Chapter 3
Intergenerational Learning Styles, Instructional Design Strategy, and Learning Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Instructional designers must appeal to a variety of audience members both in terms of competency and preferred learning style. Though many factors may influence learning style, generational preferences may provide instructional designers a broad base of understanding undergirding strategic educational design choices. While it would be naive, and even inaccurate, to assume that Millennials constitute the only unique generational challenge for instructional designers, their sheer presence in organizations and their education expectations have changed the game—so to speak. Thus, in an attempt to clarify generational uniqueness, this chapter will explore general generational instructional trends while positioning instructional design as a necessary answer to 21st century learning efficacy challenges.

A GENERATIONAL NARRATIVE

The instructional design landscape, specifically instructional audiences, are becoming more diverse. While diversity may present itself in a variety of forms in an institution (e.g., ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, etc.), one particularly fascinating trend is the

generational diversity many institutions are experiencing (Schullery, 2013). While it would be naive, and even inaccurate, to assume that Millennials constitute the only unique generational challenge for instructional designers, their sheer presence in organizations and their education expectations have changed the game-so to speak. Thus, in an attempt to clarify generational uniqueness, this chapter will explore general generational instructional trends while positioning instructional design as a necessary answer to 21st century learning efficacy challenges.

First, it is important for instructional designers to know that Millennials, one oft-discussed generation, now represent a significant portion of the workforce. In 2013, Millennials constituted roughly ⅓ of the U.S. workforce and by 2030 Millennials will comprise up to 75% of the total U.S. workforce (Pew Research Center, 2010). Millennials, those born between 1982-2004, have a reputation for being seen as lazy, entitled, and high maintenance (Morreale & Staley, 2016), yet, they are also are highly networked, appreciate experiences, and are tech-savvy. In a recent *Time* article, Joel Stein (2013) said this about Millennials:

They are the most threatening and exciting generation since the baby boomers brought about social revolution, not because they're trying to take over the Establishment but because they're growing up without one. The Industrial Revolution made individuals far more powerful–they could move to a city, start a business, read and form organizations. The information revolution has further empowered individuals by handing them the technology to compete against huge organizations: hackers vs. corporations, bloggers vs. newspapers, terrorists vs. nation-states, YouTube directors vs. studios, app-makers vs. entire industries. Millennials don't need us. That's why we're scared of them. (para. 4)

In terms of education and training, Millennials desire flexibility, promotion opportunities, and an environment that highlights professional coaching and instruction. It is important to remember that before developing 21st century training initiatives, trainers must have a generational awareness, especially in relation to Millennial workers.

Instructional designers must appeal to a variety of audience members both in terms of competency and preferred learning style. Though many factors may influence learning style, generational preferences may provide instructional designers a broad base of understanding undergirding strategic educational design choices. For example, Millennials, compared to previous generations, prefer active and engaged learning (Nimon, 2007). This preference should inform choices regarding which opportunities are included for educational participation and involvement. The evolving "learning landscape mandates that we engage students as co-consumers/ owners of ideas and approaches in the classroom [and we know] that millennials

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