

Abstract

The generational phenomenon in the workplace remains a prominent topic in research, the popular press, and within organisations. There has been considerable focus on the newest generation in the workplace, known as Millennials, and how to attract, motivate, and retain this cohort, despite a lack of empirical evidence for the existence of the phenomenon. Research on Millennials is also mostly conducted in Western countries and local research often uses formative events in the United States (US) to define generational groups. Consequently, US-centric definitions and work-related stereotypes are often imposed and applied to South African Millennials. The aim of this study was to explore Millennials' perceptions of employer attractiveness, employer branding, and the psychological contract expectations of organisations in the South African context. The perspectives of two sample groups, a sample of recent employees classified as 'Millennials' and a sample of human resource practitioners, were explored in order to gain a more comprehensive, 'above-and-below' understanding of these perceptions. The study was qualitative in nature and utilised Smith's (1996) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. Five recently employed individuals who could be classified as 'Millennials' and four human resource practitioners working in the financial and related industries were interviewed. Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data and this was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The major findings included that generations in South Africa are defined by their proximity to the collapse of Apartheid and the consequently free flow of technology; and these events had a significant impact on the conceptualisation of the 'Millennial' generation in South Africa. Discrepancies were found between perceptions of the factors that attract and retain Millennials between the two sample groups. In addition, Millennial employees indicated that they expected organisations to meet their psychological contract expectations and their evaluations of the organisation's attractiveness seemed to be based quite heavily on this. These findings provide a basis for future research and suggest various possible practical and theoretical implications.

Keywords: Millennials, born frees, employer attractiveness, employer branding, psychological contract, perceptions, South Africa.