

# How does GenZ look at work?

## Introduction

I spent the summer of 2023 at WisdomCircle – a company focused on creating meaningful employment opportunities for retirees. While doing this, I made a mental note to understand how my generation, i.e., GenZ who are at the other end of the age and employment spectrum, feel about careers and employment. I surveyed 32 GenZ individuals and 33 HR leaders to understand both perspectives – prospective employees and potential employers. I also had conversations with a select few from both pools to get behind the numbers. This article captures my synthesis of the survey and interviews.

## Summary

As workplaces evolve with the changing landscape of technology, societal values and norms, effects of the pandemic, and a generation that will see the largest transfer of intergenerational wealth, perspectives on work and career choices are also in flux. My survey and interviews reveal a set of contrasting values and expectations between GenZ and potential employers, and a sense of unpreparedness in employers to keep pace with this change. There is indeed a generational divide but there is potential for mutual understanding and collaboration.

## What Matters Most to GenZ

One of the most striking differences in the views of Gen Z and employers is in the answer to the fundamental question of “what matters most when evaluating a job.” In my survey, 80 per cent of GenZ individuals saw company culture and values, and opportunities for growth and advancement as key factors influencing their choices. On the other hand, employers recognize these factors, but felt that salary and benefits and work life balance are what motivate Gen Z the most. My conversation with Monica, a GenZ in Mumbai centered on her belief that “work should not merely be about financial compensation; rather, it should connect with personal values.” And as I spoke to Mukesh, an employer in the same city, he was convinced that Gen Z will seek flexibility and in his view that this might lead to “a lack of commitment within the workplace.” This generational divide is rooted in differing life experiences. While our parents’ generation often equated long hours and visible dedication with job security and advancement, GenZ believes a more flexible approach not only promotes well-being but also enhances productivity and overall morale.

## A disconnect on Work Life Balance

I dug deeper into the disconnect on “work life balance” in a few conversations. Rohit, a GenZ in Bangalore, working at a consulting firm, argued that modern workplaces must adapt to the realities of today’s workforce, emphasizing that many companies are

increasingly adopting flexible schedules and remote work options to meet these evolving expectations. This flexibility often results in higher levels of employee satisfaction, which, in turn, can lead to increased productivity. And Suresh, a Human Resources leader with 25 years of experience, felt that “while flexibility is indeed valuable, it carries inherent risks”. As an employer, he feared that “providing too much leeway might inadvertently diminish a sense of responsibility and teamwork among employees.” When I asked Hema, another HR leader why this may be so, I realized that this perspective reflects a traditional belief system where commitment to the organization was paramount for success.

### **Redefining Experience and Growth**

Anita, a GenZ just starting her career at a bank in New-Delhi, challenged the traditional understanding of experience. She was in favour of gaining skills through mentorship programs and firsthand learning rather than strictly through formal education. For many in GenZ, career development continues to evolve and can be measured by skill acquisition and knowledge rather than merely years spent in a role or with a single employer. Anita’s friend Pooja further emphasized the importance of mentorship, coaching, and diverse project opportunities, illustrating a desire for a non-static approach to growth that contrasts with the typically linear career paths favored by older generations.

Shantanu, an experienced HR leader at a pharmaceutical company, appreciated this progressive outlook but recommended that GenZ maintain a balance between personal exploration and institutional loyalty. He advised that “investing time and effort into a single organization can yield substantial rewards,” including professional advancement and financial stability. He even mentioned that those who stay with one employer for more than three years can expect an average salary increase of approximately 15 per cent compared to those who frequently switch jobs. When I presented this perspective to Rahul, who just graduated and was interviewing for a job in advertising, he had the confidence that he can learn enough through diverse assignments and jobs along the way to be financially secure, and not be tied down to an employer just to secure financial advancement. These beliefs highlight a critical point of contention, revealing that while both parties value growth and development, their preferred paths to achieve these goals differ significantly.

### **The impact of technology**

Technology has profoundly impacted Gen Z's career choices. It has exposed us to a wider range of careers, facilitated skill development, and promoted a focus on flexibility and work-life balance. In my survey, almost 45 per cent of GenZ felt that technology had made them more adaptable and open to change, while another one-third felt that technology was a driver for them to seek work life balance. Interestingly, employers were much more

aligned on this theme with Gen Z, with close to 50 per cent agreeing that technology has made GenZ much more adaptable to new opportunities compared to previous generations. There was reasonable alignment on the themes of work-life balance that technology has created a need for. Technology is so ubiquitous that everyone experiences it, and so both parties recognize the need for managers and employees to “switch-off” and prioritize balance even more compelling.

### **Towards a Collaborative Future**

GenZ and employers will need to adopt a collaborative approach that blends the best of both generational perspectives. My generation believes that fostering an environment where commitment and flexibility coexist can lead to an enriching workplace. By prioritizing employee well-being without compromising accountability, organizations can cultivate a motivated and engaged workforce.

In conclusion, the conversations with GenZ employees and traditional employers helped me appreciate the nature of work in contemporary society. While significant differences exist in how each generation views work, career choices, and organizational loyalty, these varied perspectives can foster insightful discussions. As both generations work to understand and respect each other's viewpoints, they have the potential to create a more inclusive and productive work environment that adapts to the needs of a diverse workforce, enabled by technology which can indeed be a double-edged sword. Emphasizing communication and collaboration will be crucial as the workplace continues to evolve in the face of unprecedented changes.