

Mind the Gap

How Gen Z is disrupting the workplace in 2024



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Gen Z has entered the workforce on new terms



The new normal of hybrid work has been disruptive, not only to how and where we work but also to what work means in employees' lives. Despite the rapid rise of return-to-office in 2023, hybrid work remains prevalent, and organizations mandating full return-to-office policies have witnessed employee backlash and walkouts. While solidifying fully hybrid cultures remains a challenge, there is another new dimension to our workforce rapidly disrupting the ways in which we think about culture and work: Gen Z.

By 2030, Gen Z and millennials will make up more than half of the global workforce and having entered under completely different circumstances than their older colleagues, they have a different take on work and their careers.¹ Growing up with the internet, social media, and influencers, they've been exposed to endless opportunities and are accustomed to seeing new career avenues arise constantly.

Gen Z has grown up in a world with many options offering them control in their own lives, making it seem meaningless to settle for a job with set boundaries, clear rules, and fixed structures. The conventional career route of education-job-career progression in the same field is now just one of many options, whereas 20 years ago, it was the obvious one. And as Gen Z has only just embarked on their career journey, it's worrying how common reports of them feeling disengaged or unhappy in their jobs already are.²

For a generation with a broad menu of career options and directions, it's hard to blame them for not wanting to settle for a traditional career path. But as Gen Z starts to make up a bigger percentage of the workforce, employers need to consider how to keep them engaged. Organizations will need to make themselves desirable to a young generation with access to many alternatives that offer more control over their lives.

For several years, we've conducted research into new ways of working, and tracked hybrid-work trends. Now, it's time we take a closer look at the diversity of the generations in the workforce, and what work and career means to its future employees. In this research we surveyed 4,473 knowledge workers in 14 key markets around the world, looking at what work, career, and connection is to Gen Z employees, and how employers can re-engage the workforce.

¹How prepared are employers for Generation Z?. PwC.

²Gen Z is sick and tired of their jobs, Business Insider, Apr 3, 2023

Making work, work in 2024

What does work look like in 2024?

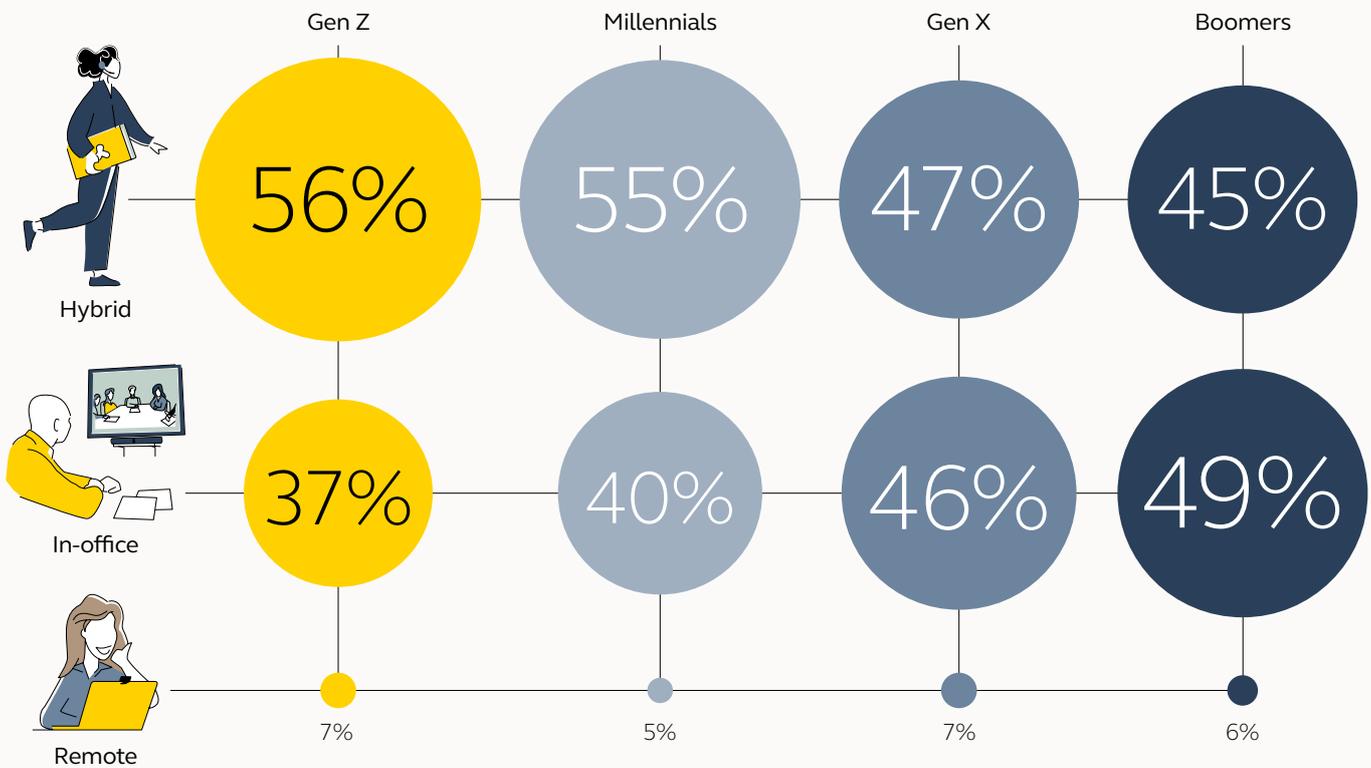
Will 2024 finally be the year we get our groove back? In 2023, headlines covered return to the office, hybrid work policies, quiet quitting and “lazy girl jobs”. As the workforce seemed more disengaged than ever, macroeconomic conditions proved challenging, and leaders were mandating sweeping office policies that never seems to meet employee approval. So, what does that mean for the state of work in 2024? With all these contradicting trends, we wanted to get a refreshed employee outlook, and better understand the preferences that would shape the way in which we work in the year ahead.

WAYS OF WORKING

1. The office is popular again, in a flexible kind of way

As our work habits further stabilize in a post-pandemic era, we’re seeing the return-to-office trend continue to rise, with 9 in 10 people working in-office at least once a week. However, hybrid work remains the favored way of working, with 51% working a hybrid-work week and 43% fully in the office. This reflects a small 1% increase from our 2023 study and a 6% increase from 2022 in employees working fully in office.¹

In 2023, many companies announced that it was time for employees to return to the office, but our data shows that most workers still aren’t working from there full-time.² And the younger the generation, the more employees work a hybrid-work week, with more than half of Gen Z working hybrid, compared to 45% of boomers.



¹Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working Global Report 2023

²Here’s a list of major companies requiring employees to return to the office, Business Insider, Jul 19, 2023.

WAYS OF WORKING

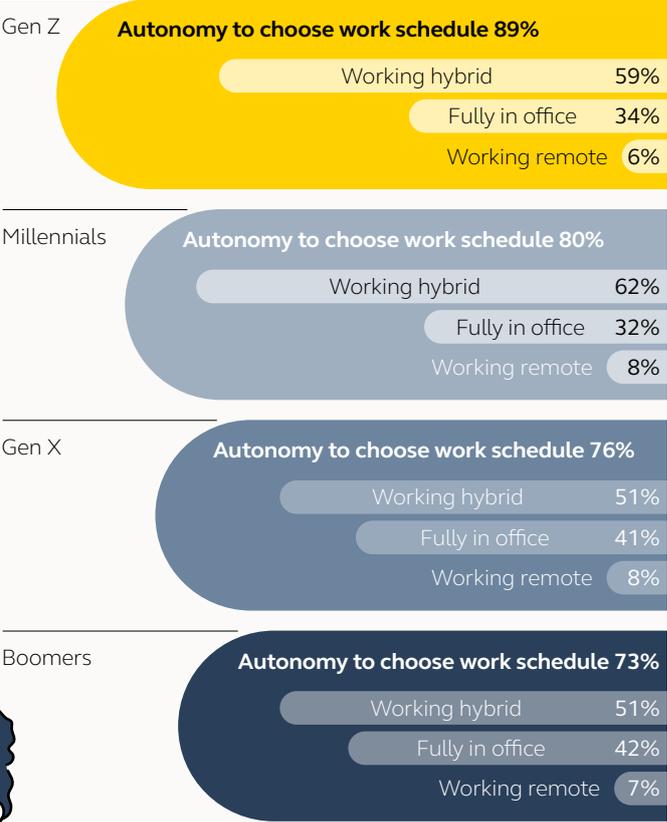
2. Employees want autonomy and employers are giving it to them

For years now, hybrid and flexible work have been hot topics, and at Jabra, we've been consistently collecting data on where employees work from. But with return-to-office mandates widely imposed by many companies, we wanted to measure how much autonomy employees actually have over where they're working.

We asked knowledge workers if they have autonomy to choose their work location or are mandated to work from the office, and if so, whether they go in full time, randomly, or on set days. The results paint a different picture than return-to-office headlines suggest. Close to 8 in 10 knowledge workers say they're currently in jobs offering the freedom to choose their daily workplace location. Not only does this data suggest that companies continue to offer autonomy to decide when to go to the office, but also that employers realize a new era of flexibility is essential to meet the needs of the modern-day worker.

Contrary to the many employee petitions reported by the media, an overwhelming 70% of all knowledge workers surveyed report that they're happy with their current levels of flexibility. While companies consider mandating certain days or full-time in-office, it's relevant to consider what consequences limiting employee autonomy could have. If most employees are happy with their current flexibility, seeking to impose stricter return-to-office mandates could see top talent leaving for more flexible alternatives. This is particularly prevalent amongst younger generations of the workforce, with our data showing an increasing preference for autonomy and workplace flexibility among Gen Z and millennials.

Employees with autonomy over workplace location and their current workweek



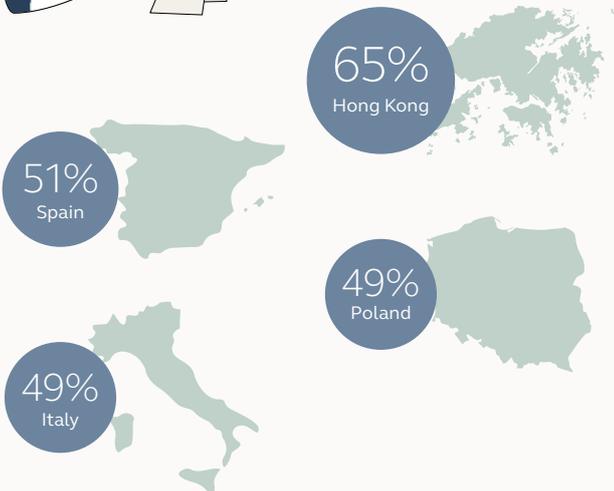
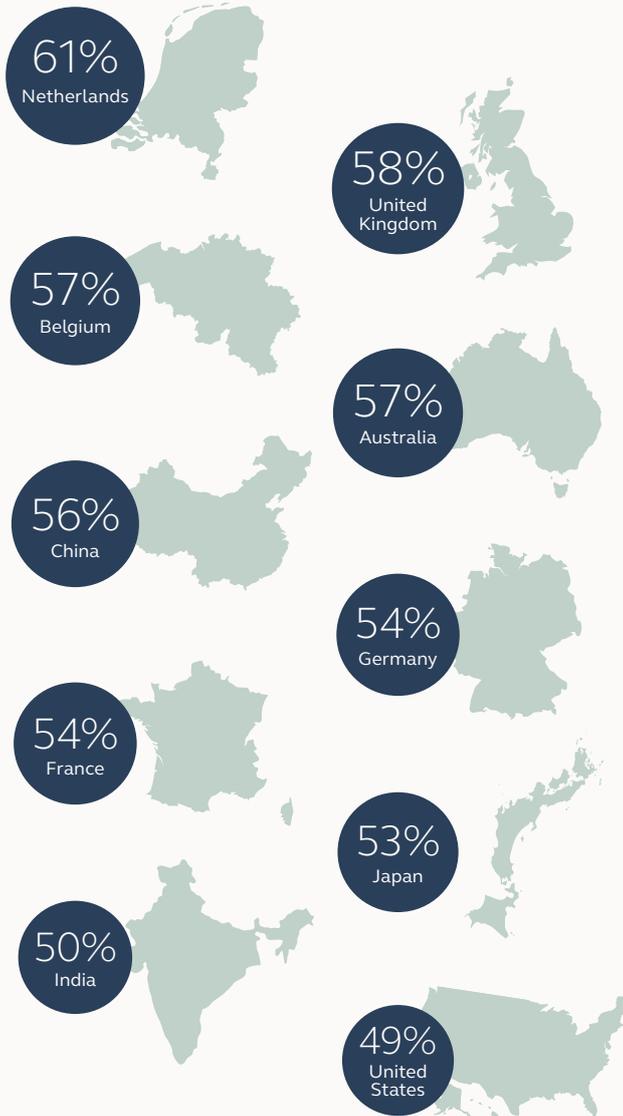
WAYS OF WORKING

3. Hybrid work hasn't won in every culture

Around the world, varying models of flexible work have been adopted based on different cultural influences. As we surveyed 14 countries across the globe, our results reveal that not all countries have embraced hybrid work equally.

Out of the total 4,473 respondents, an average of 51% work a hybrid-work week. And while most countries lean towards more employees working flexibly, there are exceptions such as Italy, Spain, Poland, and Hong Kong, who have more employees fully in-office. In the three European countries, the data shows above-average in-office mandates, while in Hong Kong, 81% of workers can choose when to go to the office, and 62% of them prefer being there full-time. These regional differences are particularly relevant for international organizations, when evaluating real-estate needs, office design, and flexible working policies across varying locations.

Which of the following best describes your current work week with regards to location?



WAYS OF WORKING

4. Workers might be back onsite, but they want an “office optional” setup

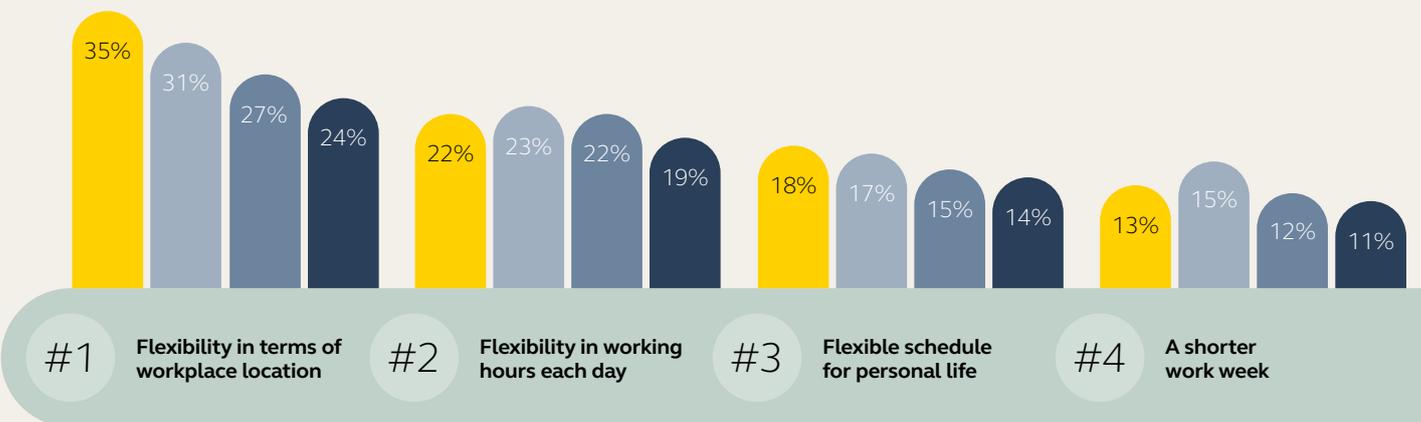
Flexibility means different things to different people. For some, it might mean the freedom to work from home, or even more remote locations, while others favor flexibility in their working hours to match their productivity cycles or better manage their family lives. To drive a deeper understanding of the specific types of flexibility that matter most to employees, we asked them to rank them amongst other influences when looking for a job.

While workplace location was the leading global preference of all potential benefits, our data shows that all the varying types of flexibility are collectively what matter most to employees when considering a job. Benefits such as generous vacation time, physical and mental health perks are further down the list after all flexible-schedule offerings. What mattered least to employees? Social events and salary. While almost 1 in 4 gave social and team events the lowest ranking, salary is the least important factor when considering a new job with 25% ranking it rock bottom.

Flexible work location is ranked as most important, over three times more than salary. This stresses how important flexibility has become in employees’ work lives, and how important it will continue to be to attract and retain employees. In a time of “flex-washing” to attract talent, organizations would benefit from leading with transparency on their flexible working practices to attract the next generation of top talent.¹

Which of these factors are most important when looking for a job?

● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers



¹Companies are ‘flex-washing’ to attract talent – but there will be a backlash, Jabra, Sept 12, 2022.

1. Nothing beats in-person facetime or the office workstation setup

While reasons for returning to the office varied over the course of the pandemic, and across generations, its core purpose has remained consistent. As companies use varying tactics to bring people back into the office, most employees are aligned on the pull factors drawing them in. With the majority of workers back in the office at least once a week now, we asked them to rank the biggest benefits being in-office brings. Managers and leaders should focus their attention on facilitating and enhancing these leading factors, rather than investing in initiatives that matter less to employees.

Collaboration, a proper workstation, and socializing are still the top 3 drivers for going to the office. The leading reason to go in is unsurprisingly that employees find it easier to work with others in person. This is closely followed by having a proper workstation and then socializing with colleagues. Being in-person with colleagues and managers and having more personal conversations are also the top enablers for feeling a connection with colleagues which fosters a sense of belonging.

Arguably, all of these drivers are challenging or impossible to replicate with remote work. In-person collaboration and socializing can't be replaced by online meetings, and we've seen that nothing beats being together in the same room.¹ In 2023, we conducted a study at the London School of Economics' Behavioral Lab to better understand the psychology of meetings in relation to technology. While we found that the type of technology teams are using to collaborate has a major impact on trust, engagement and the quality of the interaction, we also learned that face-to-face collaboration still offers the greatest level of connection in meetings.

However, it is possible to provide employees with equipment and technology that allow for a proper workstation outside of the office. A previous Jabra study showed that employees report higher levels of productivity, motivation, belonging, trust, and well-being when able to choose where and when to do their job.² This is why it's important to also equip employees with professional technology outside of the office, to ensure the best possible environment for them to do their jobs from anywhere. We know that online meetings will continue to be the most

dominant meeting form. Even if most people are coming back into the office regularly, there will almost always be attendees across multiple locations. Despite this, most meeting rooms are still unequipped, and employees are missing the technology equipment to collaborate productively anywhere. It's equally important that employers have employees set up with the right technology when they collaborate from the office, a meeting room, or when they're working elsewhere. By providing professional technology to everyone, employers can drive stronger belonging and connection in online environments, while giving people the control and flexibility they want.

What are your main reasons for going to the office?

35% "I find it easier to work with people in person"

34% "I have a proper workstation at the office"

30% "To socialize with colleagues"

29% "I have better technology available at the office"

29% "It's mandated by my manager/organization when I go"



¹Jabra Collaboration Study at the LSE Behavioral Lab, 2023

²Gen Z is sick and tired of their jobs, Business Insider, April 3, 2023

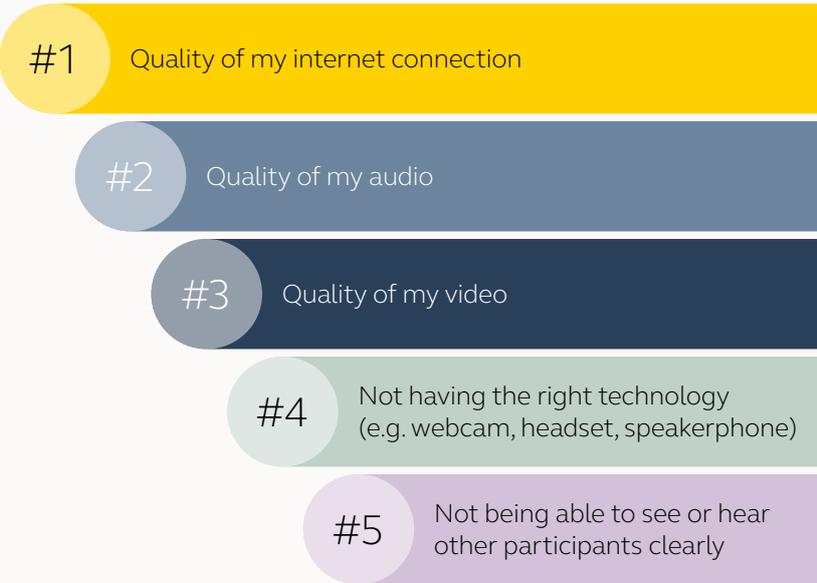
2. Colleagues don't ruin productivity in online meetings, technology does

Online meetings have come to dominate our time, as communication and collaboration across all digital channels has increased exponentially over the past decade. Between 2020 and 2022, there was a 252% increase in our weekly meeting time. Then, in 2023, a Microsoft research showed that 57% of our workday is spent on communication. It's no surprise then, that employees listed "inefficient meetings" as the leading barrier to productivity.¹ Our 2023 Hybrid Ways of Working Global Report showed that 66% of all meetings take place online.² With this in mind, we wanted to uncover the biggest barriers in online meetings that are challenging productivity.

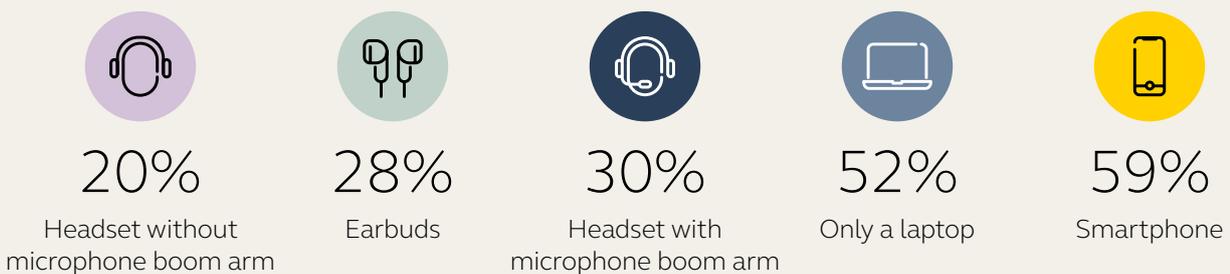
Where we had expected leading pain points to have included things like "too many participants" and "lack of a clear agenda", we were surprised to see that the simplest and most easily solved issues are still the biggest. Quality of internet connection, audio, and video all top the list of barriers, as well as not having the right technology or not being able to see or hear participants. Other factors such as people speaking over one another or problems with the meeting platforms are significantly less impactful than technology during online meetings.

Luckily for companies, issues like technology are solved far more easily than factors such as behavior and meeting etiquette. Equipping employees with professional technology for online meetings can increase overall meeting productivity and increase the quality of connection amongst colleagues online. With less than 1 in 3 knowledge workers using headsets with a boom-arm, and only one-third using video technology, employers can easily mitigate technology barriers in online meetings by upgrading employees to professional equipment.³

Top 5 productivity barriers in online meetings



Which of the following devices do you use for online meetings in a typical week?



¹Will AI Fix Work, Microsoft, 2023 ²Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working Global Report June 2023 ³Jabra Global Knowledge Worker Study 2023 & Jabra Certification Study 2023

1. Your employees say they're happy, but they want to leave

Few periods have seen power dynamics swing so drastically between employer and employee. Over the past five years, the way we work has been drastically rewritten, while macroeconomic trends have led to massive hiring and layoffs. We wanted to get a pulse on employee happiness, and the influences contributing to it.

When we asked knowledge workers to rank factors such as flexibility, manager relationship and sense of belonging at their current job, they reported being happy and satisfied. In fact, 7 in 10 say their job offers them the flexibility they want, and report being satisfied with their career development. Almost 4 out of 5 (78%) say they have a healthy working relationship with their manager and feel well connected with the people they work with. However, 41% still report feeling stress and experience symptoms of burnout from their work. More surprisingly, 36% expect to change jobs within the next year.

In a time where concepts such as “quiet quitting”, “bare-minimum Mondays”, inflation, and mass layoffs create uncertainty in the workforce, employers seem to be dealing with a more conflicted workforce than ever. And as you’ll find in the Gen Z section of this report, the younger the generation, the more ready to leave they seem to be. So, it’s more important than ever for employers and managers to consider these preferences in an effort to end the downtrend.



of knowledge workers expect to change jobs within the next year



2. Degrees are still seen as gateways to the working world

With the meteoric rise of AI in 2023, as well as a continued focus on diverse self-made career opportunities, the increased accessibility of online learning, and rising costs of higher education, we questioned if traditional degrees and learning paths were still considered relevant in relation to career opportunities in today's job market.

Our data shows that almost 7 in 10 employees consider higher-level education to be relevant for creating career opportunities in today's job market. Of these, 30% consider it a necessity because of skills learned within education, while the remaining 38% consider it valuable only because employers look for degrees. Despite many other ways to acquire the knowledge relevant in the job market, traditional education appears to still be perceived as having the highest value in today's job market. In addition to this, 74% of the employees we asked also say that their educational background is relevant to their current job. On the other hand, 16% believe it's possible to learn on the job, and a further 16% believe most things can be learned with the information available on the internet.

Interestingly – but perhaps not surprisingly – Gen Z is most likely to turn to online learning, with 1 in 5 turning to the internet for new skills, while boomers most believe in learning on the job (24%). Gen Z are digital natives, so learning things from the internet is second nature, and since boomers have years of experience in the job market, this could be the reason they believe more in learning on the job than other generations. Most people consider leaving jobs when they aren't developing or growing. With an affinity towards online learning, employers should consider continuous learning programs with younger generations as a retention tactic, actively investing in their development.

1 in 5

Gen Z employees believe it's possible to learn most things from the internet

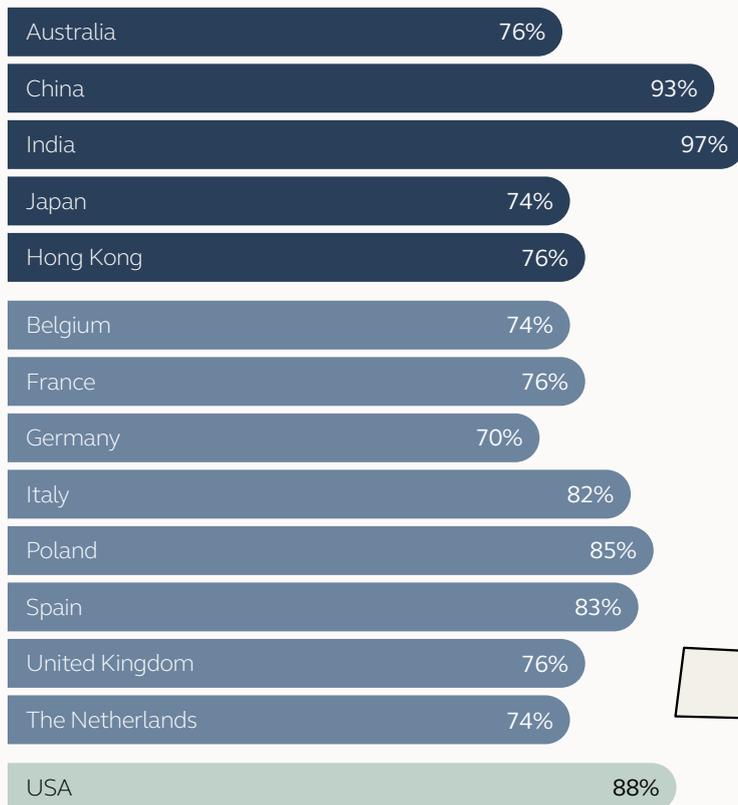


3. The career-priority scale is different in each country

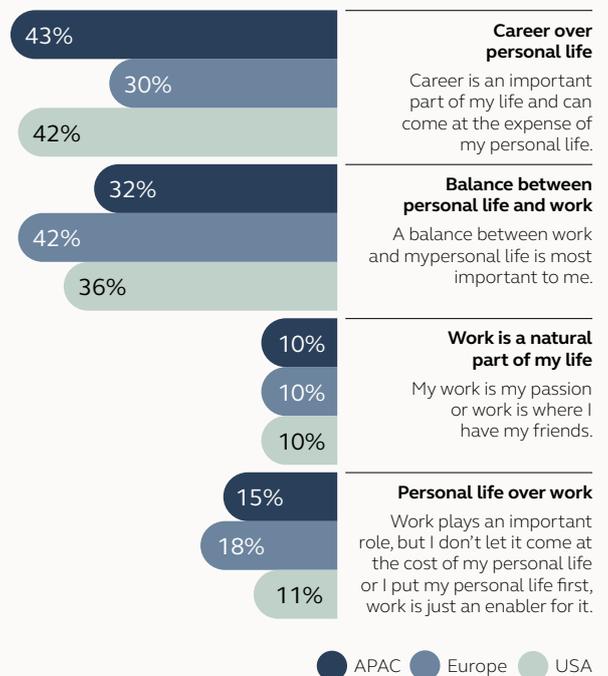
Surveying 14 markets around the world, this research not only reveals generational gaps and differences but also regional differences. While we see flexibility in work life valued across all regions, when looking at career and its role in employees' lives, there are significant differences between countries.

Across Europe employees value a balance between personal life and work the highest, while in Asia Pacific and the USA, career and work play a bigger part in employees' lives. It's a reflection of the cultural differences around work perceptions, where the USA and APAC countries spend more time at their jobs.¹ Similarly, European countries are the least likely to report that career achievements are important to their sense of personal success and identity. Meanwhile, career achievements are instrumental for personal success and identity to more than 9 in 10 employees in countries such as China and India.

"My career achievements are important to my sense of personal success and identity"



How would you best describe the role work plays in your life?



¹Statistics on working time, ILOSTAT, Jan 11, 2024.

What does work look like to Gen Z?

Revealing the future knowledge worker

Generation Z is born between 1997 to 2012.¹ Characterized as the first digitally native generation, they grew up with the internet, social media, and smartphones. They were predicted to inherit a strong economy and stable world, but the pandemic, recession, climate change, and wars turned stability into uncertainty.² Studying online, finishing degrees from their homes through video meetings, and starting their first jobs with work-from-home days, they are the first hybrid-native generation in our workforce. By being vocal about difficult topics, Gen Z has put issues like mental health and diversity on the agenda. Over the past decade, the oldest segment of this generation has entered the workforce, and done so in a headline-grabbing manner, juxtaposing the rest of the workforce. Over the course of the coming decade, Gen Z will soon be the biggest generation in the workplace.³ Painting a picture of what work is to Gen Z and what they expect from it, this research reveals four paradoxes in Gen Z's expectations at work.

¹Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins, Pew Research Center, Jan 17, 2019

²What We Know About Gen Z So Far, Pew Research Center, May 14, 2020

³How prepared are employers for Generation Z?, PwC

Gen Z say they're happy, but not enough to stick around

From time to time, most employees consider what other jobs can offer them. But what does it mean when those employees have only just entered their first jobs? While it's long been the norm for younger employees to change jobs more frequently, Gen Z appear to be taking this on with more zeal than ever. While high amounts of change are not unusual as people navigate their initial years in the working world, our data suggests a far more interesting paradox: Gen Z is satisfied in their jobs, but still expects to leave them.



PARADOX 1

1. The unhappiest “happiest generation” in the workforce

In recent years, wellbeing, burnout, and stress have gained considerably more attention in the workplace. This is no different when looking at Gen Z and stress, as this generation seem to be more affected than other generations at work. Paradoxically, they report the same levels of satisfaction in their jobs as their older colleagues, while simultaneously feeling severely more stressed.

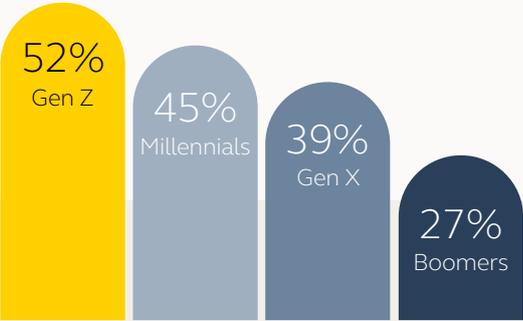
We asked respondents to rate factors in their jobs such as flexibility, satisfaction with career development, relationship with manager, and feeling connected to colleagues, and all generations show similar levels of satisfaction. Across generations, around 7 in 10 employees feel satisfied in their current jobs, and more than 7 in 10 Gen Z employees report general satisfaction in their current positions. However, around 4 in 10 employees report feeling stressed, and the younger generation the more pronounced it is. So, what makes Gen Z so stressed this early in their career?

Gen Z has entered the workforce in difficult times. They’ve had less in-person facetime in the office, experienced mass layoffs, inflation, economic downturns, and climate-change consequences, while having all-time-high student debts to pay and increasingly unaffordable housing. An unstable world can be a valid stressor. Moreover, Gen Z has widely been reported to struggle with settling into the workforce. A Gallup study found Gen Z to be more likely to feel ambivalent or not engaged at their work than other generations.¹

Whether feeling disengaged is down to stress, causes stress or is a result of feeling more distant to their workplaces because of hybrid work, it’s a sign of the integration challenges facing employers with this generation. No matter what, it leaves organizations and leaders with an important task of being proactive in managing not just Gen Z employees, but all, and establishing processes and concrete tools to prevent work causing high stress levels among employees.



How Gen Z feel about their current job



“I feel stressed and experience symptoms of burnout due to my work”

¹Generation Disconnected: Data on Gen Z in the Workplace, Gallup, Nov 11, 2022

2. Gen Z has walked into your workplace with one foot out the door

Is the grass always greener on the other side? Over the past few years, power dynamics have shifted between employer and employee through varying economic trends. And while younger generations have always trended towards shorter tenures, Gen Z appear to be increasing this trend even further. Almost half of Gen Z expect to change jobs within the next year, despite having only been in the workforce for a couple of years. So why is the youngest generation, who have only just secured their first jobs in the job market, so ready to leave?



74%
of Gen Z believe in changing jobs as a career development driver

Gen Z and millennials are much more likely than their older colleagues to be on the lookout for the next job. And Gen Z are 6% more likely to be seeking a change than millennials, while 15% and 27% more likely than Gen X and boomers. Stress could be a contributing factor, but Gen Z might have another reason for expecting to change jobs within a year.

When asked what they consider a key driver for career development, Gen Z believes more in changing jobs than any other generation. Even changing jobs frequently is considered a driver of career development to 18% of Gen Z. While more than 74% of Gen Z employees believe in changing jobs for their career growth, across generations it just accounts for 58%.

Another reason for Gen Z to expect a change of jobs is their strong desire to be their own boss. Gen Z is a generation with both high career ambitions and work-life needs, so we wanted to find out what career path is most desirable.¹ On the one hand, Gen Z appears eager to start their own business (50%), but at the same time a linear career path is also desirable to Gen Z employees (43%). When we look to the older generations, a linear career path is by far the most desired career path.

Considering “quiet quitting”, “bare-minimum Mondays” and “lazy girl jobs” trends on social media, it’s not surprising to find that Gen Z might feel fed up with their office jobs.^{2/3} But with stress, job-hopping as a career move and a desire to be self-employed, what can make Gen Z stay in a traditional 9-5? Gen Z might have a rootless nature, but 43% still say they want a linear career advancing within same company or industry.⁴

¹Gen Z: The workers who want it all, BBC, June 14, 2022 ²Gen Z is the least happy generation at work. Here's how good leaders can set them up for success, Fast Company, Nov 11, 2023

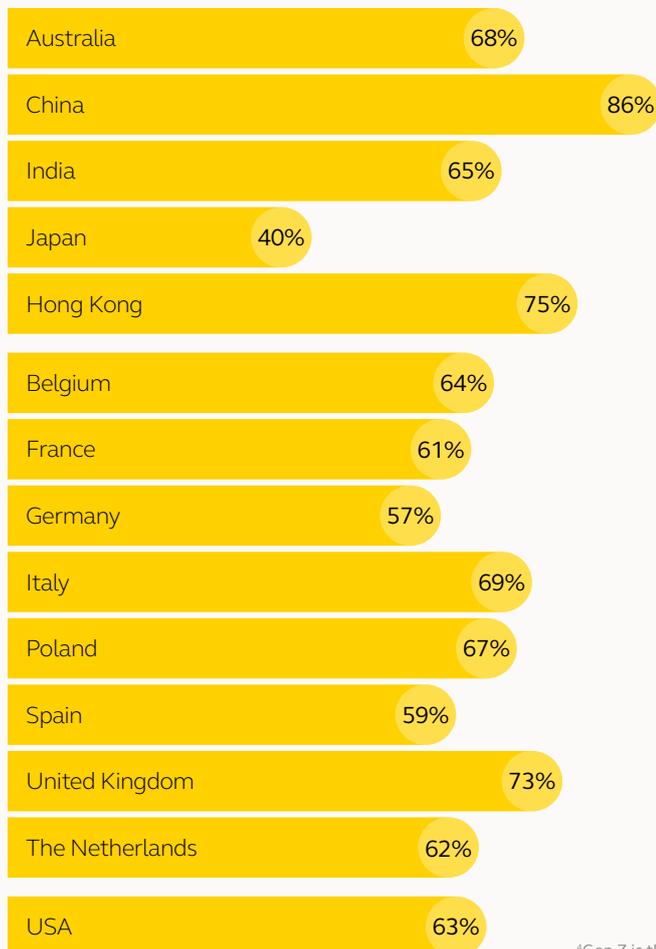
³Lazy Girl Jobs' Won't Make Gen Z Less Anxious, The Wall Street Journal, Jul 23, 2023 ⁴Gen Z is the job-hopping generation, even for those with master's degrees, Fast Company, May 9, 2023

3. Career-path desires differ significantly by region

Our data shows that Gen Z employees almost equally desire a linear career path and owning their own business. This is heavily driven by regional differences, where Gen Z employees in Europe tend to favor starting their own business more than a linear career. Interestingly, in the large industrialized Asian countries such as China and India, the complete opposite is true.

While Gen Z employees in Europe may place high value on the freedom to be their own boss, striving for a traditional career in a company or field of work could be of higher status to their colleagues in China and India. The data shows that in those countries and cultures where education is considered more important, Gen Z employees are more likely to desire a traditional career path.

“I believe higher-level education is necessary or valuable for job opportunities”



Which of the following career paths do you find most desirable?



¹Gen Z: The workers who want it all, BBC, June 14, 2022

²Gen Z is the least happy generation at work.

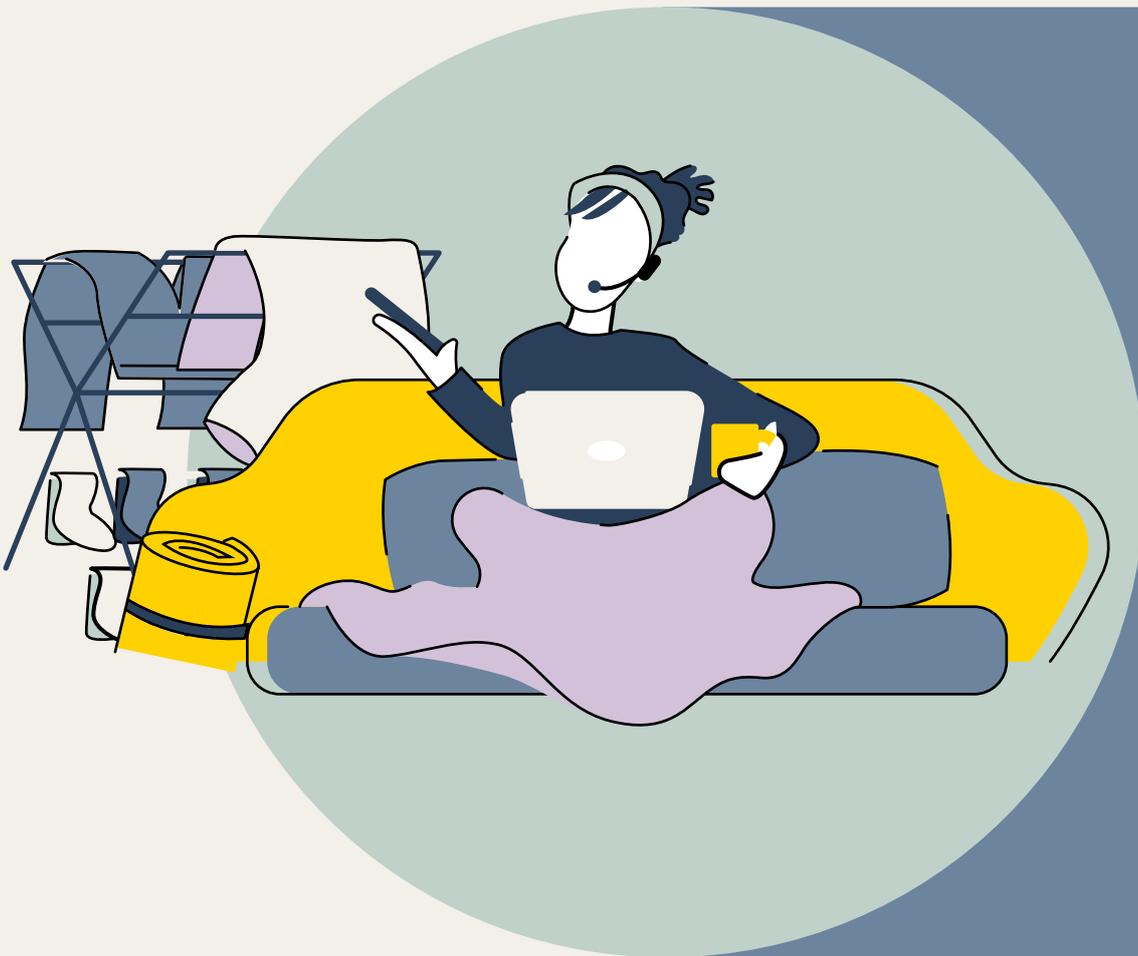
Here's how good leaders can set them up for success, Fast Company, Nov 11, 2023

³'Lazy Girl Jobs' Won't Make Gen Z Less Anxious, The Wall Street Journal, Jul 23, 2023

⁴Gen Z is the job-hopping generation, even for those with master's degrees, Fast Company, May 9, 2023

Can Gen Z get flexibility, work-life balance, and a career all at once?

Gen Z is often branded as the generation who want it all, desiring career development, work-life balance, fair pay, and value alignment at the same time.¹ Growing up with endless possibilities on how to create their lives, Gen Z don't see it necessary to compromise work-life balance for career or the other way around. But is this generation all about life over career? The data indicates an ambitious, uncompromising generation, ready to change the rules of the game.



¹Gen Z: The workers who want it all, BBC, June 14, 2022

1. Gen Z wants to work-life balance their way to the top

The pandemic made us rethink what mattered most in our lives, and work-life balance has gained more focus. While the youngest generation are no less career-hungry than the generations before them, they do want to do so with greater work-life balance.

While Gen Z could often be considered a work-life balance generation, our data shows that 43% say that work and career still play a bigger role than their personal life. That makes Gen Z an outlier, as the only generation where a balance between personal life and work isn't the most favored option when asked what role work plays in their lives. Equality between personal life and work becomes more important to employees in the older generations, who also tend to have a family life that requires a more balanced approach to work life than younger counterparts. But that doesn't mean that Gen Z doesn't want work-life balance and that older generations aren't career focused. In our survey, all generations say that career achievements are important to their sense of personal success and identity.

How important are your career achievements to your sense of personal success and identity?



And while Gen Z is one of the most career-driven generations, they also want work-life balance in their job. When we asked about which factors are most important in a job, flexibility topped everything, and salary ranked least important for Gen Z. But interestingly, when asked how they measure their success at work, salary comes out at the top. Almost 1 in 3 say work-life balance is an important measure of success, while a good salary tops the list (33%). So, despite flexibility being most valued in any job, when it comes to measures of success, salary leads.

So, is Gen Z really trying to have it all? Are they just ambitious and unwilling to compromise or have they been misinformed about reality? Out of all the generations, Gen Z is the most impacted by social media, with 24% forming expectations on career and salary informed by social media. Growing up as digital natives they've been more exposed to many different realities portrayed on social media, where access to information and a proliferation of career paths has raised expectations.

Gen Z: How would you best describe the role work plays in your life?



A hybrid workforce as eager for facetime as flexibility

Hybrid work has certainly helped many with work-life balance, but it also means fewer spontaneous chats at the coffee machine. As much as employees want to be able to work from home when they want to, they also find being together in person hard to beat. Limited time in person could result in employees feeling more alone and out of touch, but our data suggests that there are other ways for employees to feel in sync with their colleagues and the workplace.



¹Gen Z: The workers who want it all, BBC, June 14, 2022

1. Your youngest employees foster more connections digitally

In 2023, Jabra carried out research at the London School of Economics to better understand the impact of meeting technology on people's behavior while collaborating. While the quality of the technology had a big impact on how engaged and trusting participants were, we also learned that being face-to-face is unrivaled in terms of collaboration efficiency.

This is also shown in this research, when we asked respondents what their preferred way to reach out to a colleague is. In-person contact remains the most favorable, despite almost all employees preferring to work hybrid. Besides email, in-person contact also remains the most used communication channel in the workplaces.

However, while in-person contact tops the list for all generations, it matters the least to Gen Z. When asked to rate which day-to-day factor influences their feeling of connection with peers, 34% of Gen Z rate being in person important, while 41% of millennials, 41% of Gen X, and 46% of boomers find it important.

As digital natives, Gen Z are much more likely to rely on digital tools and technology to allow them to keep in contact and feel connected with their colleagues. For example, chat messages are rated more important for feeling connected than casual catch ups in person or on video. And when Gen Z reaches out to a colleague, more than half would send a chat message, something only 44% of Gen X and 35% of boomers would do.

Gen Z's digital native nature means they feel more connected through digital touchpoints than other generations. Organizations and leaders should give this due consideration. Communication practices should be explicitly stated in teams, without assuming that everyone would gravitate toward the same medium or platform.

34%

of Gen Z say being with colleagues in person or having more personal conversations with colleagues they are closer with influence their feeling of connection with peers



2. Facetime fosters belonging

With a hybrid workforce it's not only crucial how employees stay connected daily, but also how they feel a sense of belonging, which can minimize feelings of isolation and disengagement in the workplace. For belonging, facetime is key.

But being in person matters the least to Gen Z of all the generations, and is considerably more important to millennials, Gen X, and boomers. Seeing and interacting with colleagues whether online or in person is just as important for Gen Z as being in person with colleagues. Deep relationships such as friendships also rank high for Gen Z's sense of belonging and are much more important to this generation than the others. Other values like expressing oneself politically or sharing private life and feeling company values align with one's own are ranked considerably less important.

While Gen Z wants flexible working the most, they still recognize that in-person interactions nurture connection and a sense of belonging. Despite this, they are the only generation to feel the biggest sense of belonging online, most likely due to their positive relationship with technology. This makes the facetime, whether online or in-person, even more important. Leaders must facilitate the feeling of close proximity to hybrid colleagues through frequent digital touch.

Ultimately, the closer the experience comes to resembling in-person interaction, the better it seems to be. With professional audio and video technology, it can improve the 'seeing each other' experience for colleagues when they're unable to be in the same room.

What makes you feel a sense of belonging at work?

#1 Seeing and interacting with my colleagues (whether online or in person)

#2 Being in-person in the office with colleagues and my manager

#3 Having deep personal relationships at work e.g. close friends or romantic relationships

How to improve the online facetime experience for hybrid employees:

1. A professional headset or speakerphone ensures crystal-clear audio
2. A proper video device enables employees to see each other better
3. Frequently scheduled catch-ups whether online or in-person



Honest managers for a generation playing their cards close to their chest

Belonging is one thing, but feeling heard in the workplace is another. It's no secret that Gen Z is comfortable speaking up about difficult topics such as mental health and diversity, but does this translate to their professional experiences too? We asked them what the most important qualities in a manager are and how comfortable they feel speaking to their manager.



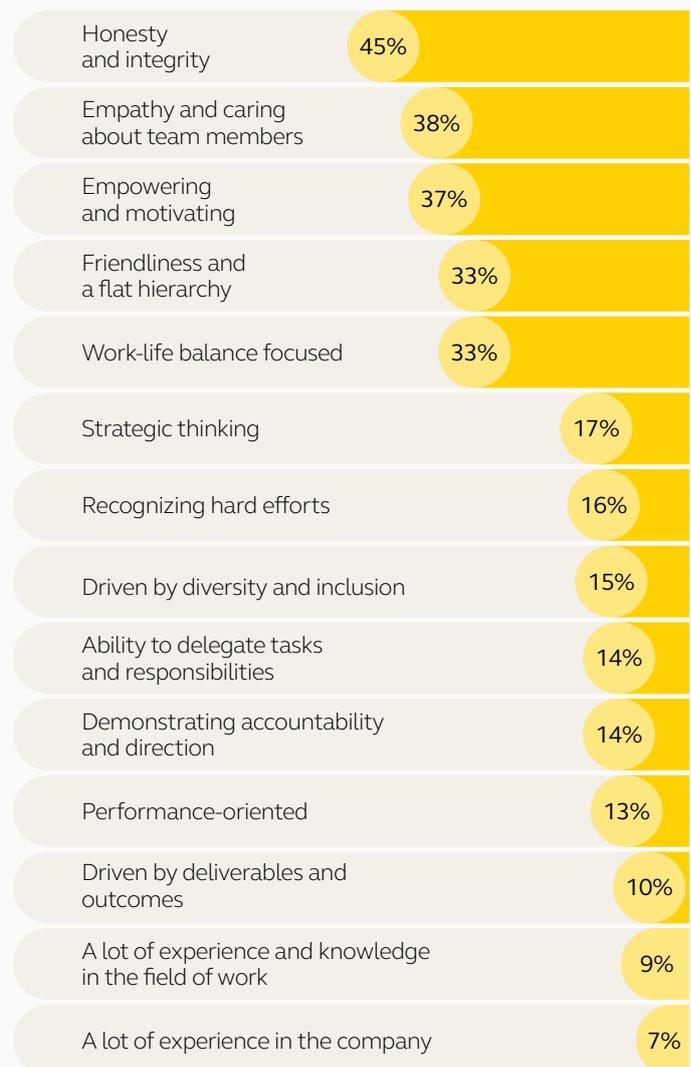
1. Forget about experienced managers, honesty and empathy is more important

An employee-manager relationship can be crucial to whether an employee stays and thrives in a job or not. So, it's extremely positive when our results show that almost 8 in 10 of employees say they have a healthy working relationship with their manager. This speaks to the evolution of management, where soft skills are far more valued than knowledge or experience within hierarchies.

Gen Z would rather have an empathetic manager than an experienced one and consider honesty and integrity five times more important than experience in a given field of work. Less than 1 in 10 Gen Z employees consider a lot of experience or knowledge an important quality, and even less find experience within a company important.

As many employees now enter management positions at a younger age, it's likely organizations will start to see a shift in management styles. For example, Gen Z considers friendliness and flat hierarchies significantly more important than other generations. This leaves managers with a difficult task. They must balance leading by example with maintaining an approachable and transparent attitude. Hybrid work also demands extra effort from managers to foster this connection virtually or facilitate in-person time. We asked employees about connection and belonging, and our data shows that even chat messages and video catch ups can drive empathy. According to Gallup, one meaningful conversation a week is all it takes to drive this connection.¹

The most important qualities in a manager to Gen Z employees



¹Gallup Finds a Silver Bullet: Coach Me Once Per Week, Gallup

2. Ask the right questions, for the answers that matter most

Honesty might be the most important quality in managers to Gen Z, but that doesn't mean complete honesty and transparency in return. Gen Z want a manager they feel they can talk to, in line with valuing a flat hierarchy and friendliness. And when it comes to pragmatic conversations such as pay raises, promotions, and requesting new technology, Gen Z feel comfortable discussing it with their manager. But when asked if they feel comfortable discussing feeling unhappy in the job, only 1 in 3 said they would be. While reporting higher rates of stress and burnout, Gen Z has trouble opening up about this. Managers need to create safe environments and prompt on certain issues, creating room for conversations that surface issues that would otherwise go undetected.

Such a dynamic could be attributed to the challenge of launching a career in the midst of a pandemic. Gen Z entered the workforce without being with their manager or colleagues fulltime in the office, leaving them without many of the lessons learned in person, or the rapport with their manager and peers. These results could indicate they're still learning the rules of the workplace or hybrid work has resulted in them

feeling more emotionally distant to managers. Either way, both leadership and younger employees have something to learn from, and teach each other, about their way of working. Gen Z is the future workforce, but there is still a task for leadership to guide them through the challenges hybrid work brings and establishing a relationship with a generation who've been accustomed to hide away with their concerns at home.

36%

of Gen Z feel uncomfortable discussing feeling unhappy in their job



Connecting the gap going forward



The oldest segment of Gen Z has only just stepped into the workforce, so we are yet to see what the full effects of this generation will be in the workplace. But their entry means organizations and managers are facing a paradigm shift. Where employees used to settle with the boundaries and hierarchies of the workplace, hybrid work and Gen Z have brought forward a shift in our understanding of what work and the workplace is.

Hybrid work remains prevalent and a favorite to employees, but while the desire to work flexibly only strengthens, so too does the return to office. Organizations who implement the right strategies will know that this is not a tug of war. For employees, choice and control remain a key factor. Organizations shouldn't be afraid that they won't see employees in the office, as employees continue to find connecting and socializing easier in-person and are craving connections that require facetime. But as autonomy seems to be an important part of flexibility offerings to employees, organizations need to think twice before imposing strict return-to-office policies.

With hybrid work strengthening its long-term position, online meetings are now status quo, and no amount of office-based work will remove the fact that meetings will always take place online. But while we're more comfortable with online meeting behavior and etiquette, the quality of technology is the single biggest productivity barrier in online meetings. With 2 in 3 meetings being online, organizations can boost productivity by equipping employees with professional meeting-room solutions, headsets, and personal cameras. Doing so will remove the biggest pain points for employees in online meetings.

Organizations also need to get both flexibility and technology right to retain and reengage Gen Z employees. Born into a time where career paths have proliferated, this generation will find new grass, if its greener. They know they want flexibility, career growth and work-life balance and that organizations need an edge to reignite engagement. Gen Z could be the most positive catalyst for rewriting the rulebook, challenging organizations to redesign work less bound by the traditions that defined it for decades pre-pandemic. It leaves leaders with a core task of understanding the complex paradoxes of younger generations, and rethinking how to get things done productively as we usher in the leaders of tomorrow.

Methodology

This survey was conducted online in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, India, and China. The survey was conducted by Toluna on behalf of Jabra from November 15 – November 25 among 4,473 knowledge workers. This online sample is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. The survey includes respondents from the following generations: Gen Z (ages 18-27), Millennials (Ages 28-43), Gen X (ages 44-59), Baby boomers (ages 60-78).

Find out more

If you have any questions about Jabra products, please contact your Jabra representative or visit [Jabra.com](https://www.jabra.com)

WHO WE ARE

Hej. (That's 'hi' in Danish.) We're Jabra and we've been engineering technology that makes life look and sound better for over 150 years. And you? Well, you might be running a million-dollar account from your kitchen (or café, or school run, or just about anywhere really). Or running your first 5k with a pair of expertly engineered earbuds. Or running a project via video, beaming yourself from a Toronto armchair to a Tokyo boardroom. Whatever you've got going on, we've got you. With advanced, intelligent video technology. And an incredible sound quality that makes your voice and your music sound better than ever. All designed to bring life and work wonderfully in tune.

Jabra. Technology for life's new rhythm.