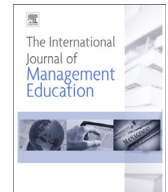


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# Management learning at the speed of life: Designing reflective, creative, and collaborative spaces for millennials



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## ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of “management learning at the speed of life” as a metaphor to inspire millennials. Millennials may face three major problems in relation to management learning: lack of concentration, lack of engagement, and lack of socialization. Management learning at the speed of life addresses these potential problems through three dimensions: reflective, creative, and collaborative learning. This paper illustrates the benefits of reflective, creative, and collaborative spaces for millennials using practices from leadership and personal development courses that were offered over seven years in Canada, Turkey, and the UK. These courses incorporated the latest technology that brought the course activities up to the speed of life.

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## 1. Introduction

There is broad disenchantment with the aloof stance of management education and business schools as articulated by a crisis of confidence (Mitroff, 2004), a climate of ethical indifference (Khurana & Nohria, 2008), a narrow curriculum driven by reductionist models and economic self-interest theories (Ghoshal, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), and a widening gap between theory and the world of practice (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004). The changing world of workplaces call for a more holistic approach to management education, as there is an increasing need to develop not only analytical and conceptual skills, but also emotional, reflective, creative, and spiritual capabilities for future leaders (Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007). Furthermore, the management instructors have been seeking ways for effectively involving web 2.0 tools into their lectures within the emerging Higher Education 2.0 environment (Barnatt, 2009).

In addition to the changing context within which business is practiced, the characteristics of the population are changing, too. The new generation, called the Net generation or millennials, face three potential problems in relation to management learning. The first problem involves the challenge of sustaining concentration during studies or lectures, given that millennials seem to be addicted to technology gadgets (Marcus, 2011). Second, students are challenged with engaging in instructor-led lectures (Graves, 2001) and traditional evaluation methods such as paper-and-pencil exams (Volkema, 2010). Third, difficulties associated with social isolation or alienation (Nie, 2001) is becoming pervasive among millennials. To address these

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challenges, this paper develops the concept management learning at the speed of life, which suggests management educators provide reflective, creative, and collaborative spaces for students.

## 2. Management learning at the speed of life

Management learning at the speed of life builds upon related constructs of lifelong learning (Ballou, Bowers, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 1999; Sharples, 2000), continuous learning (Houle, 1988), and self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975). We define *management learning at the speed of life* as a learning philosophy that incorporates reflexivity, creativity, and connectivity to adapt to the fast changing world of work. Taking the perspective of management instruction, this implies a design philosophy that celebrates diversity and gives room for students to develop their own learning approaches. It emphasizes that every student's learning journey is unique, with different departures, means, and destinations.

Management learning at the speed of life is based on three dimensions. The first dimension is reflection, which involves searching for one's own voice and learning motivation at work. Through reflection, an individual can discover a sense of meaning, invoke previous thoughts and actions, and understand the role of the self in life (Scott, 2010). The second dimension is creativity, which involves a search for novel and useful ideas or solutions (Sternberg, 2003). Creativity thrives on a sense of wonder and curiosity, as well as willingness for experimentation with unconventional ideas. The third dimension is collaborative learning, which involves a group of individuals working together on common tasks (Cabrera et al., 2002) to search for understanding or solutions (Palocsay, White, & Zimmerman, 2004). Through the process of collaborative learning, learning becomes a shared and social process (Jackson & MacIsaac, 1994), which is a learning style favoured by millennials (McGlynn, 2005). With these three dimensions, management learning at the speed of life responds to the needs of employees navigating in the new learning landscape.

### 2.1. Millennials

More than half of today's teenagers are mobile data users, and a great majority of them are using social media (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). The young members of this global platform have been referred to as Net-Geners, millennials, Generation Y, echo boomers or digital natives, who are characterized by having high digital literacy and multitasking capabilities, operating at "twitch speed." This generation has an inclination for socializing and learning on the Internet, consuming and producing digital information (Twenge, 2007), looking towards personalized careers, believing that they can achieve anything, seeking recognition from others, and demanding instant and frequent feedback (Sacks, 2006). In their everyday lives, millennials study, work, socialize, and live in the digital ecosystem - sending e-mails, sharing photos, downloading songs, and using social networking sites. In terms of lifestyle, distinctions between learning, work, fun, and leisure are blurring (Cooper, 2002) as abundant mobile computing devices and broadband connectivity allows an "always on" culture (Selwyn, 2003). Some researchers argue that millennials do not have the right set of behaviors for undergraduate education (Arum & Roksa, 2011). This argument criticizes students rather than the academic institutions. On the contrary, this article suggests that higher education needs to adapt itself to the lifestyle of the millennials since they are the generation that will be entering higher education and workforce in the next two decades (Conklin, 2012; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

From the learning aspect, millennials have unique attitudes, some of which may facilitate learning whereas others may hamper learning in the context of higher education.

On the positive side, millennials tend to easily adapt to using different learning approaches (Howe & Strauss, 2007), engage easily in digital learning (Ivanova & Ivanova, 2009), be proficient in multitasking (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008), have advanced visual memory and visual processing skills (Tapscott, 2009), and utilize communication technologies effectively for interacting with others (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005).

On the negative side, millennials may easily lose concentration while they are multitasking (Rubinstein, Meyer, & Evans, 2001), may have difficulties in listening and following lectures (Hembrooke & Gay, 2003), may suffer from cognitive overload (Sweller, 1988), may be impatient as they seek instant gratification (Sutherland-Smith, 2002), may have low tolerance for delays (Jones & Cross, 2009), may suffer from lack of socialization and Internet addiction (Cross et al. 2009) may lack critical thinking (Lorenzo & Dziuban, 2006) and complex reasoning and engagement (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

We identify three major problems that millennials face when they are learning:

- a) Lack of concentration: Millennials may be easily distracted on the Internet and may have difficulties in sustaining their concentration over long periods of time or while multitasking. This paper suggests management instructors provide reflective spaces for millennials to address this problem.
- b) Lack of engagement: Millennials might have difficulties in engaging with organization-led performance improvement initiatives where they are expected to demonstrate their performance and engagement for organizational objectives. This article suggests management instructors provide creative spaces for students in order to engage them.
- c) Lack of socialization: Millennials may tend to have difficulties in socializing with people since they are spending a lot of time on the Internet. This may lead to alienation or social isolation. To resolve this problem, this paper suggests management instructors provide collaborative spaces for millennials.

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