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An Analysis of the Factors which Effectively Attract College Graduates

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An analysis of the factors which effectively attract college graduates

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The University of Akron, Honors College

Secondary Research Paper

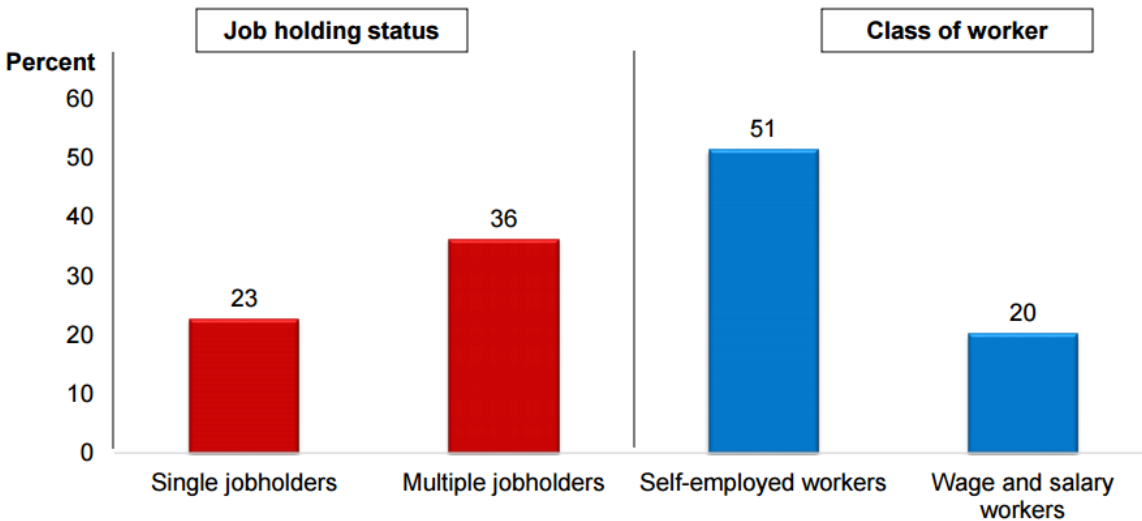
Smucker Love was assigned the task of understanding recent graduates' work environment priorities by the J. M. Smucker company. Through primary and secondary research, the team collaborated and discovered a variety of factors that are important to recent college graduates, as well as other millennials. Secondary research consisted of amassing information from a variety of scholarly sources, and the primary research was conducted via a trip to the J. M. Smucker headquarters in Orrville, Ohio. Primary research was also conducted via several surveys that were distributed to recent college graduates.

Millennials have been a point of much contention in recent years. They are often considered to have a greater level of demand and sense of entitlement than their more experienced counterparts, but also very driven to succeed (Levenson, 2010). They are the first generation of almost exclusively digital natives, which gives millennials near instant access to information. This, paired with experiencing the global financial crisis, created a very different generation than those past (PWC, 2011). The economic crisis has led to a downturn of loyalty that young employees feel for their employers. Over 25% of millennials now believe that they will hold over six jobs in their lifetime, which is up from just 10% in 2008 (PWC, 2011). Furthermore, millennials are nearly twice as likely to have earned a bachelor's degree than generations past. In 1970, 16% of people age 25-29 had a bachelor's degree, compared to 31% in 2008 (Levenson, 2010). This generation has a more lax view on changing jobs, paired with the increased ability to do so because of the higher probability of having a college education. This leads to the topic of how to hire and, more importantly, retain, these young workers being brought into the spotlight.

A trend that has been becoming more popular by the day in today's workforce is telecommuting, which is the term for performing work related tasks while not on company property, and mainly relies on electronic communication (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In general, the alternative workplace is the home, but this is not always the case. The amount of telecommuters has increased in the millennials lifetimes. In 2003, 19% of workers are reported to have done some or all of their work at home, compared with 24% in 2015, and is on trend to continue to rise (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The percentage is even higher among business, management, and finance, approaching 40%. Driving the trend of increased telecommunication is, in part, millennials. Forty one percent of them state that they prefer communication via electronics as opposed to in person or over the phone (PWC, 2011). Because of this, employers are increasingly offering the option to telecommute, but whether doing so is a good idea or not is a debated topic within companies. Though working from home can increase perceived autonomy and decrease work-family conflict, it can also lead to resentment from coworkers stuck in the office, and could force managers to change how they monitor the employee (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Behavior based systems to determine employee success, as they currently stand, can't possibly work when the employee is not on the premises. Upper management may have to change their evaluation technique to one that is more output based, if they intend to implement an optional work-from-home system. Millennials desire autonomy and a healthy work/life balance. In fact, despite lower rates of marriage than previous generations, Millennials still said that their family is the most important thing in their lives, putting it before money and other factors (Bannon et al., 2011). Working from home is a good way to promote this work-life balance. When working from home, an employee could spend

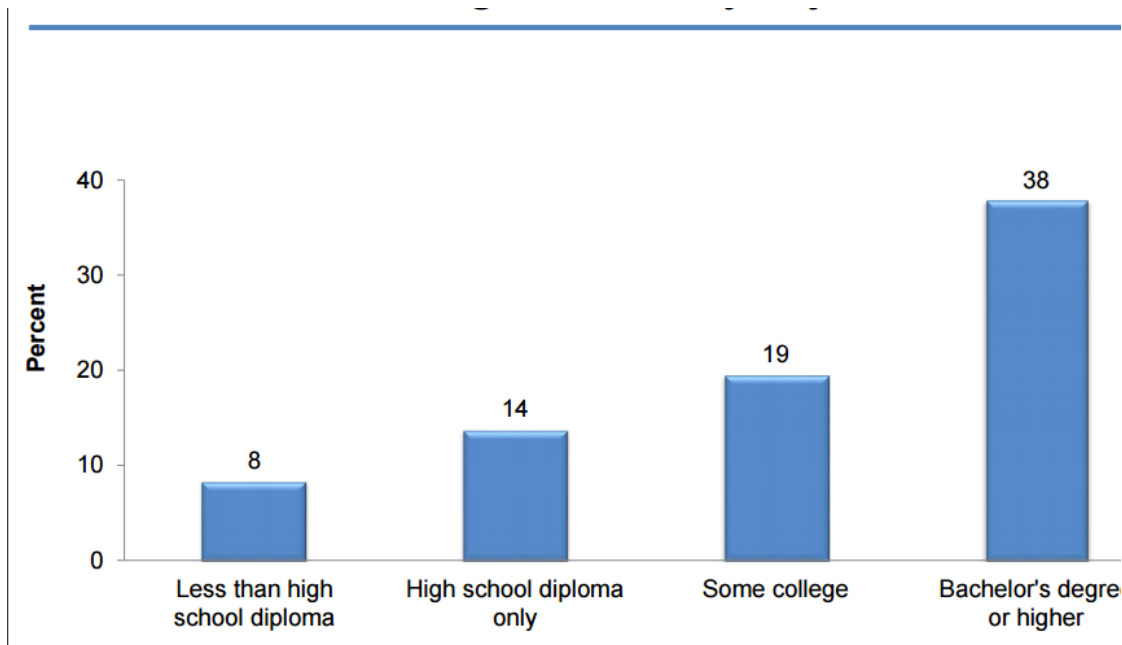
time with their significant other and children, and use their lunch break to do chores around the house. Telecommuting is linked to a modest decrease in conflicts between work and family (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, there are some downsides to working from home. Doing so can damage relationships with coworkers simply because the employee is not there to make them stronger. Humans are social creatures, and it has been proven that a dense social network has an overall positive effect on most individuals. Those with a dense social network show increased levels of innovation and job satisfaction, paired with decreased levels of stress (Monge & Contractor, 2002). Overall it seems that working from home seems to be best done in moderation. After all, less than 10% of workers say that they work from home exclusively (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Benefits can be found in allowing employees to work from home on occasion as to strengthen their home life. They should not do it so much, however, that it puts their professional life and relationships at risk. Some recent statistics on the average amount of employees work from home on a given day are as such:

Percent of employed persons who worked at home on an average workday



The statistics that are most relevant in deducing the balance in days employees should work from home are those of single jobholders and wage and salary workers. These are the employees that represent a typical employee in an organization. Since 23% of single jobholders and 20% of wage and salary workers worked from home on a given day, it can be noted that a few times a month is the ideal limitation on allowing employees to work from home, while still maintaining a productive balance and comfort from the employer on how much the corporation

is allowing their employees to use that flexibility (BLS, 2016).



Another chart, which indicates the amount of employees over the age of twenty five who worked from home based on their education level, shows that about 38% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher (which is the best representation of employees who work for a corporation like the JM Smucker Company) worked from home on a given day. This is another indicator of the ideal amount of time millennials should be given to work from home within any given month, which should be between two to five days. (BLS, 2016). Thus, it makes most sense for corporations to allow their employees to opt for the option to work from home every so often, but not on a consistent basis.

Use of and familiarity with technology is what nearly a quarter of millennials think sets their generation apart from others (Pew Research Center, 2017). They overwhelmingly think that new technology makes their lives easier, and are less likely to think that new technology makes their lives harder (Pew Research Center, 2017). This is hardly surprising, due to the

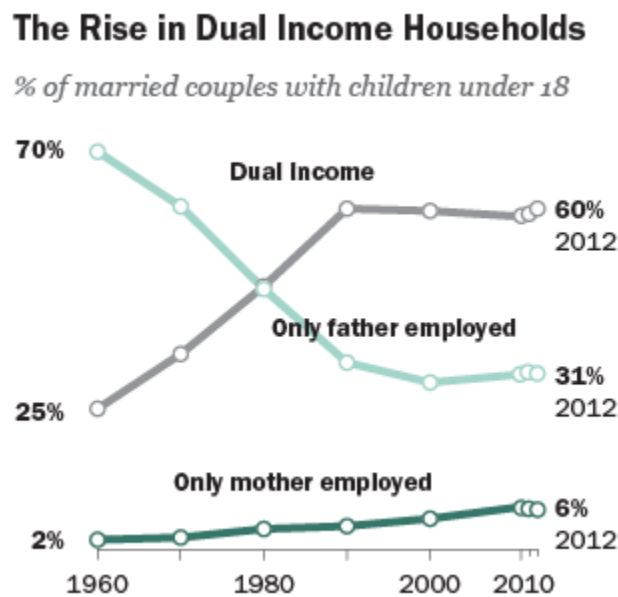
aforementioned digital nature of the generation. The difference between millennials and the generations that came before them, however, is the change that they have to make between their communication in their personal life and the communication they are expected to use in a professional environment. (Rickleen, 2014). Previous generations went to work, communicated via email, telephone, and face to face interactions. They then went home and communicated in the same way. Millennials now do much of their off-work interpersonal interaction via social networks and text messaging. When compared to the baby boomers, millennials are 32% more likely to use text messaging and 45% more likely to have created a social networking profile (Pew Research Center, 2017). Millennials tend to blur the line between their personal and professional lives. The increased use of social networks correlates to the increase of smartphone availability, and the desire to stay connected. Over three quarters of millennials say that having access to personal technology makes them more effective at work (PWC, 2011). That said, 46% of them say that their managers don't understand their use of technology at work. This has the potential to cause some friction between generations. Millennials especially have a leg up in the social networking side of the equation, because they often browse certain sites on their own time. This makes them often more privy to pop culture, as well as other trends that those without an extensive social media presence may overlook. There is an increased likelihood of the younger generation having access to personal technology in the workplace. A large portion of millennials firmly believe that using technology for personal reasons in the workplace improves their overall productivity, because it allows them to take quick breaks and wind down for a few minutes during the long work day (PWC, 2011). This, paired with the overwhelming majority of college graduates stating that it makes them more effective in the workplace, makes it seem that the best

strategy to implement would be to allow a limited, but fair, amount of access to personal technology while on the job.

Use of personal devices and social media in the workplace is important to touch on, but it isn't the only technology that workers interact with throughout the day. Within the past few decades, the amount of global connectivity has increased, and brought with it changes in organizational structure and the need for new technologies (Cameron & Webster, 2005). In an increasingly digital world, millennial familiarity with technology can be extremely useful in an office environment. Similarly, being forced to use inefficient legacy systems and being used as unpaid IT workers for the less tech-friendly can decrease their efficiency (Rikleen, 2014). Millennials are often frustrated when their job performance suffers because they are pulled off to help their associates, and are equally upset when their technology-related suggestions are overlooked. Thus, it is important for the corporation seeking recently graduated millennials to implement up-to-date collaborative technology and tools in the workplace that assist in completing tasks.

As previously stated, the work-life balance is very important to these young workers. Salary, as a factor in the decision to work for a company, is only responsible for 20% impact on job satisfaction. This means that employers will need a range of other factors that motivate their employees to stay and perform highly (Golnaz & Bowen, 2011). The baby boomer generation, being born in the years following World War II, are now higher up in their career and hold manager positions- they often act as the managers of millennials. The boomer generation oftentimes stated that building their career is high up on their list of priorities, often working 55-60 hours a week. Career is not the main focus of the millennials, however, as it is not paramount

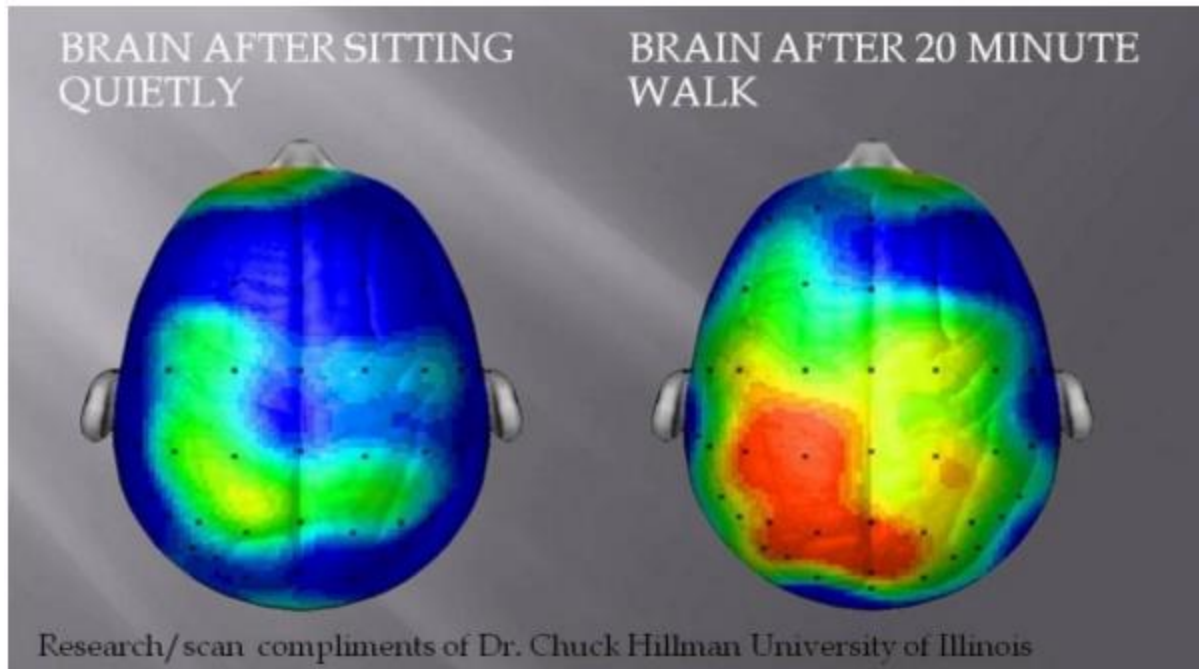
to the lifestyle they wish to lead (PWC, 2011). This is often perceived by the generations that came before as laziness or lack of dedication, and is often looked upon with disdain by the generations who came before. This is something that simply cannot be overlooked, however, considering the huge number of millennials flooding into the job market. Work-life balance can include things such as telecommuting, maternity and paternity leave, and vacation time, and child care. Employer provided child care is especially attractive to young workers because there has been a huge increase in dual income homes over the last 50 years.



In 1960, 70% of American households had only the paternal source of income, and only 25% of families had two sources of income. As of 2015, the father was the only source of income in just 31% of households, and the number of dual income households had increased to 60% (Pew Research Center, 2017). Coupled with this the price of child care is also increasing. In 1985, the cost of child care was \$85 per week, which rose to \$143 per week as of 2011 (United States Census Bureau, 2013). With the increasing need for child care, paired with its increased cost, it is

no wonder that companies that offer it for free or at a subsidized cost can be extremely attractive to young families.

Along with on-site child-care facilities, there are many other organizational perks of value to millennials in the workplace. The on-site gym is another one of these amenities that millennials enjoy having in their place of employment. The effects of onsite gyms within the workplace include: improved employee morale, increased productivity, and decreasing absenteeism (Huddleston, 2000). According to health-care statistics from the Wellness Councils of America, of all illness-associated costs, preventable disease makes up 70% (Hunnicut, D., & Jahn, M, n.d). Not only is an onsite gym a source of attraction for college graduates, it can also be a means to saving healthcare costs for the company that implements it. If an employer can inspire its employees to be more health-conscious and focus their attention on weight and nutrition management, a double benefit can result. A study conducted by Health establishes that employees who take short, frequent breaks during the workday often return to work more refreshed and with an increased stamina to work (Pallarito 2015).



This replication of brain activity both before and after a 15 minute walk indicates the importance of movement during a workday (YE Council, 2015). Oftentimes, these breaks are most re-energizing if the employee spends his or her break time doing something they enjoy, such as a quick game of basketball or ping-pong, or even a quick run on the track or treadmill. By having these options available and well-maintained for the employees, an organization gains satisfied and happy workers. Most companies look for the best employees, and to gain a competitive advantage, it becomes important to offer amenities such as onsite gyms.

Another factor that contributes to the work-life balance that millennials seek is the cafeteria for a lunch break. The power of a lunch break to act as a refresher should not be underestimated. Not taking a refresher from work that requires creativity and thought can be counter-productive. If an employee takes a half hour break away from his or her desk to eat and freshen up their mind, her or she will return with a rested and re-energized brain (Beres, 2017).

Most workers and consumers of lunch enjoy a variety in the foods they choose from on a regular basis. It has been noted through an experiment that when nutritious and healthy foods are placed with variety in front of employees in the form of attractive meals that are both rich in fruits and vegetables, the result is an increased intake of healthy foods (Lassen, 2004). Promoting healthy food choices in the cafeteria is important if the organization wishes to nudge their employees towards a more fit lifestyle. One of the easiest ways to ensure healthy choices while offering employees variety is a buffet-style setup (Lassen, 2007). Some brain-powering food options include things like: fish, chicken, avocado, whole grains, fruits and nuts, etc. (Cooper, 2014). The importance of coffee breaks is just as important to point out as lunch options. The energizing feel of coffee breaks can be linked to coping communities and informal workgroup culture. When coffee breaks were first introduced as a means to refresh when working with an emotionally taxing type of work, communities of coping were established through these coffee break encounters (Stroeback, 2013). Now, it is commonplace for corporations to provide and maintain stations for their employees, so that they can walk over and take a few minutes of downtime while grabbing coffee and chatting with their co-workers. An organization that provides food options and coffee breaks to their employees often sees the highest levels of employee satisfaction throughout the day. The level of autonomy associated with an employee's lunch break also plays a pivotal role in whether or not an employee feels well rested and satisfied after his or her lunch break. The more options and flexibility an employee has to spend his or her hour during lunch, the more that employee is refreshed and ready to go after his or her break (Troughakos 2017). An organization with the intent to provide a wholesome experience for their

employees and to attract fresh new talent should focus on amenities such as the onsite gym and cafeteria as an investment.

Since the 1960's, companies have used cubicles as a tactic to cut costs (Stahl, 2016). If companies are going to attract millennials, they must think about taking workstations in another direction. There are a few directions that companies could take to attract millennials, such as home-like offices, multi-purpose workstations, and modular/open floor concept (Leddy, 2016). The most commonly used concept is an open floor plan, with a mix of the other two. Open floor plans have less barriers between co-workers which allows information to flow more freely. Millennials are known to collaborate more than previous generations, and with the open floor plan makes collaborating with their co-workers simpler for a generation that likes to socialize, work in teams, and get help from other co-workers (Howe, 2015). One point to consider for the organization when establishing a productive work environment is the option to move around. The mixing of layouts within an organization allows for this flexibility in work environment on a day-to-day basis. Simply having a change of scenery or setting when working on a project or a task can be beneficial to an employee who may be feeling stale or drowsy. This could mean a step outside if there is an option to have a seat in the outdoors, or even just picking up the laptop and sitting down in the cafe for a while to renew focus. The change in sound levels from a quiet cubicle to a more noisy cafe has actually been proven to be beneficial for creativity (Cooper 2014).

Many companies that are run by millennial entrepreneurs have never used the cubicle and have open floor plans. Facebook and Google are two of the top tech companies that have helped speed up the trend of high tech workstations. Workstations have gone from formal to a

business casual where there is more transparency between employees and bosses (Sullivan & Horwitz-Bennett, 2014). “This arrangement is well-suited for a group-oriented generation that values the opportunity to collaborate” (Howe, 2015). Global technology research firm Gartner Group ran studies that show that workers are at their desk for only 40% of the work day. This gives companies another reason to shrink personal cubicles and move toward the open floor concept. Co-workers are able to see everything that is happening and don’t feel locked away in their cubicle with no interaction. However, the problem with open floor plans is that they are all theory based, and doesn’t represent everything that people want. While an open floor may sound like a good idea, it is an extreme shift from the traditional cubicle (Howe, 2015).

Most detractors for the open office layout are from the Baby Boomer generation. When a millennial is hired they may like the office space at that point, but design trends are always changing and could become a cause for concern if companies don’t keep up with the type of work environment that the younger employees look for. Right now open office is the new trend, but that doesn’t mean that companies need to dispose of all private rooms. Employees still might need their privacy on certain parts of their job (Douglas, 2014). Thus, it is important to weigh the pros and cons of different options to achieve the goal of the company: finding the golden middle ground for their employees.

An example of a middle ground is a modular setup. This is similar to an open space where there are no assigned seats and one can see almost everybody that is working in the same room. The difference between this modular layout and an open floor is that all the furniture is movable, which allows for the room to be used as several different facilities. Teams can bring a few chairs and couches together to brainstorm on a project, they can use the room as a

lunchroom and eat while taking a break, and if the room is large enough, they can move all the furniture and have a company meeting. This type of setting is more informal and allows for collaboration to be more spontaneous, which could help spark some new ideas for a team on a project (Ellis, 2016).

Another option for a balanced layout that both allows for seclusion and for an open space is simply area to area differences. Under this layout, certain departments have their own area modifications. Examples of some modifications that a company can utilize are: a marketing team can have an open room to help with the flow of ideas, but a writer might have a silent room to finish a column they are working on. One specific example of this layout can be found at AECOM, where they have quiet zones for coders. Here, there are no phones, talking, or music so they stay concentrated and productive (Howe, 2015).

Company culture can be seen as a broad term that encompasses the values and beliefs that a company operates on. The effectiveness of an established culture on an organization's employees can be seen when the workers of a corporation all share a common vision for the company. Clearly, the level of employee happiness and satisfaction in the workplace is linked to the strength of culture in the organization. It is often the strong, positive and well-defined culture, which is communicated effectively that attracts young talent to a company (ERC, 2013). It is of utmost importance for an organization to ensure that top management is enabling their subordinates, sharing the company's strategic plans, and providing them with the tools and supplements they need to complete the job (Schwartz, 1981). When a department of a company is aligned with the top management and overall corporate vision, the harmony within the company increases significantly (Stevens, 2015). In this way, transparency and trust is developed

within the organization, as all employees are on the same page and share that common goal, despite the functional department they are part of.

Sharing the values of a company that an employee works for is an important trait that not only recent college graduates, but all employees look for when choosing a place of employment. This indicates the importance behind thoroughly understanding and relating to the company of their choice and the values that company holds for the new job seeker. Once he or she has joined the workforce, a millennial will spend about a third of his or her life at work, which makes it integral for a college graduate, used to the fast paced, quickly changing environment, to choose a place of work that not only satisfies their work-life and communication preferences, but also one that challenges them, and keeps them interested and passionate about what they do. In order to ensure that someone who is new to the work culture enjoys and keeps their job for a long time, it is important that they know and understand the importance of being a good fit with their place of work. This will ensure greater job satisfaction, a stronger identification with the company, more commitment, and superior job performance (Schofield, 2016). Employee loyalty increases when the worker is able to see the organization's desired behavior implemented within all levels of the company, and is reinforced when cross-functional teams get together on a project, and are able to exemplify the company's overarching culture (Sadri, 2001). This is not only beneficial to the employee, but to the organization as well. Organizations with stronger cultures outperform their competitors in financial performance and are generally more successful (ERC, 2013).

The three elements of company culture that is important for an organization to establish is organizational culture, brand name and compensation. In order to attract recent college graduates, it is important to understand what drives students to apply to a position. Studies have

found a strong positive correlation between the strength of a company's brand name and how likely someone is to apply to that job opening. The ease of use of the online job portal that potential employees use to apply to the position is also of importance; studies show that if an employee can maneuver through the application process swiftly without complications, the positive reinforcement created from the result of the application rests in their mind (Chhabra, 2005). Outside of the brand name, students who are looking to apply to a job after graduation are often strongly influenced by how much responsibility and empowerment they perceive the job to have. These students are then able to gauge the level of comfort they feel around applying for the job based on their education and previous job experience (Agrawal & Swaroop, 2009).

Team Smucker Love, through completion of this secondary research, has collaborated and discovered a variety of factors that are important to recent college graduates, as well as other millennials. Secondary research is composed of gathering information from a variety of scholarly sources. The goal to provide a clear picture of what factors are of the most importance to recent college grads when choosing a place of work has been explored through the secondary research the group has gathered. Recent college graduates and millennials value flexibility and innovation within the workplace. This applies to tangible benefits and productivity, such as the option to work from home and the use of up-to-date technology in the workplace. Some other factors that college graduates seek when looking for a full-time position include a strong work-life balance, amenities, physical structure of the workplace, and the culture of the environment in which they will be employed. Smucker Love has concluded that these few factors provide a strong starting point for the next step in exploring the goal of this project, and has shaped the group's primary research findings.

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