Millennial Seafarers as Today and Tomorrow's Generation of Marine Officers: Implications and Future Directions

Emeliza T. Estimo, Elisa V. Garcia, Zayber B. Araya, Kyle M. Flores, Sirzyrus Vench P. Estrabo, and John B. Lacson

Foundation Maritime University, Iloilo City, Philippines

Abstract: The maritime industry is lined with people who belong to the millennials. This generation currently supplies the constant demand for a stable workforce who can keep pace with the expanding needs and expectations of the industry. Since human resource is as crucial as the modern equipment and technology that keep the vessels running, it is also imperative that equal importance must be given to initiatives that are designed to develop the full potential of our present and future generations of seafarers. This study provides research-based data on the general description of their traits and characteristics as derived from four different perspectives — their self-perception and the perceptions of their senior officers, their crewmates, and their shipping companies who have worked side by side with them. This paper also rationalizes how their dominant characteristics can be positively maximized and utilized in the workplace and what initiatives can be done to help them succeed as effective and efficient marine officers.

Key words: Millennial seafarers, characteristic, traits.

1. Introduction

More generations of seafarers in the maritime industry come into the picture, each generation endowed with a unique set of traits and characteristics that may influence the way they behave with others and the way they respond to situations and circumstances around them. This phenomenon raises the issue of "generational gap", which according to Caesar, Cahoon, and Fei (2015) [1], affects the retention of seafarers and influences the progressive mobility of ship officers to landside jobs. The disparity in the level of expectations between the younger and older generations in the seafaring industry has become apparent [2]; hence, the need for industry employers to critically scrutinize these differences to address problems on seafarer retention.

Currently, millennial seafarers constitute most of the workforce. This is the generation of people, also known as Generation Y, who are born in the early 80s to early 1990s. What does this generation of seafarers have in common? What does the industry need to understand about them as part of the cycle of life at work onboard multi-crewing vessels? How can our knowledge of their traits and characteristics shed light on handling human resource problems and issues relating to this generation of seafarers?

By examining across various sources, we can learn that the millennials are wired with positive as well as negative characteristics. Their motivation is built around personal and professional growth, more specific feedback, personalized/customized attention, empowerment, need for freedom and flexibility, and meaningfulness [3]. Another source points out that their choices are identified with five predominant themes — work, life, balance, good pay and benefits, opportunities for advancement, meaningful work experiences, and nurturing work environment [4].

Corresponding author: Emeliza T. Estimo, Ph.D., Research Coordinator; research fields: maritime education and training, gender equality and cultural awareness, human factors in the maritime industry, seafarers' wellness and well-being.

Moreover, the millennials possess the ability to function well with the use of technology and interaction with the world, which makes them respond better to the needs of the industry [5]. However, Ng et al. (2010) [4] suggested that many of the career goals and expectations among millennials are "supersized", unrealistic, and disconnected between reward and performance. Iovine (2017) [6] described them as too engrossed in going online and staying in touch with the virtual world that they forget how it is to socialize and mingle with real people. They also tend to question the rules and put more weight on accomplishment over time logged, and inclusion over exclusion. While this young generation adds valuable energy and effort to the workforce, their unique characteristics add complexity for organizations as they struggle to understand what challenges, inspires and motivates these young workers.

More research-based information can further validate the various impressions made about the current and future workforce of the maritime industry, and can provide some rational explanations about how their dominant characteristics can be positively maximized and utilized in the workplace and what initiatives can be done to help them succeed as effective and efficient marine officers, hence, this study.

1.1 Objectives

This investigation was undertaken to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of millennial seafarers and to determine how their dominant characteristics can be positively maximized to help them succeed as effective and efficient marine officers. Specifically, the study sought to answer of the following questions: (1) What are the dominant characteristics of the millennial seafarers as perceived by themselves, their senior officers, their shipping companies, and their workmates? (2) What initiatives can be done to help the millennial seafarers succeed as effective and efficient marine officers?

1.2 Framework

Shown in the figure, the concept of this study is anchored on the Five-Factor Model of Personality [7] which represents five core traits that interact to form human personality: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN). *Openness* means the tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, curious, and have a variety of experience. *Conscientiousness* is the tendency to portray self-discipline, act accordingly and dutifully, and yearn for achievement. High conscientiousness drives a person to be stubborn and focused, while low conscientiousness is synonymous to flexibility and spontaneity, but may also take the form of being sloppy and unreliable. *Extraversion* means to have energy, positive emotions, and the tendency to be sociable, talkative, assertive, and energetic. High extraversion causes a person to seek attention and dominate others, while low extraversion manifests a reserved, reflective personality, which may be taken to mean as aloof or self-absorbed. *Agreeableness* means the tendency to be compassionate, trusting and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. High agreeableness displays a naive or submissive person, while low agreeableness portrays a competitive or challenging personality, which may be observed as argumentative or untrustworthy. *Neuroticism* means a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. It is the tendency to give in to psychological stress. High stability exemplifies a stable and calm personality but maybe uninspiring and unconcerned, while low stability shows the reactive and excitable side of a person but can impress others as unstable or insecure [8].

2. Methods

A research design using the mixed method [9] was employed in this study. Data gathered for this study were derived from a modified survey questionnaire

conducted to 50 millennial seafarers who had been on board for at least six months, 50 senior officers who have directly supervised seafarers who belong to the said generation, 50 crewmates who have worked with millennial seafarers, and representatives of 5 shipping companies. The survey was administered personally by the researchers, while for the respondents who

were on board when the study was conducted, the survey questionnaires were sent and retrieved via electronic mail. In order to determine the dominant characteristics of the millennial seafarers according to the different dimensions, mean was used. The mean was interpreted according to the following table:

Range of Scores	Verbal Interpretation	Verbal Description
4.21–5.00	Strongly Agree	The respondents generally believe that this characteristic is very much true of millennial seafarers and possessing such characteristic could help them become an officer in the future.
3.41–4.20	Agree	The respondents generally believe that this characteristic is true of millennial seafarers and possessing such characteristics could help them become an officer in the future.
2.61–3.40	Slightly Agree	The respondents generally cannot decide if this characteristic is true or not of the millennial seafarers.
1.81–2.60	Disagree	The respondents doubt that this characteristic is found among millennial seafarers.
1.00–1.80	Strongly Disagree	The respondents have a strong opinion that millennial seafarers do not possess this characteristic.

3. Results

3.1 Results Based on the Millennial Seafarers' Self-Perception

In Table 1, data in column 2 show that the millennial seafarers generally perceive themselves to be agreeable, conscientious, and open, respectively. This means that they tend to be compassionate, trusting, cooperative and submissive rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. As conscientious individuals, they value discipline and act accordingly and dutifully to set norms. They yearn for achievement. They also perceive themselves to be open-minded and they tend to be informed, creative, insightful, curious, and to have a variety of experience. A closer look at the specific descriptors of the five core traits revealed that they slightly agree to strongly agree that they possess the following characteristics: ingenious, a deep thinker, has a forgiving nature, does things efficiently, makes plans and follows through with them, is full of energy.

However, the millennial seafarers slightly agree that they tend to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability,

and that they have the tendency to give in to psychological stress. They can be moody, easily distracted and upset, cold and aloof, easily affected by tense situations, and reserved. This implies that when put in an undesirable situation, they have the tendency to lose control of their emotions and could easily get upset, provoked or angered.

3.2 Results Based on the Perception of Their Senior Officers, Their Crewmates and Their Shipping Companies

Table 1 (columns 3, 4 and 5) shows the perception of senior officers who have handled or directly supervised seafarers who belong to the millennials, their shipping companies, and their crewmates who had worked with them. The data contained in these columns supported the self-perception of the millennial seafarers in that they find them to be generally agreeable and conscientious and open. In particular, these people who have supervised or worked with them strongly agree that the millennial seafarers like to cooperate with others, do a thorough job, have new ideas and active imagination, are generally trusting, persevere until the task is finished,

Table 1   Dominant characteristics of the millennial seafarers as perceived by themselves, their senior officers, their shipping companies, and their workmates.

Factors	Self	SO	SC	WM	Mean	Interpretation
A. Openness						
Is original, comes up with new ideas	4.40	4.20	4.20	4.62	4.36	Strongly Agree
Is curious about many different things	4.42	4.14	4.00	4.22	4.19	Agree
Is ingenious, a deep thinker	4.62	4.10	3.60	4.44	4.19	Agree
Has an active imagination	4.48	4.10	4.40	4.40	4.35	Strongly Agree
Is inventive	4.10	4.22	3.40	4.38	4.03	Agree
Values artistic, aesthetic experiences	4.38	4.00	4.40	4.42	4.30	Strongly Agree
Has few artistic interests	1.86	1.78	3.00	1.72	2.09	Slightly Agree
Prefers routine work	2.56	1.86	3.20	1.54	2.29	Slightly Agree
Total	**3.85**	**3.55**	**3.78**	**3.72**	**3.73**	**Agree**
B. Neuroticism						
Is depressed	2.82	1.8	2.80	2.58	2.50	Disagree
Is relaxed, handles stress well	2.46	2.28	2.40	2.2	2.34	Disagree
Can be tense	3.48	2.82	3.40	3.34	3.26	Slightly Agree
Worries a lot	3.58	2.68	4.20	3.28	3.44	Agree
Is emotionally stable, not easily upset	2.5	2.14	2.40	2.18	2.31	Disagree
Can be moody	4.00	2.76	4.00	3.28	3.51	Agree
Remains calm in tense situations	2.02	2.06	1.80	2.22	2.03	Disagree
Gets nervously easily	3.36	2.46	3.20	3.18	3.05	Slightly Agree
Total	**3.03**	**2.38**	**3.03**	**2.78**	**2.81**	**Slightly Agree**
C. Conscientiousness						
Does a thorough job	4.20	4.44	4.20	4.68	4.38	Strongly Agree
Is a reliable worker	4.22	4.18	4.40	4.26	4.27	Strongly Agree
Tends to be disorganized	3.02	2.68	3.80	2.04	2.89	Slightly Agree
Tends to be lazy	3.56	2.90	3.60	2.82	3.22	Slightly Agree
Perseveres until the task is finished	4.32	4.34	4.40	4.2	4.32	Strongly Agree
Does things efficiently	4.4	4.18	4.40	4.12	4.28	Strongly Agree
Makes plans and follows through with them	4.4	4.04	4.20	4.14	4.20	Agree
Is easily distracted	2.9	3.10	3.60	2.32	2.98	Strongly Agree
Total	**3.88**	**3.73**	**4.08**	**3.57**	**3.82**	**Agree**
D. Agreeableness						
Tends to find fault with others	2.94	4.14	4.00	3.28	3.59	Agree
Is helpful and unselfish with others	4.36	4.35	4.40	3.98	4.27	Strongly Agree
Starts quarrels with others	3.70	4.40	4.00	2.92	3.76	Agree
Has a forgiving nature	4.58	4.50	3.80	4.2	4.27	Strongly Agree
Is generally trusting	4.62	4.38	4.20	4.14	4.34	Strongly Agree
Can be cold and aloof	2.80	3.68	3.60	2.5	3.15	Slightly Agree
Is considerate and kind to almost	4.52	4.40	4.20	4.12	4.31	Strongly Agree
Is sometimes rude to others	3.18	4.12	3.60	2.74	3.41	Agree
Likes to cooperate with others	4.24	4.52	4.40	4.38	4.39	Strongly Agree

Total	3.88	4.28	4.02	3.58	3.94	**Agree**
E. Extraversion						
Is talkative	3.94	4.26	4.00	4.04	4.06	Agree
Is reserved	1.90	3.40	2.00	2.60	2.48	Disagree
Is full of energy	4.26	4.12	4.80	4.18	4.34	Strongly Agree
Generates a lot of enthusiasm	4.12	4.14	4.40	4.06	4.18	Agree
Tends to be quiet	2.82	3.36	3.20	2.50	2.97	Slightly Agree
Has an assertive personality	3.64	4.14	4.20	4.06	4.01	Agree
Is sometimes shy, inhibited	2.76	3.24	3.40	2.74	3.04	Slightly Agree
Is outgoing, sociable	3.80	4.32	4.40	4.34	4.22	Strongly Agree
Total	**3.41**	**3.87**	**3.80**	**3.57**	**3.66**	**Agree**

considerate and kind, value artistic and aesthetic experiences, do things efficiently, helpful and unselfish with others, are reliable workers, and have a forgiving nature. However, they find the millennial seafarers to be easily distracted, tend to worry a lot, can be moody/easily upset, and have difficulty handling stressful and tense situations. They also tend to be rude and pick up a fight when provoked and find fault with others. Like everyone else, they also possess some negative characteristics that may be detrimental to establishing a harmonious working relationship with people they work with onboard.

4. Conclusions

This study can be beneficial in understanding the characteristics of seafarers that dominate our sea workforce nowadays. The industry is filled with people who belong to the generation of the millennials. They supply the constant demand for a stable workforce who can keep up with the expanding needs and expectations of the industry. Human resource is as crucial as the modern equipment and technology that keep the vessels running; hence, it is also imperative that equal importance must be given to initiatives that are designed to develop the full potential of our present and future generations of seafarers by way of tapping the inherent characteristics that they are good at, and looking for ways and avenues by which these characteristics can be maximized and utilized in the workplace. The industry is presently teeming with

techy people who can think fast, generate new ideas, and actively engage in challenging tasks that stir their imaginations. On one end, if others in the workplace can provide them with a nurturing environment that encourages optimum use of these capacities instead of an environment that blocks them, imagine the positive impact that it could build for the maritime industry. On the other end, since these are the generation of seafarers that serve as present and future marine officers, internal measures may also be put in place to strengthen their weaknesses, particularly on the affective/emotional dimension. Coping strategies need to be developed and strengthened particularly in handling stressful situations, defusing tensions, and dealing with matters that may distract them from performing their jobs efficiently and effectively.

4.1 Future Directions

One of the perennial concerns in the maritime industry nowadays is addressing interpersonal conflicts on board multi-crewing vessels which could result from problems in cross-cultural communication [10] brought about by cultural diversity [11], regionalism [12], gender discrimination [13] and other interactional differences confounded by socio-cultural factors. Another challenge to beat is bridging the gap between generations of seafarers who are led by circumstances to work together. Morales (2018) [14] pointed out that while seafarers of the past used to accept lengthy contracts without hesitation, the

millennial seafarers consider short-term contracts that could give them more time to spend with their families and to celebrate significant events with them. Hence, they get more attracted to shipping companies that could provide them this balance between their job and their families.

4.2 Shaping Today's and Tomorrow's Generations of Safarers

In line with the second objective of this paper, and given the positive and negative characteristics of the millennials as affirmed by the results of this study, the researchers would like to propose some initiatives that may be considered by shipping companies to help the millennial seafarers — our current and future seafarers — become effective and efficient marine officers of the maritime industry. These initiatives are reflected in the figure that follows.

The results of this study have confirmed that millennials are generally agreeable, conscientious, open and hungry for new ideas, cooperative and submissive. Given the right management style and motivation, these characteristics can be an asset to the company. Their ingenuity and their ability to think as a result of their exposure to more advanced schools of thought can generate more dynamic ideas to improve the systems of management and operations onboard under the tutelage of their senior officers. But to encourage these ideas to come out, shipping companies must adopt and encourage a management style that is open to new ideas, a kind of management that provides opportunities for everyone to share and contribute in a complementary way, what they think can be best to create a positive and interactive work environment where every person would feel that his existence is a significant part of the whole team. In her paper, Rothblum (2000) [15] had pointed out that a strict hierarchical command structure can inhibit effective teamwork, whereas free, interactive communications can enhance it.

There have to be ways and avenues by which their positive characteristics can be maximized and utilized in the workplace. Our seafarers need to be provided with a nurturing environment that encourages optimum use of these capacities instead of an environment that blocks them. Related to this, Duchon and Plowman (2005) [16], mention what they call as "workplace spirituality" which acknowledges that the employees' personal life and choices are nourished by the kind of atmosphere that they have in their workplace. This implies that leaders can enhance work unit performance by nurturing the spirit at work.

Oftentimes, shipping companies are very idealistic in adopting programs that are intended to develop and strengthen the intellectual, moral, emotional and technical foundations of their crew. Such foundations are made to be part of their training preparations prior to embarkation. However, such ideals often fail to reach their intended purpose because these are not properly cascaded and fully internalized by the team of management-level officers who are expected to implement that kind of leadership on board. So instead of experiencing a positive and inspiring life on board to keep the crew going despite the challenging demands of their work, they go home bringing with them tales of their horrible experiences onboard resulting from their being mishandled, maltreated and even abused by their officers or their fellow crew. We hear of young cadets and crew in the support level being ordered to "Shut up and just follow orders without question". We have gathered testimonies of younger Captains and officers being intimated and looked down by their older crew because the latter think they are too "inexperienced" and their ideas do not hold ground as compared to their "unquestionably longer experience" in the industry. The conflict of the situation is that here comes the new generation of seafarers who want to make their ideas matter, but not having a positive environment to allow these ideas to come out and be heard.

Our seafarers need to have leaders or supervisors who could inspire and engage them to learn and grow professionally, not to be treated like work slaves. According to Duffield, Roche, Blay&Stasa (2011) [17], a positive, nurturing environment influences the employees' morale and increases employees' level of job satisfaction and staff retention. Managers who can promote a positive perception of an organization and facilitate activities that focus on the positive aspects of an organization enhance job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to stay [18]. Engaging the employees in the internal affairs of the organization can positively influence retention levels [19]. Furthermore, Knudsen (2005) [20] points out that when employees are engaged in their jobs, they tend to exert more voluntary effort, initiative, support and reinforcement to attain the needs of the organization. The challenging demands of work in the physical and psychological dimensions are already too much to deal with. Our seafarers need to be given more reasons to hold on to their profession and to be inspired to come back than to let go; hence, shipping companies need to ensure that their interaction with others on board in the social and emotional domains can provide them a meaningful experience and can be worth their decisions to stay and to remain as a productive part of the workforce.

Taking into consideration the negative characteristics of the millennial seafarers that were confirmed in this study, such as their tendency to experience unpleasant emotions (anger, anxiety, depression or vulnerability), their tendency to give in to psychological stress, difficulty in handling stressful and tense situations, tendency to be rude and to pick up a fight when provoked, and easily-distracted state of mind, one can say that internal measures may be done by shipping companies to build up and strengthen these weaknesses, particularly on the affective and emotional domain. Such initiatives should teach millennial seafarers to develop coping strategies in handling stressful situations and defusing

tensions. They should not only be oriented the company policies as regards human relationships like some pages of the book that they should obey when they are on board. Company training should put emphasis on learning the dynamics of effectively dealing with people and situations in a stressful environment, the way that they will experience them when they are already on board. The training may be facilitated by putting the crew to be assigned together in the same vessel in one training ground and by exposing them to simulated situations that will make them fully understand and adopt the respective roles that they have to observe and portray on board. This way, all the crew, from the Master to the cadets and ratings down the line could learn from each other's personalities and expectations even before they begin to embark their ship, thereby setting a clear direction for everyone to follow. It will not anymore be like dumping together complete strangers in one big pen and just watch them behave and treat each other like they do not care, as long as they will get things done.

A ship is one big organization. To succeed in its goals and objectives as an effective transporter of goods and services, it needs to have a team of people who are focused on the same direction and are able to harmoniously work together in a positive environment that builds people up, so the whole work experience can be meaningful and worth coming back to.

Existing company policies can guide the seafarers in dealing with matters that may distract them from performing their jobs efficiently and effectively. Gym and music equipment and other amenities and services such as the use of internet and other social devices to positively improve their total well-being and to stay connected with their family and loved ones must be made available to them, but in a regulated way, to keep them away from being distracted particularly when they are on duty. Adequate rest hours as stipulated in the ILO-MLC 2006 (Regulation 2.3) must be fully observed to allow the crew to revitalize their willpower and to revive their lost drive as caused

by the excessive work fatigue that they experience daily. A strong support system must always be encouraged and felt on board to help build a better interpersonal relationship among the crew.

The millennial seafarers, like any generation in the maritime industry, do not wish to be different or to be given special treatment. They only wish to be understood, valued and accepted as a useful part of the network of people who keep the vessel going. The maritime industry has been too engrossed with technical breakthroughs and innovations in response to economic and technological demands, but sometimes it forgets to focus its attention on strengthening human resource and addressing issues, such as generation gap in this case, which affect human dynamics, and subsequently affects and even jeopardizes the smooth operation of the ship. The future directions of the maritime industry should not only prioritize on the development of intellectual and technical solutions to meet the demands of globalization. In equal footing with this development and advancement is strengthening our growing and expanding generations of human resource, recognizing their unique endowments and potentials, and looking after their welfare to address the industry's need for sustainable manpower.

Acknowledgment

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