THE APP GENERATION

How employees of the future are shaping the way we work
Today’s youth is the first generation to define itself by technology, rather than by pivotal political or economic events. These young people are comfortable with every aspect of technology and our book *The App Generation: How Today’s Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World,* uncovered new insights into the influence of technology on young people's identities and the way they see the world.

Our interviews with around 100 individuals (teachers, counsellors, religious leaders, therapists), all who have worked with young people for at least two decades, yielded a surprising recurrent theme. Young people today strike these veterans as risk-averse.

Rather than wanting to explore and try things out by themselves, this ‘app generation’ is constantly pushing to find exactly what they want, when they want it. They want to know how “it” will be evaluated, what comes next and where this leads them.

It seems a proliferation of choice has led to a tendency for today’s younger generation to stick with the best and safest option.

This attitude has some obvious implications when you apply it to the world of work, which is why we found this report so compelling, especially when considered alongside the findings from our own book.

In fact, we found some interesting parallels. For instance, both our book and this report highlight how teenagers still place considerable value on face-to-face communication, despite relying heavily on text-based communication. Interesting, too, is the app generation’s emphasis on personally tailored technology and work environments. This speaks to their desire for solutions that suit them and just work.

Since the phrase the ‘app generation’ was first used in our book the term has passed over to the mainstream. There is an increasing need to understand how digital media and technology is shaping the way that teenagers are interacting with the world around them. It’s already significantly impacting their lives, and this report sheds some light on how it may shape the world of work in the not-so-distant future.

Katie Davis and Howard Gardner

Professors at Harvard University and The University of Washington respectively, and authors of *The App Generation: How Today’s Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World,*
INTRODUCTION

The next generation to enter the workforce has grown up in a world of mobile devices.

To young people, the phrase ‘there’s an app for that’ isn’t just a snappy advertising slogan. It’s a truism, an answer to just about any question they’ve ever asked and an approach to every task.

Can the same be said of today’s way of working? Well, not really. It’s more ‘there might be an app for that, but you’ve got to ask IT, and it might be blocked, or not work on your phone and…’ well just don’t bet on it being that simple.

There’s a clear disconnect. But it’s not just the ‘app generation’ who are impacted. Their expectations of workplace technology may differ wildly from the reality, but we’re all used to tech that ‘just works’ in our personal lives. And that’s not always the case when we’re working.

So what do today’s employees feel about workplace technology? How is it affecting the way they communicate, how much they enjoy their job and how productive they can be? And how do they think the app generation’s entrance into the workforce is going to affect how they work?

This report draws on research carried out among 5,000 workers across Europe and 2,500 members of the ‘app generation’ (young people aged 15 to 18 years old). Covering France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordics and the UK, it explores –

• The app generation’s expectations of the workplace and the current reality
• What current workers feel about workplace technology
• How and where employees of all ages want to work
• The impact of the app generation on the future workplace

Insights include –

89% of workers believe there are benefits to not working at the office

2/3 of workers say workplace technology needs to catch up with personal technology

Just 2% of teenagers use landline telephones, preferring text-based, video and mobile communication

72% of the ‘app generation’ agree having the latest technology will be important when they start working

Throughout this report, we explore the future of work and time and time again our research highlights the pivotal role of communication. Whether it’s sharing information, creating ideas or having conversations, technology is now driving fundamental changes in how we collaborate with colleagues and that puts communication at the heart of modern work.
1 HOW THE APP GENERATION EXPECTS TO WORK

What are the effects of growing up in a world where carrying around a computer in your pocket has become standard?

The app generation’s first experiences of technology has been post ‘mobile revolution’: what is 100% natural to them still might seem a minor miracle to many. Friends, parents and experiences within education will also influence the app generation’s view of work-based technology.

Through our research with 2,500 young people aged 15 to 18 years, we’ve identified their expectations of the world of work and the difference between expectation and the reality.

Essential items for work

What items do you need to get your job done? If you look at the average desk space over the last 50 years there’s been a continual evolution, but for current European workers many items have resisted dying off, despite technically not being necessary today. Does the app generation place the same importance on more traditional desk or office items?

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Comparing perceptions of ‘essential’ items, the top three are the same for both teens and today’s workforce – pens, printer and paper. In fact, teenagers place more emphasis on these ‘traditional’ items.

But interestingly, the results differ more wildly when we focus on items related to business communications. The smartphone is deemed as being much more important by teenagers – fourth place in their essential items list, compared to seventh for adults. In contrast, the desk phone has a clear spot in the top five for workers, but barely makes the top ten for teenagers, who even see a stapler as being more essential.

Looking at the smartphone and desk phone through all-age demographics, several trends become clear.

Which items do you consider to be essential for the workplace?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of teenagers and office workers who consider desk phones and smartphones essential by age group.]

Firstly, there’s a clear decline in the perceived importance of the smartphone between young people before they’ve started work and just after. Secondly, the perceived importance of the desk phone increases steadily with age. Thirdly, the importance of the smartphone increases for those younger demographics.

The data clearly points towards the decline of the desk phone and rise of the smartphone, as younger generations continue to enter the workforce. We also see the app generation has high expectations of working with mobile devices when they enter the workforce, which doesn’t match today’s reality.

Apps and software

There’s a stark difference between the perceived importance of desk phones versus smartphones between teenagers and current workers, so does app and software usage give us insight into why?
What kinds of apps and software do you use?

There are clear differences between the apps and software that teenagers use and those that adults use at work. For example, mobile messaging and social media show significantly higher usage among teenagers and the majority (57%) are also using video communication like Skype and FaceTime more than office workers (47%).

How teens communicate

Given the importance of communication in modern work, we looked at how teenagers currently communicate to understand the methods they are most comfortable and familiar with.

How do you prefer to communicate with your friends?

Meeting up in real life/in person
Through a chat messaging app, like Whatsapp
Through social media e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Text message/SMS service on my phone
Phone calls using my mobile
Web-based chat like instant messenger
Skype or Facetime in a group chat
Skype or Facetime to an individual
Email
Phone calls from a landline
The first, largely positive, insight is that the app generation is not glued to screens 100% of the time; meeting face to face is a popular way to interact with friends. However, if we combine all methods of text-based communication – messaging apps, SMS, web chat, social media – it shows a significant 44% prefer these methods. If teenagers are not together in person, they use quick, text-based, mobile ways of communicating.

Video calling, whether in a group or to an individual, is as popular as voice calling from a mobile (both 8%), indicating the app generation is as comfortable with video as they are with voice. Mobile voice calls are resoundingly more popular than making calls from a landline, which begs the question of how the app generation will react when presented with a desk phone.

**Flexible working**

The items, devices, apps and software that teens expect to use when they start employment give us insight into how they expect to work, but what about where? Working more flexibly is a trend that is growing, but what is the perception of the app generation?

**Thinking about when you start work, do you agree with the following statements?** (data shows the percentage that agree)

- I want to work as part of a team: 66% ALL, 64% NORDICS, 75% UK, 63% FR, 76% DE, 63% NL
- I don’t want to be tied to a 9 to 5 job: 49% ALL, 55% NORDICS, 57% UK, 54% FR, 46% DE, 53% NL
- It’s important to meet people-face to-face if you work with them: 70% ALL, 69% NORDICS, 78% UK, 68% FR, 74% DE
- I don’t want to have a long journey to work: 70% ALL, 64% NORDICS, 76% UK, 70% FR, 81% DE
- I want to be able to use the latest technology: 69% ALL, 64% NORDICS, 76% UK, 70% FR, 85% DE

The views of the app generation are not that different to what we might expect from any employee. The majority want to work collaboratively as part of a team, they still believe in face to face communication, they don’t want a long commute and are looking for the right work-life balance. A key outtake is the high importance that teenagers place on technology - the enabler of communicating with colleagues, reducing travel time and working more flexibly.
Looking at the locations teenagers would like to work from gives further insights. We might not be surprised that nearly half of teenagers want to work from their beds, but realities aside, it is interesting to note that homeworking appeals significantly more than working from an office.

Comparing this to the adult worker research, we find that only 37% actually do work from home, while another 49% would like to but can’t, or just don’t. We’ll explore work locations later, but it appears this could increasingly become a point of frustration if flexible working is not made a more common option as the app generation enter the workplace.
Technology in education

Having dissected what people aged 15 to 18 years expect when they enter the workplace, it’s interesting to consider how these perceptions have been shaped. The biggest influences will be from their home life and also education – the schools and colleges whose job it is to ready young people for the wider world.

Thinking about the technology you use at school and at home, do you agree with the following statements?
(data shows the percentage that agree)

The majority of teenagers see the technology they use at school as inferior to what they use at home or outside of school. We will highlight later in this report that current workers believe their workplace has some catching up to do to match the technology they use in their daily lives and it’s a frustration that the app generation may already be experiencing.
Software and hardware aside, a key finding is that the majority of teenagers believe they know more about technology than their teachers, which suggests they are not being readied for technology in the workplace.

Parents come off even worse than teachers, with over three quarters of teenagers agreeing they have a better understanding of technology. It’s a common feeling for many of us who aren’t in the app generation, whether we’ve experienced setting up our parents’ VCR in the 80s or their iPads in the 2000s.

In what ways does your school help you get ready for getting a job?

Looking directly at how teenagers are being readied for the workforce gives us more insight. Work experience is something that differs across Europe. Offered to a marginal majority, it’s only in the UK and Germany where it’s really prevalent and only around a quarter of teenagers are offered work experience in France. Careers advice is more common, but less so in the Netherlands.

When it comes to technology, training with normal workplace systems is most common in the UK (58%), but an overall minority (48%) are made familiar with the likes of standard software packages and email in school.

As for encouraging a deeper familiarity with technology, only 16% of teenagers are given courses in learning to code, with the highest numbers in France, at 25%.

The major outtake of all these findings is that the ‘app generation’ is not particularly ready for the world of work. In a technology context, what they’re learning in school seems inadequate even for the use of commonplace systems like email and office software. A surprising number have quite traditional ideas of the workplace, expecting to need ‘essentials’ like staplers and calculators, and apparently content with a 9 to 5 job. But it’s the current communications behaviour of the app generation – a preference for text and video – combined with a strong desire to use the latest technology in work that poses the big challenge for business in how they meet these expectations.
Members of the app generation have clear expectations around the way they will work. While it’s a few years until the majority join the workforce, the disruptive effect of younger generations is already being felt through the millennial generation (loosely understood as those born after 1980), with its defining familiarity with technology.

The vast majority of workers believe that young people entering the workplace will have a positive impact on approaches to technology. Although it doesn’t mean there aren’t reservations about how young people will integrate into the workplace, as 50% of workers also feel the app generation could present issues as they are not used to certain technologies.

This is perhaps not surprising, given today’s reliance on more traditional technologies that the app generation has never even used. For example, fax machines and desk phones are deemed ‘essential’ work items by 32% and 55% of today’s workforce, respectively, yet only 2% of the app generation actually uses any kind of ‘landline’ telephone more than once a month.

What if technology does not move on? What if the app generation enters the workplace and thousands are still deskbound? How will they collaborate with the workers who still think a fax machine – a piece of technology they would barely be able to identify – is a necessary workplace device?

The workforce of today sees an opportunity to refresh work technology. It suggests existing systems simply don’t provide the intuitive, user-led experience that is now common-place with the consumer apps, technology and devices they are using. So what technology would they like to see, and how would they ideally like to work?

**Attitudes to the the app generation entering the workforce**

- **88%** believe younger people coming into the workplace could be of benefit as they refresh and update approaches to technology.
- **50%** believe younger people entering the workplace could present issues as they are not used to certain technologies.

The workforce of today sees an opportunity to refresh work technology. It suggests existing systems simply don’t provide the intuitive, user-led experience that is now common-place with the consumer apps, technology and devices they are using. So what technology would they like to see, and how would they ideally like to work?
What the prevalence of shadow IT tells us

It’s no surprise that a large amount of technology is used within organisations without the explicit consent of the organisation, and this ‘Shadow IT’ is a further indicator of dissatisfaction with the sanctioned IT on offer.

In terms of hardware, the most prevalent ‘shadow’ device is the mobile phone, with 40% of people using their personal mobile for work purposes. The personal laptop is not far behind, used by 32% of workers.

Which personal devices do you own and use for work?

The personal mobile phone, the essential device of the app generation, is already the most used device without IT’s consent. And it’s not even a trend that is particularly biased towards younger workers – the figure is slightly higher, 41%, for those aged over 55.

Another question is perhaps more pertinent to the app generation – what apps and software are being used without IT consent?

Mobile is again the biggest problem area, with 32% using mobile messaging services like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger for work purposes without the control of IT. IP voice and video calling is another issue, with 25% using services like Skype and FaceTime, and 23% using IP voice (e.g. Viber, WhatsApp voice) without involving their IT department.

Social media and the easier to control area of productivity software (i.e. Google Docs or Microsoft Office) also have significant usage figures outside of IT’s control.
What kinds of apps and software do you use, or would like to use?

- **Cloud storage** (e.g. Dropbox, Google Drive)
  - Use under control of company IT: 7%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 21%
  - Use without control of company IT: 33%

- **Mobile messaging** (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger)
  - Use under control of company IT: 12%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 31%
  - Use without control of company IT: 20%

- **Video calling** (e.g. Skype, FaceTime)
  - Use under control of company IT: 13%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 24%
  - Use without control of company IT: 22%

- **Voice calling** (e.g. Viber, WhatsApp voice)
  - Use under control of company IT: 13%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 23%
  - Use without control of company IT: 18%

- **Social media** (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)
  - Use under control of company IT: 14%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 26%
  - Use without control of company IT: 19%

- **Photo sharing** (e.g. Flickr, Instagram)
  - Use under control of company IT: 13%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 22%
  - Use without control of company IT: 15%

- **Creative** (e.g. Photoshop, Illustrator)
  - Use under control of company IT: 12%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 21%
  - Use without control of company IT: 21%

- **Productive** (e.g. Google docs, Office)
  - Use under control of company IT: 9%
  - Would like to use but company has blocked: 25%
  - Use without control of company IT: 32%

If workers can see ways to improve existing technology, then it’s perhaps most interesting to look at the software and apps they are using for work, without IT’s consent. Mobile messaging, video calling, IP voice, social media and photo sharing are clear examples and given the prevalence of personal mobile device use for work it’s perhaps not a coincidence that all of these are natural smartphone activities.

The issue of these activities being outside of IT’s control comes down to more than just security. Sure, if business communications are taking place on WhatsApp (for example) there’s a potential issue with lack of a paper trail. But in addition to this the business sees no intelligence on those communications – what if your top sales team member seals all their deals on Skype? The organisation has no visibility of that. And in addition to that it simply highlights a deeper dissatisfaction – why allow a situation in which employees are looking outside the boundaries of IT for solutions at all? Surely it’s better to provide them with everything they need to work productively?
How location affects efficient working

Technology is much talked about as being an enabler for working anywhere. We know from our personal lives that location isn’t a barrier to communicating and getting things done. If the same could be said of our working lives, how important is location in the working world?

Well, the traditional place of work – the office – is still important, cited by two thirds of employees as the most effective location to work from if they have the right technology.

However, homeworking is not far behind and in the UK, France and the Nordics, it’s considered to be a better than using the office.

What locations do you believe you could work most effectively from, if you had the right technology?

It’s important to note that these figures do not reflect where people would like to work, but where they believe they would be most effective.

And given we know from earlier in this report that over a third of people would like to work from home but cannot due to IT restrictions, it highlights that many workers are frustrated they can’t work more flexibly.

In fact, the vast majority, 85%, believe being able to work flexibly, at times and in locations of their choosing, is important. 83% agree that it isn’t necessary to be in an office in order to be productive.

Nearly two thirds (64%) would like to be more mobile at work, and over half (51%) blame inadequate technology provided to them by their employer for restricting them from working most effectively.
Only 11% believe that there are no benefits at all to being able to work anywhere other than an office, although this increases with age.

The younger you are, the more likely you are to see the benefits of flexible working locations, but even for the over 55s it's a view of the vast majority.
Looking deeper into the reasons why people want to work more flexibly, efficiency is not the top reason. Better work-life balance comes out top, with productivity coming in second.

Enjoying work more is also cited by over a third and, as savvy organisations are aware, happy staff with good work life balance are generally the most productive, too.

What do you believe are the benefits of working somewhere other than an office?

Ultimately, all of these findings point to one central theme – workers of today, irrespective of age, wish to work more flexibly. They feel they would be happier and more productive if that was the case, and that the technology offered by their employer is inadequate for this purpose. It is this frustration that leads them to use personal devices, software and applications that are outside of IT’s control.
The research in this report spans Europe, covering France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordics and the UK. The overall trends are the same, but there are some enlightening quirks in how the regions differ in their use of technology and ways of working.

**FRENCH WORKERS ARE –**
- The most likely to see ‘work-life balance’ as a benefit of flexible working (62% compared to 54% on average)
- The most likely to consider a fax machine essential for work (42% compared to 32% on average)

**FRENCH TEENAGERS ARE –**
- The least likely to prefer using mobile messaging apps to communicate with friends (4% compared to 17% on average)
- The most likely not to want to be tied to a 9 to 5 job (57% compared to 49% on average)

**GERMAN WORKERS ARE –**
- The most likely by far to consider a desk phone essential for work (74% compared to 55% on average)
- The most likely to consider the office the most effective place to work (78% compared to 66% on average)

**GERMAN TEENAGERS ARE –**
- The most likely to care about a commute, and not want a long journey to work (81% compared to 69% on average)
- The most likely to prefer using messaging apps to communicate with friends (31% compared to 17% on average)

**NORDIC WORKERS ARE –**
- The most likely to consider a smartphone essential for work (55% compared to 48% on average)
- The least likely to consider a desk phone essential for work (30% compared to 55%)

**NORDIC TEENAGERS ARE –**
- The most likely by far to have never used a landline phone (42% compared to 17% on average)
- The most likely to want to work from an office (70% compared to 57% on average)
HOW EUROPE WORKS (2/2)

NETHERLANDS WORKERS ARE –
- The least likely to consider pens or paper essential for work (50% and 49% compared to 70% and 65% respectively)
- The most likely to believe they can work effectively from a pub or bar (18% compared to 11% on average)

NETHERLANDS TEENAGERS ARE –
- The most likely to want to work from home (83% compared to 79% on average)
- The most likely to consider a smartphone essential for work (69% compared to 60%)

UK WORKERS ARE –
- The most likely to consider pens essential for work (80% compared to 70% on average)
- The least likely to see meeting more people as a benefit of working somewhere other than an office (13% compared to 19% on average)

UK TEENAGERS ARE –
- The most likely to prefer using video calling to communicate with friends (69% compared to 57% on average)
- The most likely to use a tablet on a daily basis (39% compared to 28% on average)
We know that the current generation of workers are frustrated with the technology and lack of flexibility offered by their current work set up. But what does work ‘utopia’ look like? How should technology be deployed to curb shadow IT and deliver the experience that users are looking for? How can the app generation not only be accommodated, but their approach to technology used to inform ways of working for the better? Is the very concept of a ‘workplace’ outdated? The following points set out an agenda for a utopian, app generation-friendly workplace of the future.

Workplace technology must become equal to what we use in our daily lives

Two thirds (66%) of our office workers believe that workplace technology has some catching up to do to match what we use in our daily lives. This speaks to the central issue this report highlights, but it isn’t a simple issue to solve – organisations, particularly large ones, move more slowly on technology advancement than consumers.

However, with the uptake of cloud-based technologies, this is set to change. When upgrades can take place almost with the flick of a switch, rather than with an entire rip and replace of on-premise hardware, enterprise technology stands a much better chance of keeping pace with consumer.
Personal and work devices will merge

Your employees are already using their personal devices for work purposes and this trend is only going to grow with the introduction of the app generation. Given the genie is already out of the bottle, the only sensible option left open to IT is to embrace personal devices.

We know that people want to use their own technology – they are already doing so. So let them do so, but in a way that is sanctioned. Software like Fuze allows employees to use their own devices for business communications, with a user experience that matches (or even exceeds) what they are used to in their personal lives.

App acquisition will become easier

Employees are using non-sanctioned software, too, and the biggest software culprits are in communications – mobile messaging, video, voice and social media. As with hardware, the technology we use in a personal and a work capacity is merging (just look at Facebook for Work).

A quarter (25%) of workers will search the internet for a new piece of software or an application to help with work rather than asking IT and a further 23% will search an app store. There are enterprise applications that will suit specific needs like communications, but make app acquisition easier in work with enterprise app stores that put apps within the confines of IT’s control.
One of the defining characteristics of the app generation is that although they are smartphone power users, they rarely use their phones for their (original) primary function.

The majority of our adult workers (60%) believe that text-based communication will replace voice-based communication. Over time, email, and more recently messaging and enterprise social applications, have eaten into voice-based communication, and this trend is set to continue with the next generation significantly more familiar with text-based interaction.

It seems that text-based communication will not entirely replace actually talking to each other, but the way we do this will change, with 59% of workers agreeing that video-based communication will replace voice.

This too is borne out in the research with teenagers, which shows that they are just as comfortable with mobile video calls as they are with voice. As this generation enters the workplace, video calls will be second nature.
Technology will suit the needs of the user

Over two thirds (68%) of office workers agree their workplace technology is ‘one size fits all’. Historically, workplace technology has typically been chosen by the organisation, using the criteria of ‘it gets the job done’ and ‘it costs the right price’. Contrary to this, the app generation is actively looking for and using their own applications, seeing this as the ideal way to just ‘get the job done’. There’s an obvious clash here, but as IT becomes more ‘consumerised’, the trend is towards technology that is designed to suit the user as well as the organisation.

‘Work’ will be what you do, not where you go

Only a small minority believe they need to be in the office to be productive, while the vast majority can see the benefits of being able to work elsewhere. The benefits for the employee are numerous – from work life balance to reduced travel costs. But they are clear for employers too – a happier, more productive workforce.
Despite the expected growth of video and text-based communication, meeting face-to-face does not look like it has an extinction date. 84% of workers believe that face-to-face interaction will always be important in the workplace, and for teenagers, it’s their preferred way to interact with friends. Video and text-based communication will grow, but being together in the same place will always have its benefits.

The office will need to become a place that you want to be and one that enhances productivity and job satisfaction, not just somewhere you have to or need to be. Firstly, if all we need to work is a smartphone and a laptop, the concept of a desk becomes much more fluid – we don’t need a set workstation or desk or the traditional idea of what these should look like.

If the office is a place to build relationships and community, then it needs to be designed to suit those needs. This means easily accessible breakout areas and open spaces without barriers between departments and seniority levels.

Conclusion

The app generation is used to having an app for everything, but primarily they are using the mobile devices they are so comfortable with for communicating. As they enter the workplace, the app generation will only speed up the changes we are already seeing in how we work.

This truth is borne out by the fact that most current workers are relishing the prospect of young people coming into the workplace and refreshing the technology we use. We already have a workforce that wants to be more flexible and mobile, and one that communicates and collaborates through text and video. They see the ability to do this in their personal lives, and want to see it at work.

By re-thinking the way you allow employees to work, businesses will not only create a happier, more productive workforce now, but safeguard the company for the future.

ABOUT FUZE

Fuze is a global, cloud-based unified communications platform that empowers productivity and delivers insights across the enterprise by enabling simplified business voice communications, flexible video conferencing, and always-on collaboration. Formerly ThinkingPhones, Fuze allows the modern, mobile workforce to seamlessly communicate anytime, anywhere, across any device.

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