

Cognitive Skills of Millennials and Job Performance: A Systematic Review with Implications for Organizational Productivity

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Abstract

Background: The growing interest in the value of Millennials' cognitive skills has drawn the attention of employers and managers as an enabler for job performance and productivity in the fast-paced knowledge-driven workplace. This systematic review aims to synthesize empirical and literature evidence on Millennials' cognitive skills with the outcomes on job performance. The review draws on Albert Bandura Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Becker Human Capital Theory (1964) to provide a theoretical understanding of Millennials' reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking increase job performance.

Methodology: The PRISMA guideline was adopted to compile, synthesize and analysed peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025, retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO databases. Inclusion criteria comprised articles published in English, articles with a primary focus on millennials' cognitive skills with the outcomes on job performance. Theses, dissertations, and conference papers were excluded. Of the 279 initially identified records, 28 articles were found to meet the inclusion criteria and subjected to narrative synthesis.

Findings: Findings reveal that millennials' cognitive skills of particularly critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability have strong influence on job performance, particularly knowledge sharing, task efficiency, innovation, and collaborative effectiveness. Empirical evidence shows that organizations investing in continuous learning of employees, technology-enabled training, and informal learning environments experience greater performance outcomes among millennial employees.

Research limitations: Despite the contributions, the review was constrained by some limitations. English-only peer-reviewed articles and dominance of cross-sectional survey designs representing highest number of the articles reviewed, limiting longitudinal inference and causal claims. Uneven geographical representation articles reviewed, reflecting fewer studies from Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, it highlights the need for expanded contextual evidence.

Implications for Future Research Directions: Future research should adopt qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs, including cross-cultural comparative studies between developed and developing countries, which could generate transferable models for workforce development practice in Industrial and Organizational Psychology (IOP) and Human Resource Management (HRM), particularly in Africa, and to examine how millennials' cognitive skills develop over time and influence job performance in a dynamic workplace.

Originality/Value: This review contributes to field of IOP and HRM by synthesis empirical evidence linking millennials' cognitive skills to job performance and organizational productivity, highlighting cognitive competence as a strategic asset in contemporary workplaces. The review contributes to broader discourses on employee cognitive skills to job performance in developing contexts around the world. It enriches the Albert Bandura and Becker theoretical framework by embedding millennials' cognitive skills in a modern organization working templates.

Index Terms

Cognitive Skills; Millennials; Job Performance; Organizational Productivity