

The millennial career: No more playing by the rules

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Abstract

A changed employment landscape has been postulated for the rise in new career discourses. Boundaryless careers have been positioned opposite the traditional organizational career, with the former promoted as a way of explaining the choices, preferences and realities of modern employees - particularly that of millennials. Despite the millennial generation supposedly holding different values, career expectations and job motivations compared to previous generations, little academic research has been conducted on the sensemaking they undertake to conceptualise their career. This qualitative study on millennials working within the non-profit sector in the United Kingdom explores whether boundaryless career models are relevant to millennials in supporting them to understand and navigate their current and expected career. The study concludes that a dichotomy between whether millennial careers are “traditional” or “boundaryless” is false, with neither classification providing a useable, relevant or meaningful understanding of the modern, millennial career.

Introduction

The millennial workforce, those currently aged between 21-36 years (Savickas et al. 2009), face multiple challenges when it comes to gaining and sustaining employment (International Labor Organization (ILO) 2012), as well as understanding and managing their career (Walton and Mallon 2004). While millennials were raised “in a time of economic expansion and prosperity” they have “come of age in an era of economic uncertainty and violence” (Eisner 2005, p6). In the UK, the current rate of youth unemployment is 16.1% for 16-24 year olds (Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2015), and globally 73.4 million young people globally were out of work in 2013 (ILO 2013). The global financial crash of 2008 - the biggest recession in the UK since the Second World War (International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2009) - has resulted in

fundamental changes in expectations of all generational groups, but for the millennial generation has been characterised by high youth unemployment, underemployment, job mismatch and over qualification (Deal et al. 2010).

Though the global economic downturn has affected the employment experience for millennials most recently, the past twenty years of careers literature has been “dominated” by research proclaiming a radically changed employment landscape for all, with a range of models and ideas being presented, adopted and subsequently critiqued (Walton and Mallon 2004, p.76). Walton and Mallon (2004, p.78) comment that:

While there is growing debate about new career forms and a new way of talking about career there is a dearth of empirical, qualitative studies that seek to understand how individuals make sense of careers in a changing world of work

In response, this study will explore the sensemaking that millennials conduct to understand their present and future career, their perception of the current employment landscape and how they navigate it, and the characteristics (e.g. values, motivations, behaviours, preferences) they hope define their career. From this, this study will explore how useful recent academic conceptualisations of careers are for millennials, and the extent to which boundaryless careers models and the notion of a traditional organizational career support or hinder practical understanding for the younger workforce. It further responds to the noted lack of focus of career research on non-managerial workers and minority groups (Inkson et al. 2012). This research has potential implications for millennial workers, recruiters, organizations, careers advice and guidance professionals, and the policy frameworks and governmental programmes that support young people’s preparation for, transition to, and development within, employment.

Millennial generation

A generational label - such as Baby Boomers, Generation X and millennials - defines a grouping of birth years that share similar "social and historical events" that in turn shapes their "beliefs, values, attitudes and expectations" (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008, p366-367). The millennial generation, commonly referred to as Generation Y (or Gen Y) in the literature and more colloquially referred to with technological attachments such as the "google" (Jisc 2008), "iPod" (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 2005), or "Internet" (Curtis 2009) generation, typically refers to those born somewhere between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. This paper uses the word 'millennials' to describe those born between 1979-1994 (Savickas et al. 2009).

Millennials have been described as, "the most technically literate, educated, and ethnically diverse generation in history" (Eisner 2005, p.6). They are characterised as distrusting institutions, aspiring to a better work-life relationship, operating with a different values framework, holding new motivations and different expectations of working life, seeking a self-managed and more autonomous career as well as considering the social benefit of their work (Smola and Sutton 2002; Guest and Sturges 2007). Furthermore they are described as self-reliant and entrepreneurial (Martin 2005), skill and learning focused (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008), have a strong need for feedback and recognition (Crumpacker and Crumpacker 2007), and seek high salaries, meaningful work, rapid advancement, and a collaborative working environment (Ng et al. 2010). Recent research with over 1000 senior managers and 1000 millennial workers concluded that the most important career characteristics were: "earning a great salary", "being totally fulfilled and happy in my work" and "to have achieved a great life work balance" (CIPD 2015). From an organization, millennial workers want an environment that values their participation in decision-making, their social capital, technological prowess, multi-tasking nature, and can satisfy their desire for high value work – psychologically, financially and socially (Eisner 2005; Shaw and Fairhurst 2008; Ng et al. 2010).

However, characterisations of millennials have not always been favourable. Eisner (2005, p.6) noted that, "Gen Y has been told it can do anything and tends to believe it" and most criticisms stem from this "narcissistic" starting point. Seen as vain and self-obsessed – the "selfie" generation (Sieff 2014) – are viewed as having been indulged by parents and as being unaccustomed to hard work and graft. Millennials are criticised for having a "sense of entitlement" and are "impatient to succeed" without wanting to put in the time or effort (Ng et al. 2010, p.283). The disparity between what young people anticipate to achieve in life versus their actual capability has been described as the "ability-performance nexus" with reward expectations unattached to their performance ((Hill 2002 cited by Ng et al. 2010, p.282).

Changed career landscape

Members of the millennial generation were born through a period of globalisation, rapid economic change and technological advancement (Eby et al. 2003). Starting with Arthur and Rousseau (1996), the academic literature has claimed that these global changes have caused the stable, long-term, organizational career to no longer exist (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). Though it had been the prevailing *modus operandi* for individuals and companies up until the 1980s, Hall (1996, p.1) declared the idea of a lifelong career in a single organizational entity as "dead", with Banai and Harry (2004, p.98), concluding that, "globalization, restructuring, downsizing, reorganizing and outsourcing have transformed business".

In response, alternative career forms, such as the boundaryless (DeFillippi and Arthur 1996) career, have become the overriding research topics (Sullivan and Baruch 2009). The boundaryless career, which centres on physical and psychological mobility, is defined as, "sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings" (DeFillippi and Arthur 1994, p.307). Based on the original definitions by Arthur & Rousseau (1996), Inkson et al (2012, p.326) summarise that a boundaryless career is one that:

(1) moves across the boundaries of separate employers; (2) draws validation from outside the present employer; (3) is sustained by external networks or information; (4) involves breaking traditional organizational career boundaries, such as hierarchical reporting and advancement; (5) involves rejecting career opportunities for personal or family reasons; (6) is seen by the career actor as leading to a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.

More plainly, the boundaryless career is positioned as “being the opposite of organizational careers” (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, p.6) and has an emancipatory tone, with individuals liberated from the constraints and necessity of bureaucratic institutions of work. Boundaryless careers have been characterised as providing flexibility over job security, working for multiple organizations rather than one or two, preferring transferable skills and on-the-job learning rather than company specific training, and with emphasis on intrinsic rewards such as personal fulfilment and growth rather than a steady age-related progression of salary, responsibility and seniority (Sullivan 1999). Boundaryless career actors are seen as making non-traditional choices (e.g. lateral or downward career move, career break, volunteering work) that prioritise family life, other life roles and commitments. Such a significant amount of research has been conducted into new career discourses that one review noted that “while once considered radical”, such theories are now “part of a new status quo” (Briscoe and Hall 2006, p.1).

However, the ‘changed landscape’ has been extensively critiqued, with Guest and Mackenzie Davey (1996 cited by Pringle and Mallon 2003) commenting that, “the rhetoric of the new organization is some way removed from the reality.” In more recent papers, Inkson et al. (2012, p.328) labelled such descriptions of sweeping organizational change - such as those presented by Banai and Harry (2004) - as, “unqualified, unquestioning and all-embracing”, and that the commonly accepted “new fashions” (Inkson et al. 2012, p.325) in career literature are perhaps far removed from the employment reality. Furthermore, Zeitz et al. (2009) question the true impact of economic changes

on both large organizations and individual staff, concluding, “there does not seem to be a universal economic imperative” mandating any fundamental change in the way organizations and careers are conceptualised and managed.

Similarly, the boundaryless career has been criticised as having “multiple definitions” (Inkson et al. 2012, p.326), despite the additional weakness that research often focuses on managers and professionals and is therefore only applicable to certain social groups (Rodrigues and Guest 2010). Boundaryless career research is often limited to large corporate institutions in the USA, and the relevance of such career models outside of western, neo-liberal countries has been questioned (Pringle and Mallon 2003). Specific personality types, high internal locus of control, high self-esteem and social networked individuals (King 2004 cited by Zeitz et al. 2009) are seen as potential factors determining boundaryless career success – factors that are disproportionately lower for low-skilled, low socioeconomic populations and minority groups (Inkson et al. 2012). The relevance of boundaryless careers to non-managerial and non-corporate settings and groups remains unclear.

Furthermore, the current literature predominately focuses on physical mobility, such as changing organizations or moving teams, rather than psychological mobility (Sullivan and Arthur 2006). This is despite the potential contradiction highlighted by Arthur & Rousseau (1996) that individuals can have high levels of psychological mobility, whilst actually facing significant physical constraints. The focus on physical organizational boundaries has resulted in many of the objective and subjective boundaries, such as social, cultural, occupational, economic or geographical (Inkson et al. 2012), being less explored within the literature.

There is little empirical evidence to support the theory that boundaryless careers are being enacted, with Pringle and Mallon (2003, p.839) describing new career discourses as “empirically underdeveloped.” Objective job tenure and job separations data – which would be expected to decrease and

increase respectively if individuals were increasingly mobile across organizations - show little support for the notion that careers have become less stable or more boundaryless (Rodrigues and Guest 2010). In the United Kingdom, between 1996-2007, there was a gradual decline in both voluntary and involuntary job separations (CIPD 2013). Between 2008-2011, the average job tenure for all employees also steadily increased to approximately 9 years for men and 8 years for women (CIPD 2013). In a Labour Force Survey in 2012, a majority of people reported having been with their current employer for at least five years, with the report noting that that median job tenure “did not shift greatly between the mid-1970s and the mid-2000s” (CIPD 2013). However, where there is cause for further exploration is in the link between job tenure and age. Younger people change jobs far more quickly than older members of the workforce, with average job tenure significantly lower for younger age-brackets and then increasing with age (Macaulay 2003). In January 2014, the average job tenure in the USA for those aged 25-34 years was 3 years, compared with 5.2 years for 35-44 year olds, and 10.4 for those aged 55-64 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). The UK’s Office of National Statistics does not record this data. The trend exception was between 2008-2012, a period where the UK GDP fell 7.2% (BBC 2009), when the number of involuntary separations (being fired or made redundant) increased dramatically, likely in response to the 2008 financial crash - the worst global recession since the Second World War (IMF 2009). Given that this was an increase in involuntary separations – meaning that individuals did not want to leave their employment – this would not support the notion that individuals were seeking more boundaryless careers.

Research questions

In summary, millennials have lower job tenure, higher voluntary and involuntary separations (CIPD 2013), and hold different values, expectations and motivations for their career compared to other generations (Smola and Sutton 2002). They seek high value work, autonomous and self-directed careers, and despite criticisms of their “narcissistic” nature are a highly educated and connected generation (Eisner 2015). While objective data demonstrates a decline in job separations over the past decade (and in increasing average job tenure in the UK), boundaryless careers continue to hold the imagination of academics, management schools and practitioners (Inkson et al. 2012). While the existence of changed employment landscape may be subject to debate (Zeitz et al. 2009), this study seeks to explore whether the boundaryless career model offers millennials a way of sensemaking their career and articulating their expectations from current and future employment. Therefore, the overarching research question for this study is,

Are boundaryless career models relevant to the way in which millennials conceptualise their current and future career?

As part of this, a number of sub-questions will be posed.

The millennial generation’s experiences of the world of work have been characterised as confused and chaotic (Roberts 1997), with changes in their values and expectations compared to previous generations (Smola and Sutton 2002) positioned alongside the notion that the meaning of a career has fundamentally altered (Zabusky and Barley 1996). The “broad and vague” definitions of a career have changed over time, and while definitions may have reflected the many purposes to which the term ‘career’ has meaning, this has hindered and limited the research and practitioner community (Collin 2007, p.558). Early definitions, such as Wilensky (1961) emphasised the linear progression between paid employments, with contemporary writers, such as Arnold (1997, p.16) defining a career as a “sequence of employment-

related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person.” Recent career theory has seen an increase in non-hierarchical and more holistic definitions of the career’ however a traditional, stable, hierarchical, organizational career progression remains the dominant understanding in both academic research and the layperson’s understanding (Zabusky and Barley 1996). Postmodernists view the concept of a career as individually constructed and can be understood through narrative approaches (Cochran 1992), which can offer an organization of life events, identify career meaning (Young and Collin 1988), explore goals and ambitions and supports the “creation of identity” (Bujold 2004, p.472) Researching the subjective nature of careers is commonly understood to mean “the individual’s own interpretation of his or her career situation” (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, p.7), with that perception dependent on a variety of factors such as roles in life, identity, time, agency, and cultural and social context (Bujold 2004). Research on career sensemaking, with specific focus on boundaries and the “changing world of work” have been undertaken in the past (Walton and Mallon 2004, p.78), but this research explores how young people, at the start of their career, understand the term and interpret its meaning as relevant to their own future career - rather than being so reflective at a mid-career point as in previous studies.

Sub-question 1: What do millennial workers understand by the term “career”?

Rapid technological changes, globalisation, and the creation of new industries and occupations have resulted in a future job market that is harder to predict, with occupation choice becoming less clear and providing limited opportunities for progression and development (Guest and Sturges 2007; Savickas et al. 2009). Objectively, the employment situation for many has been altered by the 2008 global financial crash, resulting in the worst global recession in 70 years (IMF 2009), a contraction of the UK economy (BBC 2009), and youth unemployment rising above one million (BBC 2011). This has altered the reality and expectations of all generational groups (Deal et al.

2010). The literature demonstrates the depth of academic debate over the modern notion and trajectory of individual careers, with considerable literature postulating that traditional organizational jobs are defunct and have replaced with boundaryless and protean careers (DeFillippi and Arthur 1994; Hall 1996; Banai and Harry 2004; Walton and Mallon 2004). This has been countered and critiqued as underdeveloped, ill-defined, and disconnected from the objective reality (Pringle and Mallon 2003; Zeitz et al. 2009; Inkson et al. 2012). While younger people will have experienced careers advice, school and parental understanding of a career as traditional and linear (Zabusky and Barley 1996), millennials are now experiencing the employment landscape first hand. This study will respond to the limited qualitative research into career conceptualisation and individual sensemaking (Walton and Mallon 2004), by exploring how millennials understand the employment landscape and how they perceive this to be different and/or similar to that of previous generations.

Sub-question 2: Do millennials perceive that the “employment landscape” has changed?

As well as supposed changes at a global, macro level, individual approaches to careers are noted as having changed, with more focus on personal learning, fulfilment, self-managed careers, family responsibilities, “dual-career” relationships, longer life-spans, and more intrinsic-reward driven careers (Sullivan & Baruch 2009, p.1543). Though critical of the boundaryless career concept, Zeitz et al. (2009, p.338) note that developed countries, “increasingly value independence, multiple options, diverse experiences and self-fulfilment.” However, CIPD (2015) research concluded that millennial expectations were broadly aligned that to of previous generations, notably focusing on work balance, salary and prospects. A lack of data, academic research and the prevalence of strong opinions in the media results in literature that “is confusing at best and contradictory at worst” (Deal et al. 2010, p.191). It is therefore unsurprising that there is significant difference between the perceptions that organizations and managers have with regard to

millennials, and the noted career expectations of millennial generation workers (CIPD, 2015). This research builds on a call for research to focus on desired career characteristics rather than on broad career labels (Inkson et al. 2012), and will explore the career elements – such as mobility, personal development, autonomy, self-management, progression, stability – that millennials wish their career to be characterised by.

Sub-question 3: Which career characteristics do millennial workers value when thinking about the career and future?

The challenges for guidance professionals and young people in mapping, conceptualising and actioning a career have resulted in a level of despair for the younger generation (Roberts 1997). In the UK, a House of Commons Education Committee report (2013, p.3), notes “deterioration” in careers advice and guidance, with “concerns about the consistency, quality, independence and impartiality”. The literature notes that careers guidance continues to be based on positivist approaches, such as vocational psychological guidance, personality-environment fit and Holland’s (1985) personality types, which focus on stable, secure, long-term employment (Savickas et al. 2009). Millennials face challenges, such as rapid political, technological and economic changes, that make navigating a career complex and confusing, significantly impacting on career choice, organizational life and the relationship with other life roles (Savickas et al. 2009). Boundaryless careers have been criticised for over-emphasising individual agency and self-management of careers, which rely on career actors having the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to navigate the employment environment – attributes that are linked to more privileged backgrounds and identities (Inkson et al. 2012). Though millennial workers have high expectations of their careers, they have been criticised for seeking quick success without a desire or motivation to work for it (Schweitzer and Lyons 2010). Facing a complex employment and career landscape, and supported by mechanisms that have been criticised by both academics and policymakers, this research will explore how prepared millennials are in approaching and succeeding in their career.

Sub-question 4: How prepared do millennials feel about enacting and realising their future career?

Research process

This research focuses on individuals aged 20-35 years, those of the millennial generation, who work in the non-profit sector in the United Kingdom. Minority groups are often noted as having been excluded from research on new career discourses, though this commonly refers to low socioeconomic groups, disabled, ethnic minorities, and manual workers (Sullivan and Baruch 2009). Though research on boundaryless careers has included undergraduate and master level students (Briscoe et al. 2006), this study seeks to contribute to the literature by exploring the career construction of millennials at the start of their career, rather than at later careers points that is more typical of the existing literature.

In the UK, the non-profit sector is mostly associated with charitable organizations that tackle poverty, promote education or religion, or provide goods or services that are “beneficial to the community” (Salamon and Anheier 1997, p.17). In 2011, there were 900,000 civil society organizations (common terminology for UK non-profit organizations), including 170,000 registered charities (Kane and Allen 2011). Within the non-profit sector a range of sub-entities exist, and this research will focus on individuals who identify as working for a non-governmental organization or advocacy groups. The United Nations (2003, p.21) define non-governmental organizations as “promoting economic development or poverty reduction in less developed areas” and advocacy groups as those “promote civil and other rights, or advocate the social and political interests of general or special constituencies”.

This research focuses on individual career construction and the perceptions of millennial participant. It seeks to better understand their construction of reality in terms of a future career to better inform supportive practices of young

people and the millennial workforce and contribute to the academic literature in this field. The researcher takes a postmodernist epistemological position that views knowledge “as an ongoing process of creation” and adopts a qualitative process allows for the wealth of detail, context, and experience to be constructed and shared (Symon and Cassell 1998, p.2). The role of the interviewer is as a facilitator in the process of individual construction, with an attempt to see “the social world from the point of view of the actor” (Bryman 1984, p.77) and support that participant to make sense of their version of reality. The researcher identifies as a member of the NGO community in the UK and is a member of the millennial generation. This allows for relevant questions to facilitate the discussion, elicit alternative perspectives, and capture richer detail (Brott 2004). In social constructivist approaches, the interviewer is not a neutral observer as within the natural sciences (Bryman 1984). The exploratory, constructivist nature of this research means that it can only be considered representative of the participants in this particular study, at that particularly moment in time. It seeks to understand how individuals perceive, understand and construct the reality of their current situation.

As a professional within the NGO sector in the UK, the researcher made contact with individuals directly, initially via email, within professional and personal networks to secure twenty interviews. This included advertising on personal social media platforms and other participants referred two individuals to the researcher. A range of professional roles, different employment contracts, lengths of tenure, seniority and educational background were sought, including individuals who were employed, freelancers or self-employed. All participants self-identified as working in the NGO or advocacy sector. Of the 20 participants for this study, eleven were female and nine were male. 14 were full time employees (on a range of permanent and fixed-term contracts), and four had part-time employed roles (all were female). All those with part-time employed roles also undertook self-employed freelance contracts, as did one full-time employee who worked compressed hours. One person was running their own business, while another was doing a mixture of

small paid roles and volunteering after returned from a year working abroad ahead of an anticipated upcoming full-time role.

Data analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, with a mixture of set questions and subsequent space for discussion. 19 interviews were conducted face to face, with one interview conducted over Skype. The interviews began by asking participants to reflect on their current roles in life, and then moved onto questions exploring concept and perception of careers, employment landscape, desired career characteristics and responsibility and readiness for their career. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and was digitally recorded (with consent from participants) with additional handwritten notes by the researcher. Recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Template analysis was used to analyse the transcriptions of the interviewees. This is an increasingly common analysis tool within qualitative research, particularly suited to interviews, and is an approach that can be adapted to best analyse the data retrieved without forcing the researcher into predetermining the given themes (King 2012). Template analysis offers a middle road between content analysis and grounded theory (King 2012). Grounded theory, while extensively utilised, is most commonly associated with realist approaches to data analysis, seeking to discover knowledge and present “‘real’ beliefs, attitudes, [and] values” of the research participants (King 2012, p.428). Given that this research adopts a constructivist approach and seeks to understand the subjective meanings from participants as they interpret and make sense of the world around them, grounded theory would be a less suitable process of analysis. Content analysis is commonly used as part of a positivist approach where the meanings of data are “not considered to be contestable” (Lee 2012, p.396). This would be less suitable given that this research focuses on individual construction of careers and sensemaking rather than objective content. Template analysis is therefore a well-suited tool for this research as it provides both the flexibility to respond to the data

without codes set *a priori*, but with the systematic rigour of a final template for interpretation of findings.

A subset of the transcriptions, five interviews out of twenty, were analysed and an initial template was created based on codes drawn from the aims of the research and the supporting theory. The initial *a priori* template was aligned to the research questions with the following codes applied: construction of career; employment landscape; career characteristics; preparedness for career. Sub-codes were then created during the analysis as reoccurring themes were recognised. This provisional template was then used to analyse all twenty interviews using MaxQDA. Throughout the analysis, the template was modified with the addition, deletion, and redefinition of sub-codes. The transcription data was analysed twice based on the final template. As stated by King (2012, p.444):

...no template can be considered 'final' if there remain any sections of text which are clearly relevant to the research question, but remain uncoded.

The final template, including frequency of codes, is below:

Code		Frequency total
Construction of career		48
	Organizational	5
	Personal values & beliefs	3
	No perceived career	7
	Multiple roles or organizations	8
	Consistent sector / theme	6
	Paid employment	5
	Progression over time	8
	Long term	6
Responsibility		50
	Wider society	7
	Government	7
	School / university / education	1
	Organization	11

	Individual	24
Preparedness		137
	Active planning & activities	3
	Advice & guidance	11
	Careers advice	9
	Confidence or self-esteem	8
	Difficulty in presenting skills & knowledge	17
	Feeling prepared	5
	Feeling unprepared	8
	Figuring out what to do	11
	Individual research	5
	Networks	8
	Organizational opportunities & support	7
	Reflection	6
	Take it as it comes	18
	Though voluntary / freelance work	12
	Training & Education	9
Changed career landscape		111
	New demands and expectations	0
	Importance on personal life and wider activities	5
	Different routes to employment	12
	More choice & opportunities	11
	Mobility across organizations	19
	Transferable skills	2
	Organizational	0
	Change in org focus	1
	No "job for life"	7
	Lack of organizational investment	10
	Social	0
	Changed social expectations	11
	Different values	1
	Economic	0
	Less stability / more flexibility	11
	New industries and technologies	1
	Economy changes	10
	Less financial insecurity or demands	5
	Globalisation	2
	Similarities	3
Career Characteristics		262
	Good management	1
	Positive environment	3
	Organizational career	7
	Security / Stability	10
	Relationships	2
	Impact	0

	Organizational	7
	Social impact	31
	Flexibility	7
	Mobility	1
	Across team	2
	Across organizations	6
	Challenging / stimulating work	18
	Variety of work	11
	Autonomy / self-directed work	9
	Work/life/family balance	14
	Recognition of work	11
	Being valued	7
	Social benchmarking	2
	Progression	8
	Financial rewards	13
	Greater impact	5
	Formal position	16
	Responsibility	2
	Aligned to personal & social values	10
	Career as self	5
	Individual benefits	3
	Personal growth	5
	Personal project or creation	10
	Personal fulfilment	17
	Learning and skill development	17
	Wider opportunities	2

Table 1 - Final template for analysis

Results

The results section will present the emerging themes from the template analysis under the four sub-research questions. Results are primarily based on the frequency of the code within the template analysis – both high and low frequency. Based on this, the discussion will explore the usefulness of the boundaryless career model for millennials, building on the emerging themes from the whole data set.

Sub-research question 1: what do millennial workers understand by the term “career”?

Participants mostly associated the term “career” as something long-term, with progression over time. One participant noted:

Career, to me, means your job, but also the long-term development of your job. So sort of where you start, how you develop, and which path you take.

A career was seen as a something “esteemed” or “proper” or as “something that had a particular skillset attached to it.” Participants often described a career as more than paid employment, and more “part of who I am as an individual and what I want to achieve in life.”

A career was perceived as beginning at a young age and ending with retirement and was characterised by an upward trajectory of personal development and professional progression. Progression was typically conceptualised as a “becoming more senior or developing new skills or doing new things”, which included both traditional organizational career characteristics, such as formal organizational position, increased responsibility and financial rewards, as well as emphasis on personal development, social impact, intellectual stimulation and recognition. The latter are more commonly features of boundaryless careers (Sullivan 1999).

Careers were seen as interacting with organizations, either through organizational careers, or as an example of how interviewees *did not* want their careers to be shaped. Participants saw a career as spanning a number of organizations and life roles – including paid employment, volunteering, and relationships. Whilst mobility across organizations was a frequent perceived change in the employment landscape, a “career” was seen as the “thread” or “key focus” that linked a range of life activities. The metaphor of a “journey” and “path”, were commonly used to conceptualise career meaning. One participant noted:

I think of my career, like the path that I want to go on or the path that I'm on, and I think that makes up a lot of things. It makes up what I do in my private time. So whether that's hobbies or whether that's volunteering work, that also makes up my career.

A number of respondents perceived a career as something that they didn't have, particularly because they conceptualised a career in a more traditional, organizational sense that didn't align with their current employment situation, aspirations, or failed to include the many aspects of their life that felt important.

This question elicited limited responses from participants, who instead demonstrated what they understood as a career more by their description of the employment landscape and the characteristics they seek from a career.

Sub-research question 1: do millennials perceive that the “employment landscape” has changed?

Participants perceived that the career landscape has changed and is significantly different to that experienced by their parents or grandparents. This was seen in the perception of increased mobility, and an expectation that individuals will work for multiple organizations, for short periods of time, in numerous sectors, rather than a single employment setting with a “job for life.”

In part this was seen as a result of the modern economic situation, which was described as “more dynamic” and faster moving, but characterised by high cost of living, financial instability, an “unstable labour market”, and short-term contracts.

Though mobility across multiple organizations was expected, it is unclear whether this is due to changes in the global economy, or as a result of changed desires and aspirations, both, or neither. In addition to being a consequence of economic changes, increased mobility across organizational boundaries was seen as enabling of new skills development, opportunities, and personal and professional progression. One participant felt:

It's about moving around quite regularly, finding exciting things with new opportunities. There's not that loyalty to one company, it's a loyalty to that journey that you want to be on.

However, this “flexibility” was often associated with “insecurity.” Insecure contracts were perceived as particularly prevalent in the NGO sector due to fixed-term project funding, and fluctuating core funds. This was seen as both limiting for organizations in the sense that employees could leave at short notice, and added to the negative wellbeing of participants and their future outlook. One participant, who is both an organizational employee and manager of millennial staff, commented:

I think that today there are opportunities for you to move and progress quite a bit and move to different organizations more easily, maybe. But I think generally it is more about insecurity rather than flexibility...its about feeling a bit insecure rather than necessarily having those opportunities to change, develop and grow.

Participants often looked at their parents’ career with a sense of disbelief, or with a negative perception of what that generational experience must have been like. One participant compared his current career flexibility against,

“being stuck in the same industry, the same profession, and...same kind of role for quite a long time”. Similarly, as participants found it hard to conceive of a single, organizational career, participants felt that their parents and potential employers did not understand their “alien” reality. Parents and family members had “anxiety” about the instability of participants’ careers, and a “stigma” still remained with older employers who expect “all your work experience directed towards a certain job.” This has resulted in difficulty in articulating skill sets, justifying choices and creating a narrative of progression and development. Conversely, one participant who is a manager within a small UK charity had the reverse recruitment outlook and considered a person with few jobs listed on their CV as “not innovative or kind of [not] ahead of the game.”

Whether as part of traditional organizational roles, or as part of the perceived changed job landscape, participants noted that different routes to employment are demanded. The expectation of millennials to work in organizations for little or no financial compensation through internship programmes, and the requirement for increasingly high levels of education for entry-level positions was perceived as requiring young jobseekers to be more creative and flexible in their quest for employment. This is in contrast to the “more explicit pathways in how to get certain types of jobs” that existed for previous generations. This was also, in part, recognition of the varied job roles that are now available, and the need to be able to display employment-related skills as well as formal education qualifications. Whilst formal education was seen as having previously been a direct route to employment and for career progression, the targeted expansion of university education (BBC 2002) was perceived as having increased competition amongst millennials, inflating the minimum educational requirements positions, and resulting in young people needing wider experience, “that proves you know more, or are more capable.” One participant summarised:

You can’t just sit there and play by the rules anymore. I think you have to stand out and do something different.

The changed social expectations of society were perceived as providing a different career landscape compared to previous generations, notably for the role of women. The recognition of female careers and more control over family choices were seen as having a positive impact on the opportunities that women want to – and in some cases felt compelled – to take up and succeed at. One female participant noted that “there is a lot more freedom and I think we're expected to use that freedom”. Cultural identities and expectations have also been challenged, allowing individuals to pursue career options or educational subjects that were traditionally less valued. One interviewee, who identified as part of the Indian community, attributed this change to the rise of the Internet, and participation in non-formal and extracurricular activities.

Sub-research question 3: Which career characteristics do millennial workers value when thinking about the career and future?

Participants focused on individual gains and prioritised their own personal development, growth and fulfilment. Professional development was mostly characterised as the learning of new skills and knowledge, capacity to further career progression, develop expertise in a subject area, and satisfy personal goals. Many participants wanted their future careers to be exciting and part of a bigger life story than just employment. This emphasis on personal fulfilment included other aspects of life, such as travel and relationships. “Fun”, “enjoyment”, and “adventure” were some of the words used to describe how participants wanted their careers to be characterised. Many participants described learning and development as important to them personally, as they seek to grow as individuals, not only as working professionals. For one participant these were important career characteristics:

I think it's about continuous learning...in my career I want to be continually stretched and challenged to do new things or to grow my range of skills, knowledge or experiences.

Progression was described in traditional organizational career terms as a linear path of upward movement, increased responsibility, and organizational seniority. Financial rewards were rarely seen as a prime motivator, but were frequently mentioned as part of career progression alongside increased responsibility and performance. Higher wages were often linked to age, with increased financial stability being required as one got older to support family choices, enable home ownership, provide security of pensions and other employment-related financial benefits, such as maternity leave. Recognition, challenge and stimulation of work were frequently cited career and employment motivators. Within an organizational context, this included the day-to-day feeling of being valued, praise from colleagues and positive reinforcement from managers. Longer-term recognition was sought from a “community of peers” or the beneficiaries of projects they had been part of.

For many of the participants, there was sense that a career should be more than “paying the bills” and a 9-5 mode of employment. This desire for greater meaning was underpinned by a high focus on social impact and an alignment of work and personal values. Under the theme “social impact” there were 31 coded segments from 16 interviews. Given that all the participants in this study self-identify as working for the non-governmental or advocacy sector, this is unsurprising. Participants of the research were working on a range of long-term social issues, including mental health, climate change, youth work, international development, conservation, and social action. Impact was predominately seen as “making a positive impact in terms of people's lives”, the development of the organization or community, and the feeling of contribution and “leaving a better world behind.” Participants frequently noted that social impact was a significant career motivator:

I learned a long time ago that money wasn't strong enough to do that with me, it didn't interest me enough. Whereas being able to actually think about what I was doing in the bigger context really helped and that drove me.

While some interviewees attached value to “the idea of seniority and status with an organization”, hierarchical progression was seen as an enabler of greater impact given the increase power and ability to set the organizational strategy and direction. One interviewee noted that by becoming CEO, “I can instigate actual change and improve young people's lives”, while another perceived that promotion was “less about the upward recognition and more about the [professional] development.” Hierarchical progression was also desired to affect internal change, such as the development and motivation of staff, financial sustainability, and mission effectiveness.

Despite featuring frequently in participant perceptions of the employment landscape, mobility across organizations was rarely mentioned as a desired career characteristic. Therefore, participants have a perception that mobility across numerous organizations will define their careers, however, it is unclear whether such mobility is *desired*, or just *expected*. That said, out of the 20 participants, only one person stated their desire to stay with one organization for the rest of their career (though described working across multiple teams), while two others said that they like the idea of staying with one organization for a long period of time.

Sub-research question 4: How prepared do millennials feel about enacting and realising their future career?

Participants indicated a near total responsibility for their own career, with organizations and wider society playing a significant but supporting role. Even within the context of organizations, respondents felt that they had to take personal “ownership”, and that “my career is my responsibility” with the need for individuals to be proactive in terms of employment choices, education and training development, outside employment activities, and lifestyle priorities. While organizations, peers and external networks may encourage career development through advice, support or opportunities, responsibility was that of the individual with respondents indicating a ‘what you put in, you get out’ approach. As one participant noted that, “ultimately I decide what I do, how I

do it, how it's shaped.” Though participants described themselves as primarily responsible, this was in part because they felt that no one *other than themselves* – such as managers or an organization - were responsible for their career.

Despite this high level of individual responsibility, participants expected organizational and institutional mechanisms and opportunities to exist to support their career progression. Formal training and qualifications, line manager support, variety of in-role tasks, honest communication, and guidance on career progression were noted expectations of organizations from interviewees. However, there was a perception that these mechanisms were not necessarily in place, with little “investment in young people as a resource or as something that can grow and develop.” This was perceived as due to a lack of funding, less resources in the NGO sector, and a “nervousness” of investing in younger staff who may leave or be “pinched” by other organizations. In talking about his line manager, one participant reflected:

He's also got a very strong vested interest in me not gaining too much professional experience and skill development, and therefore leaving, and leaving them in the lurch.

The perceived lack of investment of young staff members has resulted in participants seeking development opportunities elsewhere to broaden their skills, experiences and career development. This included formal careers advice, guidance from trusted friends, Internet research, self-reflection, and further training and education. Participants predominately described using freelance projects and volunteering opportunities – outside of formal employment commitments - to explore other interests, develop new skills and broaden their networks. After noting the range of different skill and thematic areas that he has worked in, one full-time employee explained:

Whereas in your 9 to 5 job, you're only ever likely to focus on one of these areas. If you use your spare time to volunteer, to do internships, take on responsibility in other organizations that need help, you can take on areas that you haven't tried before, that you think you might be good at and it's a good way of testing yourself basically.

These additional experiences were seen as a strategic for career planning and progression, and more widely as useful demonstrations of additional skills, knowledge and commitment beyond formal employment. A number of individuals reflected that their current job roles, career trajectories or employment sector would be different had it not been for these wider experiences and opportunities, particularly those from voluntary placements or roles.

Despite high levels of individual career responsibility, participants adopted a "take it as it comes" approach to career progression, development and their future. Participants demonstrated a sense of openness, being receptive to new opportunities and a sense of positive optimism "that things unfold, and things will be okay." While no one articulated a clear plan for career development and progression, participants demonstrated a calmness and laissez-faire attitude to their future career – at least in terms of planning and preparation. One participant explained:

I guess I'm semi-prepared for what I'm doing now and I'm winging it. But we have to. I don't need to have a master plan of what I'm gonna be when I'm 70 or 80, I don't know, it will change. But I guess I feel prepared enough to wing it. And I think that's what we're all doing.

Many of the respondents noted that there were in a fortunate position, having supportive parents, acquired university education, had the opportunity to travel and participate in a wider range of professional and voluntary opportunities. This "good foundation of education, skills and the right current opportunities" was seen as a positive starting point on which to build their

future career, even if currently they were “not massively”, “somewhat”, or only “relatively” prepared to take proactive choices and actions. Some perceived themselves as relatively powerless against wider economic factors, market instability and job insecurity. Though the majority of interviewees were in employment, many did not know what they wanted to do next, with a more long-term plan even less defined. One interviewee concluded that, “I couldn't tell you where I want to be, what I want to be doing.”

Linked to this, participants articulated difficulty in understanding their skills, knowledge and talents due to the number of organizations, range of different employment settings and sectors, the diversity of in-role tasks and a focus on more general transferable skills (rather than specific organizational skills). One interviewee noted that with, “so many different types of roles and sometimes I found it difficult to find what my strengths are.” This lack of self-awareness meant that participants had difficulty in articulating skills, knowledge and experiences to prospective employers, through interviews and job application forms. Participants perceived that those involved in the recruitment and selection of staff were often older and were thought not to understand the changed employment landscape. While individuals may understand the choices they make, this was seen as “harder to explain it to people outside of my professional field” and required “CV twisting” to demonstrate the required skills and experience. A number of participants described using narrative approaches to make links between their current skills, knowledge and previous experiences. Constructing a narrative was seen as a useful tool to counter the perception of an “unstructured” or “unfocused” career history. However, depending on the specific role the narrative would be changed, with “two completely different jobs” resulting in “two completely different narratives.”

Discussion

With reference to the academic literature, this section uses the results of the sub-questions as the basis to answer the overarching research question: *Are boundaryless career models relevant to the way in which millennials conceptualise their current and future career?*

Career literature has been dominated by two, apparently opposing, notions of career: the traditional organizational vs the boundaryless career. This research has highlighted that while millennial workers seek traditional recognition and advancement such as formal recognition through organizational hierarchy, higher financial reward, and increased responsibility (CIPD 2015), this is alongside a need for psychologically meaningful and challenging work, alignment of their personal and social values, high level of self-career management, mobility across organizations, and an emphasis on personal growth, fulfilment and social impact. For this, they want recognition from their peers, to feel valued by their employers and to be well rewarded for their efforts. Participants in this study have defined their career against both traditional organizational careers, and more recently, boundaryless and protean career theories. This aligns with findings by Pringle and Mallon (2003, p.846) who noted that:

...participants did talk about career self-management and finding personal meaning in it, they still recognized and judged their own careers against more traditional views.

Out of the six aspects of a boundaryless career, described by Arthur & Rousseau (1996), it is noticeable that while participants did seek organizational mobility, external validation and networks, perceived themselves as boundaryless, and felt able to make career moves based on personal responsibilities or life choices, they did not break “traditional organizational career boundaries, such as hierarchical reporting and advancement” (Inkson et al. 2012, p.326). It could be that millennials don't fit into either traditional organizational or boundaryless career categories.

This potential contradiction was captured by Humphries and Gatenby (1996 cited by Walton and Mallon 2003):

Developing a term like the 'boundaryless career' and its associated practices is, at best, a way of helping individuals understand the apparent instability of their lives. And at worst a way of reducing expectations so that instability seems totally normal, even desirable.

Taking the “at worst” scenario, it is conceivable that young people have been “pushed into boundaryless careers” (Zeitz et al. 2009) rather than proactively choosing them. Participants perceived that the employment landscape is fundamentally different to that of previous generations, compared to their parents or grandparents. But for them, this *changed* employment landscape is merely their *current* employment landscape, with their attention more focused on how to navigate this. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the characteristics of their employment reality are something that participants *want* or simply what they *expect to deal with*. For example, mobility across organizations was seen as normal and anticipated, but was simultaneously seen as providing flexibility *and* precarious employment. It was something frequently mentioned in relation to the career landscape, but not as one of the desired career characteristics. Similarly, while participants were sceptical about wanting a “job for life”, there was a clear expectation of organizational progression and traditional forms of recognition. As Arthur & Rousseau (1996, p.6) articulate in their six characteristics of boundaryless careers, individuals “may perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.” Participants perceived a career characterised by personal growth, intellectual stimulation, mobility, self-management and development, irrespective of the economic and organizational challenges they perceive as facing, such as employment instability, high youth unemployment, financial insecurity, different routes to employment, and the end of a “job for life” in a single organization.

The question is then: does the notion of a boundaryless career support millennial sensemaking or does it simply legitimise a negative experience?

This research indicates that boundaryless career theories and definitions is likely having little impact in supporting millennials to conceptualise and rationalise their career. Despite the claim that boundaryless careers “have become predominant” (Banai and Harry 2004, p.98), no participant in this research described their career as “boundaryless”, nor used an alternative term or theory that defined their situation. Instead, participants were more likely to feel that they did not have a career, given that their experience failed to align with traditional understandings of a career. This was further compounded by a perception that parents and prospective employers do not understand their employment landscape or the choices and priorities they make in relation to their personal and professional progression and development.

While a “person’s subjective sense of career success may differ from the expectations of employers, family, and friends, or society at large” (Sullivan and Arthur 2006, p.24), this research indicated that participants attempt to benchmark their success against more traditional measures. This is in line with conclusions from the CIPD (2015), which showed millennials prioritising good salary and progression. Participants articulated a need to place themselves in the world and to compare themselves – whether for their own benefit, their parents’ or society’s – against a commonly understandable and appreciated framework. One participant termed this as the “cocktail syndrome”, which describes the need to create a narrative that “demonstrates how you feel about your career” when asked about your career over cocktails or at a dinner party.

Conclusion

This research has explored the extent to which the concept of the boundaryless career is relevant to the way in which millennials understand and navigate their current and future career. For the participants in this study - those working in the UK non-profit sector and from the millennial generation - neither the concept of a boundaryless career nor a traditional organizational career matches their current experience, their future expectations, desired career characteristics, and their level of preparedness. The concept of the traditional organizational career fails to appreciate the perceived millennial reality of forced/desired mobility, low organizational investment, absence of career management, and limited understanding of their situation by those around them. But neither do they include the many aspects of a career that millennial desire and expect. On the other hand, boundaryless careers as a theory and rationalisation of the modern career are unknown to individuals outside the academic field, underappreciates the desirability of organizational mobility versus economically forced, and fails to provide a socially acceptable and commonly understood measure of success and comparison.

Instead, they sit *between* the two and *outside* of both. Between the two, participants experience a boundaryless lifestyle – such as organizational mobility, self-managed progression, alignment with personal values and emphasis on social impact – and yet are unable to understand their position and create an identity for themselves without benchmarking against traditional career elements such as formal position, salary and organizational responsibility. Outside of both, participants felt excluded from a career if their experience and trajectory fell outside the norms and common understanding. This was seen by participants not feeling that they had a career – something almost impossible under the widest academic definitions – or by those unable to make sense of their employment and career landscape and incapable of explaining this to their friends, families and prospective employers.

This results in a neither classification providing a useable, relevant or meaningful understanding of the modern career as experienced by millennial

workers. More plainly: boundaryless careers have only limited relevance to millennials in terms of supporting their conceptualisation of their current and future career.

Limitations

This research contributes to the current academic literature and offers a further understanding of the perceived reality in terms of a future career and current employment landscape of the millennial workforce and highlights additional supportive practices that are required to support and guide the younger workforce. Despite the popular belief, and literature stating that millennials, "...think differently, act differently, and have different values to older generations" (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008, p.372), generational differences are only one aspect that might influence a person's behaviour and the significance attached to belonging to a certain generational groups should not be overstated (Deal et al. 2010). Further research is required to explore subgroupings within the millennial classification, including class, gender, education, and ethnicity (Inkson et al. 2012). This research contributes to the academic field by focusing on millennial workers within the NGO sector in the UK - in contrast to the US corporate-focused research that is dominant within organizational literature. Participants of this research were predominately highly educated, London-based, British-white, middle-class individuals, and would be considered part of a privileged social grouping. However, this may not be unrepresentative of the current social makeup of UK based NGOs. Larger and wider research is needed to explore the disparity between millennial expectations and broader employment realities, particularly beyond the NGO sector.

Recommendations

This study has highlighted the limited use of academic concepts, such as the “traditional organizational career” and boundaryless career theories, in supporting millennial workers to understand and navigate their current and expected career. It highlights a number of the perceived challenges facing millennial workers in the NGO sector and a number of implications for millennial workers, organizations, and wider institutions can be drawn.

At an individual level, participants in this study demonstrated a high level of motivation to achieve and balance employment and life goals, under the umbrella of their career. However, they felt noticeably unprepared to realise their goals. In the absence of organizational support and weak careers advice (both perceptions by participants), individuals will need to take more proactive steps to ensure they have the skills, knowledge, abilities and networks in order to navigate the employment landscape and fulfil their career aspirations.

Organizations need to understand the expectations of young workers, create realistic strategies for their professional development, design jobs and tasks that are varied and allow on-the-job learning, challenge and knowledge stretch. At the same time, from this study participants perceived a reticence from organizations to invest in young staff, demanded complex routes to secure employment, and offered short-term or insecure contracts.

More widely, there is the need for increased initiatives to support young people to navigate the career and employment landscape. With increased emphasis on individual agency and responsibility, initiatives may be needed to support skill development, career guidance and management, skill accreditation, social and emotional support. This research found that many participants engage in individual, often Internet based, research about career development and progression, due to a lack of support mechanisms once out of school, college and higher education. A range of institutional settings, such as employment agencies, professional communities, and unions, can play a

significant role in supporting millennial workers with the tools and skills needed to navigate the modern career.

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Word count including references: 10,848

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Appendix A – Statement of reflective learning

This study explored the experiences and expectations of the millennial generation and those working in the non-profit and NGO sector – both of which I would be defined as. Furthermore, it adopted a qualitative research design with a postmodernist epistemology meaning that I took an active role within the research interviews and acted as a facilitator in the “on-going process of creation” (Symon and Cassell 1998, p.2) with participants. Throughout this research I faced two major challenges: researcher bias and applying rigorous analysis over “gut reactions”.

Researcher bias

This study included colleagues and friends from the non-profit sector and there was the potentiality for me to draw upon knowledge and understanding of individuals gained prior to the interviews. Similarly, I am a member of the target group (I work in the UK non-profit sector) and fall within the millennial generation age bracket. In discussion with my supervisor, I explored a number of qualitative methods, such as the Life Line, Twenty Questions, and career narrative techniques, to prompt the desired discussion and limit the potential interference from myself. I wanted to avoid the possibility of leading participants, guiding their responses, and being bias towards my own experiences. However, this created an additional problem: an overly complex research design! After a trial interview, and at the suggestion of my supervisor, I adopted a semi-structured interview process that allowed for a standard research template with the flexibility of deviation and prompting.

Through this I learned to give more trust to the participants in being able to answer direct questions, and to design the research in way that *enables* participants in a process of discovery rather than *prescribes* their responses. My instinct was to provide numerous “activities” for participants rather than create meaningful questions that instigate a conversation. This is, most probably, a wider personality flaw of mine, but within qualitative research seems a vital consideration - both in terms of the participant experience and

ultimate data analysis. For future research design, this was an important self-discovery.

Data analysis

Throughout the data collection process, I would reflect on the interviews through personal notes and discussions with fellow students. In response to questions about the research, I would give my initial reactions to the data, my informal analysis and the sensemaking I was conducting. With this I found there to be a risk of interpreting the data and reaching conclusions that were based on “hunches” and “gut reaction” rather than rigorous analysis. The repetition of these to numerous colleagues can turn them into declarative statements rather than on-going thoughts and discoveries. At the same time, I find qualitative data analysis to be active, social and iterative and my understanding of the text, the meaning and the results was through my continued interaction with the data – of which conversations with others played a part.

To ensure the results were based on an honest interrogation of the data, I adopted template analysis for the interview coding. I found the thoroughness of template analysis to be useful as a novice researcher, both in creating a process of in-depth interrogation and in providing the flexibility to respond to the findings that emerged instead of setting codes *a priori* or ignoring the sub-text behind the spoken words. As a young researcher, I found this style of data analysis to be useful for my own learning and development. It allowed me the freedom to engage with the data and consider my subjective understanding, while providing a guide throughout the process to ensure a thorough exploration. I remained strict with myself about trialing the template, refining it through the coding process, and reapplying the final template. As a novice researcher, this gave me confidence in my process and overcame some of the potential pitfalls that inexperienced qualitative researchers can face.

In conclusion, I found this research project to be a rewarding experience that brought together the skills, knowledge and abilities gained from the wider *MSc Organizational Behaviour* programme. I made important discoveries about my starting points for research design and my limitations when it comes to qualitative data analysis. Crucially, I navigated solutions to these throughout the research and have reflected on how I would conduct research in the future.

Appendix B – Ethics Form

Department of Organizational Psychology
BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**PROPOSAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN
PARTICIPANTS
SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Please type or write clearly in BLACK ink

Name of investigator: Alex James Farrow

Status (e.g. PhD student, postgraduate): Postgraduate

Name of supervisor (if known): Etlyn Kenny

Course/Programme: MSc Organizational Behaviour

Title of investigation (15 words maximum):

How millennial workers within the UK non-profit sector construct the notion of their future career.

Contact address 47B Antill Road, London, N15 4AR
for investigator:

Telephone number: N/A Mobile: 07702 058 226

Email: alexjames.farrow@gmail.com

Date of Application: 28/05/2014

Proposed starting date: 02/06/2014

Source of funding if relevant: N/A

Is any other Ethical Committee involved: **NO**

If YES, give details of committee and its decision, enclosing any relevant documentation

N/A

Brief description of aims/objectives of the study

Career literature has noted that the millennial generation, those currently aged between 20-35 years, hold different values and expectations for their career, with an emphasis on self-managed development, individual life purpose and a social contribution (Tulgan, 1996; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Though this changed notion of a “career” is seen in theories such as protean and boundaryless career literature (Hall, 1996; Sullivan, 1999; Briscoe et al, 2006), the common understanding of a stable, linear, hierarchical, organisational career remains (Zabusky & Barley, 1996). Despite the emergence of “new career discourses”, their rise, relevance and significance is questioned based on little empirical support that boundaryless careers are being enacted (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010), that the definition is unclear and ambiguous (Inkson et al, 2012) and that such discourses are relevant only for certain groups, which exclude women, minorities and the low-skilled, and fail to take into account social contextual factors (Inkson et al, 2012).

It is unclear whether this change in values, attitudes and expectations, amongst the millennial generation has translated into different constructions and perceptions of a career in practice. Through semi-structured interviews, this study will seek to explore how millennial workers within the non-profit sector in the UK construct the notion of their career, the characteristics of such a career that are important, the perceived career landscape and their

perceived level of readiness for their career ahead. Interviews will be digitally recorded and subject to template analysis.

How will participants be selected? Will the selection process have implication in terms of data protection etc?

Participants will be recruited via email and social media advertising. This will ask for direct contact with the researcher. Though a representative sample is not sought in this study, prospective participants will be asked to provide their age and gender to ensure a balance across the millennial generation category. This is defined as between 20-35 years (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Only participants within the given age range will be selected, and only those who consider themselves to work within the non-profit sector. This could include individuals who are employed, freelancers or self-employed individuals, but who work within the NGO or advocacy sector. Within the non-profit sector a range of sub-entities exist, and this research will focus on individuals who identify as working for a non-governmental organisation or advocacy groups, as described by the United Nations (2003).

Where will the study be conducted?

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted in-person and/or using Internet enabled communication (e.g. Skype, Facetime, Google Hangout). In-person interviews will predominantly take place in London, UK.

Briefly describe what participating in the study will involve:

Participants in the study will be asked a number of questions as part of a semi-structured interview. The interview will last between 30-45 minutes and questions will ask participants to elaborate on how they perceive the notion of their career, whether they perceive the career landscape to be different for their generation, how prepared they feel for their career and which work

characteristics (e.g. personal values, autonomy, self-management, progression, learning, mobility) are important to them. The interview will involve a Card Sort activity to elicit deeper reflections on the notion of career, and the important values held by millennial workers.

Does the study involve the deliberate use of:

- | | |
|---|----|
| (i) Unpleasant stimuli or unpleasant situations? | NO |
| (ii) Invasive procedures? | NO |
| (iii) Deprivation or restriction (e.g., food, water, sleep)? | NO |
| (iv) Drug administration? | NO |
| (v) Actively misleading or deceiving the subjects? | NO |
| (vi) Withholding information about the nature or outcome of the experiment? | NO |
| (vii) Any inducement or payment to take part in the experiment | NO |

Does the study have any procedure that might cause distress to the subject?
NO

Give details of any item marked YES: N/A

What arrangements are to be made to obtain the free and informed consent of the subjects?

(Attach copy of information sheet/ consent form)

In line with the BPS' *Code of Human Research Ethics*:

- Participants will be required to give informed, voluntary consent meaning this will be fully briefed on the research (verbally and with an information sheet) with the option to not participate or withdraw consent at a future time.
- Participants will be fully briefed on the nature and purpose of the research.

- Participants will be fully debriefed on conclusion of the evaluation via email.

Please see the copy of the information sheet / consent form at the bottom of this Ethics Form.

How will you maintain the participants' confidentiality?

All data will be held confidentiality with participants guaranteed privacy and anonymity through use of ID numbers. Participants will be asked at the end of the interview whether they consent to having their first name used in the final analysis.

Will the subjects be minors or suffer from learning disabilities? NO

If yes, attach sheet outlining how you will address the ethical issues raised.

If you feel that the proposed investigation raises ethical issues please outline them below and, if necessary continue on a separate sheet:

I do not feel any specific ethical issues are raised within this research.

Will the research involve any conflict between your role at work and your role as a research student?

The sole researcher is a member of the target group (both in age and professional sector), and there is the possibility of prior knowledge or past platonic relationship with participants. The call for participants will be sector wide, and therefore reduce the number of participants who are known to the researcher. Professional boundaries will be explicitly maintained throughout – and beyond - the interview in relation to the research study. No access, or additional information, will be available to me as a researcher, other than that voluntarily discussed in the interviews.

Classification of proposal (please circle): ROUTINE

I consider my study conforms with the ethical expectations of management and psychological research

SIGNATURE of investigator
(appropriate)

(and supervisor, where appropriate)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Fesler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a stylized 'F'.

Date: 28/05/2014