

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Encouraging the Productivity of Female Millennial Employees Who Apply Knowledge to Enhance Products and Services**

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**The almost 20 million female millennial knowledge workers enhance products, services, and customers in American businesses by applying their skillset knowledge. While participative management theories, like William Ouchi's Theory Z, are known to promote employee productivity and loyalty it is noted that they only focus on the majority population. This study looked to extend existing participative management theories to include the female millennial knowledge worker and avoid negative costs associated with poor productivity and turnover. This manuscript highlights key results from a qualitative embedded single-case study that explored the influence participative management techniques had on the turnover and productivity of female millennial knowledge workers. This study extended participative management theory to include the female millennial knowledge worker and noted that managers with female millennial knowledge employees should consider a focus on employee development, timely feedback, and cultivating a positive working environment.**

**Keywords:** female, millennial, knowledge worker, participative management, productivity, turnover.

### **Introduction**

The almost 20 million American female employees born during the millennial generation, working in roles that benefit the product, service, or customer through the application of knowledge contribute to domestic business (United States Census Bureau, 2011; Lücking & Pernicka, 2009). Participative management techniques that are used to achieve long term organizational benefits by facilitating employee performance through loyalty and involvement are noted to focus on the majority population (male employees) and could alienate women (Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010; Angermeier, Dunford, Boss, Boss, & Miller, 2009; Pinkovitz, Moskal, & Green, 2006, Ouchi & Price, 1978). During this research how participative management influenced the productivity and turnover of the female millennial knowledge worker was considered. This paper reflects and summarizes the findings from Paros (2015).

### **Literature Review**

Researchers have found that men and women bring different perspectives and contributions to business. Male leaders have been recognized for their results orientated focus, while women are known to contribute a more collaborative style (Ion & Folch, 2009). The researchers did not look for a superior style, but recognized that applying the correct technique to a business

challenge could influence achieved success. A focus on collaborative execution, a quality correlated with the behavior of women leaders, can help to positively facilitate change initiatives where organizational buy-in is essential for successful execution (Ion & Folch, 2009). It is important to recognize and value the influence of women in business and better understand management styles that could alienate these organizational assets.

Female leaders have been found to be more dedicated to making a difference in the workplace than their male counterparts (Chandler, 2008). Women are attracted to leadership positions in order to contribute organizationally through honesty, integrity, competence, and a selfless focus (Chandler, 2008).

Organizations can capitalize on the nature of women in the workplace by placing them in positions involved in the culture of the business, initiatives focused on benefiting the community, or projects that enhance an existing quality of life (Chandler, 2008). Women have been shown to exhibit a strong sense of execution in the workplace, which is influenced by their drive to make a difference (Chandler, 2008).

Women in the workplace is a current controversial issue. It is important to understand the specific characteristics the female millennial brings into the workplace since her formative

experiences influence generational experiences and shape her professional and personal values (Young, Sturts, Ross, & Kim, 2011). Generation Y, referred to interchangeably as the millennial generation, was born between 1980 and 1995 (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). This generation has been noted for its uniqueness in the workplace carrying a focus on execution (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012; Bannon, Ford, & Meltzer, 2011). The millennial generation is praised for its acceptance of diversity, fluency with technology, global consciousness, personal confidence, and ability to multitask (Anantamula & Shrivastav, 2012; Young et al., 2011). Although, employers have also found that the millennial generation is less loyal to employers than previous generations (Anantamula & Shrivastav, 2012). In addition, the millennial generation is challenged by skepticism, impatience, and communication (Anantamula & Shrivastav, 2012). The millennial generation has also been found to value the work environment, enjoy challenging work, seek growth and development, respect work life balance, look for meaningful work, and appreciate flexibility at work (Bannon et al., 2011, Ng et al., 2010).

Coupling in the aspect of knowledge work, in the perspective of the almost 20 million American millennial female employees, focuses on women working in roles that benefit the product, service, or customer through the application of knowledge (United States Census Bureau, 2011; Lücking & Pernicka, 2009). Female millennial knowledge workers contribute to the business by applying skillset knowledge (Lücking & Pernicka, 2009). These employees are commonly seen in education and training, management, innovation, or research and development (Lücking & Pernicka, 2009). Female millennial knowledge workers contribute to business enabling industry presence by benefiting products, streamlining processes, enhance customer experiences, and supporting the execution of fiscal strategy (Nelson & McCann, 2010; Lücking & Pernicka, 2009, Pyoria, 2007).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative embedded single-case study was to explore the influence participative management techniques had on the turnover and productivity of female millennial knowledge workers. With a greater understanding for what contributes to the turnover and productivity of female millennial knowledge workers relevant support can be considered to promote this population's success in business. Three embedded units of analysis: management review of productivity, organizational review of productivity, and participant review of productivity and turnover were utilized to understand the effect management techniques have on this population. Participative management practices, like Ouchi's Theory Z, are popular in business because they drive organizational stability and loyalty, which is connected to more productive employees and lower turnover rates (Ghulam, Syed, & Zainab, 2012; Mahmood & Ali, 2011; Angermeier et al., 2009; Daft, 2004; Ouchi & Price, 1978). Participative management theories alienate the minority including female millennial knowledge workers, therefore, this study was conducted to extend current theory to include the

female millennial knowledge worker population (Kopelman, Prottas, & Davis, 2008; Daft, 2004; Ouchi & Price, 1978).

### **Research Questions**

The research in Paros (2015) started with the following question: 'How does participative management affect the productivity and turnover of female millennial knowledge workers?'

Schram (2006) supports that a series of topic questions can be used to gain understanding and reinforce a central question. The following topic questions by Paros (2015) were used to understand and reinforce the central question while exploring the positive and negative aspects of managerial styles on productivity and turnover associated with female millennial knowledge workers.

#### Topic questions focused on female millennial knowledge workers productivity

- Q1. What types of management behaviors encourage female millennial knowledge worker productivity?
- Q2. What types of management behaviors discourage female millennial knowledge worker productivity?
- Q3. What things can a manager do to encourage female millennial knowledge worker

#### Topic questions focused on female millennial knowledge workers turnover

- Q4. What types of management behaviors encourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?
- Q5. What types of management behaviors discourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?
- Q6. What things can a manager do to discourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?

### **Research Design and Method**

The researcher conducted this study to look more deeply at understanding the female millennial knowledge worker and utilized a qualitative study applying an embedded single-case study design to a single case that was most relevant to maximize the study's learning (Yin, 2013; Tellis, 1997). The explorative nature of this study considered a contemporary research question with the intent to understand behavior within its context, which is highly appropriate for the case study research method (Yin, 2013; Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2010). Yin (2013) identified that a single case study design was justifiable for supporting a common case, because "the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation" (p. 52). With a population of almost 20 million female millennial knowledge workers entering post-industrial participative management organizations, this research observed the common case associated with how participative management techniques affect the productivity and turnover of the female millennial

knowledge workers employed in these organizations daily (Yin, 2013; United States Census Bureau, 2011; McCrimmon, 2010).

Vigilant consideration was taken to ensure that the single case adequately represented the female millennial knowledge worker and allowed for maximum data collection (Yin, 2013). The embedded design supported the study’s inquiry, analysis, and insights by exploring both her manager and the organization’s review of her productivity by collecting data from her performance reviews and participating in a direct observation. In addition, her perception of her productivity and turnover were collected utilizing an interview (Yin, 2013). The three mentioned subunits were used as several data collection points: (a) her manager’s; (b) the organization’s, and (c) her perspective of productivity and turnover to support triangulated data collection. Triangulated data collection was used to increase the validity and transferability of the case study (Stavros & Westberg, 2009; Tellis, 1997; Bryman, n.d.). In addition to the subunit data collection, with-in method triangulation was used again by coupling the research topic questions to contrast participant interview responses (Bryman, n.d.). The within method triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of the study, where the topic research questions explored both the positive and negative aspects of managerial styles associated with female millennial knowledge workers (Bryman, n.d.). Two levels of triangulation coupled with a well-documented embedded single-case study design promoted construct validity and mitigated some academic concerns regarding the case study design (Yin, 2013; Tellis, 1997).

**Participant**

Women contribute 46 percent of the United States labor force and are expected to contribute 51 percent of the projected workforce increase between 2008 and 2018 (United States Department of Labor, 2010). About 72 million women currently support the United States labor population and 40 million of these women are working in knowledge jobs that benefit the product, streamline processes, enhance customer experiences, or support fiscal strategy (United States Census Bureau, 2011; Lücking & Pernicka, 2009). Applying the millennial generation birth year range of 1980-1994 an estimated population of almost 20 million female millennial knowledge workers support United States businesses (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

A purposeful focus in order to facilitate qualitative inquiry was placed on identifying a single case that met the participant criteria for being a female millennial knowledge worker employed within a participative management organization while also allowing access, cooperation, relevance, and applicability (Stavros & Westberg, 2009; Tellis, 1997). A single case method was adequate to answer the research questions even though geographic proximity limited the population to the Western Massachusetts and Connecticut area (Yin, 2013; Stavros & Westberg, 2009; Tellis, 1997).

**Results**

Using a qualitative single-case study the researcher explored the female millennial knowledge worker and the effect participative management techniques had on productivity and turnover using the embedded units of analysis of management review, organizational review, and participant review to understand this population. Data was collected through a participant interview, performance feedback, and direct observation. The interview guide is noted in Appendix A, and the confidential participant agreed to provide a current performance review along with allowing the researcher to observe her during a workplace meeting. The purposeful single case participant was confirmed to meet the study criteria by using a check and control process within a recruitment email and followed up with the opening interview questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The participant was interviewed on April 2, 2015 and observed in a workplace meeting on April 9, 2015. The observation, guided by the observation guide in Appendix C, of the participant occurred during a USA-domestic, multi-location, teleconference, meeting with 5 attendees. The participant also provided her annual performance report to support the triangulation of data using the data review guide noted in Appendix B.

The interview guide (Appendix A), data review guide (Appendix B), and the observation guide (Appendix C) noted from Paros (2015) were used to ensure that the study’s main question supported by six topic questions always remained the focus of the data collection. To enhance study credibility, the topic questions applied with-in methods triangulation to explore both the positive and negative aspects of managerial styles associated with female millennial knowledge workers (Bryman, n.d.). Pattern matching was used to identify common themes during the interview and repetition was applied to triangulate those themes in both the observation and performance review data (Yin, 2009; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Included from Paros (2015), the figure 2 chart details the number of times a theme was repeated during the interview. The themes that were repeated several times during the interview included: Work Environments, Feedback, Recognition, Timely Communication, and Employee Development.

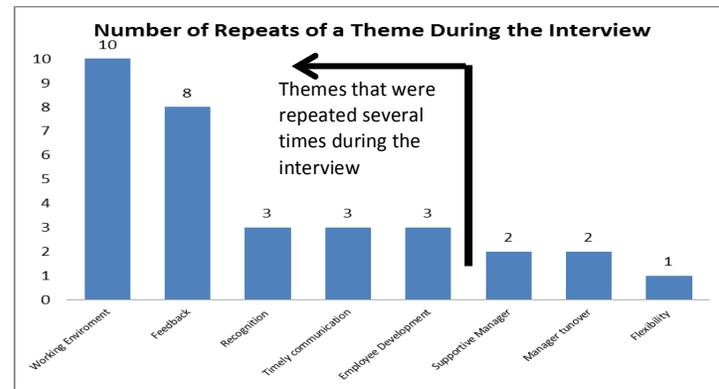


Figure 2. Interview themes based on the number of repeat occurrences.

Themes that triangulated across each data collection technique: the interview, the performance review, and the observation were understood to influence the productivity or turnover of the female millennial knowledge worker. Employee development and timely communication were the two themes that triangulated across all three data collection techniques identified to influence productivity (topic questions Q1, Q2, and Q3). Employee development was noted as all aspects where the participant looked for support regarding development and growth. Timely communication was seen to be a requirement for prompt

communication. Feedback, working environment, and employee development were the three themes that triangulated across all three data collection techniques identified to influence turnover (topic questions Q4, Q5, and Q6). In addition to the above definition of employee development, feedback was noted as a requirement for performance based feedback. The working environment included all aspects where the participant considered her direct manager to be propagating either a constructive or destructive working culture.

Table 2.

*Triangulated themes using the interview, observation, and performance review data.*

Topic Question	Themes Identified by Topic Question		
	Interview Themes	Performance Review - Data Review Themes	Observation - Data Review Themes
Productivity Questions	Themes that triangulated in all three forms of data collection:		
Topic Question Q1. What types of management behaviors encourage female millennial knowledge worker productivity?	Employee Development and Timely Communication		
Topic Question Q2. What types of management behaviors discourage female millennial knowledge worker productivity?	Recognition Feedback Working Environment	Feedback Employee Development Timely Communication	Working Environment Timely Communication Employee Development
Topic Question Q3. What things can a manager do to encourage female millennial knowledge worker productivity?	Feedback Timely Communication Working Environment	Feedback Employee Development Recognition Timely Communication	Timely Communication
Turnover Questions	Themes that triangulated in all three forms of data collection:		
Topic Question Q4. What types of management behaviors encourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?	Feedback Timely Communication Employee Development Working Environment Recognition	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Topic Question Q5. What types of management behaviors discourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?	Feedback, Working Environment, and Employee Development	Timely Communication Feedback Recognition Employee Development Working Environment	No themes Identified
Topic Question Q6. What things can a manager do to discourage female millennial knowledge worker turnover?	Working Environment	Feedback Employee Development	Feedback Working Environment Employee Development
	Recognition Feedback Employee Development Working Environment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

The effect participative management techniques had on the productivity and turnover by applying the three units of analysis: management review, organizational review, and participant

review was illustrated in this study of the female millennial knowledge worker. Understanding the population of female millennial knowledge workers will support women's

productivity in the workplace, which contributes to fiscal strength (Barney, 2004; Daft, 2004; Ouchi & Price, 1978). The researcher's findings from this study suggest that participative management theories, like William Ouchi's Theory Z, can be extended to the female millennial knowledge worker population. The results of this research propose that the management techniques of employee development and timely communication influence the productivity of the female millennial knowledge worker. Also, the management techniques of feedback, working environment, and employee development influence the turnover of the female millennial knowledge worker.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Participative management techniques that are used to achieve long term organizational benefits by facilitating employee performance through loyalty and involvement are noted to focus on the majority population ignoring the female population (Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010; Angermeier et al., 2009; Pinkovitz et al., Ouchi & Price, 1978). Alienating the female millennial knowledge worker by allowing poor management practices could affect American businesses with higher turnover and productivity challenges that accumulate to 30 percent of the lost employees salary (Kaifi et al., 2012; Synar & Maiden, 2012; Nishikawa, 2011; Davidson et al., 2010;). Managers with female millennial knowledge workers as employees should invest in employee development to increase productivity and decrease turnover, which can be accomplished by offering training, mentoring, and engaging work assignments. In addition, managers should provide timely feedback to this population of employees in order to encourage productivity. Another practical application of the findings in this research show that managers should provide timely feedback coupled with cultivating a positive and productive work environment to minimize turnover of the female millennial knowledge worker.

The researcher conducted this study looking to extend participative management theory, which was limited by a majority focus, to include the population of female millennial knowledge workers. Construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability were used to establish the quality and reduce researcher bias in this study (Yin, 2013). Multiple sources of data, such as, performance reviews, interview responses, and participant observation were used to establish construct validity while data triangulation used to identify repeatable patterns supported internal and external validity (Bryman, n.d.). Reliability was maintained in this study through the application of rigid research practices and adherence to the interview guide, the data collection guide, and the observation guide.

This study was limited by a focus on the female millennial knowledge worker and did not consider ethnic or social position. This study was not a comparative study and did not extend to male workers. In addition, the nature of this general case study included a focus on extending theory rather than representing a universe, sample, or population (Yin, 2013). A single case method was adequate to answer the research questions of this

study and this study was limited by sample size. Resultantly, this study explored the effect of participative management techniques on the female millennial knowledge worker, and was limited by its intent only to extend participative management theory.

Future researchers could expand on the themes identified in this study to consider industry, business structure, organization size, and type of work performed by the female millennial knowledge worker. Also, consideration for a larger sample of the female millennial population could consider geographic location, social levels, and cultural communities. Lastly, employing additional research methods like a survey or experiment design could be incorporated into future research to quantify the effect participative management has on the productivity and turnover of the female millennial knowledge worker.

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