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How Millennial Are You?
by Susan Casey
Second Edition

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Introduction

There is no denying it, they are coming. The number of Millennials is on the rise and they will soon be a large part of the workforce.   The Millennial generation is comprised of more than 75 million Americans born between 1981 and 2000.[1] By 2020, people from this generation are expected to make up 46% of the workforce.[2]

Understanding the Millennial generation is critical to the success of any manager as the leaders of today have a responsibility to shape the leaders of tomorrow. Despite their claim of independence and self-sufficiency, Millennials can benefit from the guidance and experience of more "seasoned" workers.   But that knowledge transfer will only take place if today's workers and leaders take the time to understand and build relationships with this young generation.

The ideas and comments shared in this paper stem from books and internet research on Millennials, as well as a Focus Group specifically designed to explore the work environments and preferences of Millennials.

Generational Differences

Every generation thinks they are special. Depending on each individual's experience, people claim their generation had it better or worse than the current generation. The truth is that each generation is simply different – not better, not worse, just different. The key to being an effective manager or co-worker is understanding the roots of peoples' perspectives and adjusting your style to theirs as appropriate.

The following table describes the last four generations of workers and their core beliefs. Keep in mind that some of the core foundations are generalizations based on years of research and behavioral studies and may not apply to everyone in that generation.

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[1] *Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. Original publication acknowledged; authors retain copyright. This paper was originally presented at the 9th Annual University of Texas at Dallas Project Management Symposium in August 2015. It is republished here with the permission of the author and conference organizers.*

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This Generation	Born In	Has These Characteristics
Traditionalists	1928 – 1945	• World War II generation • Go to work, earn a living, and don't complain • Loyal to company, company loyal to them
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964	• Currently leading – and retiring from – today's organizations • Overflowing with experience and insight • Promotions earned based on hard work
Generation X	1965 – 1980	• Independent and pragmatic • Give them work and leave them alone to do it • Dislike being micro-managed
Millennials	1981 - 2000	• Received constant praise and reward from parents, teachers, coaches, mentors • Respect for authority must be earned • Highly collaborative, prefer to work in teams

* *Some studies suggest different date ranges for the Generation X and Millennial groups, and identify the O Generation as those born between 1998 and 2015. However, most research uses the date ranges noted above.*

Characteristics of Millennials

Research shows that Millennials have certain characteristics or traits. All of the following are generalizations and there are, of course, exceptions as everyone has different experiences. However, if a manager or colleague can understand what motives most Millennials or why they behave as they do, steps can be taken to bridge the gap between the generations.

- **Tech Savvy** – Millennials have always lived in a world with computers and the internet. They used computers in school. They communicate through texts, posts, tweets, SnapChat, and FaceTime. They invent apps for SmartPhones. In the business world, they expect to use technology. It does not have to be cutting edge, but it should be current.

  *Quotable Quotes: A wellness program is underway at Company X where a Millennial Focus Group session was conducted. Employees are to track their daily exercise on a printed form. One of the Focus Group participants said, "You can tell this program is designed to get the old people to exercise more. You only have to exercise for 10 minutes at a time. Then you fill out a **paper** form and **fax** it to the health center."[3]*

- **Health Conscious** – Many Millennials are health conscious. They like to be active. They expect gym membership to be a company benefit, and preferably one that is paid for by the company. They expect the gym to be comparable to what they could get outside the company for a similar price.

Millennials prefer healthy lunch and vending machine options. If a cafeteria is available at work, they prefer that lunch be free or subsidized in some way. If they have to pay a high price for something that they could get cheaper outside of work, or if they feel the lunch options are not healthy, they will go off-site for lunch. For many companies, food service is subsidized and a certain amount of revenue is necessary to maintain the option for employees. By providing healthy, affordable breakfast and/or lunch options at work, employees and food service workers will benefit.

- **Educated** – Today's workforce is competitive and many companies require a college degree. Baby boomers could get into a company and move up based on hard work. Gen Ys might have a bachelor's degree but could get a job without one. They were promoted by demonstrating their expertise or because of their ability to lead / manage others. Today's Millennials are educated with at least a bachelor's degree. Older Millennials may have stayed in school longer and completed an advanced degree when jobs were scarce during the economic recession. For others, the market they are entering is so competitive that an advanced degree is required to even be considered for an interview.

- **Achievers** – Millennials have played on more sports teams, been involved in more activities, and worked on more school group projects than any other generation. They have taken on leadership roles, volunteered on weekends, and studied Latin all in the name of building a great resume. They are accustomed to excelling and expect to do well on the job from day one.[4]

- **Sheltered** – In the 1950s, parents nurtured their children but may not have shown a lot of outward affection. They were told that picking up a crying baby would only spoil him or her. But in the 1960s, Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote a parenting book that promoted cuddling babies and bestowing affection on children to make them happier and more secure.[5] Helicopter parenting came next, and these are the parents of today's Millennials. Helicopter parents hover over their children, ready to swoop in if anything goes wrong.

> ***Quotable Quotes:*** *A 22-year old pharmaceutical employee learned that he was not getting the promotion he had been eyeing. He was a Harvard graduate who had excelled at everything he had done and was crushed by the news. He told his parents and they were convinced there was some misunderstanding, some way they could fix it because they had been able to fix everything before. His mother called the HR department the next day. Seventeen times. She demanded a mediation session with her son, his boss, and HR – and got it. At one point, the 22-year-old reprimanded the HR rep for being rude to his mom.[6]*

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- **Entitled** – Due in part to the Achiever and Sheltered characteristics noted above, Millennials often feel entitled to special treatment, perks, or benefits in the workforce. Since earlier generations grew up believing they had to work for their promotions, pay, and rewards, this is often the greatest point of contention between generational workers today.

  Parents, teachers, coaches, tutors, and mentors have told Millennials they can be anything they want to be, they can chart their own course, and be the master of their own destiny. As a manager, do you really want your Millennial workers to chart a course independent of the rest of the team? As a Millennial, do you want to behave in a way that may alienate you from your co-workers and result in a poor performance review or worse, being fired, because you refuse to adjust to the work environment around you? The answer to both of those questions is probably no, so let us turn our attention to how to bridge the generation gap.

Managing Millennials

Explain the big picture and why their role is important. Millennials want jobs that provide purpose and meaning to their lives. They want a job that offers more than money to pay the bills. Many want to have a small business on the side, perhaps giving it a chance to grow while they have a steady income from a more traditional job. According to a survey done by Deloitte, six out of ten Millennials said a sense of purpose was part of the reason they chose to work for their current employer. Tell them *why* they should care about their work. [7] Explain why the company exists, what its strategies are, and how each team member's role supports or contributes to those strategies. (A good TED Talk on this subject is by Simon Sinek, titled *Start With Why.)*[8]

Provide an autonomous environment. To Millennials, autonomy is a sign of trust from their manager. It does not mean they do not want direction or instruction, but they do want to be given a task or project and then be trusted to get it done. Expectations should be clear, deadlines provided, quality standards defined. But once the Millennial has been given clear direction for the task or project, managers should step back and allow them to get it done. Millennials are good at figuring things out – today's tools and software do not come with instruction manuals so they are accustomed to learning from scratch.

Allow time for relationship building. Managers of Millennials need to understand that a top-down management approach will not be received well by a generation that was consciously included in many family and school decisions. Taking a "just do what I say" or "we've always

done it this way" approach by management or colleagues is going to result in a clash with the Millennials on your team. To satisfy this new generation's desire to be creative, to have important and interesting roles, and to have a say in their company's activities, a more inclusive approach is required. Some organizations include money in the budget for social activities. The team, including the Millennials, gets to decide how it is spent. Some teams take trips or do team building events together.

> **Quotable Quotes:** *"We were discussing ideas for a team building activity, but everything we [the Millennial team members] came up with, the old people said, 'Oh, I can't do that, I'm too out of shape.' There is definitely a generation gap."*[9]

This may be the most difficult adjustment for older team members to make. After all, when they were coming up through the ranks, no one cared much about *their* feelings or whether they were valued. They had a job to do and they did it. Remember that research indicates that Traditionalists do not complain about their jobs; Boomers understand that promotions are based on hard work; Gen Xers are very pragmatic. It may be difficult to cater to the "feelings" of the Millennials at first. But as a manager, if you want to attract, retain, and motivate the younger generation of workers, you need to find ways to make their work meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable.[10] This may mean indulging in social activities that seem unproductive in the short-term, but could result in greater performance and commitment from the younger workforce – and the entire team – in the long run.

Learn to flex. Millennials understand that they need to be in the office for meetings and face time with business partners, customers, and team members. But if the work they are doing can be done off-site (e.g., at a coffee shop or at home), give them the flexibility they desire. By allowing for flexible work hours, employees can come and go as needed so they can participate in their children's activities, attend to doctor's appointments, or simply avoid rush hour traffic. And if one or two individuals abuse the work from home policy, Millennials expect managers to take it up with the individuals and not revoke the privilege for the whole team. Again, they want to be trusted to get the job done but within flexible terms.

Millennials generally have a preoccupation with the obligations of management toward them. They want "free" coffee, smoothies, yogurt machines, snacks, gym membership, lunch, etc. While some of these expectations are unrealistic or impractical for many organizations, flexing allows for an ongoing dialogue and negotiation of expectations. Flexing is the ongoing conversation between managers and Millennials about, "How can we do our best work together?" Management's willingness to be flexible with respect to scheduling, assignments, and opportunities gives Millennials the feeling that they can influence what happens to them in the organization.[11]

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Give them space to relax, unwind, or solve problems in an informal setting. When shown pictures of casual work spaces, Millennials in the Focus Group liked the idea of having a break space. Some even requested a rest or nap room (and research supports that a 20 minute cat nap during the day often makes employees more productive).[12] If that's too extreme for your HR department, provide a ping pong or pool table in a dedicated space away from the work area so as not to disturb others. Allow Millennials to set up a gaming area for short breaks, or to lay out a chess board for even shorter distractions. Millennials suggest that a collaborative break area allows them to take their mind off a problem if they are stuck or simply to recharge if their energy is low. It also provides a place to bounce ideas off other team members if they need to come up with creative solutions.

> ***Quotable Quotes:*** *"If we built areas like that at Company X, I think people would eventually use it. I sit in the lobby to work sometimes just to get away from my desk. People walk by and look at me funny, like, 'Look at that guy goofing off.' If managers also used the casual space to have non-private discussions with their direct reports or other managers, then we would feel like it was OK for us to use, too."[13]*

Appendix A contains pictures of collaborative and informal work spaces that were shared in the Millennial Focus Group and that received positive responses from the participants.

Give them projects that advance or require the use of modern technology. Millennials grew up with technology, often using iPads and laptops in elementary school. When they join the workforce, they begrudgingly use software that the IT department purchased ten years ago. It is clunky, not user friendly, and it drastically impacts the level of happiness – and productivity – of the Millennial generation.[14] Whenever possible, companies should invest in modern resources for its employees. At a minimum, update collaborative work areas to include modern technology. Appendix B shows collaborative work areas where teams can gather to discuss projects using modern technology (e.g., share visual requirements, and then design, code, and test software together).

Millennials may also find meaning and purpose in projects that allow them to advance the use of technology in a company. For example, summer interns at one company designed an online check-in system for the health center to replace the paper sign-in sheet that had been used for years. The fitness center manager no longer needed to transfer the attendance from the sign-in sheet to a spreadsheet to provide monthly reports on fitness center usage. She could pull it straight from the program the interns designed, increasing her productivity. And the interns found satisfaction in contributing to the modernization of the company.

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Provide frequent, fair, and open feedback. Research shows that Millennial employees want a constant stream of review and recognition.[15] Contrary to some beliefs, they are not looking for a reward after every task is completed. But they do want affirmation that what they are doing is relevant, they are doing it correctly and as expected, and their work is recognized as valuable. To the Millennial, a manager's feedback is similar to a coach's instructions. They want frequent updates that allow them to take corrective action sooner rather than later.

Millennials do not like to go into an annual performance review just to find out they have been missing the mark along the way. In fact, they do not like annual reviews at all. The Focus Group response was unanimous – an *annual* performance review policy is the least desirable approach. Some of the participants preferred weekly or monthly feedback; most agreed that quarterly was sufficient provided the manager had an open door policy and was willing to provide informal feedback at any time. The participants also stated that defining performance objectives for the next 12 months was unreasonable, and they should be written with quarterly or semi-annual goals in mind.

Let them organize a Millennial networking group. Such a group would allow them to form a bond with their peers since there are likely to be fewer Millennials in today's companies. Millennials may also be working on projects with people several years older than themselves. This allows them to build a network of peers who may be in management with them one day, and this provides an opportunity to build a support network.

> ***Quotable Quotes:*** *"When I interned at Company X, I worked on a project in a small room with 5 other interns. When I was hired full-time, I joined a project team where everyone is at least 15 years older than me. It was a bit of a culture shock coming from school and the intern program to this."*[16]

In summary, the retention of Millennial employees has proved problematic for companies whose older managers fail to evolve beyond traditional corporate leadership strategies. Lisa Orell, author of *Millennials Incorporated*, states, "People do not leave companies; they leave managers. They're not mad at the building. They're mad at who they work with on a day-to-day basis. We [the older generation of workers] may have tolerated it for 5 to 10 years. Millennials will tolerate it for 5 to 10 months."[17]

Millennials as Managers

Some Millennials born in the 1980s and even the early 1990s are now finding themselves in the role of manager. Many came into the workforce with advanced degrees which, in some companies, gives them an edge over an employee who has been with the company longer but who only has an undergraduate degree. Millennials are also ambitious and eager for their careers to take off so they are seeking managerial opportunities.[18]

While there will always be exceptions, Millennial managers can generally be described in the following terms: collaborative, flexible, transparent, casual, and balanced.[19] This should come as no surprise given the characteristics we have been discussing about Millennials as employees. These are the values that are most important to this generation so it is natural that they would be evident in their leadership style.

Collaborative: Millennial managers enjoy hearing the opinions of their teams and working together to solve problems. It is all about the partnership, collaboration, and relationships. Millennials truly believe that a diverse group with an assortment of ideas can come up with a better solution than a lone leader. They value when their own voice is heard so they want to give every member of their team a chance to voice theirs.

Millennial managers may even shy away from using the term "direct report" when referring to those they manage as they want everyone to feel they are equals on the team. The downside to this "we're all in this together" approach is that there may be a lack of ownership or a deferment in decision making. Older generation workers are also likely to be accustomed to having a traditional leader and hierarchy.[20] This could lead to contention or power struggles within the group.

Flexible: Not only is a flexible work schedule something a Millennial manager may give his / her employees, but they may also offer flexibility in what work gets done and how. Technology certainly supports the idea of remote offices with the use of video conferencing and teleconferencing on our SmartPhones or computers. Millennials are a very trusting group – they believe that people will do what they say they will do, and they trust that employees are bright and committed enough to get the job done.[21]

Millennials are also flexible in their management style. They can decide as they go because they live in the moment. Millennials' formative years were heavily influenced by terrorism and school violence, "inexplicable things that can happen to anyone anytime." This is why they are constantly asking if the tasks given to them are meaningful, important, and challenging. If not, they want to move on to something that is. They "roll with the punches" and that flexibility will be obvious in their management style.[22]

Transparent: Given the importance Millennials place on understanding *why* something needs to be done, it is no surprise that transparency is a trait of the Millennial manager. This generation wants more communication from executives in a company – C-level officers – so they better understand the *why* behind the business strategy. This came up in the Millennial Focus Group discussions. The younger work force appreciates large company gatherings where information is pushed to the workers, but they want more casual meetings with executives as

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well so they can ask questions relevant to their own work and have face-time with senior level management.

Millennials believe that transparency can contribute to higher engagement by trusting employees with knowledge and allowing them the freedom to solve problems by knowing the entire challenge.[23] The concern that the older generation has with this transparent approach of Millennial managers is that many in the younger generation do not understand how to filter the information they share. One only needs to look at what is posted and tweeted online to see that. The good news is that even Millennial managers say they need some guidance still on what to share and not share with their direct reports. This is where the Generation X and Baby Boomers can help guide a young manager as they move up in the company.

Casual: The casual preference of Millennials does not just extend to their attire – it also extends to their attitudes and the way they communicate. Their transparent attitude of, "I am who I am" leads one to ask, "If I call my friend *'dude,'* why can't I call my colleague *'dude'?"* (At Company Y, a young sales associate was called out by his manager for calling a customer "Bro.") It is highly likely that Millennial managers will lobby for Casual Every Day rather than just Casual Friday.

While most older workers can tolerate the casual clothing, many struggle with casual communication – emails with no capitalization and little punctuation, misspelled words, improper use of grammar, shortcuts (*I M L8*), and emoticons. The age of texting has had a negative influence on the art of written communication. The good news is that as Millennials mature and gain more workplace experience, they realize there is a time, place, and audience for everything.

> ***Quotable Quote:*** *"Older people feel that we are not engaged if we are multi-tasking. They do not understand how I can talk to them and check email at the same time. I can hear everything they are saying without making full eye contact."[24]*

Balanced: Millennials are not workaholics, and there is not a clear boundary between work and life. Leading a balanced life is ingrained in them. Millennials see work and life as more of an integration that ebbs and flows in response to needs at work or needs outside of work from week to week.[25]

Millennials see that companies have policies to help facilitate work/life balance, but then no one follows them. For example, some companies try to implement "no meeting Fridays," but someone inevitably schedules a Friday meeting – at 4:00 in the afternoon, no less. A Millennial manager would be more inclined to uphold these policies.

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Because of the importance Millennials place on work/life balance or integration, they feel they should be allowed to work when they want, where they want, as long as the work gets done. This is where managers of Millennials need to be very clear about what is expected, when deliverables are due, and the quality of the work that is produced. Some companies are moving to a Results Based Work Environment where employees are evaluated less on their behaviors and more on individual results or, more commonly, the results of their team.[26] While this transition may take a while for managers from other generations to adopt, it is likely to be in effect with the Millennial manager.

In summary, Millennials can be effective managers of workers in their own and other generations if they keep the following in mind:

This Generation	Born In	Has These Characteristics	And Millennials Should Manage By
Traditionalists	1928 – 1945	• World War II generation • You go to work, earn a living, and don't complain • Loyal to company, company loyal to them	• Respecting their experience • Learning from them • Watching your pace (Traditionalists do not work at 4G speed)
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964	• Currently leading – and retiring from – today's organizations • Overflowing with experience and insight • Promotions earned based on hard work	• Letting them share their experience and insight – it may be beneficial for your future
Generation X	1965 – 1980	• Independent and pragmatic • Give them a project and leave them alone to do it • Dislike being micro-managed	• Not micro-managing • Focusing your collaborative energies on the next generation - yours
Millennials	1981 - 2000	• Received constant praise and reward from parents, teachers, coaches • Respect for authority must be earned • Highly collaborative, prefer to work in teams	• Supporting collaborative and casual environments while making timely decisions • Being transparent and professional

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Appendix A

Figure 1: All white surfaces are erasable whiteboards. The monitors display internal company news as well as external news, such as CNN. A pool table allows for relaxation and collaboration.

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Figure 2: Teams have a space to relax on bean bags and discuss solutions to problems. A whiteboard hangs out of the picture to the left.

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Figure 3: A putting green or chess table offers a brief reprise from sitting at one's desk.

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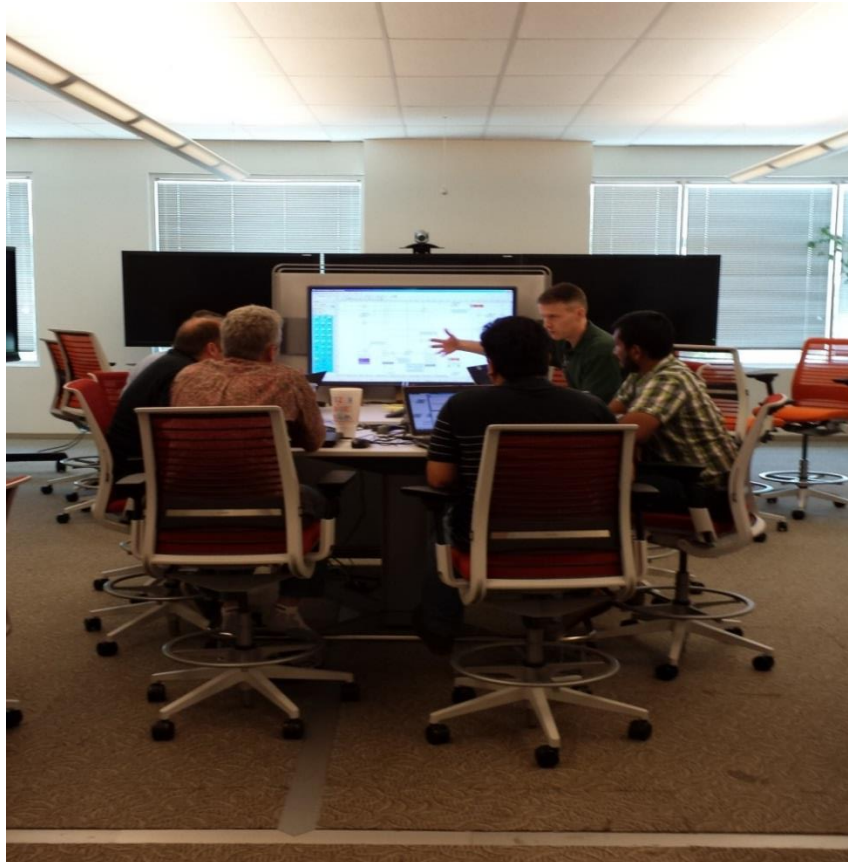Second Edition

Appendix B

Figure 4: A collaborative setup with an interactive screen and space for the team to discuss a prototype design support a more expeditious software development process.
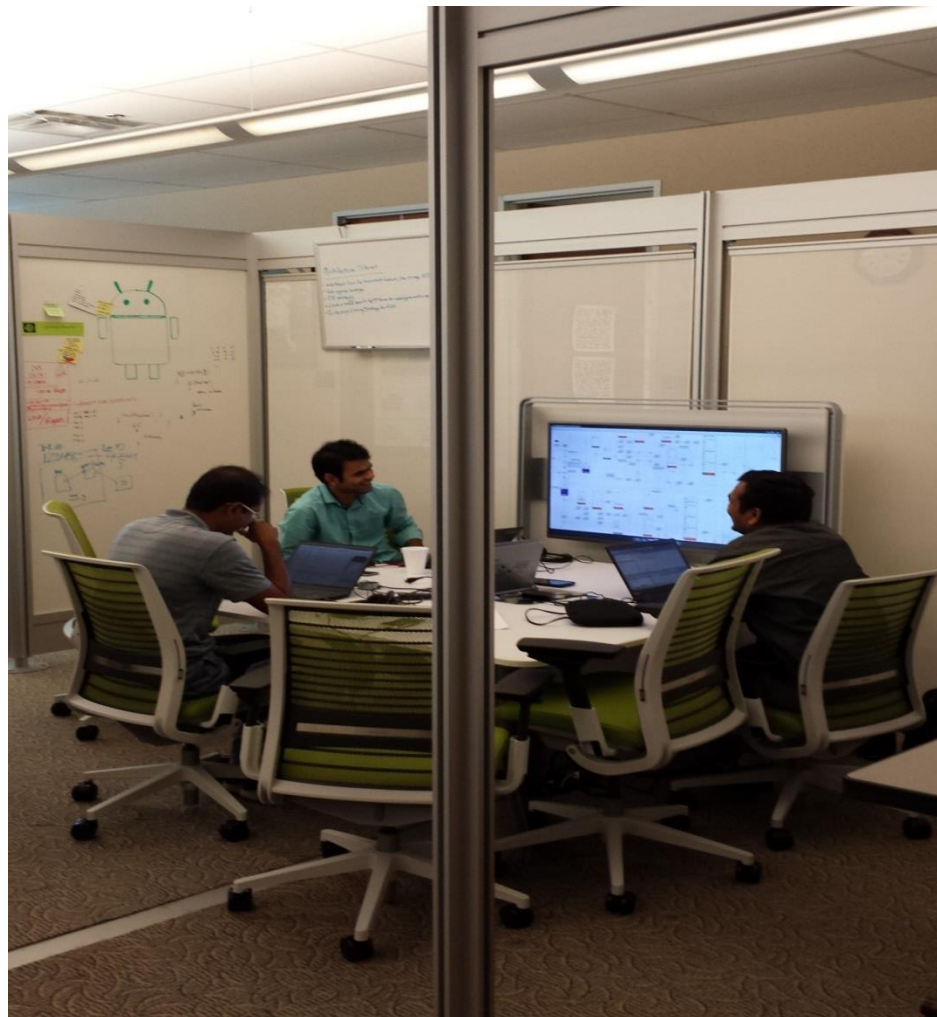
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Figure 5: Developers and testers meet to talk through the design and intended behavior of the software.

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Susan Casey is a Project Manager and Agile Coach at FedEx, with a passion for transforming traditional project teams into high-performing, self-organizing agile teams. She has seen first-hand how a more fluid, interactive, and creative environment appeals to employees in the 24-30 year age range. Susan encourages work environment changes, such as open and collaborative spaces, one-on-one sessions at Starbucks, and team meetings conducted outside under the trees on the FedEx campus. She holds brainstorming sessions at off-site locations to encourage a creative and fun environment for employees of all ages. Susan received her Bachelor's degree from Florida State University, and is working on her Executive MBA degree at The Jack Welch Management Institute. She is a former Project Management Instructor at Southern Methodist University and Collin College in Dallas, Texas, and is a parent to three Millennial boys. Susan holds several PMI and Agile certifications, is a SAFe Program Consultant, and can be contacted at scasey37@att.net.