

IN FOCUS

HR PEOPLE + STRATEGY'S WHITE PAPER SERIES

Purpose in Higher Education: The Emergence of the Generation Z Workforce

ABSTRACT

Generation Z is the most purpose-oriented group to ever enter the workforce. Forty-seven percent of college students are purpose-oriented, and they are raising the bar for higher education and the workplace. Employers and colleges that are able to adjust to meet these needs will likely thrive over the next few decades.

ABOUT THE PURPOSE IN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDY

Imperative conducted the *Purpose in Higher Education* study in collaboration with the University of Michigan, Grinnell College, and Seattle Pacific University, which represent public, private, faith-based, non-faith-based, large, and small institutions.

The study surveyed a representative sample of undergraduate students at all three, with 1,586 completing the survey between the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016.

ABOUT THE WORKFORCE PURPOSE INDEX

The *Purpose in Higher Education* study is built off of Imperative's Workforce Purpose Index, the first study on the state of purpose across the U.S. workforce. The index was designed in partnership with New York University to be an annual barometer of the workforce. It was developed as a resource for employers, educators, academics, and policymakers to advance our collective efforts to realize the potential of work. Our findings provide a clear business case for purpose as the way to align our priorities and objectives.

Key Findings of the Workforce Purpose Index

- » Twenty-eight percent of the workforce is purpose-oriented
- » Purpose-oriented workers are consistently the most valuable workers
- » Some industries and roles are much more effective at attracting this talent

About Workforce Orientation

Research has shown that we are wired to see work in two ways: being primarily about personal fulfillment and serving others or about status, advancement, and income.

WORK ORIENTATION IS STABLE

Work orientation cannot be explained by demographic factors like socioeconomic status, age, gender, or race, nor by environmental factors such as income, job level, or role. Two people in the same role at the same company with the same demographic profile can have distinctly different work orientations.

Work orientation is a consistent variable in a person's career. If a person begins his or her career purpose-oriented, he or she will likely remain so through retirement. This means that someone is consistently purpose-oriented, not just

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Purpose-oriented students won't wait until retirement to make a difference.

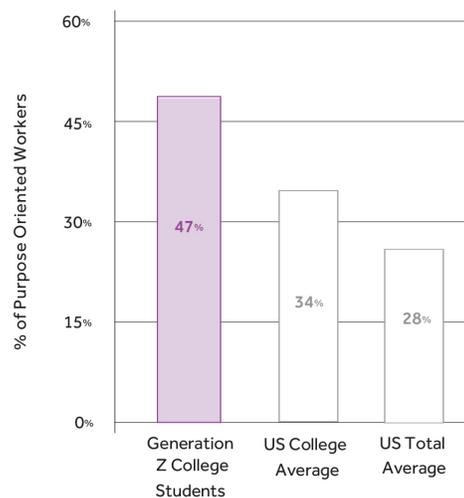
in a moment in time or in a specific situation. Purpose isn't dependent on the job, manager, or company. It is core to who the person is.

Unlike measures such as employee engagement, work orientation is a predictor of future behavior and performance since it is stable and less dependent on external variables. Because of this stability, work orientation is a valuable measure for individuals, organizations, and the entire workforce.

FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Existing Students Are More Purpose-Oriented Compared to Other Generations

Forty-seven percent of college students are purpose-oriented, which is significantly higher than college-educated members of the American workforce, which is only 34 percent. It is substantially higher than the full American workforce, which is 28 percent purpose-oriented. This is likely an indicator that Generation Z is more likely to be purpose-oriented than Millennials, Generation X, or Baby Boomers.



A New Vision for Higher Education Is Emerging

Thirty-one percent of all students expressed interest in replacing declaring a “major” with declaring a “purpose” and selecting courses based on obtaining knowledge that would help move them in that direction.

Purpose-Oriented Students Make Schools Better

Purpose-oriented students are more likely to make an impact at their school by offering support (academic and emotional) to other students, participating fully in classroom settings, and serving others in the area community.

Implications for Universities

To be attractive to employers of alumni in the future, schools should make it a priority to recruit purpose-oriented students. Furthermore, they could better tailor the students' campus experience based on their needs, including the addition of pathways of learning that are defined by purpose, rather than just academic of functional majors.

FOR EMPLOYERS

Purpose-Oriented Students Expect a Lot from Their Future Careers

Purpose-oriented students demonstrate clear differences in their approach and expectations for their careers.

- » Ninety-five percent hope to find work that is rewarding.
- » Eighty-seven percent hope to make the world a better place through their professional contributions.
- » Eighty-one percent believe that as a professional they won't consciously anticipate the weekend.

» Seventy-five percent hope work will be one of the aspects of their lives they are most passionate about

Employers Need Purpose to Recruit the Best Students

Fifty-seven percent of purpose-oriented students will make a potential employer's sense of purpose a primary selection criteria. Even among those who aren't purpose-oriented, the sense of purpose of employers matters, with 47 percent of this group so indicating.

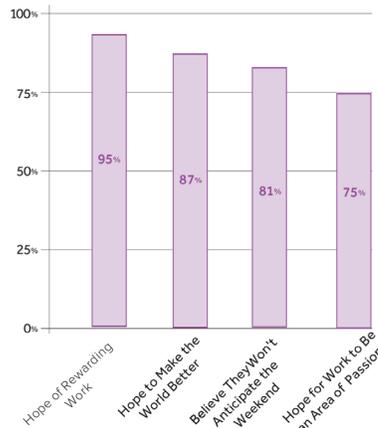
ONGOING RESEARCH

There is some evidence about what creates someone's orientation to work. We also know that given the change in the orientation of people later in their lives, it is possible to change, even if not common. Further research on both topics would reveal critical strategies for the field. It is imperative that we come to deeply understand this process so we can begin to optimize our systems and society to boost the wellbeing of people and the performance of our workforce. It will also allow people the potential to fundamentally alter their work orientation towards meaning and fulfillment. In further research we will continue to track our collective progress in transforming the workforce and workplace and also look to further understand the path of purpose-oriented workers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Sell Purpose, Not Pay

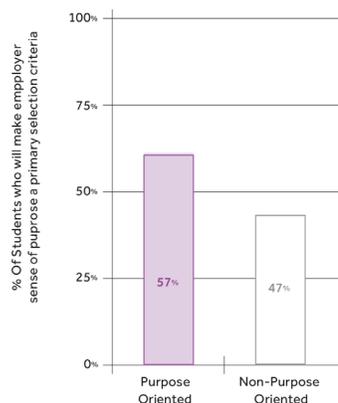
Only 28 percent of students reported that their primary reason for work in their life is financial. Sixty-four percent of students went so far as to say they would still work even if they didn't need the money and only 12 percent report wanting to retire early. What they report



wanting is rewarding work that is meaningful and makes an impact. To be attractive to Generation Z candidates, the message should be about how they will make an impact, grow and build deep relationships.

Anticipate and Design for Turnover

Generation Z sees work as very fluid and don't expect to stay in one job for very long. Eighty-two percent of students expect to be in a different job within three years of graduation. Rather than fight this trend, employers should consider redesigning their workforce around what LinkedIn's Reid Hoffman calls "Tours of Duty" that proactively anticipate the change.



Nearly a third of college students would rather declare a "purpose" than a major.

Engage Their Network

Generation Z are very likely to engage their support network in their work. They see fewer boundaries between work and life (71 percent expect to take their work home with them) and rely heavily on their parents and friends for career-related support. This can be a real asset to employers as it lessens the employee support required by the organization and also brings additional insights and connections. ■■

Aaron Hurst is the CEO of Imperative, a technology platform that enables people to discover, connect, and act on what gives them purpose in their work. A globally recognized entrepreneur, Aaron is a close advisor to many global brands and frequent speaker and writer on the development of the purpose economy. He is the founder and an active advisor to the Taproot Foundation

where he was the catalyst and lead architect of the \$15 billion pro bono service market. He was the creative force behind the conception of the national Billion + Change campaign. Previously he worked in Silicon Valley developing the precursors to social media. He is also the author of *The Purpose Economy: How Your Desire for Impact, Personal Growth and Community Is Changing the World*. Learn more at purposeeconomy.com.

Imperative is a B Corp advocating for purpose-oriented workers and supporting organizations that embrace them. Learn more at imperative.com.

Acknowledgements

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