

Star Wars vs Avengers - the disconnect between Millennials and Baby Boomers and what it means for business as we approach 2020

Written by Sarah Jane Miatt

Let's face it, the employee generation gap in many manufacturing companies is now a gaping chasm. Most of the current leaders and managers are baby boomers or gen X'ers who left school or graduated from university when the latest tech was a Walkman and they were lining up to see the first Star Wars movie in bell bottom jeans and a mustard sweater.

Fast forward 42 years to 2019 and fresh university grads with brand new degrees have permanent grooves in their fingers and worn-down thumbs from persistent smartphone usage. They stream the latest Avengers movies on Stan, bleary eyed at 2am on their everything device, whilst scrolling Instagram and ignoring Facebook.

The expectation in 1977 was to get a job and keep it. Work your way up, be loyal and get a gold watch on retirement. Now, [the average tenure in a job is less than four years](#), with only 28% of millennials expecting to stay with their current organisation beyond 5 years (Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018).

Employee expectations have evolved just as much technology in the last four decades.

Manufacturing leaders are no doubt trying to stay ahead - investing in the latest greatest systems, lean processes and robotic technology. However, they are often missing the key ingredient that drives innovation - engaged people.

As **Mark Goodsell** (Ai Group) warns, "Companies need to have an innovation strategy – you need the discipline of knowing the problem-solving areas that can make the biggest difference to your business and focus there – and don't get too distracted by the bright, shiny technology," ([Manufacturers Monthly July 2019](#))

This calls for development in strategic thinking capabilities and embracing the value of interpersonal skills to get the maximum return from investment in advanced technologies.

"Companies now require a workforce which not only has expertise in particular disciplines and technologies, but also has a handle on team building capacity, emotional intelligence, strategic visioning, market analysis and cultural sensitivity," **Rachael Wilkinson** (Ai Group, [What's Up with the Future of Work?](#)).

In our experience, we have seen how a single day's worth of soft skills training has raised efficiency in a warehouse environment where the pickers went from picking 28 to 35 lines per hour to picking over 50 lines per hour. It was not only the picking speed that improved, but also the general attitude to other changes implemented to improve company performance.

The 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey noted, “respondents lack confidence that they can succeed in an Industry 4.0 environment and are looking to businesses to help them develop the necessary skills, including the “soft” skills they believe will be more important as jobs evolve.”

While STEM skills are necessary to move through technical process - soft skills such as communication, leadership, conflict resolution and collaboration are certainly the pathway to engage the untapped potential within your workplace.

Attracting and securing the best talent to your organisation is going to be more difficult than ever before in the coming years, as there will be fewer young people entering the workforce and fewer still with the correct combination of skills.

In short, competition for new workers is going to be fierce, this has already been experienced in many sectors leading to a skills gap and the use of 457 visas to cover the shortfall.

So how do the current leaders shift the focus to attract (and keep) the best talent?

➤ **Embrace your role as “Educator”**

73 percent of those who plan to stay with their employers more than five years say their organisations are strong providers of education and training (2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey).

➤ **Invest in training from experts**

It is no use having the blind leading the blind, or an aggressive communicator running a workshop on conflict resolution. Training needs to come from educated experts who ‘walk the talk.’

➤ **Embrace diversity - Age, gender, sexuality, education level and ability**

“Those working for employers perceived to have a diverse workforce are more likely to want to stay five or more years than those who say their companies are not diverse.” 69 percent of Millennials report that they stay because of diversity, while this figure drops dramatically to 27 percent when there is little to no diversity (2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey).

Have a look around at your organisation, what’s the diversity like?

➤ **Plan for the future**

Succession planning has become a major issue within the Australian business landscape with little regard being paid to the fact that many Boomers will be leaving full time employment within the next few years. Many managers who gained their skills in the last century have not shared important information to emerging leaders or other team members. This is a situation that must be addressed today.

Soft skills are the bridge between last century industrial thinking and where we are today in the Industry 4.0 digital world. Soft skills are not about sitting in a circle, holding hands and singing *Kumbaya*. They are the solid foundations that underpin success, build strong leadership, create innovation and ensure a healthy ROI on all expenditure.

Without business leaders letting go of ego and old thinking, the Australian manufacturing sector will struggle to keep up with international competitors, many of whom have already embraced and understand the need for a well-educated workforce both in STEM skills and soft skills.

Re-skilling to stay current in this new paradigm of Industry 4.0 is now a priority for all business leaders.

The Avengers movies are a great visual demonstration of this change. It's all about difference and team work. Oh, and their diversity includes a big green guy called the Hulk, over 10 women, 2 cyborgs, the Black Panther, the whole Wakanda Nation, Captain America and his mate Bucky, who's almost a Russian.



Sarah Jane Miatt is inspired daily by the power of people to thrive when equipped with excellent soft skills to think strategically, communicate their ideas and work collaboratively. Soft skills complement STEM skills by creating charismatic, influential leaders.

Sarah sees the potential for a bright future for Australian Manufacturing, and views embracing diversity (women, LGBTQIA+ people and differently abled) as a key part of this new post-industrial environment. Investing in soft skills enables us to compete on a global level in industry 4.0.

Sarah gets a daily kick out of seeing the tangible results for her clients at the Australian Institute of Soft Skills Training (AISS Training). From increased productivity to increasing cash flow to reducing staff turnover - it's all about the ROI.