





Four generations coexisting in the same space isn't an experience just reserved for the annual family reunion: the office is another arena where the age range can span upwards of 50 years.<sup>1</sup> Every working day, the gaping age difference of the stereotypically 'time-stressed' Baby Boomers and 'socially conscious' Millennials is bridged by the 'sceptical' members of Generation X.<sup>2</sup> Dubbed the Traditionalists, the eldest generation of workers today – which includes the likes of architects Glenn Murcutt and Tadao Ando – is stepping back as the bright-eyed youth of Generation Z debuts in the ring. Today, 10 per cent of the latter group is estimated to join the labour force by 2020.<sup>3</sup> By the exact same year, it is projected that the global labour force will comprise 50 per cent of Millennials. As of 2016, the Australian workplace is broken down into 4.1 million Baby Boomers, 4.8 million Generation X and 4.9 million Millennials, making the latter the largest employed age group in the country.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, we are enjoying a dynamic transitional period for our total professional community.

### Millennials on the move

While age is one element in determining generations, there are many more factors which determine an individual's specific generation, including: their own perception of which generation they belong to; personalised common beliefs; and, placement among history's turning points.<sup>5</sup> For example, one in ten Millennials residing in Australia stated they are not optimistic about the future, making them among the least positive Millennials of the world.<sup>6</sup> And a staggering 66 per cent in Australia stated they would probably leave their current employers within three years.<sup>7</sup> Could this trend be merely an isolated, age-specific loyalty issue or a response to a more pervasive dilemma of employer neglect?

### Debunking Millennial myths

Is there confirmation of the widespread notion that Millennials job-hop faster than other age groups? An industry-wide skew in research resulted from trying

Image is provided by *Herman Miller Asia Pacific*



Image is provided by *Herman Miller Asia Pacific*

to pin down what the entire generation might want. In fact on most points – having a positive impact on the organisation, solving environmental and social challenges and working with diverse groups of people – Generation X and Baby Boomers actually *share* comparable desires with Millennials. The secret to taming Millennials<sup>9</sup> – as well as qualified employees of all ages – for the long-term may not be as perplexing as employers seem to think.

### **What employees really want**

The most successful companies in attracting millennials are naturally innovative employers (such as Google and Apple) who culturally stray from the conventional.<sup>9</sup> Instead of companies trying to appeal to just Millennial-aged workers, companies can optimise talent attraction by adjusting business culture and practices. Some of the obvious boxes to tick include offering a competitive salary and job satisfaction. Also important in determining an employee's longevity is a company's professional criteria such as a perceived lack of leadership skill-development, as well as personal matters, value conflicts, healthy work-life balance and flexibility.<sup>10</sup>

### **Workplaces must bridge office and home life**

Psychological effects presented by an office's spatial environment and colleague mentalities play an unsuspecting role in employee satisfaction. With humans spending nearly 50 per cent of time indoors, it shouldn't

come as a surprise that Millennials are demanding a healthy work-life balance as a priority.<sup>11</sup> The flexibility offered by technology and tools to turn any space into a workspace allows employees to venture away from traditional office environments while still being productive.

### **Cross-generational teams must recognise age-related differences**

Although the adage 'age doesn't matter' rings true in job performance, age can matter when it comes to working methods. Millennials communicate digitally, with 41 per cent preferring electronic means rather than in-person or telephonic communications.<sup>12</sup> Nearly half felt their managers did not always understand the way they use technology at work, leading to a need for employers to monitor for unfair bias exercised or expressed by older generations.

### **When at work, do as the Millennials do**

As a generation, Millennials are strong-willed, wanting to be able to work in the way that best suits their interests. A seamless integration of technology means that the boundary between work and home has become increasingly blurred, although many would prefer to work in a collaborative office environment than be alone. This doesn't mean they approve of traditional working practices though, as 65 per cent said they felt that rigid hierarchies and out-dated management styles failed to



Image is provided by *Herman Miller Asia Pacific*

motivate younger recruits. For example, employee rewards should be based on results rather than just based on the total amount of hours or the place where the work was performed. Ideally, offices will serve more as meeting spaces rather than a mandatory location to ride out a nine-to-five working day. While a Millennial-friendly office is first and foremost digital, it needs to be comfortable and creative. Millennials are happy to work hard, but not while cut off from a network of colleagues inside a grey cubicle. Organisations, which offer an engaging and stimulating atmosphere, are conducive to the work-life desires of the contemporary employee.<sup>13</sup>

### **Link between office atmosphere and employee well-being**

Office workers deserve environments that support their emotional well-being. According to architectural firm Gensler's *Design Forecast 2017*, "brands with strong values build strong ties to their mission through workplace design. These places embody the brand in ways that attract, retain, and motivate workers to innovate." The international practice employed their personalised strategy at the Washington Post headquarters. Amid interior spaces hallmarked by the 139-year-old publication's milestones, the print-turned-multimedia expert and novice editorial staff breathe the company's legacy and future. The identity-driven approach is aligned with Millennials' reported perception that an organisation's long-term success requires the essential elements of people, product, purpose and profit.<sup>14</sup>

### **Flexibility makes for happier workers**

Observational studies conducted by Herman Miller showed that 60 per cent of the time, assigned workstations were unused. Meanwhile, the amount of time private offices were left empty jumped to 77 per cent.<sup>15</sup> This shows interior programming can be reviewed to better suit evolving workstation needs. Alternatively, in the case of some companies, a broader review of operational strategies might be required to understand why workstations are not needed. Employees are more productive if they can make minor to considerable adjustments to their working conditions. Specifically, workstation improvements enhance perceptions of ergonomic characteristics, decreased upper back pain, and greater situational satisfaction.<sup>16</sup> Simply by being aware of the potential for project and spatial-related trends among employees, supervisors can observe and then fine-tune existing approaches – thus integrating any perceived missing elements.

### **One chair for all**

The ideal chair should encourage a sitter to find the proper seated position – evenly on the sitting bones – and responds dynamically to the sitter's weight to ultimately provide comfortable support. But a person is always in motion, placing a continually changing distribution of pressure patterns upon a chair. The array of postures, referred to as kinematics, should be primarily navigated by the surface rather than the seat and backrest elements.

According to architectural firm Gensler's *Design Forecast 2017*, "brands with strong values build strong ties to their mission through workplace design."

### Computer-bound employees don't recline

When tailored accurately, a chair's backrest aids in reducing the impact of the seat surface. Field research shows those engaged in computer-related tasks aren't leaning back but sitting upright. The need for pelvic support and correct spinal alignment is most important. The addition of lumbar support creates better contact with the seat by spreading weight distribution across a larger surface area.<sup>17</sup>

### Criteria-driven design for a seating staple

Ten years of research on how people truly sit while working led to Herman Miller's Aeron office chair, designed Bill Stumpf. The criteria list eventually evolved into 22 varied points and guided the design of each Herman Miller chair released since 1976. Launched at the office-focused trade fair

Orgatec in 1994, the Aeron chair was an immediate industry game changer by offering itself as a breathable and lightweight alternative to its clunky cousins.<sup>18</sup>

The Aeron chair's iconic design comes down to a common denominator: the human body. The catch is this shared factor comes in all shapes, sizes and, most importantly, weights and distribution. By pushing different loads into different parts of a chair, a sitter can feel pain when the seat's surface then places pressure back on the body. The resulting cutting of circulation in blood vessels of the tissue leads to discomfort. Although counterintuitive, Stumpf's research shows a single solution can neutralise the issues introduced by a wide-range of bodily possibilities. Due to the company's ongoing dedication to research and development, consistently updating findings and embracing industry or technological

#### Generation Timeline<sup>20</sup>

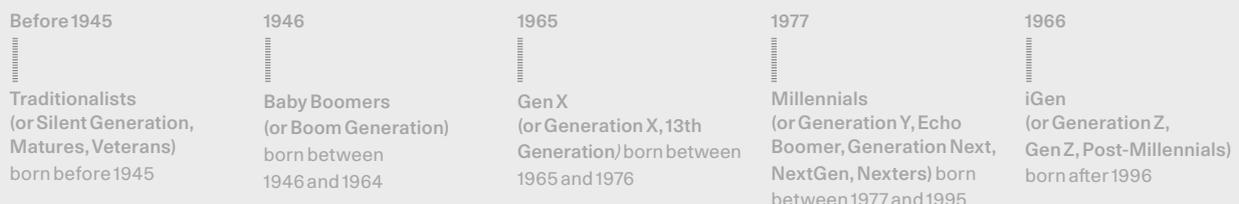




Image is provided by *Herman Miller Asia Pacific*

## The Aeron chair's iconic design comes down to its common denominator: the human body.

innovations have led to Herman Miller introducing a remastered Aeron – twenty years after its first iteration.

### Improving the ideal icon

Two years were spent by the Aeron chair's original co-designer Don Chadwick and a team of scientists and engineers to upgrade every facet. Over 20 years after its debut, the Aeron returns with the same classic silhouette and features, at first glance. Beyond appearances, the redesign fine-tunes the rolling chair to push its original goal further: to move intuitively with the sitter.

### Getting more for less

The redesigned Aeron is still available in three sizes – A, B and C – but now armrests can slide on multiple axes and better tailor to its sitter's proportions. Its seat slants forward an additional 1.8 degrees, and while seemingly insignificant by number, the incline improves the chair's adaptability to a wider range of upright postures than the original model. Engineering advancements have reduced the amount of time and number of knob twists and turns a user must perform to achieve customised comfort

levels. Originally dedicated to the pelvic tilt, the adjustable mechanism PostureFit SL™ offers optimal sacral and lumbar support by tilting to maintain the spine's ideal S-curve and upright posture. Embedded within the seat and back, the 8Z Pellicle™ envelops the body for support while encouraging a healthy state of continuous motion.<sup>19</sup> The suspension system caters to eight zones which are given one of three tasks: four "tight" areas gently force the sitter's correct posture; two "nesting" areas reduce tension and pressure; and two "stabilisation" areas promote correct positions, thus preventing the body from sinking into the chair.

While a chair's ergonomic performance is of utmost importance, its appearance matters too. Having pared down the original model to essential elements, Herman Miller reduced the chair's weight by three pounds, or 1.5 kilograms. Comprised of 39 per cent recycled material, the mesh textile and aluminium-coated components may be uniformly tinted in a choice of three shades of grey – mineral, carbon or graphite. Changing its skin like a chameleon, Aeron can blend into – or stand distinct from – the medley of interior stylings found in today's offices. The upgraded Aeron is a seating solution, customised to be as diverse as the workforce itself.

1. Edwards, Verity. 2015. "Age Gaps Can Work Wonders". Theaustralian.Com.Au. Accessed February 22 2017. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/ageing-population-generation-gaps-can-work-wonders/news-story/6103b572ec29d2f7bca263e0f4782bf8>.
2. Costanza, David P., Jessica M. Badger, Rebecca L. Fraser, Jamie B. Severt, and Paul A. Gade. "Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes: A Meta-analysis." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2012): 375-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41682990>.
3. Collier, Elissa. *Workplace Warfare: BaBoomers, Gen X And Gen Y* and Elissa Collier. 2016. "Workplace Warfare: Baby Boomers, Gen X And Gen Y". Careerfaqs. Accessed February 23 2017. <http://www.careerfaqs.com.au/news/news-and-views/workplace-warfare-baby-boomers-gen-x-and-gen-y>.
4. "Millennials: A Giant Generational Hoax?". 2016. Roy Morgan. Accessed February 23 2017. <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/6792-millennials-a-giant-generational-hoax-201605030703>.
5. Reeves, Thomas and Eunjung Oh. "Generational Differences". 1st ed. Athens: University of Georgia, 2017. Web. February 20 2017.
6. Hunt, Elle. "Millennial Australians Pessimistic About House Prices And Terrorism Threat". *the Guardian*. N.p., 2017. Web. 22 Feb. 2017.
7. "The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning over the next generation of leaders". 2016. Deloitte.Com.Au. Accessed February 20 2017. <http://landing.deloitte.com.au/rs/761-IBL-328/images/deloitte-au-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary-050216.pdf>.
8. Pfau, Bruce. "What Do Millennials Really Want At Work? The Same Things The Rest Of Us Do". 2016. *Harvard Business Review*. Accessed February 20 2017. <https://hbr.org/2016/04/what-do-millennials-really-want-at-work>.
9. "Millennials at Work Reshaping the Workplace" 2017. Pwc.Com. Accessed February 23 2017. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/managing-tomorrows-people/future-of-work/assets/reshaping-the-workplace.pdf>
10. The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning over the next generation of leaders". 2016. Deloitte.Com.Au. Accessed February 20 2017. <http://landing.deloitte.com.au/rs/761-IBL-328/images/deloitte-au-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary-050216.pdf>.
11. The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Australia Country Report". 2016. Deloitte.Com.Au. Accessed February 20 2017. <http://landing.deloitte.com.au/rs/761-IBL-328/images/Deloitte-Australia-Millennial-Survey-2016-Australian-data.pdf>.
12. "Millennials at Work Reshaping the Workplace" 2017. Pwc.Com. Accessed February 23 2017. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/managing-tomorrows-people/future-of-work/assets/reshaping-the-workplace.pdf>.
13. "Millennials at Work Reshaping the Workplace" 2017. Pwc.Com. Accessed February 23 2017. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/managing-tomorrows-people/future-of-work/assets/reshaping-the-workplace.pdf>.
14. "The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning over the next generation of leaders". 2016. Deloitte.Com.Au. Accessed February 20 2017. <http://landing.deloitte.com.au/rs/761-IBL-328/images/deloitte-au-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary-050216.pdf>.
15. "Herman Miller, Making Real Estate Work Harder: Aggregated Data, Trends, and Examples". 2011. [https://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/research\\_topics/SpaceUtl.pdf](https://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/research_topics/SpaceUtl.pdf). (accessed February 20, 2017).
16. Reeves, Thomas and Eunjung Oh. "Generational Differences". 1st ed. Athens: University of Georgia, 2017. Web. February 20 2017.
17. "The Art and Science of Pressure Distribution". 2017. Hermanmiller.Com. Accessed February 20 2017. [http://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/solution\\_essays/se\\_The\\_Art\\_and\\_Science\\_of\\_Pressure%20Distribution.pdf](http://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/solution_essays/se_The_Art_and_Science_of_Pressure%20Distribution.pdf).
18. Hall, Peter. "Aeron Chair - 1994 - Metropolis Magazine - April 2006". 2017. *Metropolismag.Com*. Accessed February 23 2017. <http://www.metropolismag.com/April-2006/Aeron-Chair-1994/>.
19. "Herman Miller Launches New Aeron Chair". 2017. Hermanmiller.Com. Accessed February 20 2017. <http://www.hermanmiller.com/about-us/press/press-releases/all/herman-miller-launches-new-aeron-chair.html>.
20. Reeves, Thomas and Eunjung Oh. "Generational Differences". 1st ed. Athens: University of Georgia, 2017. Web. February 20 2017.