

Reeducation, Reeducation, Reeducation: Graduates in the Workplace

By Colin Stuart



As we have seen from our previous article the design of the vast majority of modern workplaces has not evolved in 120 years (see [“Why has office design not kept pace with the modern work force?”](#)). They are still designed on archaic production line principles that are not tuned to get the best out of these new graduates entering the workforce. In this article, we question whether the design of our current workplaces is getting the most the new crop of “generation Z” graduates entering our workplace?

Many modern workplaces are still designed on archaic “Taylorist” production line principles that are not tuned to get the best out of these new graduates entering the workforce. Our education system, however, has changed substantially from the early days of compulsory education in the US and Europe in the late 18th / early 19th centuries. The old fashioned rote learning of facts in a handful of basic subjects has been replaced with an environment allowing students to learn any of a large number of subjects and, by the time they reach higher education, in a very self-empowered way.

This is creating a mis-match between the high school and University graduates entering our workforce (the “product” of our education system) and the environment we put them in.

Graduates are very agile

In the UK, a primary school classroom, by necessity, is structured along the lines of the original Victorian principles. Students stay in one classroom, sat largely at the same desk each day. This works because at this young age students have not learnt the necessary social and self awareness skills to be more independent, they need structure and thrive in a very controlled environment.

However, by the end of their primary school days, at age 10, more flexibility is usually introduced with students changing classroom for one or two subjects, preparing them for what is to come. A year later, these young 11 year old students are thrust into our secondary school system. A world where they have to get themselves to the right classroom, often at different ends of the school campus, with the right books and right homework done by the right time. It doesn't take them long to adapt and very quickly they are able to cope admirably. Our future graduates, at 11 years old, have already learnt to operate in a very agile way, to be mobile, to be flexible, to have the tools they need with them, to use lockers and not expect any other personal space.

Graduates are used to managing themselves by outputs

Our exam system, it could be argued, is the ultimate expression of output management. It doesn't matter how good you are, how hard you have worked – all that matters is the grade on the exam certificate. Further, the system rewards revision and encourages the student to spend time outside of the lessons revising their subjects. This focus on outputs is further magnified when the student goes to University – does the lecturer or tutor really care if the student's essay is written at mid night or midday? Do they care if the student does the work in the library or lying on their bed – no, provided it is done by the stipulated time and to a satisfactory quality level. This is output management in its purest form!

Graduates are knowledge workers

What are our students if not knowledge workers or at least “knowledge gatherers”. Those that go on to further education are driven, to a greater or lesser extent, by the acquisition of knowledge. They have the right skills to absorb, review and learn new facts, skills and techniques, and in many cases, to question and develop this knowledge further. Further, they are generally highly skilled in IT systems and remote communication tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter et al.) and are good at interacting remotely and regularly with their peer group. All traits required in the modern knowledge based economy.

Conclusion

So, we have our graduates and high school leavers coming out of the education system and entering the workforce ready to be knowledge workers, already trained to be flexible, mobile, self-starting, able work in an agile way, able to self-manage and with a focus on outputs. Aren't these the behaviours that all current management gurus and any CEO interested in innovation and driving their companies forward want in their workforce?

And what do we do, as the older generation, when these graduates enter our domain, the modern office? We stick them at a desk, restrict their ability to communicate with their coworkers, ban them from using social networking applications and manage them by time spent at their desk not by their outputs.

- Why are we knocking all their flexibility, creativity and ability to self-motivate out of them with our management styles and restrictive work environments?
- Why are we re-educating them and stifling all that creativity and potential for innovation?
- Why are we not showing them any trust?
- Why are we treating them like 6 year olds?

No wonder they are disillusioned and more likely to move jobs than any other generation before them!

If we really want to harness the potential of these “products” of our education system our workplaces need to be tuned to use that flexibility, encourage their abilities and maximise their potential to be our future innovators. We need to manage them in a way that enhances these positive traits, empowers them as individuals and is focuses on outputs. Furthermore, and most importantly, we need to place them in workplaces specifically designed to allow this to happen.

We will look at ways we can redesign our workspaces to suit the evolving workforce in future articles – please visit our website at www.bakerstuart.com/ and subscribe to receive future articles or follow us on twitter [@bakerstuartltd](https://twitter.com/bakerstuartltd) or LinkedIn <http://www.linkedin.com/company/bakerstuart>

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About the author	 <p>Colin Stuart is a specialist in workplace and occupational strategy. He has an award winning track record in the design and delivery of workplace transformation projects. A published author and speaker with an intrinsic knowledge of the drivers of corporate clients both in the public and private sector and how property can respond to those drivers in order to deliver maximum benefit to the business he has delivered major change programmes and real estate projects in both the public and private sector</p>

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