

Survey reveals interesting insights into the lifestyles, values and attitudes of Digital Natives

There is no doubt that technology has changed the way we work. As a new generation of graduates gets ready to enter the workplace, the impact of technology has never been felt more keenly. This new generation of so-called Digital Natives has grown up with technology as an integral part of everyday life and rely on cellphones, computers and the Internet to communicate.

Digital Natives intuitively understand the digital realm and desire to be connected at all times. Mobile-connected devices have effectively become extensions of their bodies, and they cannot function without them.

The lifestyles of these Digital Natives, their pattern of behaviour and their relationship with technology all have an impact on the way that they work. The reality is that many workplaces are not suited to such a generation and will need to adapt in order to make use of these tech-savvy employees effectively, while integrating them with older workers. A study conducted in 2011 by Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Innovation revealed some interesting insights into the lifestyles, values and attitudes of the Digital Natives, which point to the changes that need to be made to the workplace to cater for this new wave of workers.

Two-stage process

"The research was conducted in Germany, the UK, the US and China in a two-stage process. First, qualitative interviews were conducted with Digital Natives and Digital Native experts to gather an understanding of lifestyle, values and use of and attitudes towards technologies. The second stage included more than 2800 respondents to a survey across all regions," explained Hannah Hahn, global workplace innovation manager of Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Solutions.

Key results from the survey were as follows:

- 73.6% "agree" to "completely agree" that new technologies are addictive
- 32.6% feel inefficient and cannot keep up with the pace of life without technologies
- 60.8% also feel cut off from their friends and miss out on a large part of their life without technologies
- 35.7% "disagree" to "strongly disagree" that new technologies put them under pressure and intimidate them
- 55.1% "agree" to "strongly agree" that without technologies they cannot keep up with life
- 59.8% of the respondents are "satisfied" to "completely satisfied" with their current workplace provisions
- 77.3% report that advanced technologies in their workplace is important to very important

One of the most important characteristics of Digital Natives is their need to be "always on" and constantly connected. This

means that mobile data traffic is critical. This generation also has the ability to multitask, which allows them to search, access and exchange data wherever they are, and to communicate quickly and efficiently across broad networks. They are able to deal with large volumes of information simultaneously and tend to work in teams to develop a collective intelligence.

Critical of equipment

"The behaviour of Digital Natives in a working environment adds complexity to the workplace and these users often criticise the low standard of general basic technological equipment, which they feel negatively impacts their productivity at work. However, both Digital Natives and older generations have a common need for a workspace that can support teamwork and if organisations can effectively encourage this generation to share knowledge with older co-workers, there are many opportunities that can be leveraged. Employers need to begin listening and understanding the behaviours of the Digital Native generation and adapting the workplace to suit their needs," said Hahn.

The survey findings uncovered the following needs:

- Increased access to technology
- Cloud computing for faster, more efficient information sharing
- Internal knowledge management to support collaboration
- A more comfortable working environment, as lines between work and private life blur
- A more sustainable working environment.

"While the survey was conducted across Europe, North America and the Far East, the reality is that the findings are highly relevant in South Africa as well. Many of the graduates entering the workplace today fit the same profile as their counterparts all over the world, and as we become increasingly globally connected, the similarities become ever more apparent. Local companies and local branches of global organisations need to take cognisance of the changing workforce and begin to adapt their working environments to meet the changing needs of their employees," said Philip Gregory, Johnson Controls' senior regional executive - Middle East & Africa.

Although many respondents to the survey indicated that they are happy with their current working environment, there are areas for improvement that have been highlighted, specifically around technology. According to the survey findings, companies should consider the following tips for adapting the workplace to the needs of this new generation of workers:

- **BYOT - Bring your own technology:** Digital Natives are comfortable bringing their personal equipment to the office, such as laptops, iPads, and smartphones.
- **Always connected:** Promote the use of light portable and mobile technologies to allow for a high level of mobility and efficiency in the workplace.
- **No loss of transition from home to work:** The smooth integration of technologies while in the office, such as WiFi access, booking systems, and 3G videoconferencing, will allow workers to transition work from the office to their homes easily.
- **Consumer technologies in the office:** Where possible, to move away from corporate IT solutions to consumer-friendly ones to take advantage of consumer technologies.
- **Social networking-friendly solutions:** Allow workers to build and maintain a social network while at work to share knowledge and foster communities.
- **Collaborative solutions:** Provide solutions that allow workers to collaborate with one another wherever they are, at any time.

"Although Digital Natives have many of the same needs as previous generations, they are different in how they approach work, communicate, and integrate technology into their daily lives. Companies will need to create a balanced working environment that attracts Digital Natives, without excluding other generations. The key to this will be to find the right blend of technologies and keep working processes simple," concluded Puybaraud.

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