indicating that an effective multi-stage employee onboarding can in fact assist employees to integrate into the organization and join the organization's culture and to be retained (Chapman, 2009). Organizations can learn a great deal from both the positive and negative remarks and comments from the research subjects.

Further, although all of these wants and needs addressed by the participants may not be met by all organizations for a variety of reasons, financial or other, organizations should understand that some of their competitors are providing some if not all of these materials and aspects in order to draw and maintain top talent. Considering the heightened level of millennial turnover in organizations today, it is critical for employers, at a minimum, to assess and become better aware of the things that attract and help retain young talent, and where possible,

incorporate them into onboarding development programs.



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