

Moving into a world of "the uncharted"

By [Paige dos Santos](#)

23 Jan 2018

The millennial generation has been much discussed. And whether you love them or hate them, millennials will become the leadership that drives our society in the digital age.



As individuals and as a collective, they will wield power that is unprecedented in human history and be required to make decisions that require a strength of character.

A different side

The stereotypical millennial is perceived as glued to their phone, narcissistic, and obsessed with work-life balance. Sometimes to the point that workaholic baby boomers refer to them as “acutely lazy.” But there is a different side to millennials. An ethical side. In a recent study by Heineken, 75% of millennials said they preferred not to overindulge in alcohol on a night out, stating ‘self-awareness’ and ‘being in control’ as the reason. Authenticity, connection and mindfulness are what makes this generation tick.

These characteristics are hopeful indicators that the millennial generation will show the necessary character to navigate the challenges they will face, as society moves boldly into a hyper-connected digital world.

Character isn't a word that is used much today. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as "the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual," and "moral excellence and firmness – a man of sound character." It is a quality that shows up when times get tough, and leadership is required.

Data and technology

Technology has enabled us to collect and process more data than ever before. The diversity of these data sets is ever growing. Every day through your smartphone, data is generated on your location, how fast you are moving, and how humid your environment is. This happens without any conscious input from you. Your search engine history holds a remarkably accurate mirror of your personality and life, as highlighted in Seth Stephens-Davidowitz' new book, *Everybody Lies*.



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It's possible to know what you are feeling too, with the release of facial recognition software in the new iPhone. Apple's 2016 acquisition of Emotient provides it with the ability to measure your attention levels, engagement and sentiment. Similar capabilities have been recently released in the SAP Hybris customer engagement and commerce solution.

Health data is also expanding. More and more people are choosing to undergo DNA analysis to better understand how their bodies work. Identifying biomarkers that indicate a predisposition to certain diseases enables you to take preventive measures to minimise the risk of these developing. It also enables the prescription of precision medicines.

Seemingly benign devices, such as your toilet, could soon be wired up with sensors. Smart toilets can detect when you are pregnant, identify exactly what bacterial infection is making you ill, as well as recommend the best electrolyte cocktail to help you recover from your hangover.

Data in isolation is not all that useful

All this data in isolation is not all that useful. In fact, less than 1% of the world's data is analysed, let alone monetised. It's how we correlate it to develop insights and drive behaviour that makes it powerful.

SAP is working with a number of customers to drive insight into action. MBank is utilising hyper-personalised marketing campaigns, based on insights derived from location data and spending patterns. It has seen a 400% increase in the success of its campaigns by offering financial services to customers at exactly the right time and place.

Under Armour is comparing customer health and fitness data with benchmarks collected from its network of professional athletes, to provide health and fitness recommendations to customers that help them to optimise their performance. Discovery Group recently showed the correlation between physical activity and driving behaviours in its 2017 annual report.

“ *As we flex our muscles using new technologies, we become more and more curious.* ”

The *Economist* magazine recently reported on research performed at Stanford University, where an algorithm has been developed with the ability to identify sexual preferences based on pictures of individuals. The same technology could be utilised to identify similarly intimate traits such as IQ and political preference. We can already build highly accurate pictures of a person's physical appearance, based on their DNA. This correlation could also work the opposite way, allowing a person's photograph to be matched to their DNA sequence. Considering the fact that there is a specific gene that determines how adventurous you are, this would potentially disclose highly personal and sensitive information. It could also present a situation where other people literally know you better than you know yourself.

Radical advancements in technology provide great opportunity

All radical advancements in technology provide a great opportunity. There is also great risk in using them in the wrong way, and there is a fine line between influence and control. As we continue to refine and extend technology, we will increasingly be able to do unimaginable things.

The impact of a single advancing technology could fundamentally shift our societies. The convergence of so many all at once means we are entering an unprecedented era.

As Accenture's TechVision 2017 so aptly mentions, we are moving into a world of "the uncharted." This means there will be no precedents for the choices we must make.

Legislation and organisations are already struggling to keep up with rapid advancements and create guidelines for these decisions. Decisions that will not be black and white, but increasingly a vivid grey.

A strong sense of character

The millennial generation, and indeed all of us, need to develop a very strong sense of character.

We need to listen to our gut feelings and consider the potential systemic impact of the everyday choices we make. This applies to our teams too. Much of the remarkable opportunity presented to us relies on collaborative efforts. We need to partner and hire, not only for new generation skills but for value congruence. What we put in place now, and how each of us uses our new capabilities, will shape the world we live in over the next 100 years. Big change is always the sum of small choices made along the way.

In this fascinating, ever-changing digital world, let us never lose sight of our most priceless and beautiful assets – our humanity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paige dos Santos is the digital transformation lead for SAP Africa. She creates digital transformation strategies for SAP's top customers across Africa, drawing on resources from across the SAP ecosystem. Dos Santos has a particular focus on emerging technologies, and how these capabilities can be combined to grow profitability and create new revenue streams in businesses. She is a chartered accountant with strong experience in management consulting and strategy. Her previous roles included leading the innovation ecosystem for Deloitte Africa and establishing the innovation advisory business at Dimension Data.

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