

## The Lost GenYration

By Dr. William Burnett \*\*

*“So, when did you lose the cyber war?” The Washington Post reporter raised her eyebrows in anticipation of the response. She noted how the President seemed surprised by the question and then by the amount of time it took to come up with an answer. “We knew we were in dire straits by the 2010s, but we thought that with enough new, intelligent and energetic personnel in the federal gov’t that we could quickly solve our problems and be ahead of the cyber curve. Based on many studies, we also recognized that we were dealing with an incoming workforce that had different ideals, work habits and goals.” The President closed his eyes, thinking how those times seemed so easy and how unprepared they really were. He continued, “It wasn’t until the 2020s that we realized that no matter what we tried, we could not attract and hire personnel from Generation Y. The few we were able to hire left because they did not feel connected to the mission. When the cyber-attacks hit in 2030, our federal workforce was completely overwhelmed and our adversaries got the best of us. But, our problems extend beyond the failed cyber war. Most of our federal functions, including health care, banking, and veteran affairs were severely degraded because we, the federal government, were not persistent enough in hiring and retaining talented Gen Y workers. We should have been better prepared...”*

The above fictional account provides one worst case example if the federal government, specifically the Department of the Navy (DON), doesn’t attract and retain the next generation workforce. Search for “Generation Y” and you will get hundreds, if not thousands of web links that describe how the next generation is different from proceeding generations. They are rational, ambitious, healthy, driven but not necessarily loyal to a company or an idea. Some see them as entitled or coddled. How you perceive the next generation is not as important as how you will engage with them. By 2020 there will be potentially five generations in the same workforce: the Greatest Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and iGeneration. Those generation’s leadership styles, institutional ideas, career goals and work life balances will co-mingle and could possibly deter the next workforce from choosing to be a civilian in the DON.

As the older generations of the civilian workforce continue to retire, it has become increasingly evident that the DON must develop the next generation workforce by engaging and leveraging the Generation Y workforce, or “millennials.” Gen Y is significantly underrepresented in the DON workforce compared to organizations outside the DON. Meanwhile, opportunities in career fields critical to the future success of the DON continue to grow. Understanding how to recruit, retain, develop, and manage the expectations of Gen Y workers in critical occupational fields will be a vital component to positioning the DON for the future.

These barriers are hard to define and harder to address making this a wicked problem. Academics would call it a socio-technical problem; the DON views it as a wicked hard problem without clear solution options. To solve a wicked problem we need wickedly awesome ideas. These are not the kinds of ideas

that pop up with a handful of experts in a few hours. The thought is this; What if ideas, even half-formed ones, could meet up in cyberspace and recombine with other ideas to form new ones? What if this conversation engaged more stakeholders and tolerated more excursions? Ultimately, what if this conversation became so rich and compelling that, instead of restraining the debate, it actually enlarged the universe of possibilities?

There are new ways to solve wicked problems. One way is to maximize diversity of ideas. The internet allows us to do that on a global scale, think of Twitter. Another way is to turn the problem into a game to help us think like a child, unencumbered. What if we could combine the power of diversity and the cleverness of gaming?

The DON has a tool that does just this. It is a massive, multiplayer, online wargame that leverages the internet. It's called MMOWGLI.

MMOWGLI has garnered attention for leveraging its ability to encourage discussion and crowd source solutions to complex problems. MMOWGLI games have explored issues as diverse as the Naval energy policy, combating piracy, electro-magnetic warfare and even copyright infringement. Now we want to aim that power of MMOWGLI on our wicked talent issue. At its core, MMOWGLI is an internet card game. Players earn points by generating ideas and adapting, challenging, countering, and exploring others' in an anonymous way. Ideas are captured in a tweet length of 140 characters, helping the gamers to get their ideas out there in a punchy, readable and shareable way. Players earn additional points if other players build on his or her ideas. In other words, if you come up with a catchy, contagious or particularly fascinating idea, the crowd will flock to it and you will rack up points.

MMOWGLI is designed to support large numbers of global players. We plan to make use of that capability. The bulk of our players will be found within the DON, DoD, Academia, and Industry. We need this diversity to trigger ideas to overcome this wicked barrier.

You can save the DON, even save the world, by ensuring our next workforce is the greatest of the greatest generations. The DON is inviting you to share what you think and create the change we need. You just might be one of the MMOWGLI winners.

Our MMOWGLI starts April 2016. Interested players can sign up to be notified when account creation opens and game play begins at <https://mmowgli.nps.edu/geny/signup>. For additional information, contact Mr. Philip Lee at [DON\\_Innovation@navy.mil](mailto:DON_Innovation@navy.mil).

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\*\* =The opinions expressed here are solely those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense or the United States government.

