MILLENNIALS' WAY OF E-LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract: *e-Learning development has always been a pursuit for understanding of the way in which students learn and how to provide them with attractive materials. Millennials or digital natives are a generation different in their learning style and the way in which they expect to be trained and coached in comparison to other generations. For educators, except for pragmatic and inductive training materials which are welcomed, visuals and gamification are win-win tools. Millennials prefer collaborative learning and they like sharing stories with their peers. Multitasking allows educators to offer them more different options to utilize e-Learning platforms. Giving them an opportunity to try "do it by themselves" puts them in the position to take risks, which is actually their "comfort zone". The paper presents a framework of how Millennials cope with lifelong learning in the digital era, with the addition of the case study "My next stop Serbia" which engages Millennials all over the world to be a part of the game, sharing experiences about Serbia and enjoying the e-journey.*

Keywords: *collaborative thinking, engagement, gamification, social networks, lifelong learning*

1. GENERATION Y

Members of the Millennium generation or generation Y (according to some definitions are those who were born in the period between 1980 and 2000) are primarily characterized by an exceptional level of education, technological literacy, creativity and originality, diligence, sincerity, but also high expectations from life and a desire for successful careers which would fulfill them emotionally. They are very curious, craving for new knowledge and experiences, with a wish to be active participants in the world around them. They are fast to accept new technologies and the Internet which they use on everyday basis, they are active on social networks and blogs, and they use applications and gadgets. Despite the fact that they were born and growing up in times of crisis, they are young people who have a lot of energy and ideas, and who like digital way of communication. According to some researches, as many as 75% members of this generation have their profile on some social networks, 81% of them use Facebook every day, 58% of them use Twitter. Beautiful photos, concise copies & engaged communities are what Millennials look for on their favorite websites. [1]

According to a research conducted in Serbia by MASMI [2], the participants say that the Internet can replace anything, but nothing can replace the Internet. A web-based focus group discussion with 25 Millennials resulted in the insight that the Internet is mostly used for checking information obtained through WOM (word of mouth or word of mouse), as well as for seeking some specific information. Word of Mouse WOM as a type of reference is very popular among the digital natives generation. Millennials in Serbia most often use internet search, social networks, web presentation of companies, forums, and sometimes internet banners (if they are eye-catching and creative) as online information sources. A friend's liking or sharing a link to a brand or product page on Facebook is as convincing and reliable as WOM. Most Millennials are subscribed and receive newsletters and updates about companies and products they are interested in, via email and via Facebook. (*"I really don't like when I can't find something online, or if the found info is not up to date. It's like it does not exist." says one of participants.*)

Nowadays, every third employee belongs to the Millennium generation, while in a dozen of years they will comprise more than a half of able-bodied population world-wide. Their advantage is their excellent knowledge and use of technology, which is why they work considerably faster and more productively than their older colleagues. They also have a better approach to issues and practical solutions, as well as clearly defined goals. The formula of how to address the "Millennials" indicates that the approach, as well as the content, needs to be entertaining, informative, and educational. The greatest effect is achieved by using personalized and usable messages targeted at resolving imponderable questions and ambiguities which evoke emotions and step out of standard frameworks offering a "broader picture".

2. THE ROLE OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN 21ST CENTURY

Lifelong learning is an obligation of everyone who wishes to become and remain a serious player at the market. The job position of a leader in the networking and collaborative economy era calls for a different manner of management based on the important role of the leader who stimulates exchange of knowledge through a network of stakeholders as well as the process of transfer of a part

of his or her competences to co-workers within the team. [3]

From the standpoint of an educator who participates in education of young generations, it is very important to become familiar with their behavior and habits, and develop and implement techniques, skills, and tools to make students ready for challenges awaiting them in working environment. The current speed of change means that employees need to be trained continuously in order for companies to avoid the dangers of being out-thought and out-maneuvered by competitors. The system of Training management -- often referred to as a learning management system (LMS) -- is a key element of an effective professional development plan as well as being a key element of an organization's human resources strategy. [4]

Image 1: 70:20:10 learning model

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Universities which apply coaching have an added value. The role of educator as a coach is very important. Educators have to pay attention to the attributes, dreams and vision of their students. Coaching style of educator considers not only the subject being taught, but also the purpose and a wider picture. What is important for the student? What are his or her values? Teacher coaches can help students learn how to set goals, how to define measurable action steps and how to assess themselves. Their role is to facilitate brainstorming, ignite creativity and integrate different strategies and tools in the learning process. Thus, students are supported during the challenging studying time. Leadership coaching can prepare students to take on future career more seriously and confidently. "Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. It is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses, or organizations." [5]

3. E-STRATEGIES OF MILLENNIALS' LEARNING

Digital media pushes educators and students alike to shift to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning: a) from linear to hypermedia learning, b) from instruction to construction and discovery, c) from teacher-centred to learner-centred education, c) from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn, d) from school to lifelong learning, e) from one-size-fits-all to customized learning, f) from learning as torture to learning as fun, and g) from the teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator. [6]
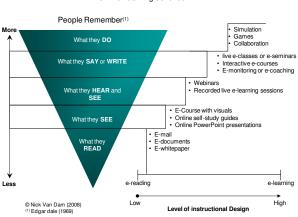

Image 2: Design of Online Learning Programs [7]

Innovative manners of e-Learning are refreshed with development of technology. Some of successful learning strategies which turned out to be effective among the millennial generation are gamification, story-based learning, interactive videos, and others. [8]

a) mLearning. Millennials have grown up with mobile technologies, learned to be resourceful, they prefer finding an answer by themselves than waiting for someone to find it for them. Millennials like setting goals, planning, and implementing defined activities. *("I know that I would be excited if I could mark completed*

activities on my mobile device and visualize progress that I have just made by using an appropriate application.") At the same time, educators and managers may follow training of their students and employees on a mobile device. For the educator it is important that training should be short, concise, and simple for use.

b) Gamification. Millennials believe that work and games should be connected. Educators, as well as the corporate world, may implement this fact by incorporating Millennials' habits into their system of education and business-making. Millennials are led by mission; they learn by watching and doing. Games are an excellent way to penetrate into mission-led values and make them meaningful for Millennials. The best video games are those which just introduce the story and allow gamers to learn the rules, familiarize themselves with the goals, and respond to the challenges they encounter on the way, similarly to the situation at work. Gamification during learning at training is also a way to provide feedback on the spot as game results. This motivates Millennials to correct their actions at once aiming for higher results which they may share with their co-gamers. Games are naturally designed to engage and motivate students.
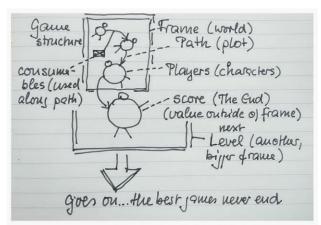

Image 3: Outline of game design [9]

Due to all aspects having impact on students (better experience in learning, better memory, longer-lasting knowledge, acceleration of the behavior-changing process; better learning environment; feedback in real time; as well as final impact via action steps), gamification may significantly increase performance during studies or training, and in the end yields high results for the university and company which implemented gamification in their educational system.

c) Video as a learning medium. Web-sites rich in video content capture Millennials' attention better than web-sites containing lots of texts. Blogs are transformed into vlogs, and YouTube is growing rapidly. The average length of a YouTube video is about four minutes. Video as a medium suits Millennials if it is sufficiently exciting and concise, so that they could learn and remember information faster and more easily. A video blog or video log, sometimes shortened to vlog is a form of blog for which the medium is video and is a form of web television. Vlog entries often combine an embedded video

(or a video link) with supporting text, images, and other metadata. Entries can be recorded in one take or cut into multiple parts. The vlog category is popular on YouTube. [10]

d) Nano-Learning vs. Mini e-Learning. As learning is becoming increasingly mobile, creation along these lines becomes increasingly important. Instead of designing e-Learning for big screens, mobile learning should be bite-sized, or as some call it, Nano-Learning. "No matter if learning refers to the process of building up and organizing knowledge, to the change of behaviour, attitudes, values, mental abilities, cognitive structures, emotional reactions, action patterns or societal dimensions, in all cases we have the possibility to consider micro, mezzo and macro aspects of the various views on more or less persisting changes and sustainable alterations of performances." [11]

e) Storytelling. This is an excellent way for educators to keep students interested and involved. Educators tell stories to entertain, to persuade and to explain. As a learning tool, storytelling can encourage students to explore their unique expressiveness and can heighten a student's ability to communicate thoughts and feelings in an articulate, lucid manner. These benefits transcend the art experience to support daily life skills. In our fast-paced, media-driven world, storytelling can be a nurturing way to remind children (students and employees) that their spoken words are powerful, that listening is important, and that clear communication between people is an art. [12]

f) **e-coaching.** Virtual coaching is conducted via telephone or the Internet. This form of real-time coaching allows the coach to provide guidance, support and encouragement, just-in-time input or feedback to a student during the lesson. [13]

4. PERSONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

In a highly competitive society, employees who make everyday investments in their knowledge are facing much greater opportunity to be promoted or keep the job. Digitalization, technology, and globalization provide consumers not only with personalized, tailor-made offers and solutions, but also the possibility of personalized learning to respond to and keep up with fast changes in the area of knowledge. In the workplace, designing a personal learning environment (PLE) has the potential to partially replace conventional courses.

Van Dam said Gen Y likes to learn online, check out the latest videos on a topic of interest, take open courseware from any leading institution, have access to content through their mobile devices and tablets, and be on social media sites during working hours. "At the same time they value being together in a learning environment where they have access and can collaborate with other people, where they have access to leadership," he said. [14]

According to Milligan et al. [15] characteristics of PLE are correlated with Millennials' values.

Table 1: How Millennial's Values correlate with PLE

PLE (Milligan et al.)	Description	Millennials' values
Learn with other people	Manage and create relationships, forming connections between contacts that are not part of a formal learning network	Collaboration Contribution
Control their learning resources	Allow them to structure, share, and annotate resources they find or have been given	Engagement Participation
Manage the activities they participate in	Provide opportunities for them to create as well as join activities that bring together people and resources	Creativity Innovation strategies
Integrate their learning	Allow them to integrate learning from different institutions and sources, re-using evidence of competency and making links between formal and informal learning	Vision Leadership

Using social media tools such as wikis, blogs, micro blogs and corporate social networks, they are connecting employees globally and fostering mass collaboration. As a result, these companies are seeing improvements in communication, cross-functional collaboration and creative approaches to problem solving. More companies are discovering that an über-connected workplace is not just about implementing a new set of tools, it is also about embracing a cultural shift to create an open environment where employees are encouraged to share, innovate and collaborate virtually. [16]

5. CASE STUDY – PUZZLE GROUP

The case study "My next stop Serbia" engages Millennials all over the world to be a part of the game, sharing experiences about Serbia, enjoying the e-journey, evolves their values, implements their way of digital communication and ultimately invite them to visit Serbia.

Puzzle Group, as an organization comprising young people with university education, is dedicated to organization of specialized travels for young people. Since its beginnings, Puzzle Group perceived the needs of the millennium generation and was the first in Serbia to have started organization of modern travels for their peer group. The needs of the millennium generation differ from the needs of standard tourists in the beginning of 21st century. Millennials want to travel with their peer group; they want an active programme where they will make the maximum of each moment of their travel; and they want maximum commitment on part of tourist personnel. These

are generations who want all their senses to enjoy, going to a remote beach in the morning, cruising in the afternoon, enjoy quality music in a bar in the evening, and spending the night in a quality club, thus spending every day throughout the journey. Except for this, PUZZLE's Millennials also want to learn about the culture, language, and gastronomy of a destination, in a nutshell, they want a comprehensive journey. [17]

Through its social responsibility sector, Puzzle activism supports key needs of young people primarily in terms of implementation of educational programmes and employment through development of entrepreneurship, and makes it possible for a large number of young people to travel and broaden their views. In relation to this, Puzzle Group actively cooperates with numerous universities, student and youth organizations and associations, and supports their activities. People in Puzzle Group believe that lifelong learning is the key to success in 21st century, which is why they want to encourage and support young people to take their lives in their own hands, permanently extend and seek for new knowledge. As young students, founders of Puzzle Group invested considerable time and effort volunteering in various student organizations and humanitarian projects. Through its Puzzle Activism sector [18] and social responsibility, Puzzle Group aims its activities to two key areas: promotion of Serbia as a tourist destination and support to young people through educational programmes, support to development of entrepreneurship, promotion of the culture of travelling, and mobility of young people.

As an organization involved in youth travels, they wish to develop the culture of travelling and stimulate mobility of young people which implies educational, cultural, and tourist mobility, as well as international cooperation and exchange. Mobility enables openness in communication with other societies and cultures, which includes knowledge, tolerance, and respect to mutual differences. Except for social learning through the inter-cultural approach, mobility enables exchange of ideas and enriching of experiences. The possibility of visiting other countries, people, and cultures is for any young mind an invaluable asset which broadens views, enriches attitude to the world, and brings new ideas. Using their own example, members of PUZZLE Group show that socially responsible behavior, care for others and the community starts with small steps that create major changes. Thus, as a youth organization specialized in youth travels with more than 17,000 members of the Millennium generation aged 16 – 30, they initiated a Facebook action "Youth Ambassadors of Serbia" with the aim to promote tourism in Serbia among young people in cities of Europe and the world. The basic goal of the action is to motivate young people from Serbia and diaspora to meet, when they travel, as many members of their peer group from the country they visit as possible, give them a personal first-hand presentation of Serbia, make them interested in its tourist offer, and invite them to visit it. Once a young person is presented and introduced, in order to be entitled

to the title of a "Youth Ambassador of Serbia", they need to have their photo taken with their peer from the world and post it on social networks and the channel #youthambassadorserbia. In the first stage of the project, which took place in November and December 2013, members of the Puzzle team asked their foreign friends to have their photos taken by some sights with a personal message that they would visit Serbia. A large number of photos arrived from different countries, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Canada, Argentina, USA, Russia etc. [19]
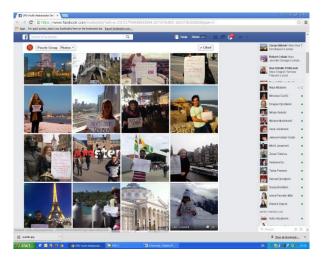

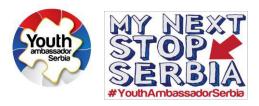Image 4: Facebook page Youth Ambassadors

Image 5: My next stop Serbia

In the second stage, about a thousand young Puzzle members who travelled to five European cities (Berlin, Prague, Cracow, Istanbul, Budapest) to celebrate New Year 2014, took part in an organized competition on who would meet more new friends and make a better presentation of Serbia and its tourism to them. They distributes thousands of specially designed brochures on the tourist offer for Serbia's youth, had their photos taken with foreigners who held a small banner reading "My next stop Serbia", and kept in touch personally, continuing to motivate them to visit Serbia. Serbia is facing a great opportunity to become one of the leading youth tourist destinations in this part of the world, if we take into consideration the fact that Serbia currently has several festivals which are considered top European and world events, Belgrade which was proclaimed the city with the best entertainment life in the world by the renowned tourist magazine "Lonely Planet" in 2010, respectable winter centres, and much of other content interesting for young tourists. Certainly, Serbia also has something which all foreigners emphasize as the major advantage of its tourist offer, hospitality and sociability of its inhabitants, especially young people; thus, it is the wish of the organizers to transfer this specific spirit to as large number of young people world-wide.

Serbian Chamber of commerce organizes a competition for the National award in socially responsible business-making for all business entities from Serbia. Puzzle Group and Special travel agency (the tour operator operating within the group) with the project "Youth ambassadors of Serbia won the National award for socially responsible business-making in the category Micro and small enterprises for 2014.

Case study Youth Ambassador indicated that application of digital communication and social networks provides young people in all parts of the world with 24/7 access, allows their collaboration, enables visibility and participation, and yields concrete results of their contribution.

6. CONCLUSION

Teaching Millennials also provides opportunities for educators to try new teaching methods, have fun, interact and collaborate with their learners in an interesting, dynamic ways. [20] How to approach Y generation and which manners of behaviour to apply are at the same time questions asking educators: Do you know who your students are? What are their needs, expectations? How to keep their attention (adding more than a text, including only necessary, be relevant by creating clear course objectives).

E-Learning courses are supposed to be easy to navigate and ready for implementation via exercises, case studies, knowledge checks, scenarios, simulations and interactive games. E-Learners want to know why they need a course, what they will learn and how they will apply the knowledge once the course is finished. E-Learner likes to have the opportunity to be interactive by choosing different documents, videos, links, and web pages as additional web resources. Games in E-Learning put an e-Learner in the position to learn faster and more easily, make them engaged, and introduce thought-provoking questions. Millennials like to be couched. To keep them focused, an educator can add humor. E-learner-centric courses include challenge, control, collaboration, personalization, engagement, relevance, and feedbacks. In order to have truly engaged e-learners, their curiousity must be stimulated and sustained along the entire course.

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