

# **Retention of Millennial Employees in the Army Acquisition Workforce**

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## **Note to Readers**

The Strategy Research Project (SRP) is an integral part of the Senior Service College Fellowship (SSCF) program for the Department of Defense (DoD) Acquisition Community at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, campus of Defense Acquisition University (DAU). Since the inception of the APG SSCF in 2009, the SRP implementation has emphasized the use of survey design and data collection. In January 2015, DoD Instruction 1100.13, *DoD Surveys*, was released, and it included the requirement for DoD-level review of any “surveys requiring participation of personnel from more than one DoD or OSD component.” Also, the implementation instructions for AR 335-14, *Management Information Control System*, added significant new review requirements for surveys. Changes driven by these new policies were not assessed at DAU before the start of APG SSCF Academic Year 2016.

Implementing the new review requirements could add 8 to 12 weeks to the SRP timeline and would not guarantee approval of any survey; such impacts cannot be reasonably accommodated within the existing SRP structure. Thus, the decision was made in December 2015 to remove the survey distribution and data collection from the SRP program and instead emphasize research based on evidence found in existing literature. Because this change was implemented in the middle of the APG SSCF 2015–2016 curriculum, the reader may detect minor impacts to the authors’ research continuity that were beyond their ability to fully resolve.

## **Abstract**

Millennial employees are not flocking to government organizations in large numbers. And employees that do decide to join the Army acquisition workforce are staying only for a short period of time. As this trend continues and the older generations retire, the skilled Army acquisition workforce shrinks.

This research assesses whether there is a correlation between the Millennial generation and the well-documented employee retention factors, in order to devise a method for retaining Millennials in the Army acquisition workforce. Specifically, it explores the employee retention factors, generational characteristics, and generational differences in employee retention factors.

The research uses existing case studies and additional scholarly sources, producing a conceptual model to illustrate the importance of the aforementioned components to accomplish the retention of Millennial employees in the Army acquisition workforce. Understanding the factors that enable Millennial employee retention will allow organizations to grow and prosper in the future.

**Keywords:** Employee retention, Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials

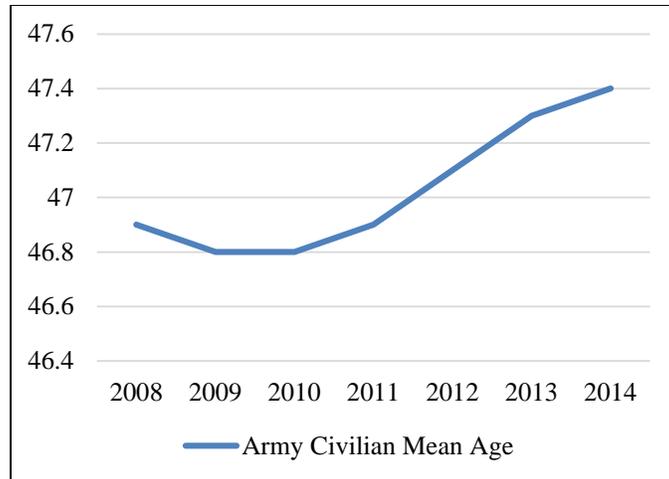


## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **Background**

According to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (OASA(ALT), 2016), “The Army of today is developing many of the most technically advanced systems and technologies in human history. There is no cookie-cutter approach to acquisition. While we focus on some of its inherent challenges—cost, performance and schedule risks as well as funding instability—it is worthwhile to note that we continue to succeed in fielding the best-equipped Army in the world. However, moving the world’s largest land force forward requires an ongoing commitment to learning and innovation.” Learning and innovation are two important factors of employee retention.

Winograd and Hais (2014) estimated that by 2025 the Millennials may constitute up to 75 percent of the workforce, dominating workplaces and shifting corporate culture. The mean age of all Army civilian employees from 2008 to 2014 is shown in Figure 1. The data for this chart was gathered from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM, 2013, 2014, 2015). This figure shows that the mean age of the Army civilian workforce has increased from 46.9 to 47.4 over the past six years.



**Figure 1 – Army Civilian Employees Mean Age**  
 (Source: OPM, 2013, 2014, 2015)

***Employee Retention***

Employee retention is defined by BusinessDictionary.com (n.d.) as “an effort by a business to maintain a working environment which supports current staff in remaining with the company.” Employees departing a company can cause negative consequences within the organization, such as reduced morale, loss of knowledge, reduced productivity, and increased costs for recruitment and training (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). However, employees departing an organization can also afford some positive opportunities for those employees that remain in the organization, such as upward mobility, cross-training, and lower payroll due to lower-level replacements (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980).

***Millennial Generation***

A generation is “shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at the time” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42). The Millennial generation grew up in a time of world events like the Gulf War, natural disasters, the September 11 terrorist attacks, war in the Middle East, and college campus shootings—a pretty downtrodden time to be a child. The literature review will focus on the generational characteristics of Millennials. For the

purpose of this research, the generations will be separated as displayed in Table 1 (Pew Research, 2015).

**Table 1 – Generation Birth Year and Age**

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Birth Year</i>	<i>Age in 2015</i>
Z	1998 – present	0 – 17
Millennial	1981 – 1997	18 – 34
X	1965 – 1980	35 – 50
Baby Boomer	1946 – 1964	51 – 69
Traditionalist	1928 – 1945	70 – 87
Greatest	1927 and earlier	88 and older

***Army Acquisition Core Competencies***

A competency is the “necessary technical knowledge and skills as well as general abilities such as communications, teaming, managing, and organizing” that are necessary to be successful in a job (U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC), 2014, p. 24). There are over 40,000 employees within the Army acquisition workforce that exemplify the necessary competencies. These individuals constitute a very skilled and dedicated workforce that executes the mission to “provide our Soldiers a decisive advantage in any mission by maintaining quality acquisition professionals to develop, acquire, field, and sustain the world’s best equipment and services through efficient leveraging of technologies and capabilities to meet current and future Army needs” (OASA(ALT), 2016).

**Problem Statement**

The National Society of High School Scholars conducted a survey with more than 18,000 Millennials and found that they prefer working at organizations like Google, Walt Disney Company, and Saint Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital (Thurman, 2015). There were 10 government organizations ranked within the top 134 organizations. Those organizations are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 – Work Locations for Millennials**

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Organization</i>
5	Federal Bureau of Investigation
8	Central Intelligence Agency
18	United States State Department
21	United States Air Force
32	United States Navy
42	United States Army
60	United States Marine Corps
93	United States Coast Guard
107	United States Census Bureau

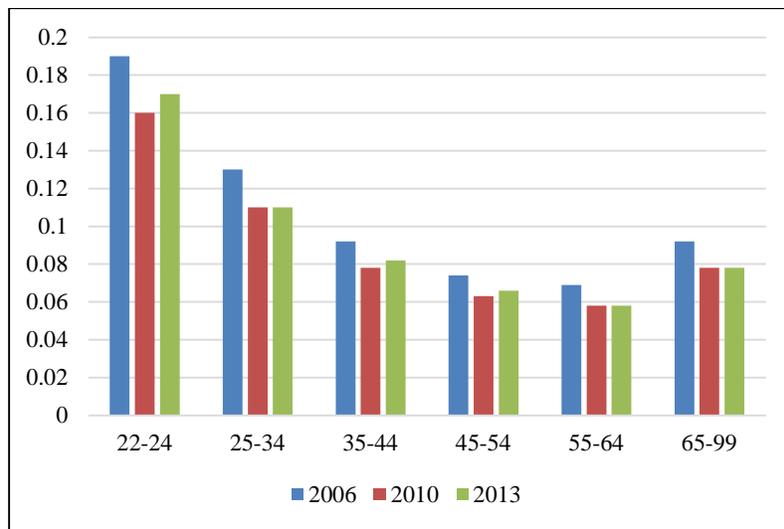
Furthermore, 63% (approximately 11,350 Millennials) of the survey participants were interested in learning more about government organizations (Thurman, 2015). This supports the argument that Millennials do not plan to work for the Army acquisition workforce, which exacerbates the issue of retaining those employees who do join the workforce. Organizations cannot remain competitive if they fail to retain high performers (Hausknecht, Rooda, & Howard, 2009). An international study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Andrews & Williams, 2011) found that the employee image matters to Millennials, resulting in 12% of the survey population not wanting to work for national defense and 11% of the survey population not wanting to work in government or public services.

The specific problem being addressed with this research is that Millennials are not flocking to government organizations by choice, but if they do decide to join the Army acquisition workforce, how do we retain them?

### **Purpose of This Study**

This study focuses on the employee retention strategies necessary keep Millennials in the Army acquisition workforce. Viechnicki (2015) reported that “fears about Millennial turnover rates are largely unfounded. When young workers do leave government jobs, their decision to do so can be explained largely by their age and the business cycle, rather than by a generational

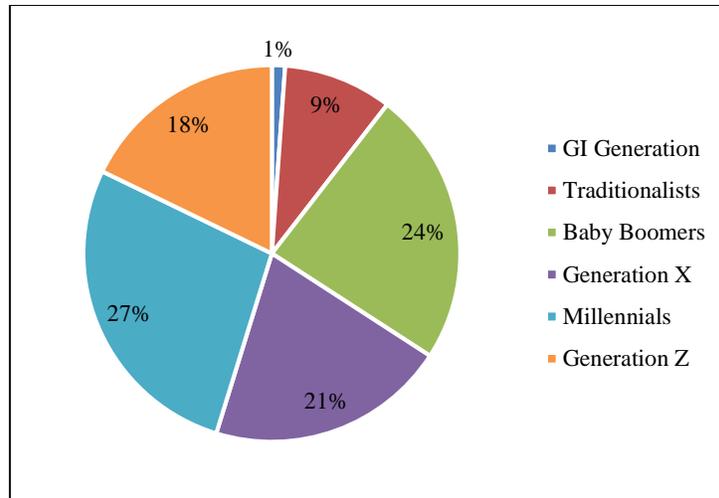
propensity to hop from one job to another” (p. 3). Figure 2 depicts the turnover rate by age group in the years 2006, 2010, and 2013. The data for this chart was gathered from U.S. Census Bureau analysis by Buckley, Viechnicki, and Barua (2015). By separating these age groups into the generations, the rate for Millennial turnover in 2013 (ages 22–24 and 25–34) was 14% and the rate for Generation X in 2006 (ages 25–34 and 35–44) was 11%. This reinforces findings that young workers leave government jobs based on their age and not the specific generation to which they belong (Viechnicki, 2015).



**Figure 2 – Workforce Turnover Rates by Age Group**  
*(Source: Buckley, Viechnicki, & Barua, 2015)*

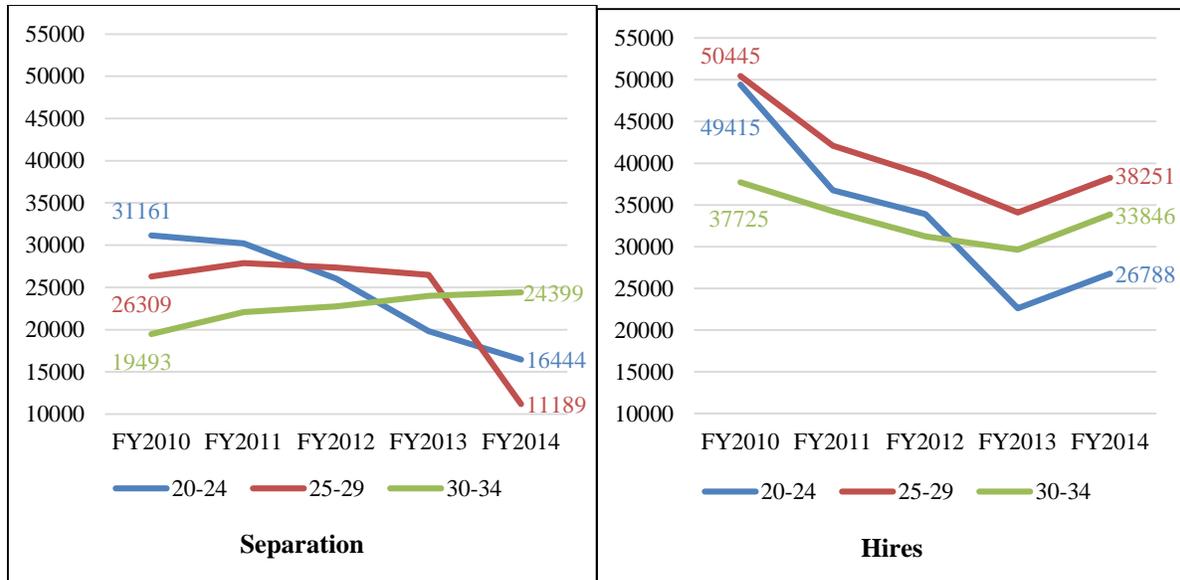
### Significance of This Research

Figure 3 shows the U.S. generation population by percentage in 2014. The data for this chart was gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau (2014). This figure illustrates that the Millennials, together with Generation Z, make up 45% of the total U.S. population of almost 319 million in 2014.



**Figure 3 – U.S. Population by Generation**  
*(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014)*

Ramlall (2004) posited that “there is significant economic impact with an organization losing any of its critical employees, especially given the knowledge that is lost with the employee’s departure” (p. 52). Specifically, when employees depart the Army acquisition workforce, there is a significant loss in tacit organizational knowledge, process knowledge, and relationships. The numbers speak for themselves with respect to Figure 4. The data for this figure was gathered from the OPM (2014) records; the graph on the left shows separations from the federal government and the graph on the right shows hires into the federal government.



**Figure 4 – Separation from, and Hires into, the Federal Civilian Workforce**  
*(Source: OPM, 2014)*

Although this data does not organize the findings based on generation, there is a trend that can be discussed based on five-year age groupings. From FY10 to FY14 there was a 53% decrease in separations for 20–24-year-olds, a 43% decrease in separations for 25–29-year-olds, and a 20% increase in separations for 30–34-year-olds. From FY10 to FY14 there was a 54% decrease in hires for 20–24-year-olds, a 24% decrease in hires for 25–29-year-olds, and a 10% decrease in hires for 30–34-year-olds. These findings show that for 20–24-year-olds the separations are on par with the hires; there are 19% more hires than separations for the 25–29-year-olds; and in the 30–34-year-old age group, there is a 30% gap between those separating from the government and those being hired.

**Overview of the Research Methodology**

The research method used in this strategic research paper was literature review and evidence-based research. The scholarly literature was gathered by searching multiple databases for recent articles and books in various related subject areas, contributing to this body of

knowledge. The literature review was divided into three clusters of research: employee retention, the Millennial generation, and the Army acquisition core competencies.

### ***Research Question***

In order to help reduce the loss of human capital in Army acquisition, this study aimed to find a solution for how to retain Millennial employees. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study: (1) What factors contribute to employee retention? (2) What are the preferred work characteristics for the Millennial generation? (3) What are the preferred work characteristics for the previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers)? These questions are pertinent to today's workforce, are feasible to answer within the time allotted for this research, and are supported with relevant scholarly literature.

### ***Research Hypothesis***

This study seeks to validate the following hypothesis: Millennial employee retention factors are the same or similar to those retention factors of previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers). The hypothesis was generated based on the literature on employee retention factors and generational work characteristics. If the hypothesis is validated in this analysis, it will support the findings of Viechnicki (2015) and Buckley et al. (2015) that Millennials are not much different than previous generations when they were of equal age.

### **Limitations**

The scope of this research has been limited to the employee retention factors that have been found effective in previous studies and analyses conducted by well-respected scholars. These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this paper. This study is limited by time and unavailability of specific primary survey data. If time and primary survey data were not limiting

factors, the literature review would be comprehensive enough to pinpoint a few specific employee retention factors to consider instead of the extensive list currently being considered.



## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This literature review discusses empirical studies and theoretical works that contribute to Millennial employee retention in the Army acquisition workforce. The scholarly literature was gathered by searching Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Academic Search Premier Databases for recent articles and books in various related subject areas, contributing to this body of knowledge. The scholarly journals and sources used to provide the theoretical underpinnings for this study were the *Academy of Management Executive*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of American Academy of Business*, *Journal of Nursing Administration*, and *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

Scholars use a variety of theories and concepts to explain employee retention, the Millennial generation, and employee competency. When examining the combination of the three research streams, the main theoretical lines that appear in this study came from motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1968), equity theory (Ramlall, 2004), and generational theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Briefly, motivation-hygiene theory considers that certain job characteristics contribute to job satisfaction and others contribute to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Equity theory identifies the connection between an employee's perceived treatment as compared to the perceived treatment of peers (Ramlall, 2004). Generational theory identifies the generational cycle that recurs about every 22 years (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

This review was divided into three clusters of research to establish a baseline for existing literature in the areas of employee retention, the Millennial generation, and the Army acquisition core competencies.

## **Employee Retention**

Steel, Griffeth, and Hom (2002) restated a quote from Jack Welch (former chief executive officer of General Electric), saying that “in bad economic times you have to take care of your best. Go hug your best. Give them a raise while you’re laying other people off” (p. 149). That is a demonstration of how important it is to keep the high performers in an organization. There is a substantial body of knowledge in the area of employee retention. This body of knowledge is filled with theories, such as the motivation-hygiene theory and equity theory, as well as the application of those theories that result in factors that may contribute to an employee staying in an organization. Employee retention has been defined as the “effort by a business to maintain a working environment which supports current staff in remaining with the company” (BusinessDictionary.com, n.d.).

## ***Turnover***

Just as a study of employee retention investigates how to keep employees in an organization, a study of employee turnover investigates why employees leave an organization. This is an important concept because the reasons people leave an organization are not always the same as why they stay (Hausknecht et al., 2009; Steel et al., 2002). The study of employee turnover has been ongoing since Crabb discussed the concept of scientific hiring in 1912 (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) have proven that the individual factors, work-related factors, and economic opportunity factors shown in Table 3 determine the turnover rate in organizations. These three determinant categories can be compared to the three antecedent categories for employee commitment posited by Steers (1977): personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences.

**Table 3 – Determinants of Turnover**  
*(Source: Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980, p. 268)*

<b>I. Individual Factors</b>		
Age	Intelligence	Aptitude
Length of service	Biographical indices	Personality
Family size	Family considerations	
Vocational interest	Alternate income sources	
<b>II. Work-Related Factors</b>		
Recognition and feedback	Role clarity	Task repetitiveness
Job autonomy and responsibility	Person-job congruence	Work unit size
Supervisory characteristics	Occupational-role integration	Flexi-time
Experienced job satisfaction	Organizational/job prestige	Organizational size
Commitment to the organization	Pay	Technology
Seniority provisions	Pre-employment interventions	
<b>III. Economic Opportunity Factors</b>		
State of national economy (e.g., GNP, employment levels)		
State of local economy (e.g., employment levels)		
Type of industry (e.g., average level of earnings)		
State of industry/occupation (e.g., No. of job vacancies)		
Presence of secondary labor market		
Alternate institutional income sources (e.g., unemployment insurance, welfare eligibility)		

Additionally, Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979) designed a conceptual model for the employee turnover process. The process, as shown in Figure 5, considers several sources of an employee's turnover behavior. These sources include individual, organizational, and economic-labor market; once again, these sources correlate to those factors put forth by Muchinsky and Morrow (1980) and Steers (1977).

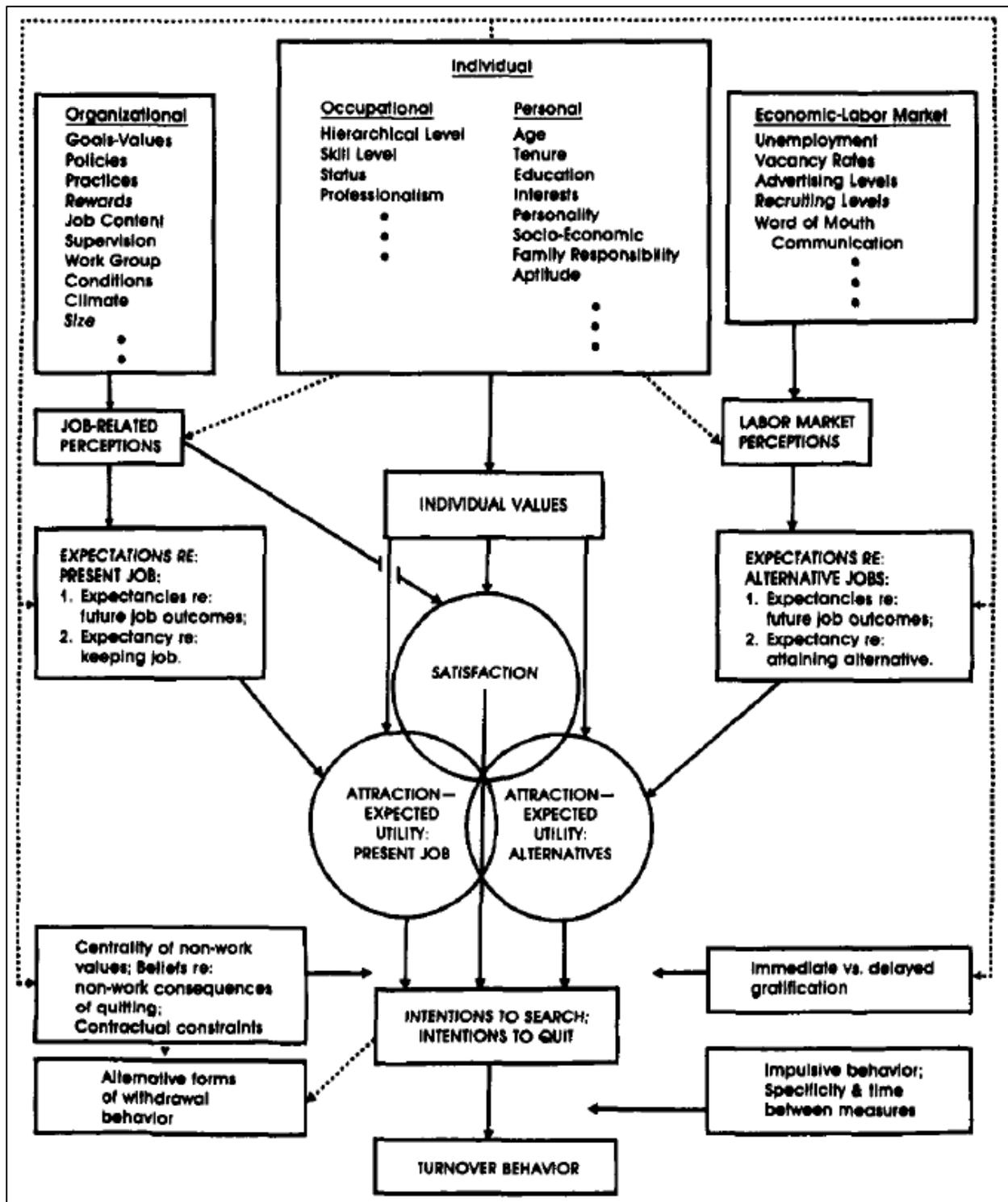


Figure 5 – Employee Turnover Process  
 (Source: Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979, p. 517)

### ***Equity Theory***

Equity theory has been posited as a contributor to employee retention and/or turnover. Equity theory considers how an employee feels they are treated as compared to other employees. It holds that a person naturally develops a perception of what they deem as fair and equitable compensation for their contributions. It is a type of exchange equity between an employer and employee, a type of *quid pro quo*. When equity does not exist between the employee, peers, and employer, the employee will take action (Ramlall, 2004). This action can be as subtle as reducing work output, or as severe as quitting the organization.

### ***Motivation-Hygiene Theory***

The same factors that motivate employees can also be used to help keep them in the organization. The motivation-hygiene theory explains that employees find satisfaction (motivation) based on the job content and they find dissatisfaction based on non-job-related (hygiene) factors (Herzberg, 1968). The motivation factors may include “achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth” (Ramlall, 2004, p. 57). The hygiene factors may include “company policies, salary, coworker relations, and supervisory styles” (Ramlall, 2004, p. 57).

### **The Millennial Generation**

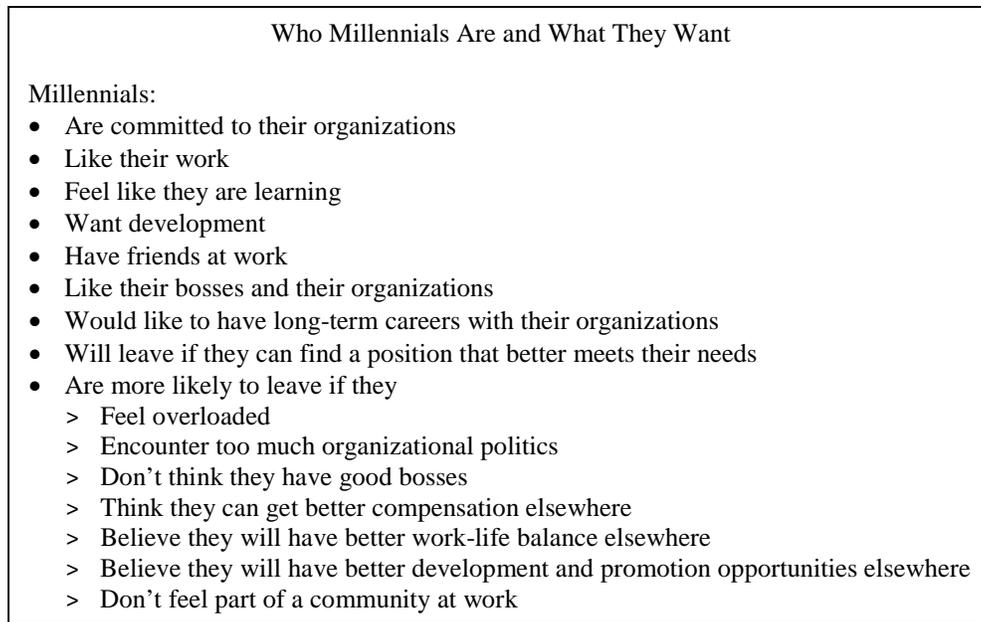
A generation can be defined as an “identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical development stages” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). In the current Army acquisition workforce, there are four primary generations operating: the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. The differences between those generations are formed by the societal influences of their respective times. The members of a particular generation have shared the same historical and social life experiences that distinguish

one generational group from another (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). The major environmental influences that are received early in life affect the development of personality, values, beliefs, and expectations that will remain into and through adulthood (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). Over time, not only do the generational differences shift, but individual values change as well within generational groups as a result of societal experiences and the general change process of individuals (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

The Millennials are those employees that were born in or after 1981. As the youngest generation in the workforce today, these employees have had access to digital technology all their lives (Reddick, 2006) and have never known life without the Internet. This generation is extremely technologically advanced and able to communicate extensively through electronic means (Aruna & Anitha, 2015). In 2011, a survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that 41% of Millennials “prefer to communicate electronically at work than face to face or even over the telephone” (Andrews & Williams, p.4). As children, the Millennials were often asked their opinion of what they wanted to do before being told to do something (Goman, 2006). That phenomenon has led to this generation not respecting the chain of command: they go directly to the leader who can help them (Goman, 2006). The Millennials excel when multitasking and enjoy having simultaneous tasks that they can choose to focus on at any one time. Employees of this generation have no tolerance for boredom, learn quickly, and have little patience. In order to improve processes and become more efficient, organization should minimize repetitive work for Millennials (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Although this generation works hard, friends and family take priority over their work. Unlike the earlier generations, they are not workaholics (Goman, 2006; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). Winograd and Hais (2014) reported “a recent Intelligence

Group study [that] found...almost two-thirds (64%) of Millennials said they would rather make \$40,000 a year at a job they love than \$100,000 a year at a job they think is boring” (p. 9).

“Millennials want to do interesting work with people they enjoy, for which they are well paid, and still have enough time to live their lives as well as work” (Deal & Devenson, 2016, p. 1). They tend to be high-maintenance employees who feel they are entitled to certain things within an organization. Without working long hours or paying their dues, Millennials want to be acknowledged for their good work and be put on the fast-track to promotions and rewards. They “give importance to personal life in work life balance, high salaries, immediate reward, and instant gratification” (Aruna & Anitha, 2015, p. 96). This generation is a very social group that wants managers to give personal attention to each employee and at least know their employees’ names. Millennials prefer to have regular feedback on their performance, almost in a real-time fashion, rather than every six months or annually (Haserot, 2013). They are team players and enjoy collaboration even though they are somewhat independent (Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Gursoy et al., 2008; Macky et al., 2008). Figure 6 summarizes the specific Millennial employee characteristics and needs as conveyed by Deal and Levenson (2016).



**Figure 6 – Who Millennials Are and What They Want**  
*(Source: Deal & Levenson, 2016, p. 167)*

### ***Generational Similarities***

Recent research by Viechnicki (2015) suggests that “Millennials behave much the same as other generations did once they find a steady job, form their own household, buy a car, and consider starting a family” (p. 15). Moving away from their parents’ home and forming their own household is somewhat delayed due to factors such as student loan debt. Buckley et al. (2015) found that 54.9% of 18–24-year-olds were living with their parents in 2014, up from 49.5% in 2005; and 17.7% of 25–34-year-olds were living with their parents in 2014, up from 13.5% in 2005.

Buckley et al. (2015) posited that the economic conditions present during the time Millennials were growing up have contributed to their attributes more than “fundamental differences in their aspirations” (p. 1). A Gallup poll revealed that the job market affects the retention of all generations of employees, not only Millennials (Sorenson & Garman, 2013, p. 3). If the employees’ needs are met in a positive job market environment, 17% of Millennials would

seek other employment, 9% of Generation Xers, 5% of Baby Boomers, and 3% of Traditionalists. This difference in generations seeking additional employment in a better job market might be explained by the older generations having more at stake rather than having a specific fundamental difference in how they approach staying in a job.

### ***Millennial Retention Factors***

Research shows similarity between the overarching employee retention factors discussed previously in this literature review and those specific to the Millennial generation. Gallicano (2015) has found that there are six fundamentals that support Millennial employee retention: (1) see how they are being groomed for long-term success, (2) ensure that they are constantly learning, (3) communicate a commitment to their long-term growth, (4) cultivate personal relationships with them, (5) accommodate their interests and preferences, and (6) create a strong work environment. In addition to those six fundamentals, Thompson and Gregory (2012) emphasize the need for a genuine, meaningful, individual, and trusting relationship with Millennials.

### **Army Acquisition Core Competencies**

In order to excel in a job or task, an employee should hold certain core competencies. Competencies are “the necessary technical knowledge and skills as well as general abilities such as communications, teaming, managing, and organizing” (AMC, 2013, p. 24). Based on the Army civilian training, education, and development system, there are eight core competencies that enable excellence in performance. These competencies are oral communication, written communication, computer literacy, decision making, interpersonal skills, reasoning, teamwork, and customer service. Although a limitation of this research is the description of Millennial core competencies, an assumption can be made, based on the Millennial characteristic research

described earlier in this chapter. The assumption is that Millennials do possess the basic competencies of oral communication, written communication, computer literacy, interpersonal skills, and teamwork. An assumption about Millennial possession of good decision making, reasoning, or customer service cannot be made based on the existing literature.

## Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

### Research Hypothesis

For this research project, the hypothesis is that the factors contributing to Millennial employee retention are the same as those of previous generations.

### Research Design

The research design for this strategic research paper is literature review and evidence-based research (EBR).

### *Literature Review*

The scholarly literature was gathered by searching multiple databases for recent articles and books in various related subject areas, contributing to this body of knowledge. The databases that were used to find the articles and books were Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Academic Search Premier. The scholarly journals and sources used to provide the theoretical underpinnings for this study were the *Academy of Management Executive*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of American Academy of Business*, *Journal of Nursing Administration*, and *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

The review was divided into three clusters of research: employee retention, the Millennial generation, and the Army acquisition core competencies. Employee retention is defined as an “effort by a business to maintain a working environment which supports current staff in remaining with the company” (BusinessDictionary.com, n.d.). A generation is “shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at the time” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). The differences between generations are formed by the societal influences of their respective times. A competency is the “necessary technical knowledge and

skills as well as general abilities such as communications, teaming, managing, and organizing” that are necessary to be successful in a job (AMC, 2013, p. 24).

### ***Evidence-Based Research***

The purpose of using the EBR approach is “to develop practitioner-scholars who are competent consumers of management and educational administration research. EBR is a method of using secondary research (i.e., case studies, theory development, data analysis, etc.) to make new connections in a particular field of study” (Bragg, 2011, p. 60). EBR was conducted by correlating and performing an analysis of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this paper.

### **Bias and Error**

The literature review conducted for this research considered all scholarly literature that was found using the online Webster-Eden Library System (<http://library.webster.edu>). In efforts to reduce the impact of bias, perspectives were presented both in support of and against generational differences in employee retention factors. King, Lengerich, and Bai (2015) define error “as the difference between the true value of a measurement and the recorded value of a measurement.” If a survey instrument were being executed for this study, the effects of error would be reduced by providing the survey instrument to a large and diverse sample size.

### ***Research Validity***

The survey was designed to validate the extent to which employee retention factors do or do not directly correlate to an employee’s generational identity; internal validity concerns are reduced by considering only those variables. The results of this survey would maintain external validity with other federal government professionals outside of the Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG), Maryland community; however, findings may not be generalizable to those employees in a private industry company. The survey was distributed to several Defense Acquisition

University Senior Service College Fellowship (SSCF) colleagues for their review to ensure that the questions were relevant and representative of the construct being measured, thus addressing content validity. The construct of this research is sound.

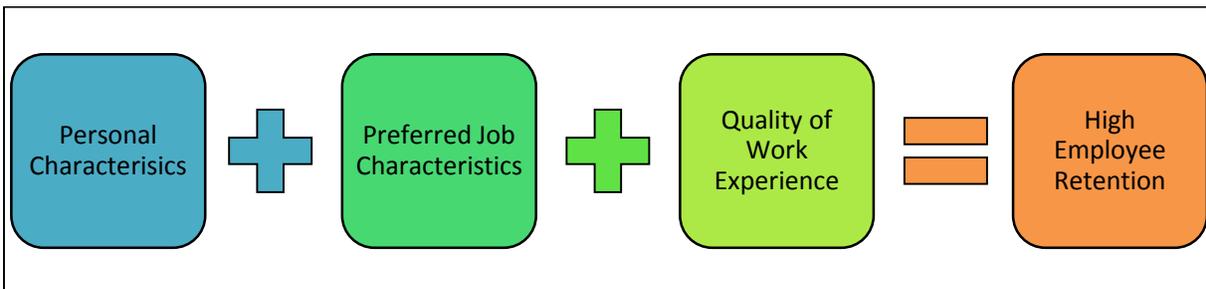
### ***Response Reliability***

Reliability of the survey responses has been ensured through the use of an automated online survey tool ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) that maintains the database of responses, reducing internal consistency concerns. If the same population (the acquisition workforce at Aberdeen and Edgewood areas of APG) are surveyed again using this survey dissemination tool, the results should be stable; however, factors such as employees separating from the government or federal government status may skew those results. The survey provided the opportunity for respondents to add free text comments to ensure that all comments are captured, even if they are not directly asked in a specific question. Because this survey was administered online, without a requirement for participation, input may have been omitted, resulting in the potential for workforce perspectives to be missed.



## Chapter 4 – Findings

The objective of this research was to use a literature review and EBR to assess whether there is a correlation between the Millennial generation and the well-documented employee retention factors of previous generations. This research was guided by three questions: (1) What factors contribute to employee retention? (2) What are the preferred work characteristics for the Millennial generation? (3) What are the preferred work characteristics for the previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers)? The literature discussed in Chapter 2 proposes that the employees' generation may or may not contribute to retention. This research suggested that personal characteristics, plus preferred job characteristics, plus quality of work experience, equals high employee retention, as depicted in Figure 7. The following chapter will provide answers to the research questions and validate the hypothesis set forth.

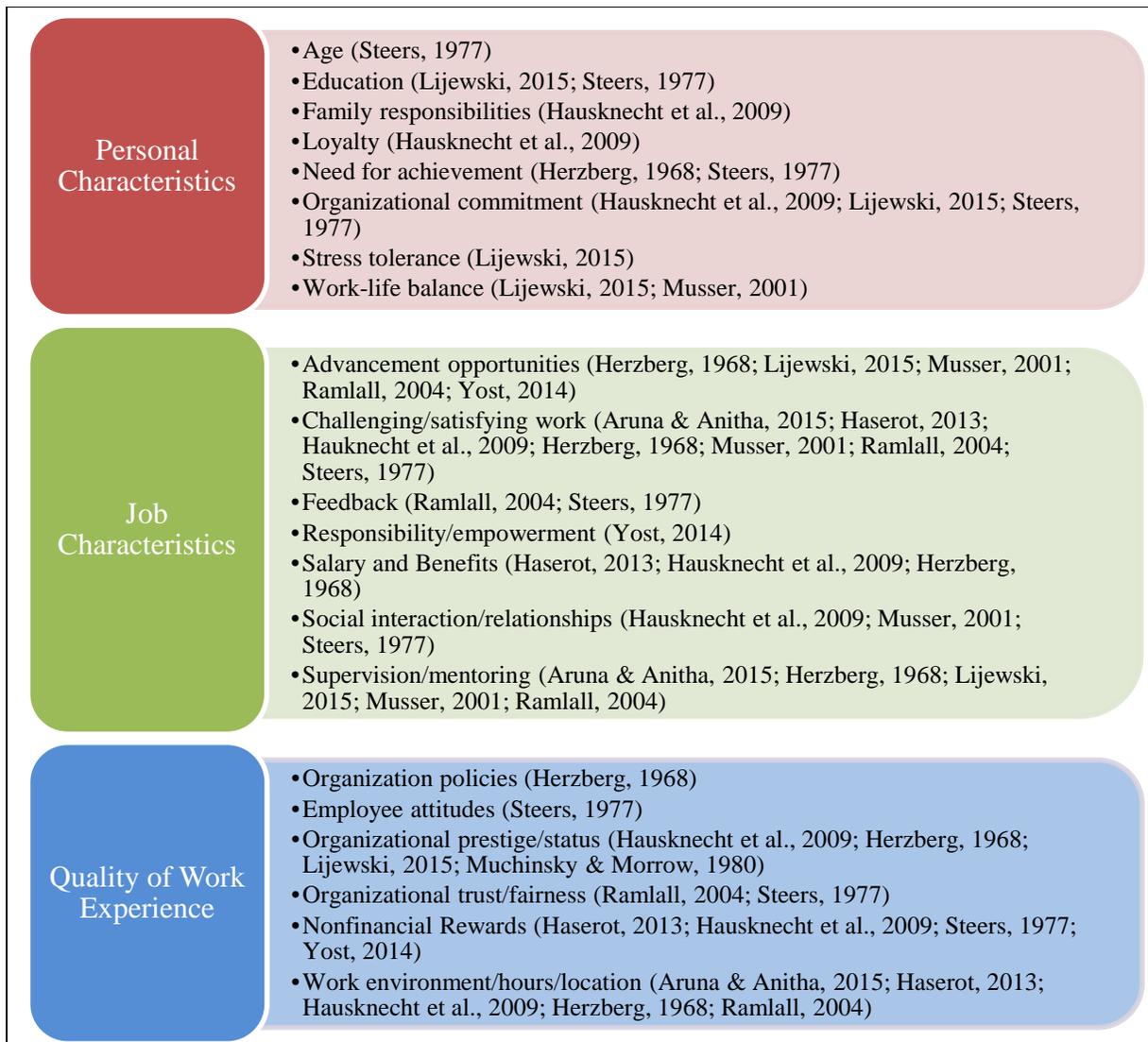


**Figure 7 – Findings Framework**

### **Analysis**

#### ***Factors Contributing to Employee Retention***

When analyzing the scholarly literature on employee retention, there are three categorical themes that arise: personal characteristics, job characteristics, and quality of work experience. The specific factors of each category have been grouped based on the literature presented in Chapter 2 and displayed in Figure 8. This list of contributing factors for employee retention spans the generations.



**Figure 8 – Retention Factors**

Additional research conducted by Radford, Shacklock, and Bradley (2012) in Australia’s aged-care workforce provides data on short-term (12 months) and long-term (5 years) employee retention factors across the four generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials). This study surveyed 2,100 employees with a response rate of 17.6%, or 370 employees. The findings, shown in Table 4, posit many similarities between the generations with respect to short-term and long-term retention factors. It should be noted that this data was collected in 2012, when Traditionalists were age 67 to 84; Baby Boomers were age 48 to 66;

Generation Xers were age 32 to 47; and Millennials were age 15 to 31. The data were not collected from each generation when they were at the same age.

**Table 4 – Short-Term and Long-Term Retention Factors**  
*(Source: Radford, Shacklock, & Bradley, 2012)*

Generation	Short-Term Retention Factors (12 months)	Long-Term Retention Factors (5 years)
Traditionalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• Work hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• Job stability &amp; security</li> </ul>
Baby Boomer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• Job stability &amp; security</li> <li>• Management support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• Job stability &amp; security</li> </ul>
Generation X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Management support</li> <li>• People they work with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• People they work with</li> <li>• Career Opportunities</li> </ul>
Millennial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• People they work with</li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work itself</li> <li>• Financial need to work</li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> </ul>

As shown in Table 4, a factor that encouraged short-term and long-term employee retention for all four generations was the work itself; the employees wanted to enjoy what they do and be challenged. With the exception of Generation Xers, the other three generations reported that their financial needs encouraged them to stay in a job. While the Traditionalists were looking for job stability and security, the Generation Xers and Millennials needed career advancement opportunities available to them in an organization. Lastly, the Generation Xers and Millennials considered their coworkers and other people they worked with to be a factor that encouraged them to stay in a job.

***Work Characteristics Preferred by Millennials***

When considering workplace preferences of the Millennial generation, it is important to ensure that the environment is open, casual, and technologically equipped with access to social media. They thrive in an environment that is colorful, fun, and set up with a casual space for

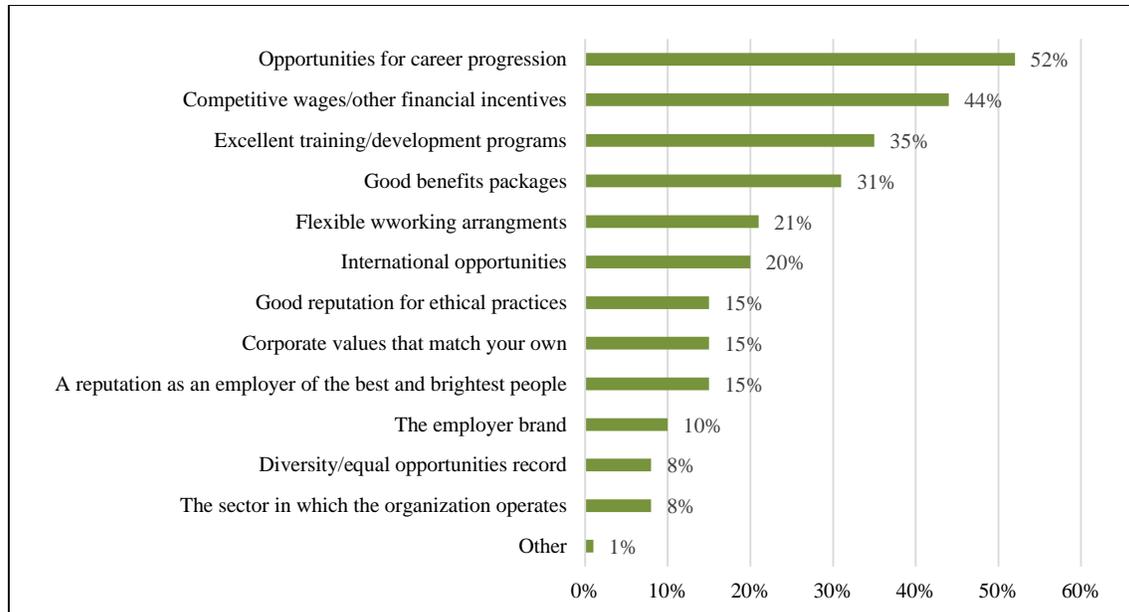
informal meetings and critical thinking (Aruna & Anitha, 2015). In the study of 18,000 high school students, college students, and young professionals, Thurman (2015) explored what factors most influenced the Millennial generation in selecting an employer. The following factors were most important: employer perception and image, salary and perks, job-specific opportunities, and work atmosphere. Figure 9 represents the percentage of the survey participants that found those factors to be important in choosing an employer.



**Figure 9 – Millennial Factors in Choosing an Employer**  
*(Source: Thurman, 2015, p. 6)*

The equity theory (Ramlall, 2004) holds true for the Millennial generation in that they want to be treated fairly and want others around them to be treated fairly as well. Andrews and Williams (2011) posit that Millennials are “motivated by much more than money” (p. 10), and Thurman (2015) found that flexibility in their work schedule is most important. The

fundamentals presented by Gallicano (2015) are also validated by Thurman's study, which reported that Millennials find learning the necessary skills to advance as the most important. Lastly, although diversity and friendly colleagues are close seconds, a solid work-life balance is most important to Millennials. This work-life balance finding was also reported by Andrews and Williams (2011) in their survey results from of 4,364 Millennials age 31 or under who graduated from college between 2008 and 2011. Highlights of this survey find that for Millennials, work-life balance is the most important benefit from employers, followed by flexible work hours and cash bonuses. As detailed in Figure 10, Andrews and Williams (2011) also found that career progression was most important to Millennials, followed by wages, training, and benefits. Fifty percent of those surveyed are satisfied with their opportunities for career progression while 23 percent are not. The "capacity to attract, retain and manage executive talent does not depend on the compensation package, but rather on our ability to create a sense of belonging to an organization that offers a long-term relationship and a professional development opportunity, and that has a clear conception of itself, of what it wants to be, and of how to achieve it" (Andrews & Williams, 2011, p. 10).



**Figure 10 – What Millennials Find Attractive in an Employer**  
 (Source: Andrews & Williams, 2011)

### ***Work Characteristics Preferred by Previous Generations***

*Generation X:* When looking back approximately 20 years ago, when the Generation Xers were similar in age to today’s Millennials, the research shows that they were not loyal, image sensitive, mobile, disrespectful, hungry for a challenge, and lifetime learners. Hein (2007) reports that Generation Xers look at “loyalty to the corporation [as] an old fashioned concept” (p. 85). The image of a company is important to Generation X, and this image must have real meaning, not just stand for making money (Ruch, 2000). This generation does not respect the chain of command so much as they respect the individual value brought by the person in that position of power (Ruch, 2000). Motivation for these employees does not come primarily from “monetary reward, job stability, job longevity [or] success” but by setting goals and experiencing success and achievement (McVey & McVey, 2002, p. 81).

Generation X needs to be valued by their older generation managers (Ruch, 2000). To retain Generation X employees an organization needed to “keep the job at the center stage of

their personal growth and development” and give them the rewards and recognition that allows them to learn new skills or have more responsibility (Hein, 2007, p. 85). The organization should have provided a formal mentoring program, complete with developmental assignments in other facets of the organization in order to expand the knowledge base of Generation X. Feedback must be given on a continuous basis in order to feel as though they are contributing and are valued by their supervisors. Bates (2002) suggested a list of seven items that organizations can do to retain Generation X in the workplace: (1) follow their input on how they would like their careers to be developed; (2) offer them control over their work hours and space; (3) give short-term, performance-based bonuses; (4) provide timely and consistent feedback; (5) assess their motivation and adjust perks and benefits; (6) introduce entrepreneurial opportunities; (7) let them own their work and be responsible for their bottom line (p. 14).

*Baby Boomers:* When looking back approximately 30 years ago, when the Baby Boomers were similar in age to today’s Millennials, the research shows that they were not loyal to their corporation but loyal to their profession, and they were self-sufficient and independent. This generation held four cultural values: (1) defiance of authority; (2) participation in decision making; (3) service ethic; and (4) anti-careerism (Raelin, 1987).

To retain Baby Boomer employees, an organization needed to give them responsibility and challenge; allow them to control their own destiny; provide the opportunity for independent decision making; offer the opportunity to develop new skills and be mentored; and make promotions based on knowledge and fairness versus bureaucratic politics. Above all Baby Boomers wanted to work for an organization that maintained an active community involvement and spreads peace and love (Raelin, 1987).

*Traditionalists:* When looking back approximately 40 years ago, when the Traditionalists were similar in age to today's Millennials, the research shows that they were quiet, uninvolved, self-centered, uninterested in politics or social issues, hypocritical, and smug ("Silent Generation," 1970). With the exception of the radio, this generation grew up without any mass communication technology.

## Chapter 5 – Interpretation

This study focused on the employee retention strategies necessary keep Millennials in the Army acquisition workforce. Evidence presented in Chapter 4 supports Viechnicki's (2015) initial report that "fears about Millennial turnover rates are largely unfounded. When young workers do leave government jobs, their decision to do so can be explained largely by their age and the business cycle, rather than by a generational propensity to hop from one job to another" (p. 3).

In order to help reduce the loss of human capital in Army acquisition, this study aimed to find a way to increase retention of Millennial employees. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study: (1) What factors contribute to employee retention? (2) What are the preferred work characteristics for the Millennial generation? (3) What are the preferred work characteristics for the previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers)? These questions are pertinent to today's workforce, are feasible to answer within the time allotted for this research, and supported with relevant scholarly literature.

This study validated the hypothesis: Millennial employee retention factors are the same or similar to those retention factors of previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers). The hypothesis was generated based on literature on employee retention factors and generational work characteristics. This supports the findings of Viechnicki (2015) and Buckley et al. (2015) that Millennials are not much different than previous generations when they were of equal age.

This research has found that the Millennial employee retention factors are the same or similar to those retention factors of previous generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers). This research provides evidence that the generation an employee is a part of

does not determine their preferred retention factors. The retention factors are a product of the employee's age bracket, lack of responsibilities, and overall position in the world.

## **Conclusions**

This research identified six common factors that organizations must employ to improve retention of employees. The factors are (1) understand the employees, (2) spell out the job duties required, (3) praise often, (4) provide regular real-time feedback, (5) provide a flexible work environment and schedule, (6) and help them develop and grow for their future positions. This research has led to the conclusion that incorporating these factors will enable retention of employees and thus facilitate an increase in overall organizational performance.

## **Recommendations**

A survey of the Army Acquisition workforce should be conducted to validate the findings in this paper. The survey should consider all generations and all organizational levels. As reported by Deal and Levenson (2016), the percentage of Millennials at the administrative/nonprofessional level is 1%, professional level is 48%, first-level manager is 32%, mid-level manager is 16%, and at the director/executive level is 3%. A suggested informed-consent agreement (Appendix A) and survey instrument (Appendix B) are included in this paper. The survey was designed to collect data to validate or invalidate the hypothesis of this research. It was constructed and reviewed by the project advisor and several Defense Acquisition University SSCF colleagues. This survey should be edited to ensure all questions are asked of the various generations when they are the same age as the Millennial generation to ensure the data is comparable.

The variables that were examined in the survey include specific demographic information (age, pay grade, years in service, etc.) and job satisfaction factors. Specifically, survey

respondents should be asked demographic questions to gauge the employee age, how long they have been in their current job, and their education level. Survey respondents should also be asked content questions using Likert scale, yes or no, and open-ended formats. The subjects for the content questions include potential for departing their current job, how often they receive feedback from their supervisors, whether there is a professional development or mentoring program provided by their organization, and several questions related to factors that contribute to their job satisfaction. In aggregate, responses to these questions will provide the data to verify whether Millennial employee retention factors are the same or different than those of previous generations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Data collected for this research was found through case studies and surveys conducted by other service areas (i.e., nursing, senior person care) and other countries (i.e., Australia).

A primary survey of the Defense Acquisition Workforce could not be conducted due to emerging policy restrictions.



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## **Glossary of Acronyms and Terms**

AMC .....Army Materiel Command

APG.....Aberdeen Proving Ground

EBR.....evidence-based research

FY .....fiscal year

OASA(ALT) .....Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics  
and Technology

SSCF .....Senior Service College Fellowship



## **Appendix A – Informed Consent Agreement**

As an adult 18 years of age or older, I agree to participate in this research about retention of Millennial employees in the Army Acquisition Workforce. This survey is being conducted to support research efforts being performed by [fill in your name].

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time. By agreeing to participate in this study, I indicate that I understand the following:

1. The purpose of the research is to explore employee retention factors for Millennial employees in the Army acquisition workforce. Should I choose to participate in the survey, I am aware that my feedback will be consolidated with other participants and the outcome will be briefed to Army leadership allowing them to potentially employ my recommendations.
2. If I choose to participate in this research, I will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will include items relating to demographics, job description, future career plans, feedback methods, and job satisfaction characteristics. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
3. There is no incentive for participation.
4. All items in the questionnaire are important for analysis and my data input will be more meaningful if all questions are answered. However, I do not have to answer any that I prefer not to answer. I can discontinue my participation at any time without penalty by exiting out of the survey.
5. This research will not expose me to any discomfort or stress beyond that which might normally occur during a typical day. There are no right or wrong answers; thus, I need not be stressed about finding a correct answer.
6. There are no known risks associated with my participating in this study.
7. Data collected will be handled in a confidential manner. The data collected will remain anonymous.
8. The purpose of this research has been explained and my participation is entirely voluntary.
9. I understand that the research entails no known risks and by completing this survey, I am agreeing to participate in this research.



## Appendix B – Survey Instrument

1. I have read the Informed Consent Agreement and will participate voluntarily.
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. What is your age?
  - 21 years old or younger
  - 22 – 34 years old
  - 25 – 50 years old
  - 51 – 69 years old
  - 70 years old or older
  
3. What is your current pay grade?
  - GS-05 or below
  - GS-07 to GS-09
  - GS-11 to GS-12
  - GS-13 to GS-14
  - GS-15
  - Senior Executive Service
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Are you in a supervisory position?
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. How long have you been in your current job position?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - 4 – 5 years
  - 6 years or longer
  
6. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
  - Less than high school diploma
  - High school diploma equivalent (e.g., GED)
  - Associate degree
  - Bachelor degree
  - Master's degree
  - Doctoral degree
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. How likely are you to change jobs in the next 6 months?
- Extremely likely
  - Very likely
  - Moderately likely
  - Slightly likely
  - Not at all likely
8. How likely are you to change jobs in the next year?
- Extremely likely
  - Very likely
  - Moderately likely
  - Slightly likely
  - Not at all likely
9. Does your organization have a professional development program?
- Yes
  - No
10. Do you receive feedback from your supervisor in a timely manner to meet your needs?
- Yes
  - No
11. How often do you receive constructive feedback from your supervisor?
- Immediately after task completion
  - Monthly
  - Quarterly
  - Bi-Annually
  - Annually
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
12. What factors of your employment in Army acquisition would encourage retention?
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
13. What factors contribute to your job satisfaction? (choose all that apply)
- Advancement opportunities
  - Balance between work and home life
  - Challenging/interesting/satisfying work
  - Mentoring
  - Networking/social interactions/relationships
  - Salary and benefits
  - Supportive/empowering environment
  - Timely feedback
  - Supportive Environment

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. What is the most important factor that contributes to your job satisfaction?

- Advancement opportunities
- Balance between work and home life
- Challenging/interesting/satisfying work
- Mentoring
- Networking/social interactions/relationships
- Salary and benefits
- Supportive/empowering environment
- Timely feedback
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Please provide any additional comments that would help keep you employed in the Army acquisition workforce.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
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