

Graduates: Who they are and why we need them

By Anais Rodriguez Fajardo, Cubiks Consultant



Much attention has been paid lately to young graduates and finding ways to understand this new generation coming into the workplace.

Why are employers focusing so closely on graduates today?

Graduates are essential to society in a broader sense because they add value to the economy as a whole, which can only remain competitive if its intellectual capital is strong.

In the context of an aging workforce, the need to focus on younger generations has increasingly become a priority¹.

Young workers today have work-related attitudes, values and behaviours that differ from those of previous generations, mainly due to changing conditions from a social and economic point of view^{2,3}.

In parallel, attracting and retaining young talent is a true challenge for employers; especially as organisations must fiercely compete to attract young talent, all the while trying to reduce their labour costs⁴.

In essence, a better understanding of the typical young graduate profile will help organisations propose job offers and working conditions that best suit them; thus attracting and retaining them more efficiently⁵.

Although we should avoid over-generalising this new generation of workers, there are some recurring traits in their profiles that are worth mentioning here.

Who are these young graduates?

From our field experience and literature research, we know that young graduates (also known as; Millennials, Gen Y, Nexters, "Baby Boom Echo" ⁵) often possess the following traits:

International perspective – Young graduates are believed to be more open to the globalised workplace than previous generations. Young people embrace live virtual discussions with colleagues across the globe, and are more keen to travel. They are comfortable working with the technological evolutions that break down historic barriers to working globally.

Independence – They are more independent and less loyal to a single organisation than previous generations. Often they prefer working within a flatter hierarchy¹.

Feedback seeking – They like to know how they are performing. In today's modern society, young people are used to receiving feedback; whether that's a 'like' on a post they shared on social media, being star rated in certain apps, or when it comes to their work achievements.

Ambition – Graduates today often have an ambitious outlook, as well as high expectations regarding how fast they can evolve in a role and within an organisation⁶. Impatience can come alongside this²; with the expectation of quick progression and substantial pay rises. As such, they are more likely to be attracted and retained in Graduate Programs when job security and opportunities for promotion are put forward. They want it all and they want it now⁵.

Skills gaps – Research shows that there can often be a skills gap or "ability-performance nexus"⁷ between what young graduates expect to achieve and what they are able to deliver.

Embracing challenges – Young graduates are attracted by challenging roles, often those in which they feel they can contribute to society. They are increasingly interested in companies' missions and values, to understand whether the organisation fits with their need for a meaningful and fulfilling job experience⁵.

Relaxed, easy-going social style at work – Young graduates are likely to be attracted to roles in which they can work collaboratively with others, build relationships with colleagues⁵, and have fun with others in the workplace³. On the whole, they also prefer workplaces in which there is a more casual dress code.

Focus on work / life balance – Today's graduates want to make a life, not a living. They tend to prioritise their personal lives and look for opportunities to combine work and play⁵. They look at their parents' generation, some of whom could be on the verge of burn out and this motivates them to ensure they're focused on the personal sphere of their lives, as well as work.

Look out for Anais' next article in the coming weeks, following up on this discussion with some simple tips to help HR attract the best graduate talent.

About Anais

Holding a Master's Degree in Work Psychology, Anais is currently working as an HR Consultant for Cubiks Belgium. Connect with Anais on LinkedIn.

Sources

1 Jackson, D. (2009). An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skill gaps in modern graduates. *International Journal of Management Education* 8(3), 29-58.

2 Boccuzzo, G. & Gianecchini, M. (2015). Measuring young graduates' job quality through a composite indicator. *Social Indicators Research Journal* 122: 453-478.

3 Loughlin, C., & Barling, J. (2001). Young workers' work values, attitudes, and behaviours. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 74, 543-558.

4 Dychtwald, K., Erickson, T. J., & Morison, R. (2013). *Workforce crisis: How to beat the coming shortage of skills and talent*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

5 Ng, E.S.W., Schweitzer, L. & Lyons, S.T. (2010). New generation, great expectations: a field study of the Millennial generation. *Journal of Business Psychology* 25: 281-292.

6 Braid, M. (2007). Why today's graduates don't make the grade. *The Sunday Times*, February 25, Appointments, 7-15

7 Hill, R. P. (2002). Managing across generations in the 21st century: Important lessons from the ivory trenches. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11, 60-66.

Abel, J. R., Deitz, R., & Su, Y. (2014). Are recent college graduates finding good jobs ?. *Current issues in Economics and Finance* 20(1).

Simon Sinek on Millennials (viewed January 2017) <https://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/simon-sinek-millennials-workplace-bbab/>

Smith, E.E., & Krüger, J. (2005). Perceptions of graduates regarding workplace expectations: An exploratory study. *South African Journal of Business Management* 36(1), 23-31.

Volver a [FACTHUM](#)