Editorial

Myths and realities of Colombian millennials

Diego René Gonzales-Miranda[*]

The proliferation of literature on Y generation or *millennials* expresses the importance and interest of the business sector and the academic world to study and understand this generation both in the social and organizational spheres. Much of this information evokes reflections on its characteristics, its insertion in the market as employees, consumers and investors (Kempf Taylor, 2018), for the factors that motivate them (Wong, Gardiner, Lang and Coulon, 2008), for the satisfaction in their workplace (García Cruz, Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo & Román Calderón, 2018) among many other aspects. This is understandable since *millennials* nowadays have become in the generation that has a large part of the productive processes and services in organizations under their responsibility, as they begin to occupy positions of responsibility in their senior management.

This makes their study relevant and pertinent. However, part (not to say in excess) of the information on this generation comes from foreign realities, mainly from North America and Europe. This leads to consider a series of biases in the description and analysis of this generation; since the political, economic, social and cultural realities of Colombia are very different and have particularities that make inappropriate the translation of conceptions from other latitudes. In that sense, the constitution of a generation, based mainly on age, requires considering the scope and context of development and projection before making statements that obviate these aspects, and therefore, outlaw or sentence characteristics that lead to preset behaviors and scenarios far from the social space that circumscribes and conditions the action of *millennials*.

Another special feature is added to this juncture. Many of the studies and research developed on this generation are carried out by consulting companies that have little methodological rigor when considering a very small sample of the Colombian reality. In

[*] EAFIT University

addition to the above, the results of these inquiries are replicated by certain journals and newspapers which, due to their emphasis on controversial aspects and of informative interest, punish a deeper, contextualized and appropriate analysis of the Colombian *millennial*. This leads to a series of ideas, imaginaries and beliefs that begin to be considered and integrated into the strategic plans of organizations. This is definitely a risk and in turn is an invitation to carry out; from the academic field, research and reflections that invite not only to meet the Colombian *millennial* in its context and reality, but to foster a critical reflection in organizations about the management and support that are being given to this generation.

In this context, it is important to make a series of reflections on the study of *millennials* in Colombia, which have been supported by a series of myths that are necessary to specify and demystify. It is not intended to address all the lack of information that circulates swiftly in the media of journalism and academics, it is just to foster critical reflection, and to raise questions that foster future inquiries on this topic.

The first thing to say is related to the definition of this generation. There is no consensus that establishes the age range attributable to the Y generation (Zabel, Biermeier-Hanson, Baltes, Early & Shepard 2017; Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010). However, many studies take age as the sole criterion of classification as a benchmark. This is an arbitrary issue; it means, there is not technical-scientific argument that supports such election. The disagreement focuses on the qualifying margins, always referred to age. This criterion is practical and functional; since including others would imply specifying the *millennial* context in each social district where they are located. In that sense, it is not that the age limitation is a matter that invalidates the reflection, but is the fact of circumscribing only to it and trying to support the analysis process having only such criterion as a reference. By way of contrast, Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo, García Cruz and Román Calderón (2017) propose three axes or categories that as a whole and combined allow an individual to be identified as *millennial*: salary level, family obligations and level of training. This is a way of going beyond the temporal criteria of age to qualify an individual as belonging to Y generation.

In relation to the above and taking up the considerations on the social context in which generations are enrolled, it is clear that trying to conglomerate all individuals born between a certain time range, such as *millennials*, is to unify and standardize irresponsibly their characteristics, personality traits, motivations and other aspects of human life as if the uniqueness and peculiarities of each individual were only hypothetical considerations which are not worth taking into account when managing and accompanying their transit and growth within the organizations. In that same clarity, it is important to consider that the particular and the exception cannot be administered, which does not mean to have more real criteria of differentiation that give rise to intervention policies more in line with the local reality. In that sense, and as a way of illustrating what has been said, an individual who meets the age of being a *millennial*, who has the obligation to answer for his parents, with a basic level of training and with a discrete income, will behave and approximate to life and work in a very different way to a *millennial* who does not have family responsibilities (obligations) and who enjoys significant income thanks to a high level of training. Thus, the temporal range in which *millennials* are located expresses the great diversity and social distances of the country which are not shortened or solved by naming everyone under a category that, far from reflecting reality; hides countless social components and crevices, which require a more thorough analysis.

By unifying individuals in the great category of *millennials*, they all share the same characteristics. Thus, some of the attributions that are usually imputed to them are to consider them as a self-confident generation, narcissists, with high self-esteem, little committed and prone to resign towards the job

dissatisfaction (Eisner, 2005; Twenge, & Campbell, 2012). This type of assertions commit all individuals without distinction, so it tends to be equivocal. In that sense, it is preponderant not only to clarify such statements, but to conduct studies that account for the diversity and differences within this generation. In this regard Gonzales et al., (2017) identify four types of Colombian millennials. These are the following:

- Type A Millenial: it is an individual with a high salary, without restrictive family obligations or who has the capacity to settle, and with a high level of training (university or postgraduate).
- Type B Millenial: It is an individual whose salary is proportional to the structure he occupies in the organizational hierarchy. A safe promotion is expected from him that will improve his quality of life. He does not have family obligations or does not become an impediment to his professional career, and he is going through a training process that leads him to move towards the managerial level.
- Type C Millenial: He is an individual who has a low salary and position in the organizational structure, he does not have restrictive family obligations (children), and he has a low or medium level of educational training.
- Type D Millenial: It is the millennial type C, but with some kind of family obligations (children).

Thus, the attributions that are usually 'heard' and 'read' in Colombia correspond largely to the *millennial* type A, but they leave aside that the other three types coexist in society and organizations. It is important to consider and integrate all types to have a social and organizational landscape in accordance with the local reality, since otherwise; it would lead to partial actions and thus inappropriate for this generation. This fragmentary tendency to conceive all *millennials* as equals, manifests a social and educational reality which prevents guaranteeing the conditions of possibility so that all individuals can access to a decent work and a fair compensation that allows them to fulfill their aspirations and desires.

Another aspect is the almost unequivocal consideration that there are pure generations. For the specific case of *millennials*, it seems that they do not have influence of the *baby boomer* generation, even of the Z generation. It is clear once again that age cannot be considered as the criterion which resolves those characteristics that homologate a given generation of another. What it is appropriated, not to say sensible; is to find in the *millennial* generation lags and behaviors of other generations. Thus, establishing the limits sharply without an analysis that shows the nuances and aspects that overlap between generations, is not only to promote an inadequate systematization and alien to reality, but also to promote the application of certain criteria for management that far from leading to efficient actions, they end up recreating dull realities that harm *millennials*, while fostering the proliferation of preconceived judgments that end up affecting the perception of this generation.

In this context, it is imperative to continue the study of *millennials* in Colombia using methodologies that are consistent with the reality of the country. This generation is made up of young people who full of illusions, projects and expectations aspire to prosper in society, and therefore, in the organizations where they are linked. The contrast with the other generations is evident, however, it is necessary to make an analysis in context to be able to understand the Colombian *millennials* discarding any type of foreign labeling that far from clarifying, ends up confusing. This will lead to better policies, mechanisms and accompanying actions that have a positive impact on both individuals and the development of organizations.

Conflict of interest

Authors declare non-existent conflict of interest with institutions or business corporations of any nature.

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