

## Meet Gen Z

The next generation is here: Hopeful, anxious, hardworking, and searching for inspiration



This is the first in a series of reports from The Workforce Institute at Kronos and Future Workplace that examines attitudes of Gen Z in workplaces across Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S., including how their education has prepared them for the working world, their perceptions about the gig economy, and their views on how to be an employer of choice for the next generation.



# GEN Z WORK IDENTITY: CONTRADICTIONS ABOUND

Anxiously optimistic digital natives in pursuit of face-to-face interaction

**Gen Z is tech-savvy, hardworking, and relentlessly hopeful...**

...but prefers personal and interactive work environments, craves schedule autonomy and flexibility that supports work-life balance, and feels anxiety is the biggest barrier to professional success.

# RECONCILING PERSONAL WISHES WITH WORK REALITIES

## Gen Zers are still figuring out where they fall in the generational divide

### Gen Zers say they're the hardest-working generation — but demand flexibility

Nearly a third (32%) of Gen Zers believe they're the hardest-working generation<sup>1</sup> — beating out the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers. However, they admit that their hardworking nature is influenced by work-life balance: One in four (26%) would work harder and stay longer at a company with flexible schedules. On top of that, a third of Gen Z would *never* tolerate:

35%

Being forced to work when they don't want to.

34%

Not being able to use vacation days when they want to.

33%

An employer who gave them no say over their work schedule.

### Even in the digital era, Gen Z prefers face-to-face interaction at work

When given a list of names that best personify their generation, the majority (29%) of Gen Z chose the “digital generation” — yet nearly half (44%) prefer to work with their team or coworkers in person:



75% prefer to receive feedback from their manager in person.

Only 17% prefer to receive feedback via technology.



39% prefer to communicate with their team or employer in person vs. via text (16%) or email (9%).

In Mexico, more than half (55%) favor in-person communication.



43% prefer hands-on training and in-person first-day orientation.

This is most important to the majority (55%) of Canadian Gen Z.

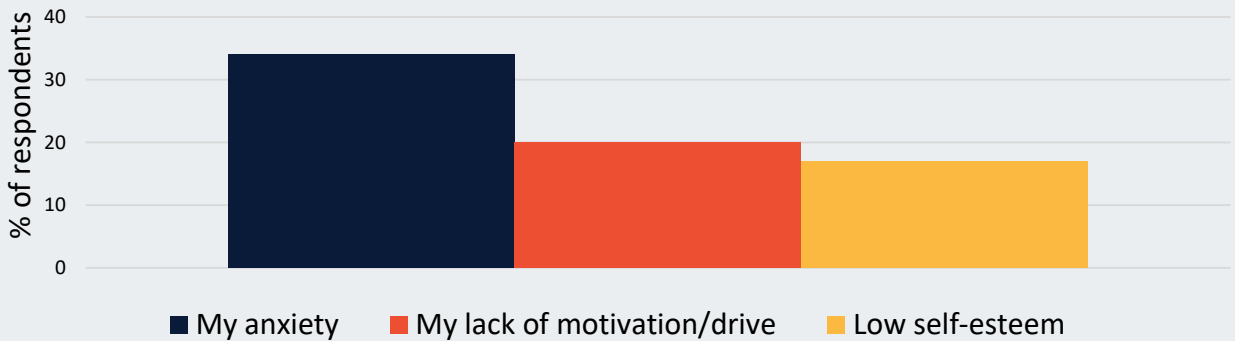
## Gen Zers are largely optimistic about their future — but anxious about their abilities to be successful workers

Across the globe, more than half (56%) of the Gen Z workforce is hopeful about the future. In India, an incredible 44% are “extremely optimistic,” followed closely by the U.S. Gen Z population at 31%.

This optimism is met with climbing anxiety about work expectations and achieving success. In fact, Gen Zers believe they have it as hard today as the Silent Generation did when they entered the working world. However, this mentality seems to stem from emotional barriers standing between them and the workplace.

Just over a third (34%) of Gen Zers feel their anxiety is holding them back; they also perceive their lack of motivation (20%) and low self-esteem (17%) to be barriers to their success in the workforce.

### Emotional barriers to workplace success



These findings are based on a global survey of 3,400 Gen Z respondents (aged 16–25).

Anxiety is the greatest concern among Gen Z in Canada, the U.K., and the U.S., and is more prevalent among female respondents (39%) than male (29%).



In Canada, 44% of Gen Z sees anxiety as a barrier to success.



In the U.K., 40% of Gen Z sees anxiety as a barrier to success.



In the U.S., 40% of Gen Z sees anxiety as a barrier to success.



# MIND THE “PREPARATION GAP”

How organizations and managers can effectively develop Gen Z for what school didn't teach them

## Despite record-high college enrollment, Gen Z still feels unprepared to enter the workforce

Only half of Gen Zers credit their college or high school experience as critical preparation for the working world, yet they look to managers and leaders to trust their abilities and support their work performance and professional growth.

# UNDERSTANDING GEN Z'S CONCERNS AND VALUES

To effectively train and develop Gen Zers, managers should meet them at the starting line

## When it comes to professional success, Gen Zers are most concerned about their education — and what it didn't prepare them for

Education is perceived as a barrier to workplace success by one in four (26%) Gen Zers. Specifically, they feel their education did *not* prepare them for common workplace skills such as:

- Negotiating (26%)
- Networking (24%)
- Speaking confidently in front of crowds (24%)
- Working long hours (24%)

One in five also feel their education hasn't adequately prepared them to resolve work conflicts (23%) or be managed by another person (21%).

Entering the workforce directly out of high school or college, a third (34%) of Gen Z is concerned that lack of professional connections or experience may negatively impact performance or success at work.

What *does* Gen Z feel prepared for?

- Showing up on time (67%)
- Working in a team (57%)
- Hitting project deadlines (57%)
- Working with customers (56%)

However, it's worth noting that Gen Z's confidence in these work skills stems primarily from general work experience (68%) and internship experience (57%) — more so than college experience (51%) or high school education (41%).



In India, 40% see education as a barrier to success.



In the U.S., 34% see education as a barrier to success.



In China, 45% feel unprepared for public speaking.



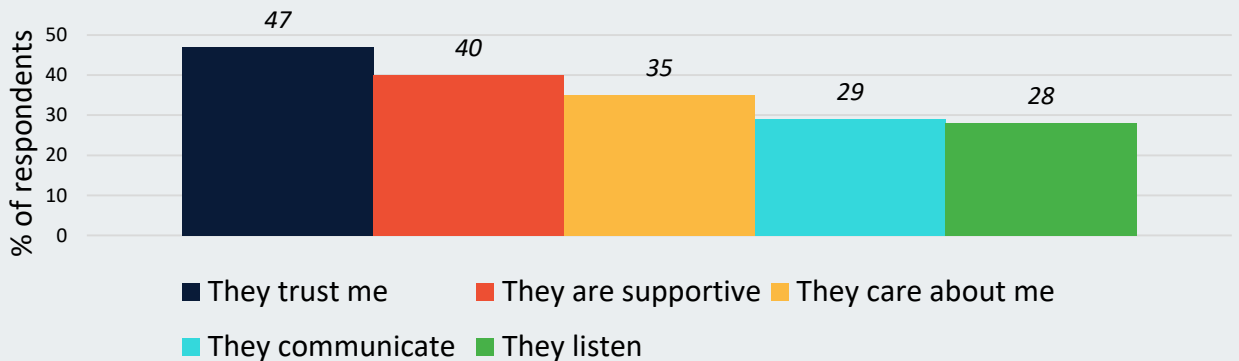
In the U.K., 37% feel unprepared to work long hours.

## Gen Z values trust and support above all else in a manager

Managers matter: Nearly a third (32%) of Gen Z is motivated to work harder and stay longer at a company if they have a supportive manager, and 29% believe having a poor manager would get in the way of their performance at work. In fact, 37% of Gen Z would never tolerate an unsupportive manager.

When it comes to managers, Gen Zers seek out **trust**, **support**, and **care** as their top three leadership traits. They're looking for leaders who will help them be inspired in their day-to-day work while encouraging them to try new things and develop professionally over time.

### Most-valued traits in a leader

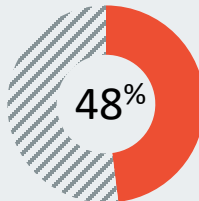


By demonstrating the qualities that Gen Z values most in a leader, organizations and managers can more effectively build and retain an inspired multigenerational workforce.



In Australia and New Zealand, more than half (51%) of Gen Z would never tolerate an unsupportive manager.

This sentiment is also high in Canada (49%) and the U.K. (45%).



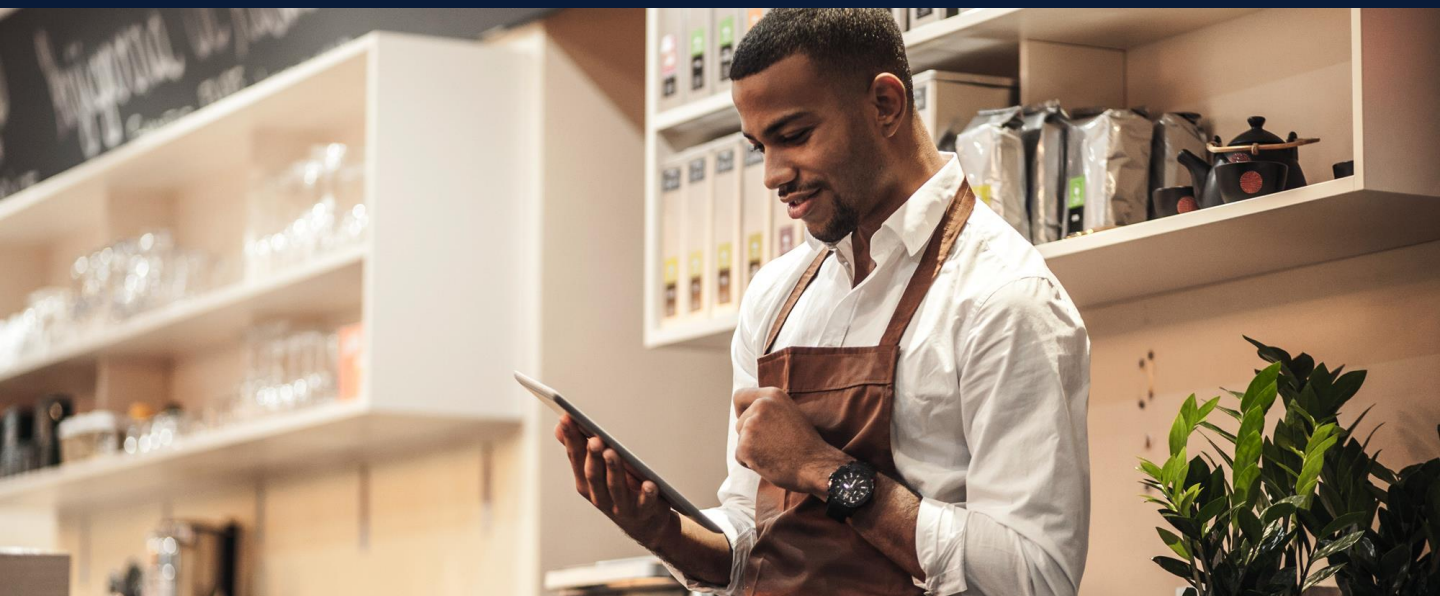
Half of Gen Zers believe a stressful working environment would impact their performance at work.

Another 43% say visibly unhappy employees would make them lose interest in joining a company.



In China, more than half (52%) of Gen Z is inspired by leaders who are strategic.

They are also most likely to seek a promotion within six months (38%) to a year (29%) of joining the team.



# MEETING GEN Z'S WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS

Set clear goals and recognize achievements to help Gen Zers move up the professional ladder

## When respect meets real-time feedback, Gen Z feels most motivated

It's not all about modern workplace technology — although that's certainly a part of it. Gen Z desires the same things as the generations that came before: feedback, recognition from managers, work they enjoy, and comprehensive benefits.



# RECOGNIZING A JOB WELL DONE

Engage Gen Zers by giving them what they want...  
which might be more frequent promotions

## Clear goals and real-time feedback to help them advance

Gen Z is keen on achieving goals and advancing professionally, with one in four (26%) looking to managers to set clear goals upfront and one in five (20%) counting on a defined path toward advancement.

Set expectations: More than a third (35%) of Gen Zers measure their personal success by how quickly they advance at work.

**57%**

of Gen Z worldwide expects to be promoted at least once a year.

Starting on day one, 25% of Gen Zers want regular check-ins with their manager during the first month of onboarding.

And don't wait to give feedback: Nearly half (43%) prefer receiving real-time manager feedback rather than during a scheduled performance review.

## Modern workplace technology that meets this digital generation's baseline expectations

It should come as no surprise: The self-proclaimed digital generation expects the same tech experience at work as they have at home.

**26%**

of Gen Z worldwide says poor workplace technology would affect their performance.

One-third (33%) of Gen Zers expect their employer to provide modern workplace technology.

- This expectation is held by more college graduates (38%) than those currently in high school (29%).

And many simply would not tolerate outdated workplace technology.

**21%**

of high school students and college graduates would not tolerate outdated workplace technology.

This sentiment is felt strongest in India, with 37% of Gen Z considering outdated workplace tech a deal breaker.

## Recognition and respect

A third of Gen Zers measure their success based on how respected they are by their coworkers (34%) and the recognition they receive from managers (32%).



Gen Z in China is more likely to measure success by respect from coworkers (50%) and recognition from managers (44%).

Women are more likely to validate their success by respect from colleagues (38%) and recognition from their manager (36%) compared with men (31% and 28%, respectively).

Overall, this kind of validation is encouraging to Gen Zers — it lets them know they're on a path to success.

## Fulfilling projects

Want Gen Zers to do their best work on the job? Give them projects that they actually care about and enjoy doing.

**51%**

of Gen Z worldwide is motivated by enjoyable work.

Although they consider themselves the hardest-working generation, Gen Zers gain their motivation from doing the work they care about most.

By encouraging Gen Z with fulfilling projects, more than a third (37%) say this will encourage them to do their best work.



In India, fulfilling work is more likely to motivate Gen Z (54%) to work harder and stay longer at a company — compared with pay/salary (34%).

## Work-life balance and competitive benefits

The shift across the workforce toward a strong work-life balance continues with Gen Z, which counts on employers to offer flexible hours (37%), paid vacation time (34%), and paid sick time (32%).

**31%**

of Gen Zers worldwide expect their employer to offer paid mental health days in support of work-life balance.

However, traditional benefits should not be forgotten in the push to attract Gen Z: Nearly half (44%) of Gen Zers care more about good healthcare coverage than paid time off (37%).

And contrary to popular belief, Gen Z is drawn toward good employee benefits (30%) more so than “perks” like free snacks, happy hours, or gym reimbursements (15%).

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This survey is the first in a series of reports from The Workforce Institute at Kronos and Future Workplace that examines attitudes of Gen Z in the workplace. Part one, “Meet Gen Z: Hopeful, Anxious, Hardworking, and Searching for Inspiration,” explores surprising contradictions of how 16- to 25-year-olds view themselves, their expectations of work, and how employers can best prepare to manage Gen Z employees.

## WORKFORCE INSTITUTE AT KRONOS

The Workforce Institute at Kronos is a think tank that helps organizations drive performance by addressing human capital management and workforce management issues that affect both hourly and salaried employees. Through education and research, The Workforce Institute empowers organizations with practical ideas for optimizing the 21st century workplace. Board members and key stakeholders publish articles and insights through The Workforce Institute Blog at [www.workforceinstitute.org](http://www.workforceinstitute.org).

### *Survey Methodology*

*Research findings are based on a global survey conducted on behalf of The Workforce Institute at Kronos and Future Workplace by Savanta across Australia and New Zealand (surveyed together), Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Mexico, Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S. from April 9–23, 2019. For this survey, 3,400 respondents were asked general questions to explore thoughts on gig economy, workplace readiness and expectations, corporate culture, and learning and development with respect to their career. The study targeted Gen Z employees. Respondents are recruited through a number of different mechanisms, via different sources, to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All panelists have passed a double opt-in process and completed on average 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents are invited to take part via email and are provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 1.7 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.*

*Footnote 1: Generations are defined as follows: Gen Z, ages 16-25; Millennials, ages 26-37; Gen X, ages 38-54; Baby Boomers, ages 55-74; and Silent Generation, ages 75-94.*

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