

U.S. Memo

Date: January 30, 2020
To: Express Employment Professionals
From: The Harris Poll
Subject: Education Revolution Study – United States

The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between December 5 and December 30, 2019 among 1,206 U.S. employees (defined as adults ages 18+ in the U.S. who are employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed and have at least a high school degree). Figures are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, income, marital status, employment, household size, and propensity to be online to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

Most US employees agree a new approach to education is necessary as the current education system does not adequately prepare students for the workforce.

Nearly 9 in 10 employees (87%) agree an education revolution (i.e., a whole new approach to education, skills training, and learning) is needed to better prepare people for the workforce, with 2 in 5 (40%) *strongly* agreeing with this sentiment. And, this idea is shared across generations as overwhelming majorities of US employees agree with this statement regardless of their age (Gen Z, 82%; Millennials, 86%; Gen X, 90%; Boomers/Seniors, 88%). Perhaps this is due to perceived disconnects between education and the real world as less than half of US employees (46%) believe schools are doing a good job of preparing the next generation of workers for what the needs are after school. Further, 4 in 5 say schools are not preparing students with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace (80%) or that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the workforce (80%).

Despite a strong consensus that job experience is helpful in preparing employees for the workforce, many employees enter the workforce ill-prepared without having participated in any work experience programs.

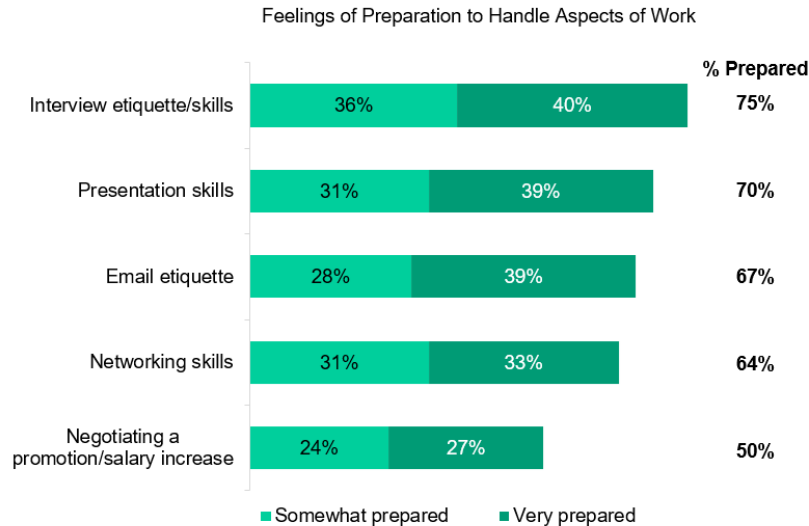
Although the majority of US employees (73%) say they felt prepared entering the workforce after their highest level of education, only 28% felt *very* prepared. Most (85%) believe getting a degree should require on the job experience, not just coursework. However, close to half of employees (45%) say they did *not* participate in a work experience program like internships, shadowing, apprenticeships, or co-op placements during school. Of those who participated in a work experience program, most (87%) feel it helped prepare them for the workforce. For those who didn't participate in a work experience program, 4 in 5 (80%) believe participating in a work experience would have been helpful in preparing them for the workforce.

- Notably, those who participated in a work experience program when they were in school are twice as likely as those who did not to say they felt *very* prepared entering the workforce (36% vs. 18%).

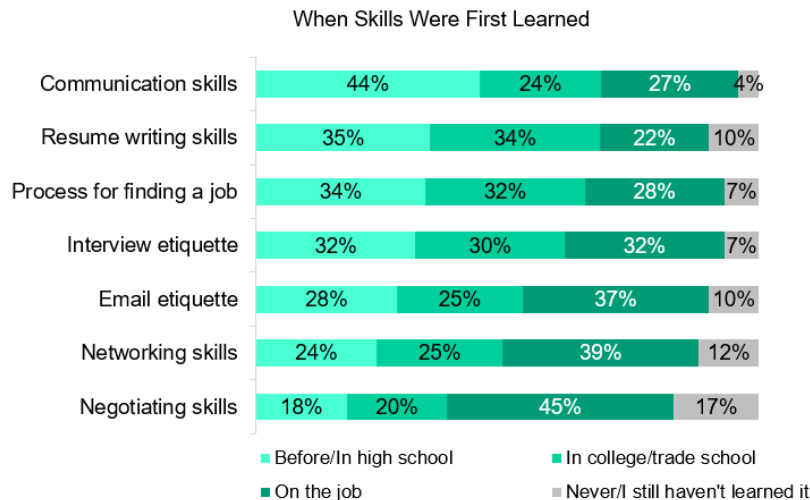
The majority of US employees wish that they had more exposure to the world of work while they were in school (87%) or that they had been better prepared to deal with the transition from school to the workforce (79%). Most employees agree that colleges place more emphasis on grades than on preparing workers for a job (84%) or that society makes it seem like college is the only choice when in reality it isn't preparing workers for the real world (81%). Further highlighting the value of job experience during school, more than 4 in 5 (83%) agree job training certifications do a better job of preparing people for the workforce than college does.

Schools fail to focus on the skills needed to find a job and be successful in the workplace.

After entering the workforce following completion of their highest level of education, the majority of US employees say they felt prepared to handle various aspects of work; however, only 2 in 5 or fewer say they felt *very* prepared to handle these aspects.



While around 1 in 3 report learning many of these skills before or in high school, a significant proportion say they didn't learn these skills until they were on the job, with some even admitting they still haven't learned them.



Given that many US employees do not learn key skills until they are on the job, perhaps it is not surprising that around half wish their high school would've taught networking skills (51%) or offered interviewing tips/practice sessions (50%). In addition, over half (56%) wish their high school would've taught them how to handle real-life workplace situations (e.g., disagreements with colleagues, etc.).

Advanced degrees may be helpful to US employees' career paths, but many believe career success takes skills beyond those taught in school.

Although the majority of US employees (83%) say their education has been useful to their career, only 18% say it has been *absolutely essential*. In fact, more than 3 in 5 (61%) agree an education isn't actually necessary to be successful in their job and nearly 1 in 3 (30%) say their education did *not* provide them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. And, a similar proportion (34%) say they could have gotten their job without the education that they have.

Still, US employees appear to equate a college degree with success as 7 in 10 (70%) agree getting any degree is better than no degree at all. Further, nearly 2 in 3 say that four-year colleges are the best avenue to career success (64%) or that a high school degree is not enough to be successful in America (63%), with nearly 3 in 4 Millennials (72%) agreeing that a high school diploma is not enough. And, more than 2 in 3 (68%) say in ten years, advanced degrees (e.g., master's degree) will be the new minimum requirement for many jobs. While degrees seem to be perceived as useful, 3 in 4 (75%) believe educational institutions give students false hope about climbing the career ladder quickly after school and more than 4 in 5 (84%) say it takes skills not typically taught in school to get a job.

The current school curriculum is misaligned with career needs as few use their education daily in their current job.

The majority of US employees (67%) say they are working in the same field/profession in which they received their degrees or certifications. Still, only around 1 in 3 (35%) say they use *a lot* of their education in their current job, while 65% say they use a little or none at all. More than 3 in 4 (77%) agree that most of what they do day to day at their job, they never learned in school.

- Notably, employees whose highest level of education is a job-specific training program are just as likely as those with a bachelor's degree to say:
 - Their education was *absolutely essential* to their career (23% vs. 22%)
 - They use *a lot* of their education in their current job (42% vs. 43%)
 - They could *not* have gotten their job without the education that they have (70% vs. 74%)

Among those who are not working in a profession in which they received their degrees or certifications, the most common reasons for this are: "the field that I went to school in has very little jobs available to apply for", "I can make more money in my current field compared to the field I have certification for", and "disliked the profession in the working world".

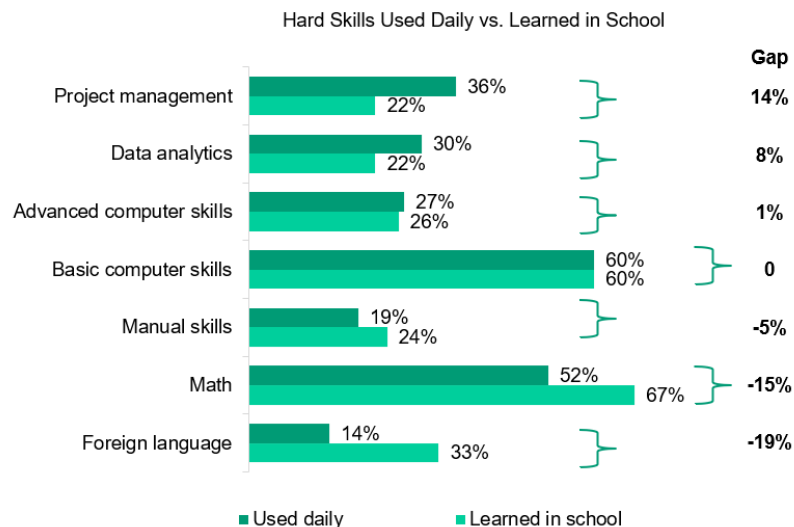
Specific resources that employees most commonly cite as having been offered in high school or college to help them find their career path include job fairs attended by potential employers (33%), access to a career center (30%), or sessions with a career counselor (28%). Fewer report access to job readiness programs (22%) or being offered a predictive test that said what job would be good for them (22%). More than 9 in 10 (92%) agree there needs to be more of a balance in education to match learning to actual career options.

A gap exists between the skills and subjects taught in school and those that employees perceive as important or use daily at work, leading many to feel the education system hasn't caught up with the skills needed for today's workforce.

Thinking about success in the workplace, around half of US employees (56%) say that hard and soft skills are equally important. About 1 in 4 (26%) say hard skills are more important than soft skills, while 18% place the importance on soft skills. This varies by generation, as older employees are the most likely to say that soft skills and hard skills are *equally important* to a worker's success in today's workplace, while younger employees are the most likely to say soft skills are more important.

- Equally as important: (Gen Z, 49%; Millennials, 51%; Gen X, 59%; Boomers/Seniors, 64%)
- Soft skills more important: (Gen Z, 24%; Millennials, 21%; Gen X, 17%; Boomers/Seniors, 12%)

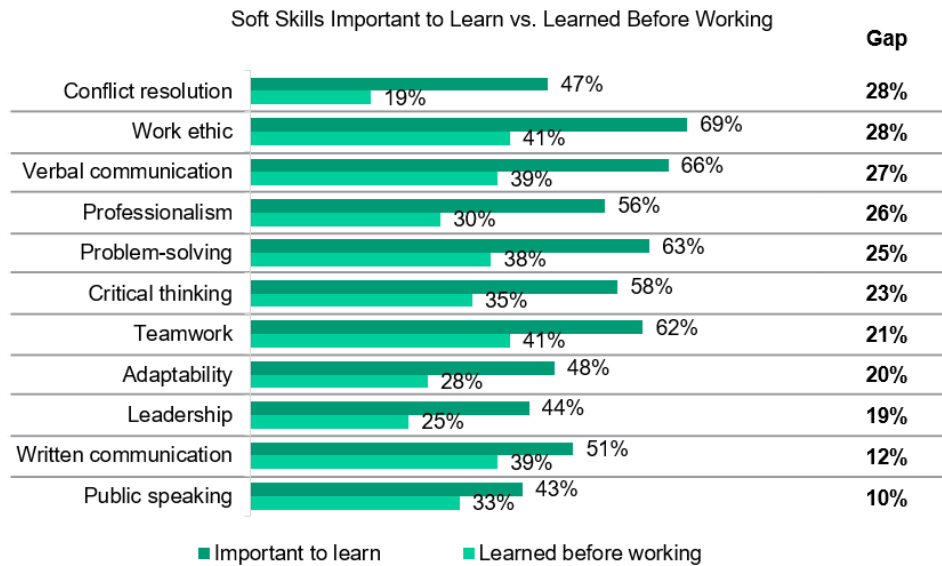
Despite using various hard skills daily at work, few report learning these hard skills in school, with the exception of math and basic computer skills (e.g., typing, word processing, etc.). Skills like foreign language and math are more commonly learned in school but not used on the job; meanwhile, employees say they use skills like project management and data analytics at work daily but did not learn them in school.



About 4 in 5 agree employees in general must refresh their hard skills to stay competitive in the workforce (84%) or say it's important for workers *in their field* to continually refresh their hard skills (78%).

When thinking about common school subjects applied in the workplace, English (e.g., spelling, grammar) (58%) and Math (57%) are by far the most commonly reported subjects used in daily activities at work, while far fewer employees say they use Art (9%), Political Science (8%), or Religion (6%) in their daily work. Perhaps that is why many employees say subjects like Religion (38%), Art (36%), or Physical Education (30%) are *useless* in preparing most students for the workforce.

On the other hand, around half or more US employees say various soft skills are important to learn before entering the workforce, yet far fewer report actually having learned them.



Notably, 2 in 3 (66%) say verbal communication is important to learn before entering the workforce but much fewer (39%) say they actually learned it in school. In fact, more than 1 in 4 (27%) say they did not first learn communication skills until they were on the job. Given the wide gaps between soft skills viewed as important and those actually learned before entering the workforce, it's no surprise that more than 3 in 4 US employees (77%) agree the education system hasn't caught up with what skills are needed for today's workplace. This may in part be due to an idea shared by nearly 3 in 4 (74%) that schools have limited resources to prepare students for the workforce.

Most report lacking education on financial topics and wish their high school would have taught skills like budgeting or filing taxes.

The vast majority (87%) agree teaching basic economic skills (e.g., budgeting, managing finances) are lacking in schools today. While 2 in 3 (67%) felt prepared to budget their paycheck after their highest level of education, only 36% felt very prepared for this. Following this sentiment, more than 3 in 5 (61%) wish their high school would've taught money management to better prepare them for the workforce. Only 34% first learned basic personal finance before or in high school, while another third (33%) did not learn it until they were on the job. For taxes, half (51%) first learned how to fill out a W-2 form on the job, and a similar proportion (47%) wish their high school would've taught them about filing taxes.

Many view college and advanced degrees as worth the extra cost and time they take, though most say they aren't necessary to make a good living.

When considering who should bear the financial burden of a college education, there is no one clear responsible party. Two in 5 (40%) believe the student should be responsible for paying for their college education, 28% say this burden should rest with their parents/family members, and nearly the same proportion (27%) say the government. Notably, views on this diverge across generations, with Gen Z the most likely to say government should pay for college while Boomers/Seniors are the most likely to cite the student.

- Government: (Gen Z, 54%; Millennials, 32%; Gen X, 23%; Boomers/Seniors, 14%)
- The student: (Gen Z, 26%; Millennials, 33%; Gen X, 43%; Boomers/Seniors, 52%)

In addition, the overwhelming majority (94%) say they had a job while attending school, with most (74%) saying this was a full-time job. Notably, 63% of Boomers/Seniors, 74% of Gen X, and 80% of Millennials who went to college had a full-time job while they were in school, indicating this trend is only increasing with recent generations.

Two in 3 US employees agree a college degree is worth the cost (66%) or advanced degrees are worth the cost (65%), with Gen Z the least likely generation to agree with these statements. Still, nearly 7 in 10 (69%) agree you don't need a degree to make a good living. While it's unclear if the price of higher education is worth it, these financial costs may pose a barrier for some. Among those who have not returned to school after entering the workforce, the most commonly reported reason for not going back is that it is too expensive (42%).

About 3 in 4 US employees agree a college degree is worth the extra time it takes (78%) or advanced degrees are worth the extra time (72%). Among those who have not gone back to school after beginning their career, 40% say it is because they don't have the time. Still, the extra cost and time degrees take are top of mind as nearly 7 in 10 (69%) believe getting a degree in your area of interest is not worth it if there aren't good career options available.

The value of refreshing or upgrading skills is clear, with many saying continual learning will be essential to success in the future workforce. However, participation in opportunities for employees to upgrade their skills is reportedly less common, which may point to why few feel very prepared for jobs of the future.

One in 3 US employees (33%) have returned to school after entering the workforce and although another 41% have considered it, the majority (67%) have not returned to school. Among those who have returned to school, the most commonly cited reason for going back to school is thinking it would lead to salary increases (39%). This is followed by it being required to advance at a job (35%), to refresh existing skills (29%), or to change careers entirely (26%). Returning to school may have value as among those who have returned to school, 3 in 5 (60%) say it was absolutely critical or very helpful to their career, with another 27% saying it was somewhat helpful. Still, only slightly more than half (57%) have ever completed courses or programs outside of an official college degree program to upgrade their skills for their job, with another 1 in 5 (21%) saying they have not but have considered it.

When it comes to employer-sponsored education, around 2 in 5 US employees (42%) report their employer currently offers courses or programs to help workers expand or upgrade their skills, while close to half (49%) say their employer does not offer these, and 10% are not sure. Further, nearly 2 in 5 (38%) say their employer does *not* offer employees any opportunities for skill improvement (e.g., sponsoring training certificates, paying for additional education, etc.).

Nearly 4 in 5 (79%) agree anyone who doesn't continue to learn in their career (e.g., staying up to date on new techniques, advancements, etc.) will be left behind in the workforce. Among those who have not gone back to school after entering the workforce, most (79%) think it would be useful, and few (24%) say the reason they have not gone back to school is because they have already acquired the necessary degrees or certifications for their career.

Nearly 3 in 4 US employees (73%) say they feel prepared for jobs of the future, however, few (23%) say they feel *very* prepared. Still, only around half or less say they are knowledgeable about certain areas that may become increasingly common in future work, and less than 1 in 5 feel *very* knowledgeable about any of these areas.

