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# An Analysis of the Factors which Effectively Attract College Graduates

Mandy Kaur

*University of Akron, mk148@zips.uakron.edu*

Kaleb Oney

*The University of Akron, kron3y@gmail.com*

Joseph Chadbourne

*The University of Akron, jchad94@gmail.com*

Kayli Bookman

*The University of Akron, kkb40@zips.uakron.edu*

Benjamin Beckman

*The University of Akron, bjb126@zips.uakron.edu*

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An analysis of the factors which effectively attract college graduates

Team SmuckerLove: Mandy Kaur, Kaleb Oney, Joe Chadbourne, Kayli Bookman, Ben  
Beckman

The University of Akron, Honors College

Primary Research Paper

Team Smucker Love has been presented with a prompt that required our group to research and present the factors that are of most importance to recent college graduates when choosing a place of work. Using the secondary research as a guide, the team was able to narrow down the topics which drove the structure of the primary research. While secondary research consisted of a more general exploratory approach, which included the collection and analysis of information from a variety of scholarly sources, primary research was conducted with a more narrow approach. The team used the consolidated findings from the completion of our secondary research to drive the primary process, which consisted of several surveys that were distributed to recent college graduates, as well as thorough in-depth interviews and focus group settings.

Once the group collected and analyzed secondary research, Smucker Love concluded that there are a select few factors that are of importance to recent college graduates. Through secondary research, Smucker Love explored each of the factors listed, and narrowed down the project scope. The group then collaborated and used the information found through secondary research to shape the primary research portion of the project. Through this, the group was able to narrow the goal in recognizing exactly what elements recent college graduates and millennials value when choosing a full-time work position. The factors that make up the team's final recommendation include: flexibility (working from home), the use of technology in the workplace, physical set-up of the work environment, work-life balance, and culture. This paper will outline the factors found within the secondary research, and will validate or refute the information relating to each. It will also highlight any new information and statistics the group assembled through this process.

As the group wrapped up secondary findings, Smucker Love initiated the primary research portion of the project through an on-site visit to the JM Smucker Company, with the courtesy of Mr. John Nicholas, VP of Corporate Services & Smucker Experience. The group was able to hold three focus groups during this time: a group of Smucker employees that were recent college grads, a group that had joined Smucker mid-career, and one session with the corporate recruiter. Through questions and discussion, Smucker Love was able to understand some of the factors that each group found of importance when they were making their decisions on whether to join Smucker's as a full time employee. Questions asked of each segment differed slightly and were catered for each based on the previous professional experience the groups have had, which was dependent on when they joined the company. The data gathered as a result of these sessions showed that all employees felt satisfied about their decision to join The JM Smucker company as a full time employee, but all had different reasons for their attraction to the company.

The next step for Smucker Love was analyzing these findings, as well as secondary research findings, and applying the results to a more narrowed and specific questionnaire and survey. These surveys were sent out to several business students. The results of the survey provided the team with a stable and well rounded understanding of how students are prioritizing the elements in terms of importance when looking for a place to work after graduation. In the same way, sitting down with several College of Business students at the University of Akron and asking some open-ended questions relating to these factors resulted in a better understanding of why students feel the way they do about their place of work (if they have an internship), why they chose their full-time position (if they have one lined up), and why they would like their future place of work to have certain elements.

Telecommuting is becoming a popular trend within the workplace. Telecommuting is

defined as performing work related tasks while not on company property, and thus, is highly reliant on technology as a means to communicate with co-workers. The group, through secondary research, found that the number of people who have completed their work-related tasks while at home or out of office is increasing on a yearly basis. In order to delve deeper into this conclusion, team Smucker Love questioned the current Smucker employees and students at the University of Akron on this topic. To gain a better idea of how current students and soon-to-be graduates feel about telecommuting, the survey that was sent out contained questions that urged students to respond on whether they feel that the option would be beneficial. 93.9% of respondents would like to have flexible work hours. 89.6% of respondents believe that flexible hours improve their productivity. 73.5% of respondents like the idea of working from home. However, 59.2% believe that it does not improve their productivity.

Through primary research interviews with students that attend the CBA, our team found that most of the students surveyed that had previously held a position as an intern in a company had the option to take advantage of a “summer hours” program. Although this program cannot directly be compared to working from home, the fact that students liked the program and indicated that they, along with their fellow interns, all enjoyed the option to utilize flexible hours and spend their Friday afternoons at home is a good indication that an option to choose flexible hours and telecommuting can be beneficial for employee morale. Those students interviewed who did not have a previous internship background, while never having the chance to experience the option, still felt that it would be a good perk to have in a company and indicated that they would enjoy an internship or job more if this option were available.

One student who was interviewed spoke about the plan that Goodyear has implemented in their company for their employees. The plan works on a departmental level. The director of

the respective department will allocate about three days per month for each employee who works in the department on which that employee will be working from home. The worker is given the option to choose the three days that he or she would like to telecommute, and sends those suggested days back to the director. Once the team lead or director has looked over the requested days, he or she makes sure that those days do not conflict with anyone else's telecommute requests on that team, and that those days do not have project reviews or important meetings scheduled. Once this review has been completed, the director then approves those requests and the employee then follows through by working from their place of choice on that day instead of coming into the office.

Smucker Love's recommendation for this factor is to follow a plan similar to Goodyear's, which will create an opportunity for employees to take advantage of a program that they find of value, and it will ensure that those employees are not abusing that system and spending so much time at home that it begins to feel counter-productive to both the team and the individual. It is also important to note that, when implementing such a system in the workplace, performance reviews must be catered to this new option. While most performance reviews take into account things like the behavior of the employee within the team, the way the employee interacts and works with others, and the way the employee conducts his or herself during team meetings, it is imperative that when telecommuting is made an option, the performance monitoring for those days is more focused on output and level of contribution. This is a key change to implement in order to make certain that the employee is not feeling unproductive and to gauge whether this telecommuting system continues to remain beneficial for the employee and team.

The level of change and investment needed for such a development is not large. The value that can result from this change however, can be manyfold. 80% of our interviewees and

survey respondents (all recent graduates and current students) feel that the option to telecommute is a point of attraction to them when looking for a place of work for a full-time position. Another suggestion to the JM Smucker company from our team is to implement a year-round option for flexible hours. Team Smucker Love is aware that the Smucker Company currently has a summer and holiday hours plan in which the company allows their employees to leave early on Fridays if their work is complete and if the employee had made up for the half day by working extra during the rest of the week. Primary research on this factor was completed by asking full time employees at the JM Smucker company whether a year-round flexible hours option would be something that they'd like to see being implemented. The answer was overwhelmingly yes from these employees, as they all felt that the flexible hours improved employee morale.

Another factor that team Smucker Love decided to focus on in this project was the exploration of the idea of using technology in the workplace, both for projects and collaboration, as well as for personal use as a means of letting employees take “tech breaks” throughout the day. Secondary research and analysis of graphs indicates that the majority of millennials, when compared to previous generations, find technology as a useful tool that can be used to enhance collaboration and make processes more efficient. Our team took this information and added a question in the survey that was sent out to business students at the University of Akron regarding the importance of taking short breaks throughout the work day. Most students, when given the option of rating the importance of breaks on a scale from one to five, chose a four or five. The results show that students and recent graduates find it refreshing to use a few minutes every so often to scroll through their social media, answer text messages, etc. Millennials see this “tech break” as something that can be compared to the baby boomers’ smoke breaks. The team’s recommendation on this topic to the JM Smucker company is to continue the trust and

responsibility the company has in their employees. As it stands, employees and interns are not reprimanded for checking their phones from time to time. This open attitude is beneficial to employee morale and reinforces the positive feeling of trust that millennials and college graduates look for in the company they wish to apply to for a full-time job.

The topic of technology in the workplace can be expanded on to include the use of up-to-date technology to complete tasks and projects. In the survey our group sent out to students of the University of Akron College of Business, the question was asked “How well do you feel your older coworkers understand technology and the various trends of the evolving workplace?” On a scale of one to five, most students answers rested between one and three. Another question, “How often do your older co-workers come to you for help on technology?” received an overwhelming response of two on a scale of one to three. These results indicate that it is important, not only to maintain and keep up with up-to-date technology, whether it be collaborative or functional, but also to make an effort to maintain a strong change-management department when implementing new technology. This is an area that the JM Smucker company has established and maintains well. The team’s recommendation on this topic is to create an ad-hoc committee that will be assigned the task of assembling cross functional, as well as interdepartmental teams in a manner that includes an even split of recent graduate or millennial workers, as well as more experienced employees. The purpose of this will be to ensure that the respective project or task is getting the attention of both the millennial mindset and those that are more experienced with the process flow in question. A student with previous internship experience who was questioned on the significance of collaborative technologies in the workplace is quoted: “It is important for companies to have collaborative technologies (like MS Exchange for ways to instant message, share calendars, etc.). The company I currently intern for



does not have many collaborative technologies implemented, so employees find that it takes lots of wasted time to do simple activities, like scheduling a meeting, where technology that currently exists that can help make these activities faster. The reasons I hear that the technologies are not in the company is because the executives (who are older) believe that the benefits gained do not justify the cost (which they are very expensive, sometimes over a half million investment) of the technology.” This further exemplifies the need for a committee that can assign and maintain a mixed group of employees within the department and for project purposes.

The next topic team Smucker Love focused on researching is the physical work environment of the company. The physical work environment encompasses a few different aspects which include the office space, seating arrangements, and overall workplace appearance.

### How did you feel about the office space, seating arrangements, and overall work place appearance?

(46 responses)

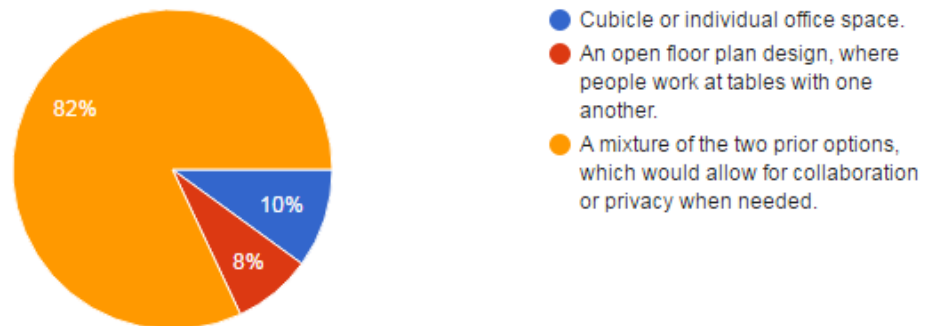


The survey results indicate that most students with a previous professional experience or internship feel good about the workplace that they worked at, but that there was an aspect of it that they were dissatisfied with. Our team used our secondary research as a guide to delve deeper

into the level of satisfaction employees feel about the physical work environment.

The secondary research the team gathered pointed our group toward the idea that while cubicles are a traditional and popular set up within most office settings, a new trend that is beginning to show up in the setup of progressive companies is the open floor plan concept. In order to better understand the balance that employees and students require to feel comfortable and productive in the workplace, our team decided to ask both our in-depth interviewees and the survey respondents how important physical set-up is with regards to maintaining an equilibrium between privacy and collaboration in the work environment. The survey conducted contained a few questions that clarified this question for the team.

**In your opinion which type of office design helps you both complete work effectively and maintain a comfortable, communicative environment?**  
(50 responses)



The survey sent out to University CBA students shows that most students look for a mixture of the two aspects of the workplace; it is important to maintain the cubicle setup when employees are seeking privacy and are working on completing quiet, task-type responsibilities. In the same way, when collaboration and interaction with co-workers is needed, employees appreciate the open floor plan concept. The in-depth interviews conducted by our team, both

with current Smucker employees and students, affirmed this idea. A student who has had a previous internship was willing to share her thoughts on establishing a balanced physical work environment so that the employees do not feel stagnant and unproductive: “I personally work well when I am given my own space and can be closed off to concentrate, but also enjoy collaborating as well.” This opinion is shared by many others (students with internships and those without) that our team had the chance to interview. It is evident then that a balanced office layout is the best way to attract young college graduates who already know their work behaviors and productivity levels in different settings. To expand on this idea, employees often enjoy being able to shift their work environment to have some time in a different area or scene. Another student with previous internship experience shares: “Having more than one place in an office to work is really nice for me personally. I enjoy being able to have a change of scenery. I can work at my desk, but then take my laptop and sit outside in the courtyard, by the fireplace, or by the coffee area. It is great to keep moving without feeling stuck in one place.” This idea is already illustrated by the setup that exists at the JM Smucker company. The new renewal building that was added as an addition to the company offers such an area for employees to sit and complete their work. The feedback our group accumulated through the primary research validates that this addition and freedom of movement is something that both current Smucker employees and students, or soon to be college graduates value and should be maintained.

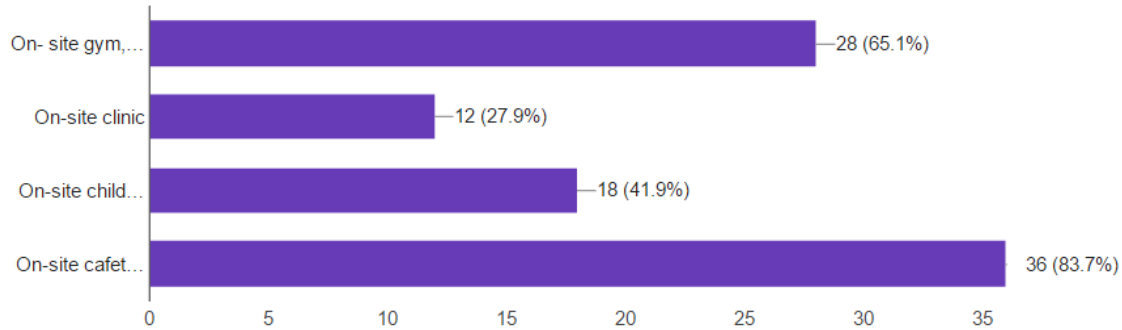
The combination of maintaining a balance of privacy and collaboration, as well as offering employees the option to move and obtain a change of scenery throughout the day, pointed team Smucker Love to the recommendation to Smucker for this topic. Our group recommends an office floor plan similar to one found when conducting secondary research. At AECOM, a company that implements area to area differences, the floor plan is set up according

to departments. In the marketing department, the desks are set-up more like tables with computers, in the effort to allow and encourage a more collaborative work environment. In the IT department, where the software engineers are seated, the environment is setup with cubicles marked as “quiet zones.” This allows for a more private area, which is well-suited for the task type that requires a focused and silent location. The Smucker Company already has a combination setup that contains cubicles, huddle rooms, conference rooms, and open areas, and thus is on the correct course to attract young college graduates looking for a full time place of work. If any change is to be considered in the future, team Smucker Love recommends looking into implementing an area to area adjustment.

The next topic our group decided to focus our primary research on is the work-life balance and amenities that a company offers. As found through secondary research, salary accounts for only twenty percent impact on job satisfaction. The rest of the eighty percent comes from the other perks and amenities. Work-life balance in an employee’s life refers to the proper prioritization between energy put into work (career and professional goals) and one’s lifestyle (personal life, time with family, health, pleasure, leisurely activities). Team Smucker Love focused its efforts on the analysis of the importance that recent college graduates place on the amenities that the JM Smucker Company currently has on its campus.

### Choose all of the following in office benefits from that are of importance to you on your job choice after college

(43 responses)



Through the survey that was sent out to fellow students at the University of Akron College of Business, our team was able to conclude that the on-site cafeteria and the on-site exercise facility were of the highest importance to current students. This validates the team's findings from the secondary research conducted earlier. It can be noted through previous studies that a half hour lunch break taken at some point during the midday hours can be very beneficial for the employees' productivity levels. In many of the discussions held with students during an in-depth interview, these students claim that during their internships, when they walked away from their desk for about an hour to take a lunch, they felt that the rest of their workday was easy to get through. Current prices at the cafeteria are also a strong incentive for current and prospective Smucker employees. During the visit that team Smucker Love took to the Smucker campus, it was evident that both the variety offered in the cafeteria and the vastness of the on-site basketball courts and gym caught the attention of all of the group members. Team Smucker Love also had the chance to speak with some recently hired employees at the company, and found that many of these recent hires were very taken with the large, open spaces on the campus as well as the exercise facility and the cafeteria. Secondary research previously done on the importance of

providing a variety of healthy food choices to an organization's employees indicates that when employees are given choices between a variety of healthy foods or junk foods, most will opt for the healthy food choice. This idea fueled our group's questions when conducting in-depth interviews with students. When team Smucker Love asked students with previous internship experience about the thoughts these students have on cafeteria and food choices at their place of work, the popular response was that the food options were something that caught their eye and that the more variety there was in the cafeteria, the more inclined the students were to actually step away from their desks and take some time to themselves for a lunch break. Thus, Smucker Love's recommendation, in regards to the cafeteria if it becomes imperative that the company must cut costs, would be to raise prices but maintain the level of variety in the food choices the company offers.

The on-site exercise facility is another amenity that was rated high on a scale of importance in the survey our team sent out. Secondary research on this topic pointed our group towards the fact that most employees find it refreshing and beneficial to their productivity levels to get up and take a small, fifteen to twenty minute break a few times throughout the workday. Thus, team Smucker Love inquired further into the subject by asking our in-depth interview participants and focus group members about their thoughts on maintaining an on-site gym at their place of work. All participants our team spoke with mentioned how eye-catching the new basketball court and tracks were at the company, and brought up how eager they'd be to join the on-site gym membership for the sake of convenience and increased productivity levels throughout the day. Our team's recommendation is to continue to maintain the on-site exercise facility. Happier and healthier employees have a direct correlation to the amount of work they are able to complete during the workday, and both the cafeteria and the on-site gym contribute to

this goal.

The other two perks listed on the survey did not show as high of a value in importance by respondents, but are still significant as factors that attract recent college graduates. As the upward trend of dual-income homes in the United States continues, the cost of childcare facilities is also continuing to increase, as shown by the secondary research our group completed in the earlier phase of the project. For this reason, the team decided to include it as an amenity option in the survey that was sent out. While it was not given a high priority over the other options, it is telling that college students still find it of value and would consider it in their search for a full-time job. Lastly, the on-site health clinic was rated least important. While it is important to have an on-site clinic, our team recommends maintaining a heavier investment in the cafeteria and on-site gym; when employees are eating and exercising in a healthy manner, they will be at work more often and with higher productivity levels, and thus, this return on investment balances the lower level of investment in the on-site clinic.

The last topic that team Smucker Love focused on through primary research is the internal culture of the company. The secondary research our group conducted on this topic pointed us to the fact that companies with a strong internal culture often outperform their competition. Thus, this was a question that the team made a point of asking about when we took a company tour and met with a few groups of employees at the company. The response from each current employee was an overwhelmingly positive one. The employees are appreciative of the family-friendly feel that the JM Smucker Company has established amongst their workers, and feel that this is the reason each employee has continued to notice a consistent level of comfort and shared values throughout the company. When asked about the importance of fit, many of the team's in-depth interview participants validated that when looking for an internship

or a place of work, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the cultural environment and collaboration with other coworkers feels right to the student before they choose to commit to the company. A student with a previous internship quoted, “It's all about your coworkers. If you like them and they like you, even the worst jobs are nice. If you don't get along, the perfect job could be the worst job ever and feel like prison.” Another shares: “Attitude is everything.”

Team Smucker Love’s recommendation on this topic is to maintain levels of transparency and enablement with employees, continue to provide employees with flexibility and autonomy, and to continue this established culture in which every employee is treated like they are a part of the family. One other suggestion the team has developed as a result of two mentions of a small apprehension that the employees have as an outcome of the relaxed and family friendly culture at the Smucker Company. Due to the respect that employees have between one another, there can be an issue of accountability between project members, as none of the employees in the group are often willing to break the kind and polite demeanor in order to come to a hard and final decision when there is indecisiveness on a project or an incomplete task at hand. To remedy this concern, the team suggests a survey be sent out to gauge the severity of the issue and if it can be fixed with a minor push or a nudge in the right direction where the problem exists.

Smucker Love was assigned the task of understanding recent graduates’ work environment priorities by the J. M. Smucker company. Through completion of this primary research, the team has collaborated and discovered a variety of factors that are important to recent college graduates, as well as other millennials. The Smucker Love team has had a wonderful time working with the J. M. Smucker company on the completion of this project. The progression of the project brought both challenges and learning as we worked through the topics and collaborated on ideas and solutions that were ultimately provided through the presentation.



The amount of pre-existing secondary research on the topic is vast, as the team came to see. As the group sifted through the information, we were able to narrow down the avenue the team wanted to take on the scope of the project. By using our secondary research findings as a guide, we created our structure on what topics to focus on when conducting the primary research. The visit to the JM Smucker company's headquarters in Orville was helpful for the team to better understand the company's current state and gave the team a chance to speak with some full time employees in person about their experiences. From there, the survey and questions for in-depth interviews were developed. The primary research conducted was helpful for our team to validate and find more in depth answers and suggestions to our proposed topics: working from home, technology in the workplace, work-life balance and amenities, physical work environment, and internal company culture. We sincerely thank the JM Smucker Company for their prompt and for their support and hospitality as our group came to our conclusions on the project. We also extend gratitude to Dr. Hanlon and Andy Platt for their time and guidance.