

HR Professionals and Higher Ed Instructors Review Hybrid Courses and Interdisciplinary Job Requirements Relating to Generation Z and Work-Life Balance

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This study focuses on Generation Z employees and students. Within the contents this project reviews the limitations of jobs that can be conducted virtually and those that cannot. What the author considered was the variations between generations that can influence the way organizations recruit and develop work teams. Human Resource professionals are dealing with such generational differences because they must constantly deal with change, motivation, technology and the leadership of employees. While life-work balance varies among the generations making HR an important factor in human relations and seeking out what employees can offer an organization beside of their specialty such as soft skills.

Higher education professionals need to keep abreast of the HR managers' needs of how a broader range of skills are required along with the fact companies are in a technology driven environment whereby these professionals expect employees to be equipped to completely utilize the power of technologies needed within the workplace. Higher education curriculum construction professionals will be hard pressed if not prepared and willing to realize job hybridization is here to stay and not going away. Included in the study is how soft skills merge into job skills and HR managers job requirements have become interdisciplinary.

Keywords: interdisciplinary, soft skills, hybrid jobs, hybrid classes

INTRODUCTION

Two Gen Y staff members employed by a medium-sized company happen to meet in the train station saying:

I don't know what you think Amy, but since the pandemic, I have had a change of heart about coming to the office every day. What I mean is that some jobs can be conducted out of the office and those that need to be onsite.

Funny you should mention that Mike, me, and my husband talked about that last night. My husband is a technology person who can help his company that conducts business in five states, including three overseas locations all outside the office.

Mike: Well Amy, the components of my job responsibilities are data input, tracking shipments, electronically communicating with suppliers customers, while taking on the role of leader for the two production areas that report to me.

Amy: Yes, Mike, I have a comparable situation, parts of my day are on the computer while other parts of my day I need to be in the operations areas. When all is said and done, there would be times I could work at home or anywhere from half a day once a week or on some rare occasions when I am sick. You know how tough it was during the Pandemic to get things done. That is not to say I would not be opposed to some occasions an employee might spend some time working from home, but not constantly.

Mike: You know Gen Z has a different mindset such as work life balance.

Amy: Of course, I remember, times when there were just a small number of employees on site making it difficult to keep orders going out on time and lasting for over a year. I agree we should mention this at our next managers' meeting with HR. In addition, we need to mention how jobs require more skill sets.

This is a study of the issues Human Resource Professional are dealing with such as generational differences. Within the labor market, four generations are currently working: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. This study will focus on the Z generation. It must be considered that the variations between generations can influence the way organizations recruit and develop teams. In addition, HR professionals must constantly deal with change, motivation, technology, and leading employees. All of which leads to boosting productivity, staying abreast of competition, and attaining effective customer service (Bejtkovsky, Jiri, 2016)

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is work-life balance? According to (Eikhof, D.R., Warhurst, C., and Haunschild, A. 2007). Work-life balance boils down to people with too much work rather than too little work. What these amounts to is debilitating long working hours having influences on life. This influences one's spirit and body and leaves scars on their psychic and physical being. In turn all these components are eventually brought to one's home.

As with work-life balance has different meanings to employees depending on organizational culture and generation the employee is part of. In today's organizations employees are comfortable requesting adjustments in their work schedules. In some sectors, employees own their work schedules, resulting in improved work-life balance. When organizations encourage employees to openly discuss flexible working arrangements that measure up to the company's needs, production morale, and employee engagement increase (Koster, 2013).

There is an indication that employees are not seeking to reduce working hours but to provide more flexibility in their working hours, such as working from home when not needed at the office. These flexible arrangements exemplify how working arrangements have a common balance to benefit employee and employer. This indicates that an employee who engages in a lifework balancing arrangement can experience greater job satisfaction (Eikof, D. R., Warhurst, C., Haunschild, 2007).

Before long, it will become necessary to realize flexible work conditions will redefine the expectations of managers and employees, which will affect rules, working conditions and should employees work at home or come to the office. In addition, organizations must rethink having technology in their offices for employees to interact in person and for those working at home to take an active part in meetings. If a specialized team needs to convene, and all members cannot attend in person, there needs to be an alternate technology with remote linking for those working at home or other locations (Glazer, E., Cutter, C., 2021).

Generation Z is resisting going back to the office five days a week. Employers who want to see their offices and desks occupied need to be aware that sixty-four percent of employees worldwide are likely to be thinking about seeking employment elsewhere if they must return to the office full-time. ADP conducted a survey finding Generation Z workers are especially inclined to quit their job, rather than returning to the office setting.

The ADP Research Institute conducted another newer survey in 2022 of the global workforces to find that 71% of 18- to 24-year-olds claim that if their employer insisted they return to their workplace full-time, they would look for other employment. Overall, ADP's survey indicated 64% of the workforce would seek other employment if forced to return to an office setting full-time. The survey was distributed in the US, India, and the Netherlands (Steinberg, 2023).

These findings indicate workers want more flexibility in work hours and location preference. In addition, depending on the employees' needs, it is workers may not want to commute to an office every day to an office and will accept a reduction in wages. It is going to be up to be aware in making sure they provide similar experiences and employee promotion paths (Hoff, Madison, 2022).

Unsurprisingly, many companies across all types of industries have come to grips with considering work from home, acknowledging virtual work is here to stay and having developed hybrid work models. HR managers will have to assist managers and supervisors in how to achieve company goals in new ways, and ensure their employees' satisfaction, because in person work environments may no longer be effective. Remote or hybrid workers are more independent, and it is difficult for supervisors to micromanage due to employees not commuting and allowing them to work at their own pace. HR managers need to develop site workday standards for remote and hybrid employees to control the days and times when these employees must be in the office. What needs to be kept in mind when hiring new employees is the distance from the office, travel time, method of transportation, and do they have the flexibility to come to the office when needed. And these specifics need to be documented at the time of onboarding or reassigning current employees to hybrid or remote assignments (Smith, & Chaker, 2024)

HR managers and those involved in higher education deal with multiple generations whereby Baby Boomers prefer going to the office, while Generation Z chooses to work remotely in a hybrid mode and would quit their job if going to the office becomes mandatory. It seems age influences work modality such as, employees over the age of 59 represent 37% of those who prefer a five-day work week at the office. That said, only 20% of employees under the age of 35 prefer working on-site. Interestingly, females, parents, and people of color lean towards hybrid working conditions, while 42% of managers want to see their employees (Bergeron, 2023).

Thus far the indication is that Generation Z preferences are causing employers to have no choice but to accommodate the Z's wants and needs. The workplace of the not-too-distant future will be looking different with the Z generation work environment is becoming clear they want to remain hybrid. We researchers are beginning to believe that higher education will and must consider hybrid and online classes a sign of the future. The upsides of hybrid being seriously considered include allowing for a more diverse range of employees, reducing an organization's carbon footprint, and saving the high costs of work area spaces. Gen Z is expressing that out of three workers, two lean toward the benefits of a hybrid workplace that benefits mental health and wellness. They believe their mental health plays an important role in their physical health by cutting down on stressors caused within the workplace. From an educational point of view, students in hybrid or online courses can work at their own pace, resulting in a reduced-stress environment (Iovacchini, Nick, 2021).

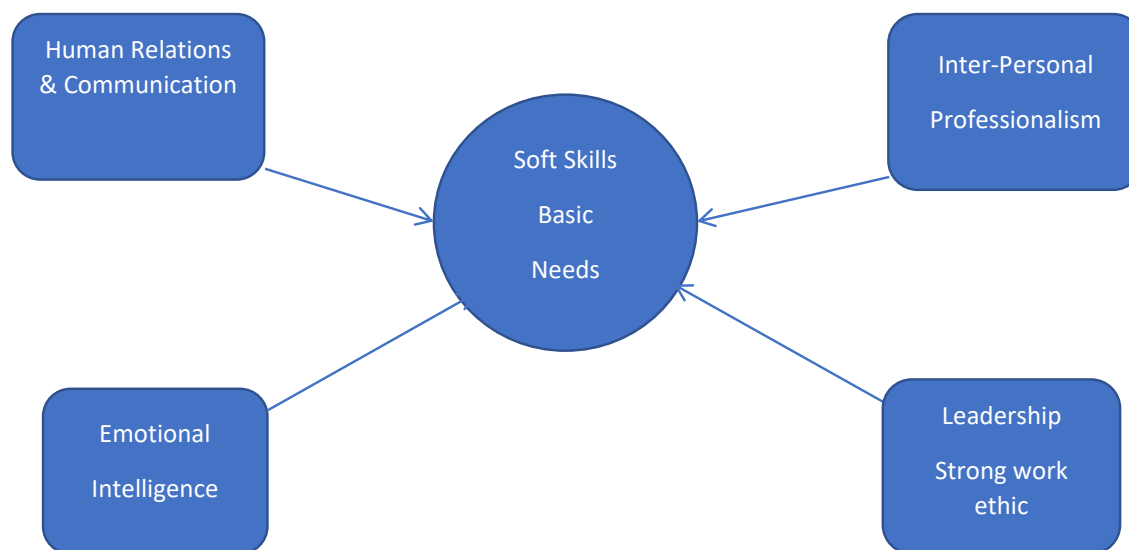
Looking at some or the most recent job markets such as 2009 a great recession, 2020 the pandemic, and the most recent job market is lucrative while the Gen Z is not taking advantage of the opportunities out there. Yes, the job market is always fluctuating, the reality is the jobs that are hired do not require a degree with lower compensation. According to Hoff and Kaplan, (2022), most open jobs are in business services, health care, education transportation, utilities, trade, leisure, and hospitality, where 41.4 % of recent graduates are employed. In addition, Gen Zs is leaning towards hybrid jobs they have become accustomed to in classrooms.

Higher education professionals need to keep up with HR managers' needs such as; employees with a broader range of skills. We are in a technology driven environment whereby HR professionals expect employees to be equipped with the skills needed to completely utilize the power of technologies used in the workplace. The workplace has become dependent on the ever-advancing of technology. Jobs are now becoming increasingly complex, requiring a wider range of skill sets way beyond traditionally accepted skills, that has led to the growth of hybrid jobs. Higher education professionals will be hard--pressed if unprepared and willing to realize job hybridization is here and not going away anytime soon. Educators need to adapt to the various learning modalities and development approaches where skills will overlap and become interdisciplinary. Being proficient in a discipline is no longer good enough (Mandloi, Rajeev, 2020).

The skills required for hybrid jobs are not necessarily new. However, what is new is the merging of skill sets not formerly learned in tandem? For the most part, those in higher ed teach most of the required skills. That said, the drawback is most students at the college level are taught vertically, such as, learning a discipline as if that discipline was isolated from others, rather than linking a discipline with others. To clear this up, most educators use the term hybrid as flipping the class, using technology one class period and students coming to class another class period. In the not-too-distant future, the term hybrid will mean teaching any discipline with a hybrid approach and delivered from an interdisciplinary point of view and outside the box (Weber, 2019).

Figure 1 illustrates how soft skills merge to become interdisciplinary as job skills:

FIGURE 1
SOFT SKILLS MERGE INTO JOB SKILLS



Source: Mosca, Joseph, Ball, Danial, 2023
Journal of Business Diversity Vol. 23(1) 2023

The current workplace environment indicates that education needs to adopt teaching approaches that are interdisciplinary by incorporating various disciplines and utilizing the hybrid approach to teaching. Suppose online lessons were designed to encompass instructional lesson plans that are comprehensively constructed and fit for online learning. In that case, class time can and should be used for students engaging in problem solving activities or site visits relating to their major studies. In addition, these site visits should be video available to class members as the site visit activity is taking place. Higher Ed professionals need to come to grips with the evolution of how teaching modalities need to keep up with technological advancements and how generations such as the Zs want to learn (Westrope, A., 2021). Tomorrow, the

successful Gen Z employee of tomorrow must merge traditional soft skills such as collaboration, leadership, interpersonal, and human relations with technological and hard skills. Schools who are keeping up to date are exploring creative ways to merge liberal arts with professional and technical skills. Therefore, incorporating various teaching modalities, student engagement, and combining experiences in the workplace through an interdisciplinary perspective are the changes required to accomplish the changes, challenges, and innovations leading to economic growth (PR News, 2015).

Mosca, J., and Ball, D. (2023). surveyed to analyze soft skills acquired by students by didelphine. The analysis of these survey results revealed areas of program success as well as opportunities for improvement. These results can be used to help educators make program modifications that will better prepare graduates for success in the marketplace. Table 1:

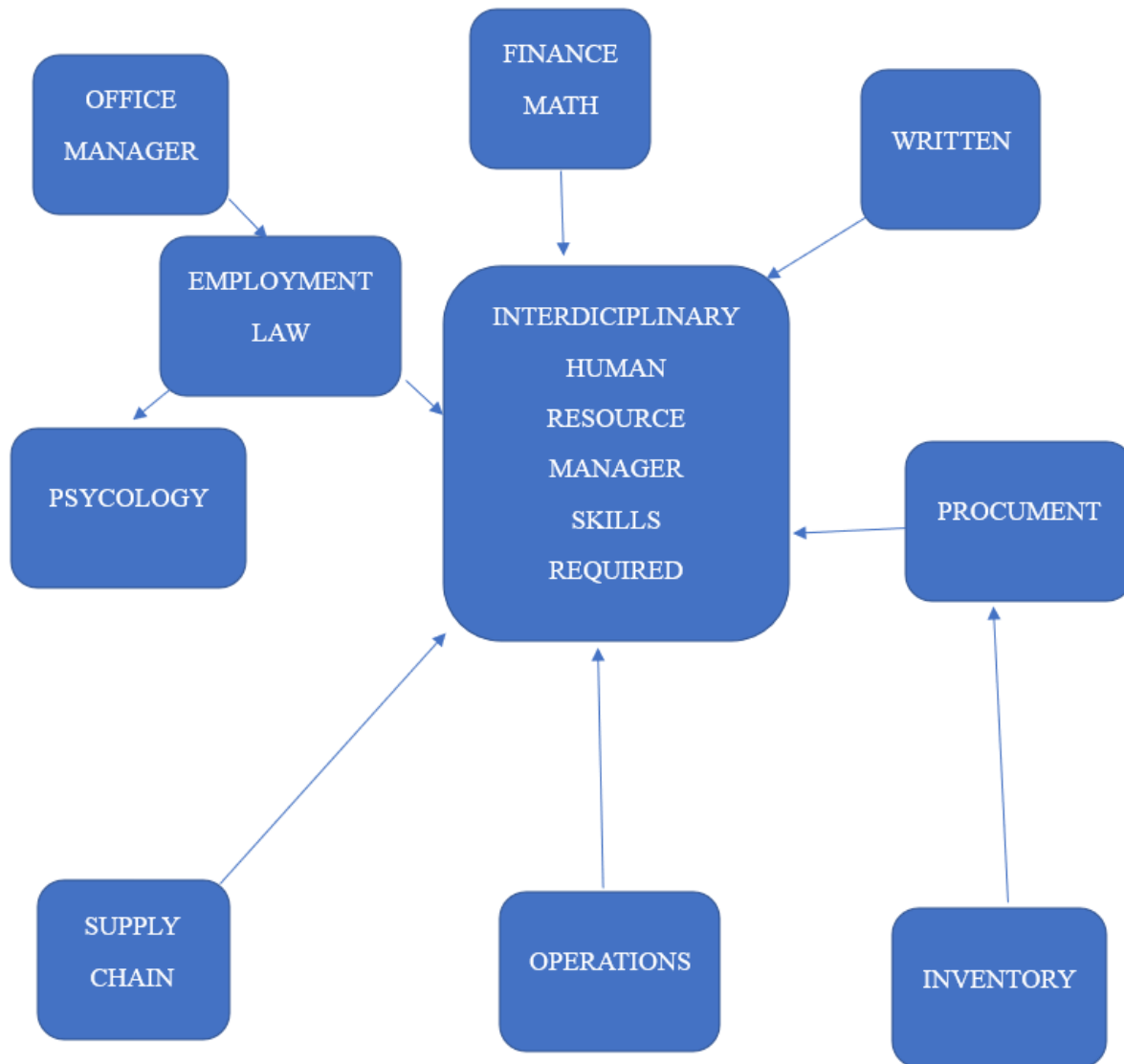
TABLE 1
STUDENT SURVEY OF JOB SKILLS RESULTS

Concentration	Response	Problem Solving	Critical Thinking	Time Maintenance	Leadership	Team Building	Emotional Intelligence	Human Relations	Human Resource Management	Multidisciplinary Background	Collaboration
Accounting	Yes	66.7% (6)	66.7% (6)	33.3% (3)	33.3% (3)	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	44.4% (4)
	Partially	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	11.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	33.3% (3)	11.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	0.0% (0)
	No Instruction	11.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	66.7% (6)	66.7% (6)	66.7% (6)	77.8% (7)	55.6% (5)	66.7% (6)	77.8% (7)	55.6% (5)
Management	Yes	83.3% (25)	83.3% (25)	53.3% (16)	80.0% (24)	66.7% (20)	20.7% (6)	63.3% (19)	70.0% (21)	20.0% (6)	70.0% (21)
	Partially	16.7% (5)	16.7% (5)	43.3% (13)	20.0% (6)	26.7% (8)	51.7% (15)	26.7% (8)	23.3% (7)	53.3% (16)	26.7% (8)
	No Instruction	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)	27.6% (8)	10.0% (3)	6.7% (2)	26.7% (8)	3.3% (1)
Marketing	Yes	53.8% (7)	76.9% (10)	53.8% (7)	53.8% (7)	53.8% (7)	15.4% (2)	30.8% (4)	16.7% (2)	41.7% (5)	58.3% (7)
	Partially	30.8% (4)	23.1% (3)	38.5% (5)	38.5% (5)	46.2% (6)	30.8% (4)	61.5% (8)	41.7% (5)	25.0% (3)	33.3% (4)
	No Instruction	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	53.8% (7)	7.7% (1)	41.7% (5)	33.3% (4)	8.3% (1)
Management & Marketing	Yes	88.9% (8)	88.9% (8)	44.4% (4)	55.6% (5)	44.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	33.3% (3)	33.3% (3)	11.1% (1)	55.6% (5)
	Partially	0.0% (0)	11.1% (1)	33.3% (3)	33.3% (3)	33.3% (3)	55.6% (5)	55.6% (6)	44.4% (4)	66.7% (6)	33.3% (3)
	No Instruction	11.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	44.4% (4)	11.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)
Finance / Economics / Real Estate	Yes	75.0% (15)	70.0% (14)	30.0% (6)	30.0% (6)	40.0% (8)	25.0% (5)	20.0% (4)	15.8% (3)	5.3% (1)	47.4% (9)
	Partially	20.0% (4)	30.0% (6)	30.0% (6)	35.0% (7)	30.0% (6)	10.0% (2)	55.0% (11)	36.8% (7)	21.1% (4)	21.1% (4)
	No Instruction	5.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	40.0% (8)	35.0% (7)	30.0% (6)	65.0% (13)	25.0% (5)	47.4% (9)	73.7% (14)	31.6% (6)
Business (Undeclared)	Yes	66.7% (10)	60.0% (9)	40.0% (6)	60.0% (9)	46.7% (7)	26.7% (4)	66.7% (10)	50.0% (7)	28.6% (4)	42.9% (6)
	Partially	26.7% (4)	33.3% (5)	46.7% (7)	13.3% (2)	46.7% (7)	40.0% (6)	33.3% (5)	35.7% (5)	42.9% (6)	57.1% (8)
	No Instruction	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)	13.3% (2)	26.7% (4)	6.7% (1)	33.3% (5)	0.0% (0)	14.3% (2)	28.6% (4)	0.0% (0)
Non-Business	Yes	62.5% (5)	100.0% (8)	50.0% (4)	50.0% (4)	75.0% (6)	50.0% (4)	37.5% (3)	25.0% (2)	37.5% (3)	75.0% (6)
	Partially	37.5% (3)	0.0% (0)	37.5% (3)	25.0% (2)	12.5% (1)	37.5% (3)	50.0% (4)	25.0% (2)	25.0% (2)	0.0% (0)
	No Instruction	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	25.0% (2)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	50.0% (4)	37.5% (3)	25.0% (2)

The ever-advancing education environment must be abreast of rapid changes parallel with the increased dependence on technology including the evolving instructional methods employed by instructors. These components of keeping up are paramount to meet the unique educational needs of students entering the workplace. Therefore, infrastructure within the educational environment decision-making will have to change, such as, dealing with in-person classes, hybrid, and totally online. This indicates that in-person classes are popular, hybrid and online courses are becoming decision factors for students choosing a college or university. Keeping in mind that Gen Z students want an education to focus on their holistic development, in other words, a hybrid approach (PR Newswire, 2015 & 2022).

Figure 2 is an example of a Human Resource Manager's job requirements from an Interdisciplinary Skills point of view:

FIGURE 2
JOBS BECOMING INTERDISCIPLINARY



METHODOLOGY

Five questions were distributed to 140 students enrolled in senior-level Business courses. Of the 140 students, 133 responded. The questions are illustrated in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6.

Survey Results

- 99% reported the work-life balance was important for GenZ
- 90% reported hybrid courses to provide opportunities for internships and part-time employment.
- 98% reported hybrid and online courses provide more flexibility to schedule classes.
- 88% reported hybrid and online courses allow them to take an extra course when needed.

Survey Results

FIGURE 3
WORK-LIFE BALANCE

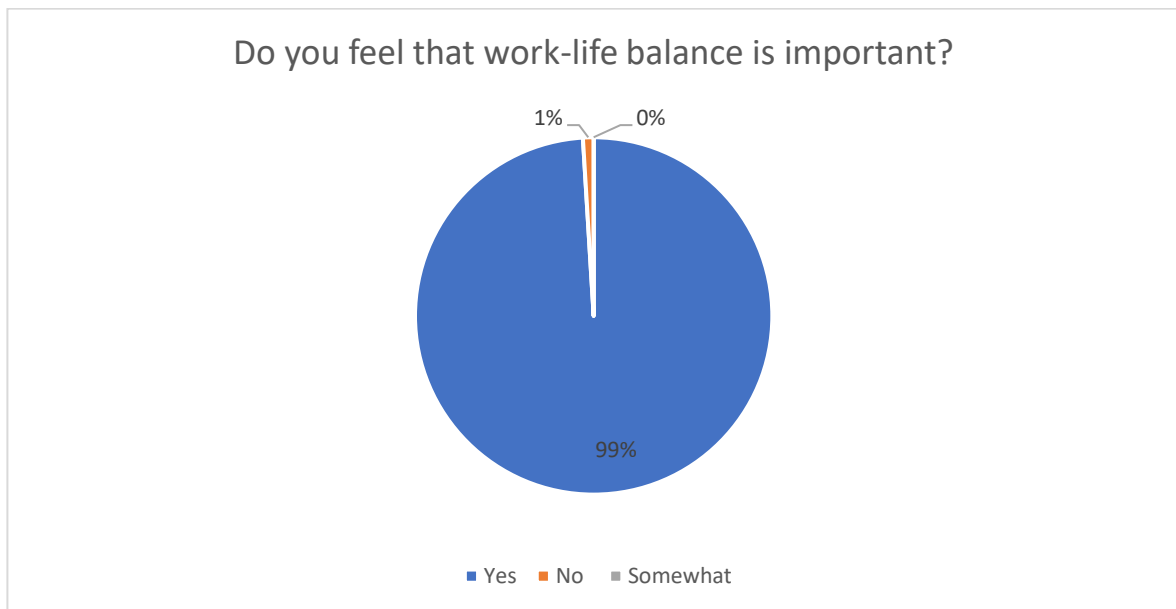


FIGURE 4
HYBRID CLASSES

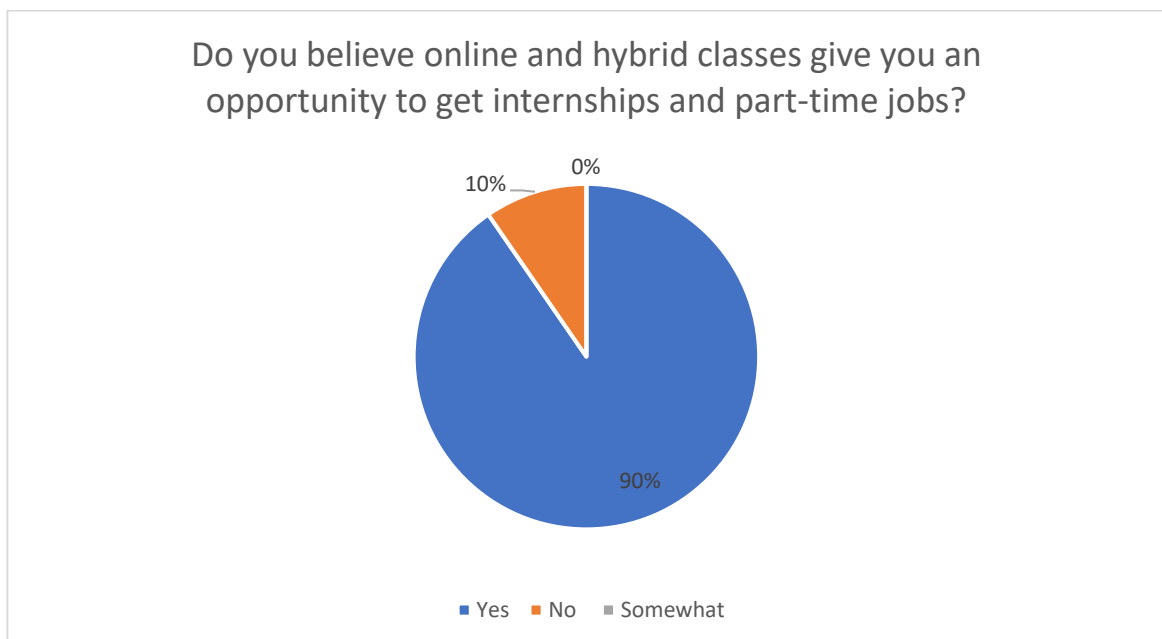


FIGURE 5
FLEXIBILITY

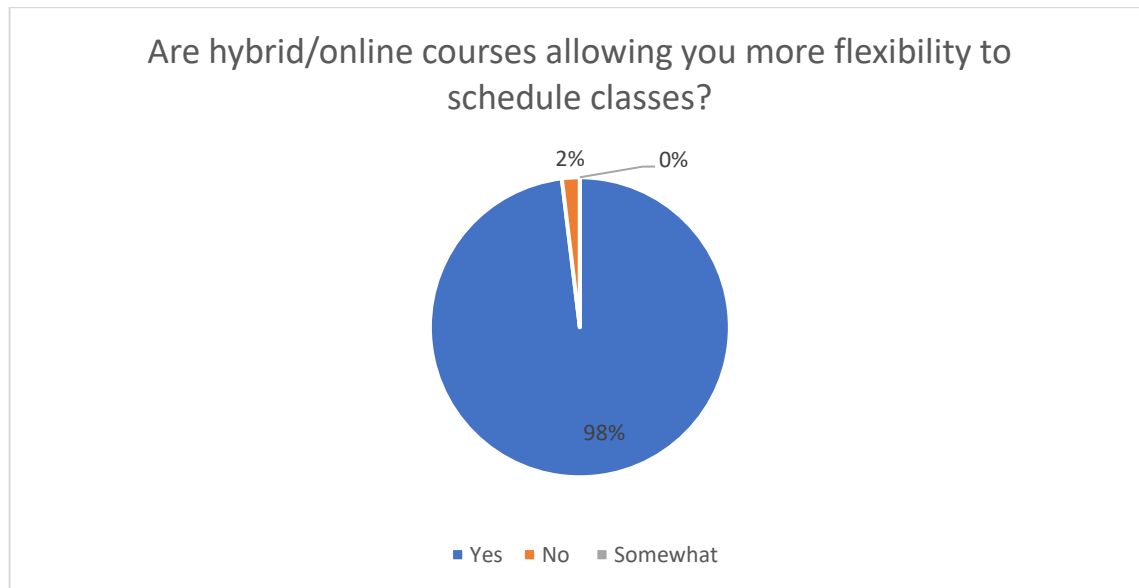
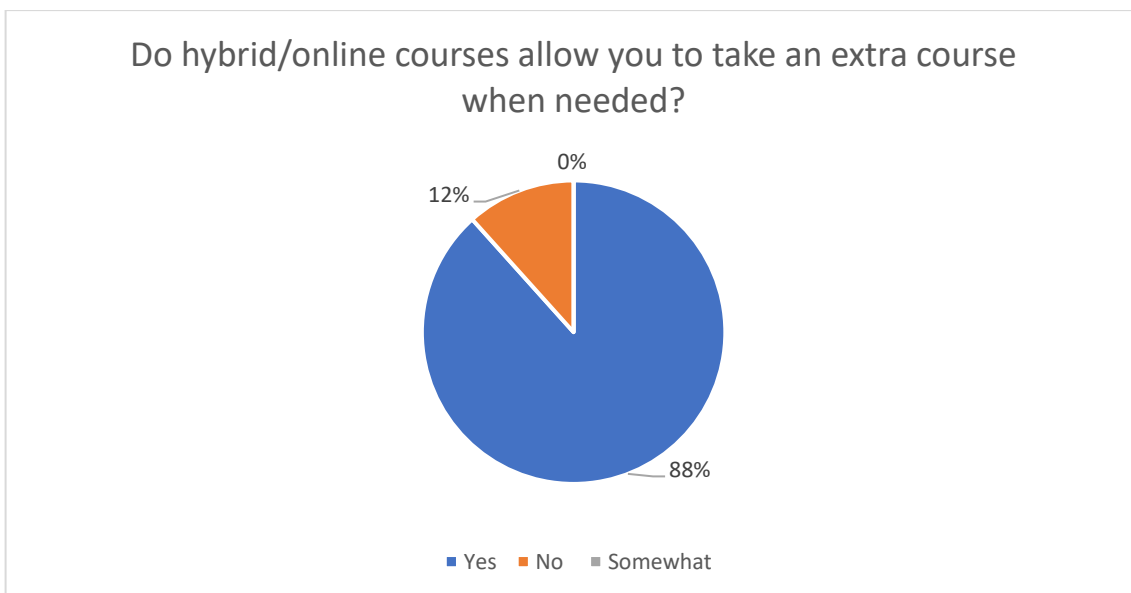


FIGURE 6
ABILITY TO TAKE EXTRA COURSES



CLOSING REMARKS

During this point in time after COVID, organizations are in favor of employees returning to their on-site places of work. In addition, higher educators encourage students to return to the classroom. The survey, although limited indicates Gen Zs prefer online and hybrid courses and a better work-life balance. The literature indicates some jobs can be conducted virtually. Higher education needs to evaluate new approaches and methods of the learning process; organizations have an increased interest in employing

candidates with a wider range of skills other than knowledge of their concentrated degree such as Accounting or Finance.

That said, Gen Z finds work-life balance to be a significant factor when searching for employment. Their choice of the methodology of how a course is delivered is another consideration. These results can be used to help higher education institutions make program modifications that will better prepare graduates for success in the marketplace. Professional Human Resource Managers should review Job Descriptions and Job Analysis to see which skills can be linked to other tasks and jobs. This skill analysis will provide an in-depth understanding of the diverse characteristics of jobs, and the personalities of employees, directly supporting the effective management of knowledge workers, providing insights into the management of the modern workforce.

Suggested further study would include surveying what jobs could be virtually fulfilled, on what occasions, and what environments, conditions, and alternatives.

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