



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Using Strategic Foresight to Examine the Impacts of Generational Change

Prepared by
Strategic Studies Group, Office of Policy and Planning
January 23, 2014



SSG Emerging Issues List

- **Alternate Futures for Benefits and Services**
- **Cemeteries in a Social Media World**
- **Changing Nature of Warfare**
- **Ethics**
- **Future of Government Communication**
- **Future of Health IT**
- **Generational Impact**
- **Identity Management**
- **Inspiring Innovation**
- **Malignant Cyberspace**
- **NCA's Future: Exploring Cemetery vs Shrine**
- **Personal Data Technologies**
- **Research and Development**
- **The Challenge of a Mobile Enterprise**
- **The Future Client**
- **The Future of Education**



Setting the Stage

Jean, a 42-year old VBA employee, is interviewing 23-year-old Brandon via video teleconference. The brother of an Afghan War Veteran who uses VA services extensively, Brandon sees VA as a place where he can help people like his brother, while also developing customer service skills that will make him more employable. After witnessing major turnover of Millennials early in her VA career, Jean is apprehensive about hiring a Millennial, but hopes newly implemented programs will alleviate any preconceived notions Brandon holds. She is pleased to see Brandon's enthusiasm when she describes VA's mentoring programs, rotational fellowships, and flexible, results-based scheduling that would allow him to work just the hours needed to accomplish his assigned tasks, and excitement about the opportunity to work from any location with a wireless connection.



Developing a “Preferred Future” for VA

- **Rise of Millennials appears to be an inexorable “metatrend”**
- **Strategic foresight methods help illuminate what the dynamics of the future workforce logically will be as a result**
- **Strategic foresight methods also enable us to identify what the VA response to those future workforce dynamics logically should be – a preferred future VA approach to HR**

The methodology we employed comprised six steps:





Methodology in Detail

- 1. Frame the future environment by establishing assumptions to bound and scope a notional future state set 5-15 years from now (2018-2028)**
- 2. Identify trends and drivers through research and scanning that could interact to cause the emergence of that future**
- 3. Conduct research to identify prevailing expertise in the open-source environment about Millennials and generational change in the workforce, and related sub-trends to include conducting interviews with experts on workforce issues and managing generational change in the workplace**
- 4. “Red-team ” to identify gaps, weaknesses, and unconsidered issues associated with the notional alternative future**
- 5. Extrapolate and intermingle trends identified sub-trends to depict a notional future VA workforce model – set in 2020 – and help the Department consider what it might take to succeed in the future environment**
- 6. Identify potential implications for the Department and areas where it might conduct further analysis**



Trends Within the Metatrend

- 1. Search for meaning in the work they do**
- 2. Crave immediate access to information**
- 3. Seek constant feedback and collaborative environments**
- 4. Are highly educated and want to keep learning**
- 5. Demand flexibility**
- 6. Are hesitant to make decisions, or commit**
- 7. Tend to be more informal than their predecessors**
- 8. Question the status quo**
- 9. Were shaped by a decade of uncertainty**



Trend Exploration – Preferred Future

Recruitment

- Targeted advertising highlighting VA's mission and vision (1,9)
- Less emphasis on a lifelong career, and more on making a difference for Veteran peers while building transferrable skills and expanding professionally (4,6)
- Highlight VA's flexible work environment, its continual learning focus, cutting edge technology, and programs to coach and mentor rising staff (3,4)
- Openness to candidates with non-traditional academic backgrounds (e.g., virtual degrees, self-taught, etc.) (4,7)
- Describe VA's tangible benefits (e.g., 401K and a pension) (9)

Professional Development

- Formalized coaching programs to create connections and opportunities for validation, critical reviews, and reinforcement with more experienced mentors and peers (2,4,6)
- Feedback culture institutionalized (via text, video chat, or in-person meetings) (2,3,5,7)
- Emphasis on skill based learning through rotations within VA, to other agencies, and to professional education programs (1,4)
- Ongoing feedback and assessment that sets clear metrics and goals for success and actionable development planning (3,4,6)
- Reward structures offer choice (time off, cash bonuses, etc.) for high performers (5)

Benefits Composition

- Flexible benefits packages that allow employees to make tradeoffs based on their current situations and modify as needed (5)
- Sliding scale for salary vs. leave allows employees to buy, or sell, leave time based on individual needs (5,8)
- Multiple retirement provider options, immediate 401k vesting, and free financial advisory services (5,6,9)
- Medical coverage tailorable based on need; can extend to non-traditional dependents (5,8)
- Adjustments to all benefits easy through interactive, cloud-based dashboards (5)
- Student loan repayment plans (9)

Working Environment

- Flexible hours and dispersed, remote work enabled by cloud-based networks, virtual worlds, and holograph or video meetings (5)
- Open communication with employees about the reasoning behind tough decisions and leadership's perspective on challenges (2,9)
- Cutting edge technology paces that which Millennials use in their personal lives (2,5)
- Office spaces designed to enable collaboration and creativity through bright, open, shared space, and mobile technology (3)
- Flatter organizational models and purposeful avoidance by leadership of language emphasizing hierarchical relationships (7,9)



Indicators and Warnings – Help Enable Action

- **Number of Millennial applications**
- **Rate of change in Millennial applications over time**
- **Millennial satisfaction**
- **Extent of Millennials taking advantage of employee benefits**
- **Millennials recruiting Millennials**

One means of bridging the future back to the present – making strategic foresight have operational impact

Helps leadership consider what they are doing – or not yet doing – to get to the preferred future



Implications – What VA Can Start Today to Do

- **Develop a compelling narrative**
- **Cultivate a learning environment**
- **Be honest, and realistic, about expectations**
- **Be a technology leader**
- **Prepare Millennials for leadership now**
- **Help Millennials understand their predecessor generations**
- **Facilitate mentoring**
- **Offer competitive compensation and flexible benefits – up front**



Lessons Learned

- **Tailor insights for leadership**
- **Importance of framing the future in practical terms – leadership can easily see as things they can do**
- **Identify and include office or offices within the agency with a clear stake in the issue**
- **Diversity in team doing the research and analysis (Boomers, Gen X, Millennials) – “constructive conflict”**
- **Look for further opportunities for products to be used by leadership (e.g., Senior Leaders Offsites)**