

**Equine Assisted Learning: A Healing Therapy To Engage The  
Needs Of Millennial Workforce**

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**Abstract**

This paper throws light on equine-assisted learning or which may also be called “horse whispering” and considers the results of human–animal interactions which can act as a tool for the development and improvement of one self. Through this human– animal interaction, the paper presents three Lacanian concepts of subjectivity, desire, and fantasy in determining the fractured relationship between self and other which may also be portrayed as the leader–follower relations. Organizations are struggling hard to meet the needs of the Millennials. Managers are thus facing the problems in building relationships with Millennial employees and fully understanding which motivating factors affect them and their work. Special training focusing on the Millennials can help the leaders to work with Millennials in a more effective manner which in turn can increase retention rates for organizations, reducing the costs as well as increasing the loyalty among them. Throughout history we have observed that the horses have been remained the symbols of power and leadership. They have been the deciding factor in the fall and rise of various empires for thousands of years. But can we imagine that horses can still be influential in the corporate world today also through EAL programs that is Equine Assisted Learning.

**Keywords- EAL, Healing Therapy, Importance for engaging the Millennial.**

**Introduction**

Today, in this rapidly changing environment, the organizations are facing lot of challenges to survive not only externally but also internally. With the advent of globalization, technology and innovations, management of the younger generation at workplace have created many challenges in the businesses, including the higher costs as a result of decreasing retention rates of the young, self-motivated employees This young generation is known as the Millennials. According to Werth (2015) some people says that people born between the early 1980s and early 2000s are said to be as millennials, while the majority of the people say that millennials are those who born between the 1980s and mid-1990s. Current census bureau results says that that the millennial workforce is the generation of children born between 1982 and 2002. This generation will soon replace the Baby-boomers as they retire. There are a lot

of opinions by different researchers about who is this generation of millennials? What are their priorities and why they are so important in the coming years? If one quickly goes through various articles millennials are said to be altruistic. Mostly people are confused that do they fundamentally prefer the stability of the work culture of an organization, or their only preference is the job security and do they switch over if some good offer comes to them? Are they multitaskers or behave just like previous generations? They are the one who are more interested in the benefits of work or they are interested in the work itself? Is it really difficult to engage the millennials? This remains a matter of debate. Millennials reduce their expectations regarding the work-life balance and work environment. However, their expectations related to job, training needs, career orientation, and rewards keeps increasing. Thus, one can say that Millennials' expectations are highly influenced by the individual factors such as career and optimism. In short, it can be said that sometimes where the other training sessions fail in improving the behavior of employees, unique training sessions, especially with the assistance of animals can act as a source of motivation.

### **Literature Review**

Dell (2008) discussed about the different theoretical connections between a culture-based model of resilience, EAL and health promotion. Wagner et al. (2008) focuses on the important role that emotions may play in MI, particularly the positive emotions. Kane, S. (2009) discussed the specific uses of the EAL therapy, why only horses are used in this programme as well as the positive outcomes of the programme. Deal et al. (2010) discussed the importance of an area for understanding the behavior of different people of different generations, and suggested how organizational practitioners can use the available data to take better decisions about Millennials. Hauw et al. (2010) suggested that managers need to focus their limited resources during different situations especially in times of recession. Salem, P. (2011) discussed that horses perform the work of teaching and healing through a variety of equine assisted programmes including class room training as well as experiential learning programmes. Study of Gergely et al. (2012) focused on lack of knowledge about EAL and organizations that provide equine-assisted therapy to individuals with different mental health issues nationwide. Kelly, S. (2014) draws attention towards Lacanian psychoanalysis to rethink about one self and the practice of experiential leadership development. The main purpose of Mota (2014), is to understand the meaning of animal assisted therapy specially

with the help of the horses who can act as a tool in improving not only the psychological health but also physical health of the client. Notgrass & Pettinelli (2015) discussed that the horses are natural teachers in regards to self-awareness and non-verbal communication. Their responses to nonverbal cues from both humans and other horses during their interactions are instinctive and instantaneous. Pohl (2015) lays stress upon EGLE which provides the means by which leaders can get equipped for the task. Working with a horse is a powerful integrating experience for a person which helps to learn a lot. It is basically learning through action by relationship problem solving. It is an innovative way to teach leadership and other competencies. Werth et al. (2015) gave training administrators and educators some important suggestions on how to develop and increase the learning abilities of Millennial generation students by studying the existing literature on it. Gibbons et al. (2016) studied and evaluated the effectiveness of an equine workshop for young men using a mixed-method approach on 37 participants. Meola (2016) conducted a literature review on ongoing research and the use of EAL theory programme in the field of training and development. The purpose of the causal-comparative study by Pentecost, A. L. (2017) was to compare the mean scores of their survey to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the mean pre and post-test scores of perceived professional developments received by the participants of the Equine Assisted Learning leadership workshops. According to Tartakovsky, M. (2018), the main aim of equine-assisted learning is the experiential treatment where the individuals interact with horses in a number of activities, including grooming, feeding, walking, playing games in order to improve their psychological health. Bell (2019) explained the amazing healing properties of different animals such as dogs, rats, cats, dolphins which can just overshadow many treatments or medicines.

### **Objective of the study**

The main objective of this paper is to study the meaning of the equine assisted training and how it is important for an organization specially to engage the needs of Millennial Workforce.

### **Research Methodology**

A literature review is conducted on ongoing research and use of EAL in the field of management training and development. In order to understand this concept an attempt is

made to review the literature on millennial and the training concept of EAL. So, this conceptual paper gathers necessary information mainly with the help of secondary data including books, articles and research papers.

### **Do animals possess natural healing powers?**

According to Bell(2019), although humans have been successful in discovering different healing therapies, medicines, treatments for themselves, but still DNA of certain animals might surprise everyone with their healing properties which may act as a gift to us. There is no denying fact that almost everyone is afraid of a snake, but venom of a snake can reduce thickness of blood, which in turn avoid clots and reduce the chances of human strokes, thus saving many lives. Pet dogs or well-trained service dogs can heal mental unwellness, stress level, depression, bipolar disorder, trauma and are even helpful in autism. Rats if trained properly can sniff the life-threatening diseases. In the year 2014, a rat named Mozambique was trained to sniff tuberculosis in some areas of Africa and thus, many lives were saved. Similarly, horses due to their ideal properties, just like humans, can easily connect with them. According to Mota (2014), under therapeutic settings, the power of horse can provide an opportunity for a human to heal themselves by looking upon their own issues. Thus, a horse can connect the inner world of the person with the outer world which includes peer group, family and society.

### **What is an Equine assisted learning?Is it a Healing therapy?**

According to Salem, P. (2011),Horses can perform the work of teaching as well as healing through a number of equine assisted applications such as education (both through a classroom as well as through experience), youngsters at risk programs, in anti-drug programs, mentalcounselling, mentoring, and workplace training itself. But what is the main difference between the different ways of partnering with horses teaching as well as healing people? The focus of horses teaching and healing is not just riding or horsemanship but horse care is sometimes an important part of the activity.Equine Assisted Learning (EAL), Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning (EFEL) or in other words, Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) refers to the various activities done with horses to gain experiential learning. Such Learning programmes can be used to re-engage the students in academics and here the clients

have to participate in a training session with the horses on the ground, along with the trainer. Organizational development professionals deliver the programs such as Equine assisted team & leadership training programmes (workplace training) to the executives and teams within the organization using instructional design and training techniques. According to Kane, S. (2009), workforce today is facing many problems such as Anxiety disorders, psychiatric disorders, mood swings, behavioural problems, trauma, grief, divorce and loss, risk youth, victims of violence which can be handled or improved through EAL therapy. Just like human behavior, behavior of a horse can be best understood through observation. After analysing the biological history one can say that, horses have developed intense, unconditioned responses to different threatening situations. Their immediate reaction to real or perceived threat is to flee, although sometimes they will stand their ground and defend themselves. For horses, survival dictates that they serve as members of a group, who bind together and cooperate with one another as a socialization process just similar to that of humans. Thus, the ability of horses to get attached also extends to other species especially humans. One can say that team work is based on natural curiosity and strong bonds present in both the horse and humans.

### **Why an organization must go for EAL?**

These programs are not only cost-effective, reduces time delays but also create long-term benefits for employees as well as the employers. Different organizations are currently using EAL to inculcate leadership and team-building skills in their managers and employees. According to Mota (2014), Equine assisted learning (EAL) program is an effective training tool that helps many organizations to bridge the gap between older managers and the Millennial employees. Thus, an organization may adopt these training programs in order to reduce the stress levels among the employees and for improving the relations among the members.

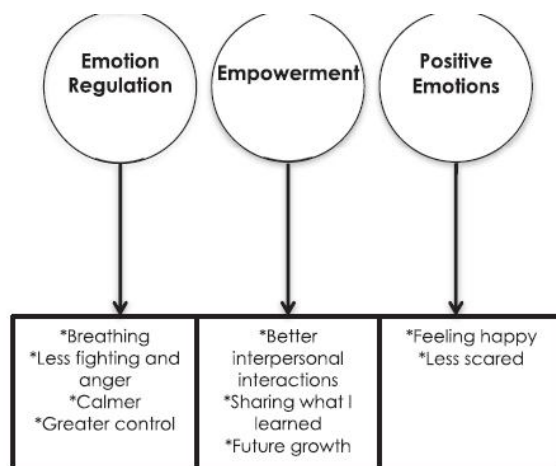
EAL is rising as an effective experiential training method for teaching the managers all those skills that are required in order to survive in a corporate environment. While there are some

disadvantages too under this approach such as availability of programs geographically, higher costs, and liability concerns otherwise if we see as a whole, it is a new learning experience that can affect the employees for a long time. EAL teaches the importance of nonverbal communication and teamwork and helps the participants to experience a successful leadership by expressing effectively. According to Gergely (2012) there are different variations in equine-assisted therapy. Some of the other versions include: equine-facilitated learning(EFL), equine-facilitated therapy (EFT), equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP), equinefacilitated mental health (EFMH), equine-assisted experiential therapy (EAET), equineassisted counseling (EAC), equine-assisted learning (EAL), and equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP)and the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) offering training as equine therapy.

## **Findings**

One can say that EAL act as a healing therapy for millennial workforce. Deal (2010) focused upon Millennials as the altruistic beings who want to save the planet more than anything else through latest trends and knowledge. The researcher tried to find the answers for the certain questions such as whether they believe in stability of working for one organization, or its their preference until a better offer comes to them? Are they more interested in the benefits or in the work itself? Are they multi-taskers or love to do one task at a time?By comparing 2 matched samples of Millennials in 2 different situations Hauw (2010) was able to find the Millennialspsychological contract expectations. Gibbons et al. (2016) found the effectiveness of an equine workshop for the youth using a mixed approach method. About 37 participants came from difficult situations like poverty. Thus a 2-day equine-based workshop were conducted to be evaluated where the participants completed various measures of leadership, emotional balance, aggression, and interpersonal response to various threats and fears. Focus groups with participants and their family members reported to have multiple benefits, including improved emotion regulation. The workshops were based on anexercise developed by natural horsemanship trainer MontyRoberts who tried to increase trust and leadership among the participants through nonviolent communication. He utilized the horse's natural instinct and sensitivity to human behavior. This 2-day workshop included some PowerPoint and video presentations as well as query sessions between the participants and workshop organizers. Participants were also engaged in a breathing exercise in close contact with a

horse where they concentrated on their breath and self-awareness for 20 to 30 minutes, recording the heart rate of the horse before and after the contact. 2 weeks later a small session was conducted to get the feedback of the participants, how they are implementing the new skills to their lives through role play exercise.



**Fig 1-Learning from workshop(Gibbons et al.,2016)**

All equine-based programmes are based on experiential learning between the participant and the external environment. In such training programmes the participants must solve problems in real time, such as how to elicit behaviors in horses without forcing them. Similarly, Dell(2008) discussed how YSAC’s culture-based model of resiliency is put into practice at White Buffalo through the example of EAL. The application of this model to a horse-assisted learning program is a unique contribution to the literature. An innovative approach, such as EAL with First Nations youth can help to promote such programmes. Pentecost (2017) worked upon a concept to bring better-quality curricula within leadership training and how to improve professional competence of the educators and different business people. Their research provides valuable information about the perceived professional leadership qualities which can be gained through equine assisted leadership courses. Although many studies have been completed on the behavior of horses and their natural leadership roles within their species but very little has been examined or experimented on humans in successful equine programs. As described by Notgrass & Pettinelli (2015) on

their website EAL programs are a form of experiential learning programs which follow several principles:

- Experiential learning transpires when carefully selected experiences are reinforced through reflection and critical examination.
- Involvement is necessary so that the learner takes initiative, decisions and be responsible for the results.
- During the experiential learning routine, the learner is highly involved in feedback, exploring, investigating, resolving problems, responsibility, being creative, and creating meaningful results.
- Students are not only engaged academically and socially but their involvement also creates an awareness that the learning assignment is genuine and helpful.
- Various relationships are established such as learner to self, learner to others and learner to the outside world.
- The instructor and the learner may undergo various outcomes such as achievement, disappointment, exploring new things and uncertainty, since the outcomes of events cannot completely be anticipated.
- New opportunities are discovered for students as well as the teachers to observe their own values.
- The instructor's main role includes creating appropriate learning environment, solving the problems, setting limits, supporting students, protecting physical and emotional safety, and aiding the learning process.
- The learning experience is designed in a manner which is helpful to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and accomplishments.

### **Can one say that EAL is a positive emotions theory?**

In last 10 years, various psychologists have become interested in the role of positive emotions in human development, change and psychotherapy. Some commonly researched positive emotions are joyfulness, interest, elevation and contentment. According to Wagner, et al. (2008) emotions can be learned in the form of hope, love, gratitude, and mutual trust. Nowadays one is focusing more on negative emotions rather than positive emotions. Here definitely it can be said that equine-based programmes or learning is a positive emotions

theory as it laid stress upon experiential learning through emotions where an individual learns to act in a better manner in real time situations or problems. According to Meola (2016) the common job training programs are not able to satisfy the new demands as the Millennial employees seek constant communication at the workplace including mentoring, and continuous feedback from managers. So, it can be said that EAL is an emerging and effective experiential training method for teaching the heads about the skills required to incorporate world. EAL teaches nonverbal communication and teamwork to the participants as learning about oneself and one's leadership style can be a life time lesson which may bring positivity at the workplace. Pohl, L. (2015) worked upon the Equine Guided Leadership Education (EGLE) which is a form of Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) programme and effectively leads to learning through the integration of the four aspects of human experience: mind, emotions, spirit and body which in turn allows us to develop four basic leadership competencies: feedback, awareness, action and somatic intelligence.

### **How is EAL helpful in engaging workforce?**

According to Tartakovsky, M. (2018), EAL can improve the psychological health which in turn helps in engaging workforce in the following ways:

- **By providing an insight for growth.** Therapists can use the clients' reactions and emotions to horses' behaviors to in order to understand the client's interaction with people and thus help them to gain self-awareness.
- **By offering instant feedback.** As the horses offer instant and correct feedback they throw light on the feelings of the trainee.
- **By fostering a healthy and loyal relationship.** Horses allow patients or the trainee to connect them without the risk of rejection or criticism which may be helpful in curing eating disorders too.
- **Building trust and confidence.** Many patients with eating or other mental health disorders have experienced trauma whether they are work alcoholic or not, so it is very difficult for them to trust others. EAL therapy helps them to break these barriers and overcome the trust issues which not only improve their relations at the workplace with the peer group, boss or subordinates as well as in personal life but also helps them to gain confidence.

Cane, S. (2009) also discussed the different positive outcomes of the EAL or EAP programme such as:

- EAL helps in teaching teamwork and creating problem solving attitude.
- In providing a safe environment to the trainee where they can experiment the emotions.
- Helps in learning new ways to interact socially.
- EAL includes fun and therapeutic healing for millennials.

The research done by Cane, S. (2009) says that Non-verbal communication with a horse helps the trainee to better understand themselves and how they must behave with others in the outside world by developing a bond involving various parameters such as affection, assertiveness, communication skills, empathy, self-control, respect for others, trust and acceptance for others.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Employees are expected to build relationships, think creatively, work with a variety of entities to identify needs and utilize the available resources in a multidirectional problem-solving process. Trainers and faculty alone cannot change the culture of an organization. Supervisors and other administrators must also learn about the new generation of people entering into formal training programs. These individuals have the power within an institution to focus attention away from providing information and toward building an environment where students can learn effectively the skills needed to succeed. According to Kelly (2014) Lacan's mirror stage, mirrors have definitely the power to reflect, but this reflection is not a simple feeding back and validating of someone's true nature. So, one can say that EAL training programme can act as a revolutionary programme especially for the millennial workforce in order to motivate them and to inculcate better leadership qualities among them. In one of the articles published by 'The Economic Times', dated 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017, various challenges faced by the Millennial workforce are being discussed. As per this article it is well said that the attitude of a Boss has a direct impact on self-motivation and level of confidence of an employee and vice versa. So, one can say that EAL can be helpful in such situation too and such training programmes can bring a drastic change in the attitudes of people,

coordination and can impact team work at workplace and thus can engage the millennials in one or the other way.

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