

Leadership

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## The Danger in Millennials' Favoring One-Style-Fits-All Leadership

With millennials eclipsing generation X in the workforce and moving quickly into leadership roles, an emerging leadership style will impact the workplace that may be quite different from that of prior generations. For organizations to survive, they will require fundamental changes that may challenge basic assumptions regarding how leaders are promoted, trained and developed.

Millennials will demand cultures that are vibrant, innovative and creative. They will be less tolerant of a slower pace in chasing their aspirations. The danger is that millennials may run the risk of adopting a one-size-fits-all style of leadership, disregarding years of research proving the value of diverse leadership styles.

### Under the Microscope

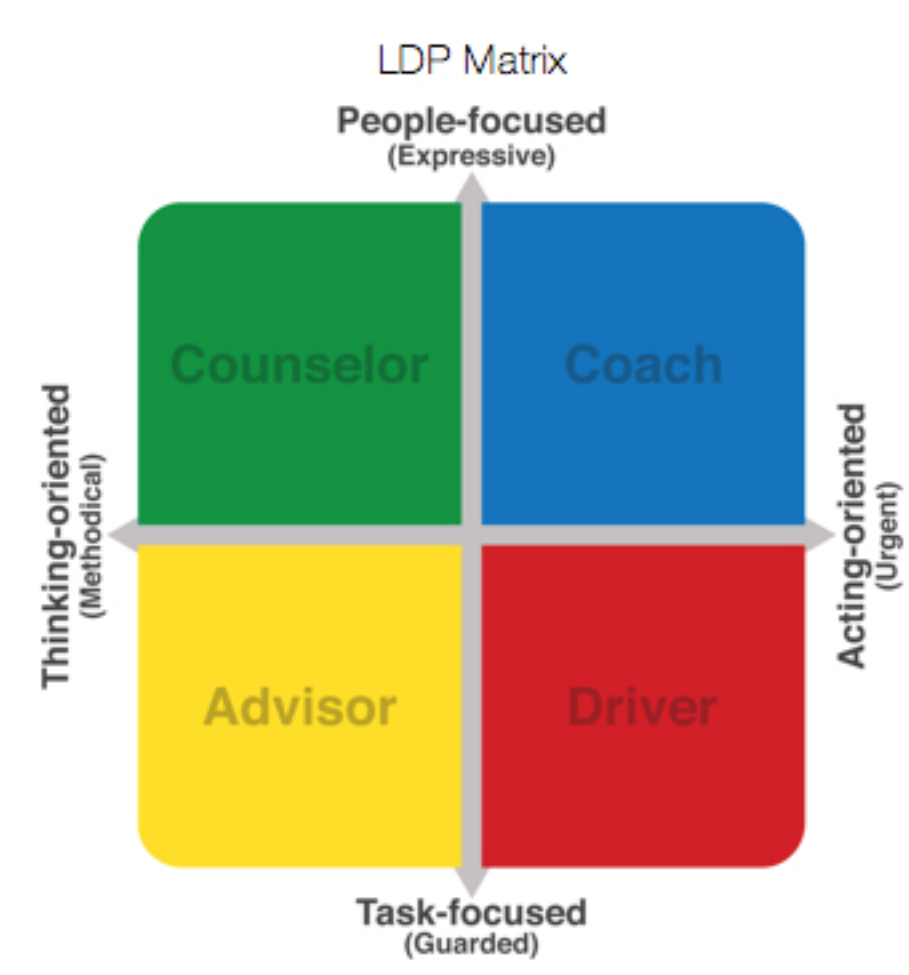
A 2016 study by PDT and Leading Dimensions Consulting suggests that millennials may be challenging traditional notions of exercising leadership and influence in the workplace. In the study, involving 532 people in Australia, the U.S., Ireland, the U.K. and South Africa, different behavioral trends emerged in leadership styles across generations.

Participants completed a 95-item personality assessment that revealed dimensions that shape achievement drive and relational drive, two primary factors long regarded as comprising a person's leadership style.

Participants were categorized by four distinct leadership styles: Counselor, Coach, Driver and Advisor, each revealing specific behavior patterns in achieving goals and relating to people.

| Personality Dimensions Measured by the LDP |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Achieving Dimensions                       | Relating Dimensions |
| Intensity                                  | Affiliation         |
| Assertiveness                              | Openness            |
| Risk Tolerance                             | Consideration       |
| Adaptability                               | Status Motivation   |
| Decision-making                            | Self-protection     |

### Blazing a New Trail



Baby boomers and gen-Xers showed diverse preferences across leadership styles. Millennials were more likely to prefer a coaching style, known for its charismatic appeal and urgency to pursue big-picture ideas. Leaders favoring this style motivate others with a very animated and fast-paced approach to reaching goals.

Millennials only occasionally preferred other styles, with advisor (characterized by a more methodical, analytical approach emphasizing planning, efficiency and structure) being the least preferred. While 48 percent of millennials identified coach as their ideal approach, 34 percent of baby boomers and 41 percent of gen-Xers feel most comfortable leveraging this style. For millennials who did not identify with the coach style, many suggested that it was still the style they would aspire to use more often in becoming an ideal leader.

Baby boomers tended to show more patience in accomplishing goals, less tolerance for uncertainty, and a preference for more structure and formality in the workplace. Gen-Xers seemed to trade structure and process for greater flexibility in decision-making, while showing an appetite for change and advancement.

Millennials appeared less tolerant of methods and processes that slow progress. They may be more comfortable leveraging instinct over analysis in making typical decisions. Millennials know what they want, they want it now, and they have less patience for bureaucracy and formality.

### Inspiring Their Stakeholders

When asked about the leadership roles in which they felt most comfortable, millennials tended to thrive in gaining consensus from stakeholders and rallying others around a cause. With their preference for advancing ideas and vision, millennials may seek to delegate or avoid the work of planning, implementing and monitoring such ideas.

Millennials tend to prefer a more collaborative culture in which relationships shape employee performance. While prior generations might have looked to policies and procedures to dictate action, millennials hope to build a sense of community in pursuing broad, "big-picture" ideas. Their emphasis on relationships may cultivate a more transparent culture with leaders who are more inclined to seek feedback and buy-in for initiatives.

### The Bottom Line

As millennials become leaders, we may see a shift from more flexible or diverse styles toward one dominated by an urgent drive to achieve. In acclimating too well to today's faster pace of work and life, millennial leaders may risk settling into a "one-size-fits-all" approach to leadership. This tendency has implications for professional development, highlighting a need to reinforce emotional intelligence in these emerging leaders. While urgency and risk tolerance promote great accomplishments, the constant drive to achieve can result in employee fatigue and burnout.

Today's trend toward the coach style can be seen in the emphasis on charisma and flash among entertainment, media, sports and political leaders. But it's not the only way to lead. Two decades of emotional intelligence research and practice show that recognizing and adapting to each of the four styles is the surest way to cultivate leadership capacity in future leaders.

Where do we go from here? Back to the basics. While society and culture promote a "right now" mindset, and intensifying global competition impacts basic leadership functions, we must equip emerging leaders to respond with "leading intelligence." Our training and development efforts must deliver three elements aimed at preparing leaders to reject a one-size-fits-all approach: interpersonal awareness, situational recognition and adaptive influence. Where we can cultivate this leading intelligence within millennial ranks, we will serve the generations to come with capable, effective and, most importantly, diverse leadership role models.



Paul Findlay is managing director of PDT, an Australian professional development training company operating in 10 countries. PDT uses the Leading Dimensions Profile matrix, a psychometric assessment tool created by Florida-based Leading Dimensions Consulting, to improve leadership effectiveness.

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