



Generational Shift:

# Rethinking the Modern Workforce

# Introduction

Gen Z aren't just entering the workforce, they're rewriting the rules.

For the first time, four generations are working side by side. But it's Gen Z who are driving the biggest shifts. Bringing new values, expectations, and ways of working that challenge the status quo. From how they communicate to what they expect from employers, they're not just fitting in, they're reshaping the workplace.

In this paper, we share some of the most compelling insights from our recent events and conversations, plus practical tips to help you prepare for a more generationally-diverse future.



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# Key facts about Gen Z

51%

of younger workers viewing physical and mental health as their top metric for success

65%

of UK Gen Zers agree that real-life experiences matter more than online ones

They're not here to climb the ladder, they're here to change the rules.

Nearly 1 in 5 Gen Z workers expect to move through six or more companies in their career (EY), and only 6% are motivated by leadership roles. At a time of eroded social safety nets, mental health challenges and growing economic inequities, they prioritise work-life balance and aligned values over titles.

1 in 5

expect to move through 6 or more companies in their career

## Wellbeing isn't just a perk, it's a dealbreaker

With 51% of younger workers viewing physical and mental health as their top metric for success (EY), holistic wellbeing has become non-negotiable. But there's a gap: 24% of UK adults say they can't manage daily stress (Mind UK), and in the US, 67% of 18-34-year-olds say stress impacts their ability to focus (APA). Nearly half of Gen Z workers say they'd quit within two years if a company falls short on work-life balance or values (Deloitte), making it a primary concern for this cohort.

They're diverse, outspoken, and done with legacy norms.

Gen Z expect workplaces to reflect the full spectrum of identities and lifestyles and are driving a cultural shift toward greater openness around neurodivergence and mental health. In the US, 30% of adults under 30 now identify as neurodivergent (YouGov, 2024) and this generation is leading the charge in de-stigmatisation in the workplace. That means better inclusion policies, real flexibility, and systems that work for all.

30%

of adults under 30 now identify as neurodivergent

## They value real-world connection.

Despite being digital natives, 65% of UK Gen Zers agree that real-life experiences matter more than online ones (Canvas8). Only 27% prefer a fully remote role (Joblist), showing this generation's desire for in-person collaboration and real office environments.





# Tensions created by multigenerational workforces

As generations converge in the workplace, new tensions naturally arise. Recognising these friction points is about understanding where gaps exist so we can bridge them with intention.



These are some of the key areas where generational differences tend to show up most clearly, to help organisations design more inclusive, future-fit workplaces that work for all.

## Return to office debate

1 Generational perspectives on the ideal workplace environment differ. Many Gen Z employees value in-person time to learn, connect, and feel part of something while other generations often favour the flexibility of remote or hybrid working.

## Work-life boundaries

2 Younger generations are more likely to protect their mental health by switching off outside of work hours. This clashes with legacy cultures in some places where availability was seen as commitment – a challenge that’s reshaping expectations around work-life boundaries.

## Adoption of technologies and AI

3 Although younger generations are more digitally native, the rapid rise of AI and its subsequent taking over of junior roles has led to fear of job loss among entry-level roles. For all generations, this is sparking conversations around the balance between humans and AI, and how to maintain a sense of value and progression.

## Learning and skill building

4 Not everyone learns the same way. Gen Z and Millennials tend to put a premium on growth, feedback, and personalised development. And more traditional models of training may fall short – prompting organisations to rethink how they build and nurture talent at every stage.

## Redefining professionalism

5 From language and tone to meeting etiquette and appearance, the definition of ‘professional’ is being challenged. Gen Z are helping expand what leadership and success can look like, but that shift can feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable to those used to more traditional norms.



# Actionable strategies



“Try to find a new way forward that meets these changing and dynamic needs”

Elle Davidson, Head of Strategy, People Made

## → Start with listening

There's no such thing as a typical Gen Z employee, or a typical Millennial, Baby Boomer or GenXer for that matter, and perspectives can be attitudinal as well as demographic. So rather than lean on generational myths, ask realpeople what they really want.

From return-to-office views to definitions of professionalism, different age groups bring different perspectives and experiences that can shape or affect your culture.

Elle Davidson, Head of Strategy at People Made, suggests that “instead of reverting back to muscle memory of ways we've always done things, [try] to find a new way forward that meets these changing and dynamic needs”.

➤ **QUICK TIP:** Tap into employee resource groups, pulse surveys, or encourage reverse mentoring to hear directly from colleagues and get a better sense of what they really want and need.

## → Build bridges, not silos

Generational divides often come from misunderstanding. Tensions around hybrid working, professional etiquette, or work-life balance can build quietly. The fix? Create space for connection. When different generations mix meaningfully, they don't just get along, they spark new ideas, better collaboration, and a stronger sense of belonging.

➤ **QUICK TIP:** Try cross-generational social clubs, buddy systems, or project teams intentionally mixed by age and stage to create non-judgmental spaces and opportunities for shared views.





→ **Support holistic wellbeing**

Wellbeing looks different to everyone, and younger generations are expanding the definition. For Gen Z, mental health, psychological safety and financial security are all essential to feeling well and staying engaged at work.

According to Grant Thornton, 70% of workers suffer from financial stress. Likewise, 65% of young adults say they want more open conversations about money, and over half believe their financial health directly affects their mental and physical wellbeing.

This puts greater pressure on employers but creates opportunities to implement programmes offering targeted support that covers areas like investing, retirement, and budgeting.

At Screwfix for example, as our event panelist Sarah Brookes told us, financial stress came up in conversations with younger staff, so they introduced salary-based microloans. A simple, human fix with big impact.

» **QUICK TIP:**  
Rethink your wellbeing offer. Are you supporting every stage of life and circumstance? Have you considered different types of wellbeing? Think outside of the box and make sure to ask, listen and tailor. [Jump to page 16](#) for some useful questions to spark this reflection and discussion.

→ **Make purpose tangible**

For Gen Z, purpose is paramount. This generation is particularly focused on addressing social issues and inequalities in their work. But, talking about purpose without action can backfire. It needs to be visible, lived authentically, and experienced and evidenced throughout the employee journey. Led and embedded by leaders and people & culture teams who champion it and make purpose felt throughout the organisation.

Purpose is also a powerful unifier. It creates shared direction across age, background, and experience.

» **QUICK TIP:**  
Weave purpose into everyday storytelling – in team meetings, onboarding, recognition moments and leadership comms. Make it feel real, not just rhetorical.

“People join us because they believe in Selfridges. That’s the power of purpose.”

Maria Glasscock – Former Director of People & Culture, Selfridges



# The opportunity



“I believe we’re at a pivotal moment right now where there’s an opportunity to make a huge amount of progress in a short space of time. This is about redesigning the structures of the workplace that have remained largely unchanged for the last 100 years, and now we have the energy and the opportunity here to rewrite the rulebooks and rethink about the world of work in a different way.”

Elle Davidson, Head of Strategy, People Made

The arrival of Gen Z, and the coexistence of different working generations, isn’t just a challenge to navigate. It’s a chance to build something better. Organisations that ignore these shifts risk losing both relevance and talent. But those who listen, adapt and empower diverse perspectives will unlock the innovation and resilience needed to thrive in an era of constant change.

As Fru Bekefi, Cultural Insights Analyst, reminded us: “Innovation thrives on diversity. It thrives on inclusion. It does not thrive on monocultures.” This isn’t just about meeting new expectations, it’s about designing a future of work that works better for everyone.



# Questions to spark reflection and action

A key takeaway is to listen to the people in your teams. These conversations starters can be used to help provoke conversation, reflection and insight to move from awareness to action:



How are we currently gathering meaningful input from employees across different generations?

Where might we be making assumptions, and how can we challenge them?

Do we create intentional spaces for cross-generational connection and collaboration?

Do managers feel equipped to support wellbeing across life stages and needs?

Are we clear on what 'growth' looks like for different individuals and generations?

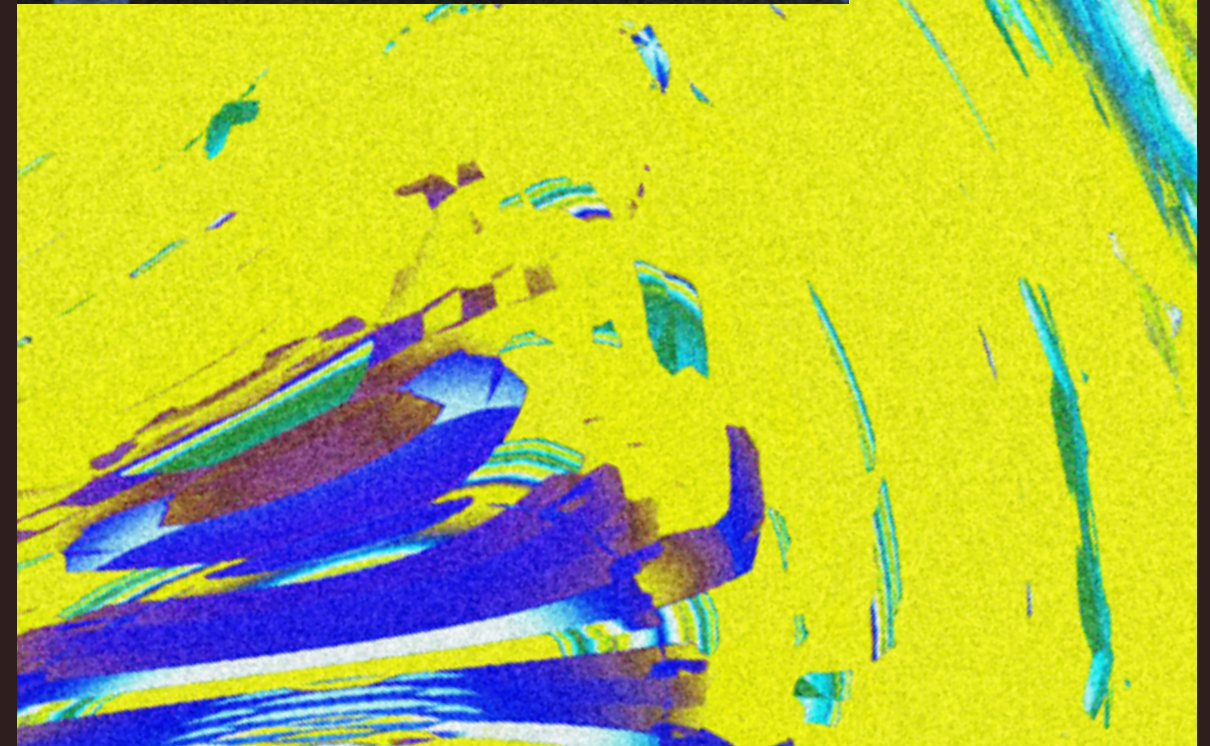
How are we supporting employees to grow and develop in a way that feels meaningful to them?

Are our purpose and values felt at every level, or only seen at the surface?

Are our internal narratives evolving as our workforce does?

How might we better use purpose and storytelling to bridge generations and unite teams?

If you would like support with analysing your employee experience or following up with actions after you've considered these questions, we're here to help at: [hello@people-made.com](mailto:hello@people-made.com)





# About us



At People Made, we bring together leaders in people and culture through thoughtfully curated events – both in-person and online. These sessions spark meaningful conversations around the topics that matter most. Founded in London, we’re a global brand culture agency committed to shaping positive change.

We founded People Made on a strong belief that brands are defined by what they do, not what they say. They’re built from the inside-out by a culture that consistently delivers a distinctive employee experience.

That’s why we connect brand and culture as one. Because brands are people made.



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