

Learning in the Age of TikTok: How Gen Z is Shaping the Future of Learning and Work





Contents



Executive Summary	4
Key Research Findings	4
Key Recommendations	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Literature Review	8
Overview	8
Characteristics of Gen Z	8
Gen Z and the World of Work	8
The Learning Habits of Gen Z	9
Learning in the Age of TikTok	10
Managing Gen Z in the Workplace	11
3. The WorkJuggle Workplace Attitudes Survey	12
Overview	12
Survey Responses	12
4. The Employer's View of Gen Z	20
Employer Interviews	20
Themes and Insights	23
5. Discussion and Recommendations	24
Overview	24
Attention Spans and Content Delivery	24
The Primacy of Purpose: The 'Why'	24
Feedback, Coaching, and Mentoring	25
Recommendations for a Gen Z Learning Strategy	25
Bibliography	27

Executive Summary

This report, prepared by the Learnovate Centre, Trinity College Dublin for WorkJuggle, investigates the evolving learning and professional development requirements of Generation Z (Gen Z) as they integrate into the modern workforce. The report is compiled from a review of the literature complimented with insights derived from a survey of Gen Z employees, and qualitative data gathered through interviews with key Irish Learning and Development (L&D) professionals. The central finding is that effective L&D for Gen Z requires a fundamental shift from traditional, passive training models to a dynamic, purpose-driven, and highly relational approach that delivers regular feedback.

Key Research Findings

The research identified three primary areas where Gen Z's expectations diverge significantly from those of previous generations:

The Primacy of Purpose and Values

The data overwhelmingly indicates that Gen Z requires learning to be anchored in purpose. The survey of Gen Z employees highlighted that this cohort places a high importance on values and purpose and demands to understand not just what they are learning, but why it is relevant to their personal career trajectory, the company's mission, and any broader social impact. Without this foundational context, training is perceived as obligatory, leading to low engagement. This preference for intrinsic motivation means they seek a coaching process - one that empowers them to find their own solutions and align their development with organisational goals - rather than a passive, prescriptive consultancy approach.

The Demand for Adaptive, Multi-Modal Content

The research highlighted a significant contraction in the average learner's attention span, a crucial factor when designing modern learning programs. Gen Z, accustomed to the speed and variety of digital platforms, rejects monolithic training content and, instead, demands microlearning content delivered in short, 'bite-size' pieces. Furthermore, a variety of content formats - including short-form video and interactive elements needs to be used to allow the learner to "choose their own path" and maintain engagement.

The Need for High-Frequency Relational Support

Despite their digital fluency, Gen Z highly values authentic, human-centric support systems. The research consistently stressed the importance of mentoring and learning from others. Specifically, Gen Z requires regular coaching-style feedback focused on continuous development and future potential, not just past evaluation. In addition, Gen Zs seek robust mentoring relationships to help navigate complex professional landscapes and value Peer-to-Peer learning as a means of collaborative, non-hierarchical skill acquisition.

Key Recommendations

From the research conducted for this report, the following recommendations should be taken into account when designing learning programs for Gen Z:

- Focus on the Why: Gen Zs place a high importance on values and purpose and need to understand not just what they need to learn but why.
- Multi-Format Delivery: Learning content should be presented in a variety of formats, in short 'bite-size' pieces and in a way that allows the learner to choose their own pathway and pace.
- Frequent Feedback: Provide regular, personalised feedback delivered in a coaching style.
- Consolidate with Mentoring: Mentor Gen Zs to consolidate their learning and build their expertise and career development.

In addition, it is crucial to listen to this cohort of learners and incorporate their feedback into their learning experience thus creating a sense of ownership of their learning and maintain engagement.

By taking into account the above, organisations can improve the effectiveness of training programmes not just for Gen Zs but for all employees.



This research report explores the learning habits of what is referred to as Generation Z (Gen Z).

While there is no agreed definition of Gen Z, the term is generally used for those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s^{1,2}. The generation born since the early 2010s is often referred to as Gen Alpha³.

Gen Z represents the first generation to have grown up fully immersed in digital technology and their formative years have been shaped by smartphones, social media, and on-demand access to information. This has influenced not only how they interact socially and professionally, but also how they learn, process information, and engage with content.

Often referred to as 'digital natives', Gen Z tends to be highly adept at navigating online platforms, multitasking across devices, and seeking out information independently. They are often characterised by a preference for visual and interactive content, shorter attention spans for traditional text-heavy formats, and a strong desire for personalised, self-directed learning experiences. At the same time, they value authenticity, inclusivity, and relevance in the material they consume, expecting learning to be practical, engaging, and immediately applicable.

Understanding Gen Z's context is essential for designing effective learning experiences. Their habits are not simply the result of individual preference but reflect broader cultural and technological shifts. As such, learning design strategies that align with their digital fluency, collaborative mindset, and emphasis on purpose-driven learning are more likely to resonate with this generation.

Importantly, the disruption to in-person interaction during the global COVID pandemic has impacted on the soft skills development of Gen Zs.

From a demographic perspective, the statistics website media.market.us Media estimates that there is approximately 2 billion Gen Zs in the world (around a quarter of the world's population)⁴. Furthermore, it is estimated that Gen Z will constitute 27% of the workforce by the end of 2025⁵.

With the above in mind, this report was prepared using three main sources of research: a literature review examining papers, reports and other relevant content; a survey of Gen Zs gathering data on their attitudes to work and learning; and interviews with Learning and Development (L&D) professionals aimed at gathering insights from the perspective of those delivering training to this cohort of learners.

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z>

² <https://usafacts.org/articles/who-is-gen-z/>

³ <https://www.economist.com/culture/2025/03/13/meet-generation-alpha>

⁴ <https://media.market.us/gen-z-statistics/>

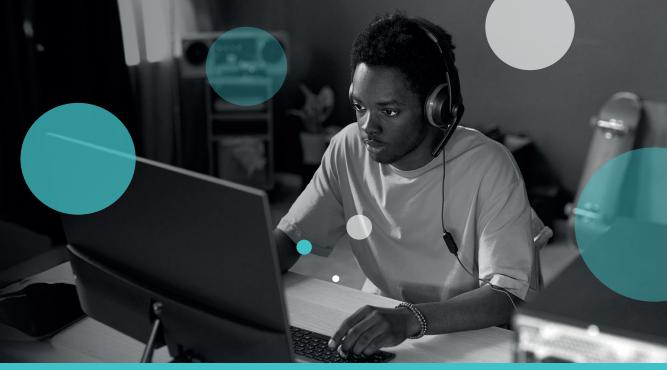
⁵ <https://about.udemy.com/press-releases/new-research-finds-65-of-generation-z-is-eager-for-professional-development-and-career-growth-challenging-stereotypes-toward-newest-members-of-the-workforce/>

Finally, it would be unwise to treat such a large cohort of individuals as one homogenous group when discussing generations, as 'sweeping generalisations are unfair' (Forbes, 2024).

Indeed, "there's a lot of nuance to how [Gen Zs] view the working world"⁶.

Thus, caution should be exercised when deploying strategies to deliver learning programmes for Gen Z – what works in one context may not prove as effective in others.

⁶ <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/email/genz/2023/04/2023-04-25b.html>



Overview

Today, there are four different generations active within the workforce, namely: Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y and Z⁷. The research conducted in preparing this report aimed to understand the particular characteristics of one of those generations – namely Gen Z.

A key goal was to identify the specific learning habits of this generation with a view to exploring strategies that organisations could adopt to effectively deliver learning programmes to this cohort.

Characteristics of Gen Z

Gen Zs place a high importance on an organisation's values and demand institutional purpose and accountability⁸.

They also see a healthy work-life balance as an essential component in maintaining their own well-being on which they place a higher importance than previous generations.

Despite being the first generation to have grown up in a world dominated by digital devices on which they spend an average of 8-10 hours every day, Gen Zs also show a strong preference for meaningful in-person interactions at work⁹. Indeed, according to Microsoft's Work Trend Index, 72% of Gen Z employees value face-to-face communication for important work discussions¹⁰. LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report further reveals that 65% of Gen Z professionals believe in-person collaboration leads to better work outcomes and stronger team relationships¹¹.

So, Gen Zs are driven more by values than salary, seek purpose and a sense of belonging, and, although being 'digital natives', consider face-to-face communication to be highly important. To this end, Gen Zs look to seamlessly blend technology with human interaction. They also have an expectation of regular feedback.

Gen Z and the World of Work

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), Gen Zs now make up approximately 27% of the workforce in OECD countries¹².

⁷ <https://imagine.jhu.edu/blog/2022/11/17/the-changing-generational-values/>

⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z>

⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/understanding-engaging-generation-z-workplace-2025-insights-tjjdf/>

¹⁰ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>

¹¹ <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report>

¹² <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/gen-z-don-t-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind/>

Increasingly over the last number of years, articles have been appearing that portray Gen Z as being a 'challenge' or even a force that is fundamentally changing the world of work^{13,14}.

Retaining Gen Z employees presents even greater difficulty than retaining Millennials and Gen Zs have no problem leaving a company or business at odds with their beliefs (Johns Hopkins University, 2024).

Gen Z is the generation with the least regard for salary and rate workplace values above competitive pay (Johns Hopkins University, 2024). These values include meaningful work, diverse and inclusive company culture, mental health prioritisation, open and honest communication, stability and balance, professional growth and development, collaboration, autonomy, and flexibility.

A recurring theme is the need to provide Gen Zs with regular and specific feedback. This has evolved from simply wanting frequent check-ins to desiring a more comprehensive development experience. Among Gen Zs, 84% prefer regular coaching-style conversations over formal reviews, 69% want feedback that focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses, and 78% expect clear growth opportunities and skill development pathways¹⁵. Gen Zs view feedback as an essential component of personal development, not just performance evaluation. As a result, they seek mentors who can guide their development rather than just managers who simply assess their work.

The Learning Habits of Gen Z

Research consistently identifies several fundamental characteristics of the learning habits of Gen Z:

- **Immediate Access** - Gen Zs expect information to be available instantly, on-demand, and without unnecessary barriers. According to the Deloitte Global 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, Gen Z's focus on immediate application of knowledge is reflected in their career preferences, with learning and development opportunities ranking among their top three reasons for choosing an employer (Deloitte, 2025). This aligns with their expectation that learning should be immediately applicable to their current challenges or goals. This is further highlighted in the LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report which shows a significant move away from traditional learning formats to microlearning modules.
- **Micro-Learning** - Accustomed to instant access to bite-sized, digital content, Gen Z have shortened attention spans. Consequently, they struggle to engage with lengthy learning modules¹⁶.
- **Visual Processing** - Gen Zs have a preference for visual information, making video content particularly effective for knowledge transfer and retention. Furthermore, they show a strong interest in learning through immersive experiences like VR or AR.
- **Practical Application** - Gen Zs prefer learning that has immediate, tangible relevance to their current challenges or goals.

¹³ <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/01/23/gen-z-in-the-workforce-challenging-or-change-makers/>

¹⁴ [https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/gen-z-don't-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind/](https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/gen-z-don-t-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind/)

¹⁵ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/understanding-engaging-generation-z-workplace-2025-insights-tjjdf/>

¹⁶ <https://www.nicheacademy.com/blog/8-tips-for-engaging-gen-z-with-better-training>

- **Self-Paced Progression** - Gen Zs like to control their learning journey, with the ability to pause, rewind, and review content as needed. They appreciate having the autonomy to choose their own learning path from a bundle of resources (such as videos, articles, PowerPoints or PDFs) rather than following a single, rigid curriculum¹⁷.
- **Collaborative Learning** - Gen Zs value learning from peers and influencers they perceive as authentic. Furthermore, Gen Zs place a high value on mentorship (Deloitte, 2025).
- **Feedback** - Driven in part by the instant feedback provided through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, Gen Zs expect and thrive on regular guidance and frequent, constructive feedback to support their growth (Deloitte, 2025).
- **Purpose** - Gen Zs expect all aspects of their work to be meaningful and have a sense of purpose and training programmes need to align to their values¹⁸.

Learning in the Age of TikTok

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of Gen Zs and TikTok is one of the most widely used platforms among this generation. Launched globally in 2018, TikTok now has over 1.6 billion users who spend an average of 90 minutes on the platform every day. 70% of Gen Zs spend over three hours daily watching online videos¹⁹.

However, the relationship Gen Zs have with TikTok (and other social media platforms) is far more complex than it might seem – as revealed in a Harris Poll conducted in 2024²⁰. One of the most surprising results surfaced by the poll of 18-27-year-olds was that among this generation (the first to grow up with social media woven into their lives), nearly half report that they wish that each of TikTok (47%), Snapchat (43%), and X (formerly Twitter, 50%) were never invented. Furthermore, significant numbers wish that YouTube (15%), Netflix (17%), the internet itself (17%), messaging apps (19%), and the smartphone (21%) were never invented. Nearly all survey respondents have taken steps to limit their social media usage at some point.

One key impact of TikTok has been to establish short-form video as a dominant form of content delivery. From a learning perspective, when instructional content is concise and focused, the information is easier to consume, process, and potentially retain. The ability of the short-form, summarised format to reduce what is termed cognitive load (or the amount of information to be processed) and, at the same time, reinforce learning is supported by the research.

Another benefit of using short-form video as a learning tool is that it facilitates the easier sharing of knowledge and expertise by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who can create their own quick instructional videos that can be used across the organisation²¹.

¹⁷ <https://performanceandlearning.ca/blogpost/1880447/477756/Engaging-Gen-Z-Learners-Tools-and-Tips>

¹⁸ <https://www.articulate.com/blog/training-gen-z-employees-3-things-you-should-know/>

¹⁹ <https://www.dreamgrow.com/tiktok-statistics/>

²⁰ <https://theharrispoll.com/briefs/gen-z-social-media-smart-phones/>

²¹ <https://www.edume.com/blog/tiktok-style-employee-training>

Managing Gen Z in the Workplace

Finally looking at the wider task of managing Gen Z employees, the WEF recommends that business leaders incorporate the following five elements into their leadership strategy²²:

1. Foster 'Intra-preneurism'

This involves business leaders fostering a culture of creativity that mirrors that of a small start-up. It cites the example of Amazon who dramatically increased their growth by implementing an internal structure built on 'small autonomous units' thus transforming a very large organisation into something more akin to a collection of start-ups.

2. Flexibility

As already evidenced by the research, Gen Z places a high value on work-life balance. Therefore, the need for flexibility is essential – not least since half of Gen Zs say they would prefer to be unemployed than in a job they don't like.

3. Encourage Diversity

Diversity matters to Gen Z and, to demonstrate an organisation's commitment to diversity, it must not be siloed in HR but embedded right across the organisation.

4. Commit to Globally-Guided Values

Across a range of critical issues, Gen Z employees expect their organisation to be proactive. For, example, 64% of 18–22-year-olds consider it important for their employer to take action on environmental issues.

5. Train Them in Future Skills

Like previous generations, Gen Zs can benefit greatly from training and upskilling. To accommodate this most recent cohort, organisations should also open up their hiring processes in non-traditional ways.

²² [https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/gen-z-don't-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind/](https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/gen-z-don-t-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind/)

The WorkJuggle Workplace Attitudes Survey



Overview

As part of the research for this project, a survey was conducted to gather insights into the learning habits of Gen Zs.

During June, July, and August of 2025, the survey questionnaire was circulated to a cohort of Gen Zs employees²³.

Survey Responses

I consent to participate in the survey, understanding that the data will be anonymous and will only be used for research purposes.

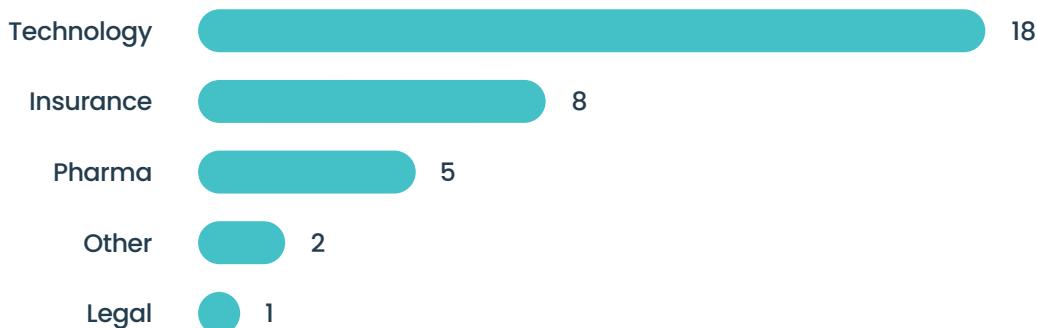
All participants gave their consent by answering Yes to this question.

What is your country of residence?

Of those who responded, 25 or 74% were from Ireland and 9 or 26% from the UK.

What industry do you currently work in?

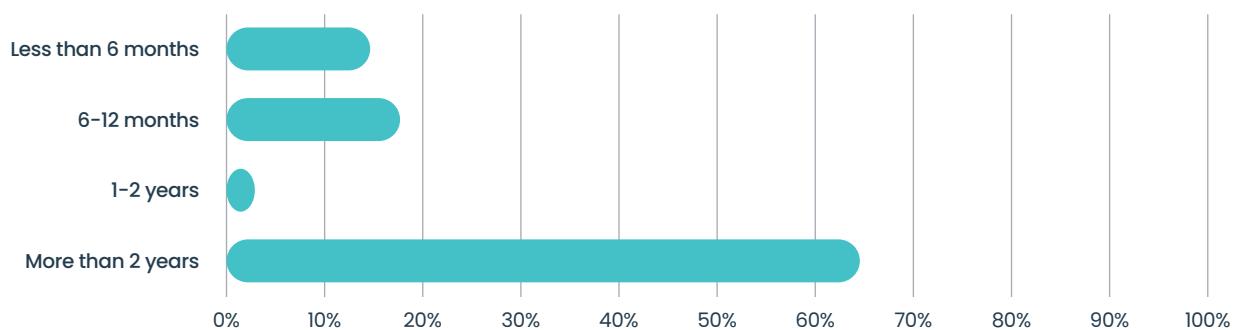
By far, the highest number of respondents worked in the Tech sector (18), with 8 working in Insurance and 5 working in Pharma.



²³Total of 34 participants from Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK)

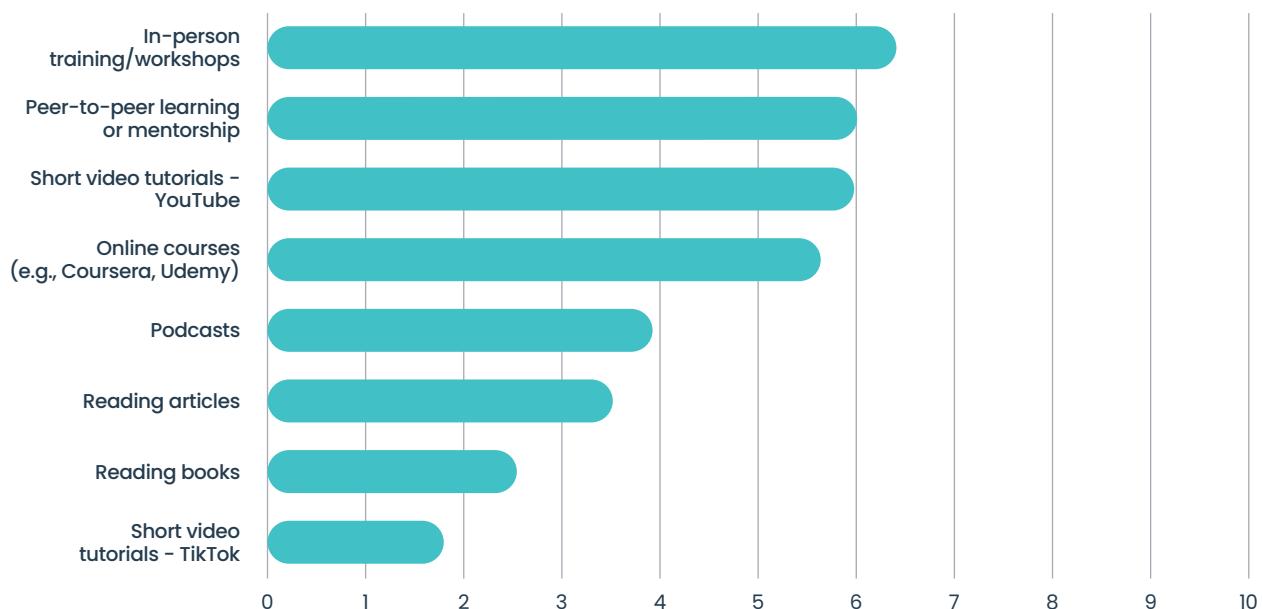
How long have you been in the workforce?

65% of the survey participants (22) have been in the workforce for 2 years or more.



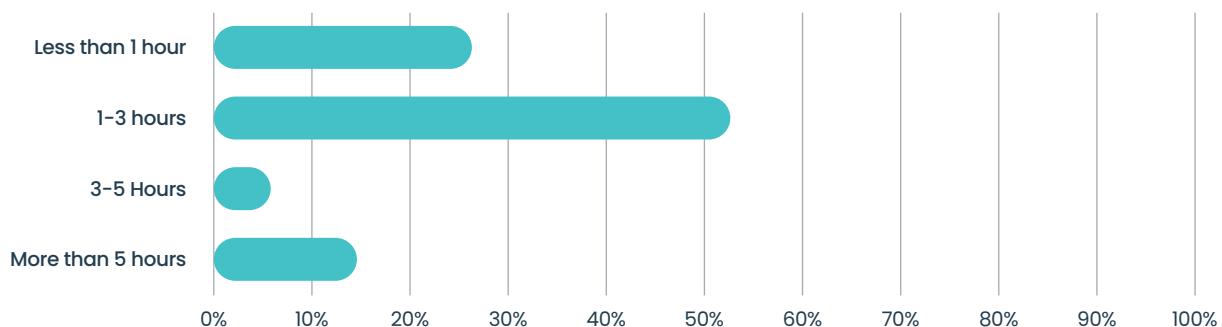
How do you prefer to learn new skills at work? (Please rank the options in order of preference)

'In-person training/workshops' and 'Peer-to-peer learning or mentorship' were consistently ranked in the top 3. 'Short video tutorials on You Tube' scored in the middle to high rank, however, 'Short video tutorials on TikTok' scored lower down along with Reading books.



How much time do you typically dedicate to learning and professional development in a week?

Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) spend 1-3 hours or more a week on learning and professional development.



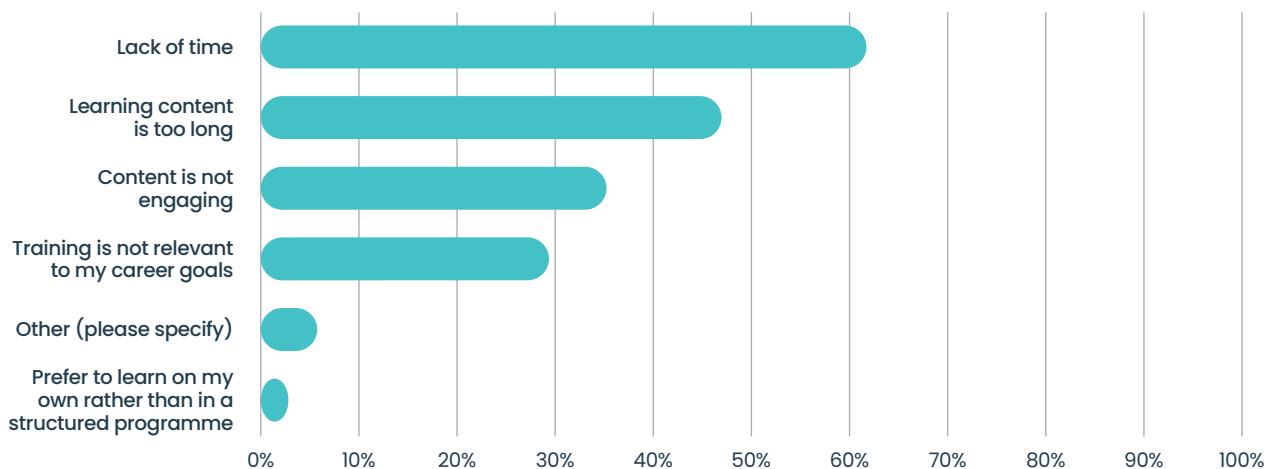
How important are the following factors when deciding to engage in workplace learning?

Almost all of the options scored highly (Important or Very Important), with only Certification or accreditation scoring more in the Slightly important and Moderately important points on the scale.

	Not important at all	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Total	Weighted Average
Convenience and accessibility	0	2	4	13	15	34	4.21
Relevance to career goals	0	1	2	9	22	34	4.53
Certification or accreditation	0	7	7	11	9	34	3.65
Opportunity for career progression	0	1	1	16	16	34	4.38
Learning in short, digestible formats	1	2	8	13	9	33	3.82

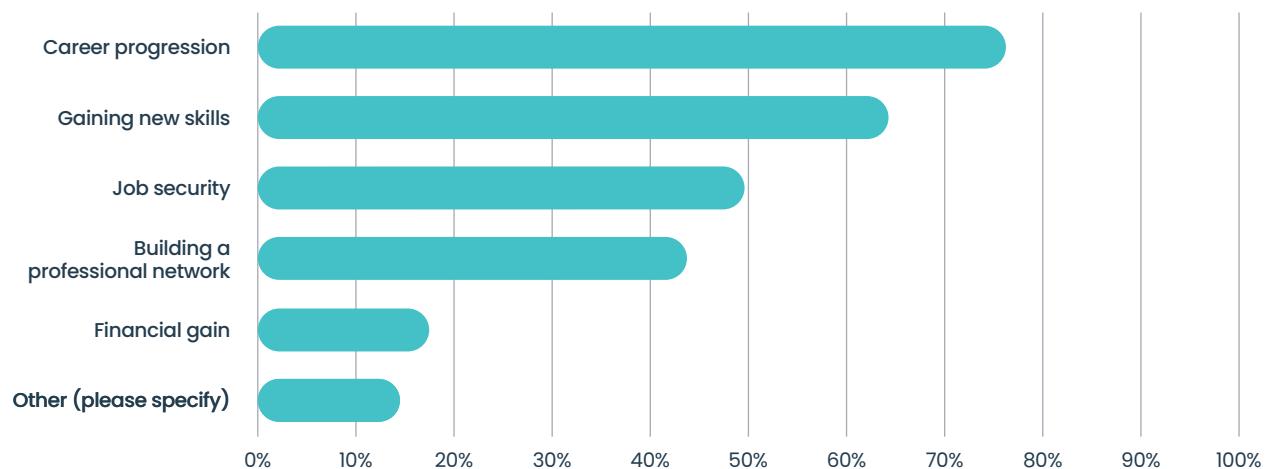
What barriers prevent you from engaging in workplace learning? (Select all that apply)

'Lack of time' and 'Learning content is too long' were highlighted as the two biggest barriers preventing participants from engaging in workplace learning.



What were your main motivations for joining a graduate program? (Tick all that apply)

'Career progression' and 'Gaining new skills' were the top two factors motivating participants to join a graduate program.



To what extent has your graduate program met your expectations?

Asked to rate their graduate program out of 100, the participants rated the program at an average of 74%.

What would make a graduate program more valuable to you?

This question allowed a free text response, and this is a selection of those submitted by the participants:

'A graduate program would be more valuable to me if it offered a variety of learning mediums including hands-on projects—in interactive and engaging formats that encourage active participation and deeper understanding.'

'More hands-on practice and working alongside more experienced colleagues.'

'Team activities, or activities in general. Learning by completing tasks or activities, instead of reading/listening. Building connections'

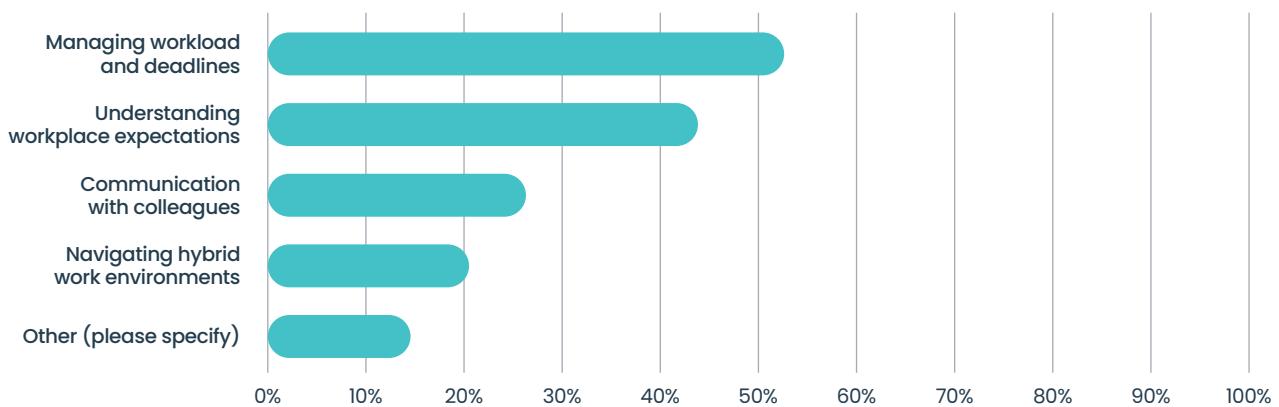
'Hands-on-learning experience'

'Feedback on my progression and the skills I am developing.'

What challenges have you faced in transitioning from education to the workplace? (Select all that apply)

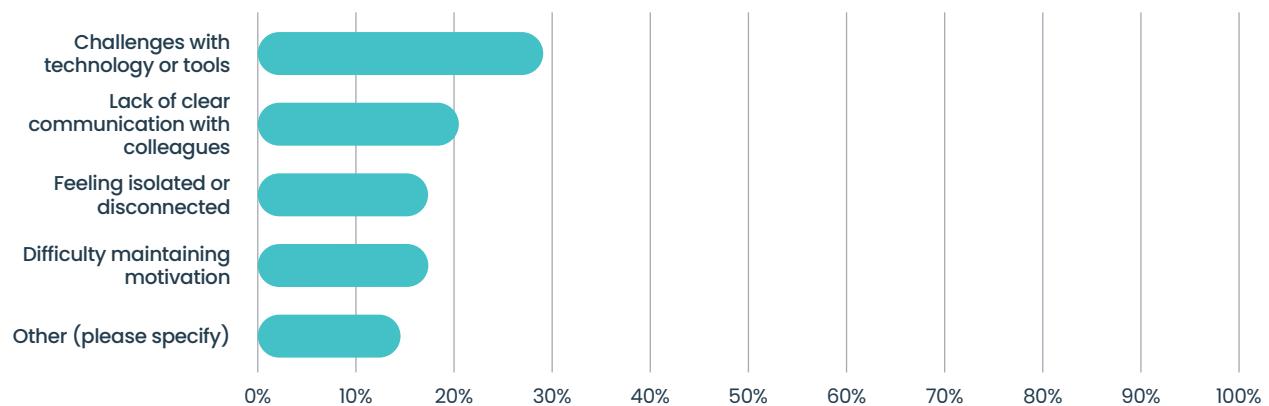
There was an even spread across the choices, with Managing workload and deadlines and Understanding workplace expectations emerging as the two most significant challenges.

One challenge cited in the 'Other' category was 'Lack of mentorship'.



What challenges have you encountered in the workplace?

Nearly 30% of respondents cited Challenges with technology or tools as the biggest challenge they have encountered in the workplace.



Question 14: How do you typically evaluate whether a task at work is worth the effort?

A number of approaches were cited by participants

'Determine importance of the task and the time required to fulfil it and whether it contributes to the overall strategy of the organisation.'

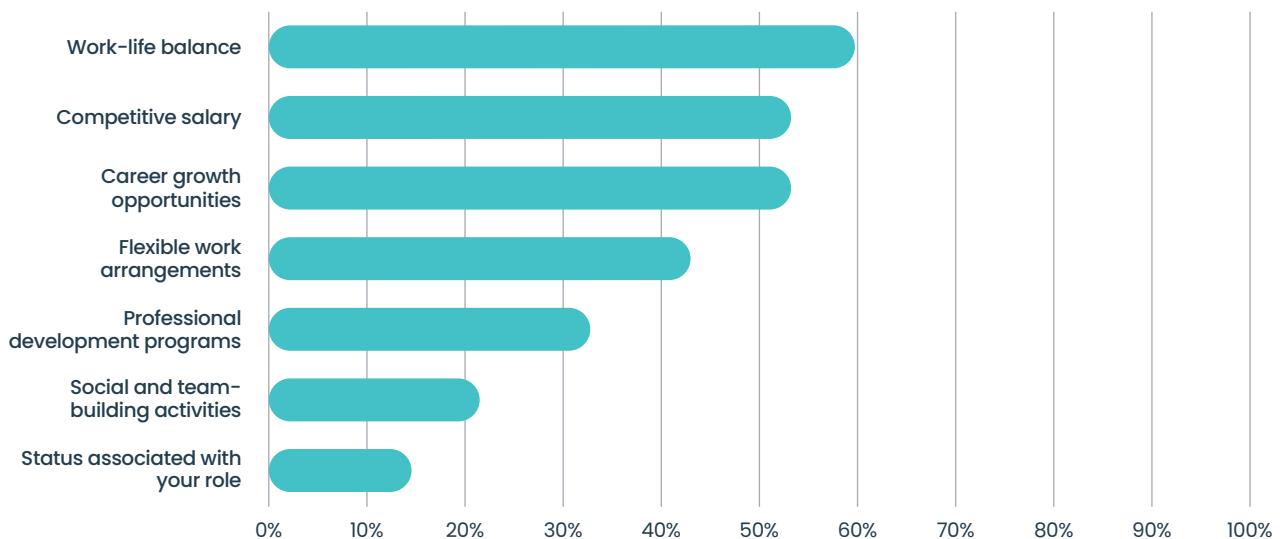
'Time taken vs. value to the business / customer.'

'Based on the outcome and growth it will give to the company.' --

'If I learn something by doing the task.'

What workplace benefits or perks matter most to you? (Please rank the options in order of preference)

The responses are spread across the options, with Work-life balance, Career growth opportunities, and Competitive salary occupying the first three places in the ranking.



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Across the five statements, a majority of participants either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' with the statements: 74% feel valued at work while 77% are regularly learning valuable knowledge.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
My current job meets my financial expectations.	1	6	8	18	1	34
I feel valued in my workplace.	1	1	7	17	8	34
I have opportunities for personal and professional growth.	1	2	6	17	8	34
I experience a good balance between effort and reward at work.	0	2	9	19	4	34
I am regularly learning valuable knowledge	0	2	6	19	7	34

What could your employer do to enhance your learning opportunities in work?

The participants had a number of suggestions on how their employer could enhance their learning opportunities:

'Dedicated working hours for experimentation and learning.'

'Assign dedicated time to learning and development. Provide opportunities to job shadow.'

'More guidance on which technologies are the most important to upskill in and signposting of resources.'

'Bi-/tri-monthly short training programme (online/hybrid) on latest tool/concept used for work in the company which might benefit the company in future as well.'

What could your employer do to improve your experience at work?

The participants had a number of suggestions on how their employer could enhance their experience at work:

'Recognise achievements, truly support the work-life balance - don't have it just as a tick box exercise'

'Flexibility in working hours based on the volume and completion of work.'

'Clearer expectations/feedback on performance and perception.'

Employer Interviews

As part of the research for this report, a series of 1-to-1, online interviews were conducted with people from the corporate world with a role in delivering learning programmes to employees that included a significant cohort of Gen Zs.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather insights from the employer's perspective on their experiences with Gen Z employees.

The format used was a 30-minute, semi-structured interview during which the participants were asked questions on the following topics:

- Their experiences with Gen Z employees
- What they saw as the key characteristics of Gen Z
- How they viewed Gen Zs approach to learning
- Examples of learning initiatives aimed at Gen Z
- Recommendations on designing effective learning programs for Gen Z

In total, 4 interviewees participated as part of this part of the research.

Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 is a Learning and Development Consultant with a large financial services company.

He spoke about the significant changes they have made to their learning programmes to accommodate Gen Z. He explained that, with new starters before getting into the minutiae of their role, he needed to talk about the company's values and endeavour to demonstrate how they aligned with the perceived values of Gen Z. Previously, this would have been woven into the induction programme over a period of six months, but, now, this needed to be set out clearly at the start.

As an example, he described how the company would explain its position on climate change and the measures it was taking as a result. He felt this 'alignment of values' was a defining factor in delivering any training programme to Gen Z. Thus, the company sees the need to explain 'why' they do what they do and not just the 'what' or the 'how'. This has also seen a subtle but significant shift away from being almost entirely customer focused to paying heightened attention to their internal messaging.

Feedback now needs to be rethought and carefully structured in a way that doesn't necessarily tell the employee what they need to do but aims to help them find what they should be doing themselves. This can be as simple as asking questions like 'If you were to do it again, would you do it any differently?' and then framing the question around this. Interviewee 1 also explained

that when he gives feedback, he makes sure his phone is put away, his laptop closed, and the employee sees they have his full attention. He stressed the need to pay particular attention to language as Gen Zs can shut-off more quickly than other cohorts when put in an uncomfortable position.

The company also runs a comprehensive mentoring programme, and all their mentors are given specific training. As part of this programme, they run one-day 'networking sessions' that bring together mentors and mentees during which they are encouraged to share their experiences.

He encouraged organisations to build their learning programmes on data – because that will help you explain the 'why' while also incorporating continual checks on people's feelings and thoughts on their learning experience.

Interviewee 2

Interviewee 2 is Head of People at a growing start-up that develops AI-powered solutions for call centres.

A large proportion of the company's staff are Gen Z, and the average age of their employees is 31.

The company conducts exit interviews with any employees who leave, and these show a trend that Gen Zs are less career driven than previous generations. This manifests itself in a lack of interest in doing overtime or even progressing beyond middle management into a more senior role which creates challenges within the organisation when it comes to forming the next generation of senior leadership.

The company works hard at creating a working environment that appeals to Gen Z – this involves shying away from a traditional hierarchical organisation structure and ensuring an element of fun in the workplace.

Interviewee 2 sees the importance of a work-life balance as a key priority for Gen Zs across a range of backgrounds and roles within the organisation. She felt that this was a good thing as it demonstrated how they looked after their health and well-being.

When it comes to learning, she highlighted a high degree of interactivity as key to ensuring engagement of Gen Zs and also spoke about how effective collaborative learning was amongst this cohort citing team exercises as an example.

She also spoke about the appetite Gen Zs have for feedback, explaining that the organising had moved from originally only having annual reviews, to bi-annual reviews and were now moving to quarterly reviews.

Mentorship is a key tool within the organisation when it comes to fostering professional development. But she insisted on the importance of trying to make as much of it as possible happen in-person which has been far more effective than online mentoring.

With regard to designing effective learning programmes for Gen Z, she strongly recommended that, if at all possible, the content should be as practical and relevant as possible. Furthermore, she cited role-play as a particularly effective technique for delivering training on topics such as communication or meeting management.

Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 is a highly experienced L&D professional responsible for accreditation programmes in the financial services sector.

She spoke about the importance of recognition to Gen Z employees. They expect recognition of their effort and contribution. To this end, she strongly believes that Gen Zs will go to organisations where they feel valued.

She also highlighted the importance Gen Zs place on the work-life balance and used the new phenomenon of younger employees buying holiday leave to demonstrate how this manifested itself in the workplace.

In talking about learning, she highlighted a number of key considerations. The short attention span of Gen Zs means that any content must immediately engage the learner. Previously, the organisation's learning content followed a traditional design model that began by telling the learner what they were going to learn, then presented the learning before finishing by recalling the key points of the learning. Now, however, learning content is presented with only the shortest of introductions (often less than 10 seconds) and broken down into much smaller segments for easier and quicker consumption.

Furthermore, the organisation's learning programmes now typically consist of three 'layers' of content: core content (full-length content often in the form of textbooks), alternative content (full-length but in a different format such as a video or a podcast), and complimentary content (summarised content in the form of an infographic or a mind map, for example). She also pointed out how useful the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be when designing content across these three layers. The aim of UDL to provide a framework for designing learning content accessible to the widest audience lends itself very well to the task of delivering content in variety of modes to engage Gen Z.

Interviewee 4

Interviewee 4 works as the Head of Learning and Development in a tech services company and has many years' experience delivering training programmes.

The key learning in her organisation takes the form of a 21-month Academy Programme that new-hires undertake to learn the skills needed to integrate into their respective teams. The programme consists of an initial 3-months entirely devoted to training after which participants continue with training as they work until they achieve their qualifications at the end of the programme.

Mentorship and on-going support are provided to the participants throughout the programme, and this was highlighted as central to the success of the Academy model.

Interviewee 4 also pointed out that the organisation had made a conscious decision to bring people back into the office for 3 days a week. This has allowed for in-person training to be scheduled which has seen noticeable improvements in engagement and progression.

Furthermore, when the Academy Programme was initially launched a number of years ago, the participants were almost all early career starters embarking on their first role in the workforce. Interviewee 4 explained that the results from this first cohort were mixed. However, since then they have had a mix of early career starters and people returning to work (roughly a 60/40 split) and this has resulted in much better outcomes. Interviewee 4 believes this is due in no small part to the positive influence most experienced participants have on the younger, Gen Z cohort.

Themes and Insights

A central theme across the interviewees was the importance Gen Z place on a healthy work-life balance. The notion that work was a defining part of your life and who you were was nothing like as strong as previous generation. Gen Z wants to work, but not to the point that it impacts on their quality of life or overall well-being. And they will take conscious steps to achieve the work-life balance they desire. As an example of this, one interviewee cited the recent trend of employees buying holiday leave to ensure they had time to pursue their life outside of work. As one interviewee said, they ask themselves: 'Does this job fit my lifestyle and who I am?'. As another interviewee put it: Gen Z are not working to live at all. Once they're out the door it's me time'.

Another theme was the alignment of values and having a sense of belonging and gaining recognition being key elements to this.

The importance of communication was also a recurring theme – with particular importance being placed on how you communicate with the Gen Zs. One interviewee cautioned: 'Never be preachy with [Gen Z]'.

Interviewees stressed the importance of short but frequent communication with a narrow focus. One interviewee cited the example of workplace survey they had carried out on which they had run a conscious communication campaign explaining in short messages displayed on screens around the office what the purpose of survey was and, crucially, how the company intended to act on the survey results. One interviewee stressed how their organisation went out of their way to explain why a task (learning or other) was important to the individual and not just stating that it had to be done.

The need to provide frequent, targeted feedback was cited by all interviewees as an essential approach to effectively managing Gen Zs. As one interviewee explained: 'Gen Zs are seeking out more feedback'.

Mentorship also emerged as a key theme. It was cited as a key element in supporting training and development of employees and ensuring they achieved the necessary level of skills for their role. It was also pointed out that Gen Zs expect organisations to have a solid mentoring programme.

Another theme was the need to find the right pace for learning by constantly monitoring learner progress and eliciting feedback on the learner experience. As one interviewee said: 'You need to allow them time and space to grow' and realise that you are 'taking people on a journey' while, at the same time, understanding their needs by listening carefully. The need to take on board inputs from Gen Z and adjust any learning programme accordingly was highlighted by more than one interviewee.

Discussion and Recommendations

Overview

The research conducted through the review of the literature, survey of Gen Zs, interviews with Learning & Development (L&D) professionals confirms a fundamental shift in the landscape of professional development driven by the integration of Generation Z into the workforce. The key finding across all three research strands is not merely that Gen Z learns differently, but that their expectations for learning and career development are inextricably linked to core values of purpose, engagement, and relational support.

Attention Spans and Content Delivery

Emerging from the research is a widely accepted premise regarding a contraction in the average attention span, a point that was also validated by the interviews with L&D professionals. Consistently highlighted was the need to design content with this shorter attention window in mind, favouring 'bite-size' learning chunks. This necessity is not a deficit on the part of the learner, but a reflection of the digital environment they have grown up in, demanding information to be delivered quickly, efficiently, and often visually.

This requires a move away from monolithic, hours-long training modules. The evidence from the research points to the need for a diverse blend of content—short-form video, curated resources, and varied modes of engagement—to ensure continuous retention and engagement. It is also clear that Gen Z demand content that allows them to "choose their own path," suggesting that passive consumption is less effective than active, self-directed exploration. Therefore, the discussion must pivot from if content should be multi-modal to how to effectively manage and deploy this complexity to maximise engagement and combat the highlighted attention challenges.

The Primacy of Purpose: The 'Why'

One significant finding across the research lies in the Gen Z desire for purpose. This cohort places a high importance on values and purpose and needs to understand not just what they need to learn, but why. This is a significant shift from previous generations who may have accepted training based on hierarchical or corporate mandate. For Gen Z, the learning intervention must be anchored to a clear narrative that connects the skill being taught to their personal development, the company's mission, and, often, a broader social good.

The need to explain the 'Why' of any training programme is thus not an optional introduction but the foundational component that unlocks engagement and commitment from the Gen Z learner.

Feedback, Coaching, and Mentoring

An important concept consistently underscored was the importance of human-centric, relational support mechanisms, specifically Feedback, Coaching, and Mentoring. The reliance on technology for information does not negate the need for human connection and guidance. Instead, it seems to heighten the demand for authentic, personal interaction in their professional lives.

Feedback, in particular, is positioned as a key tool for learning support, which must move beyond occasional 'touchpoints' to become more frequent, coaching-style feedback. This implies a continuous dialogue focused on growth potential rather than past performance deficits. Similarly, the emphasis on mentoring and learning from others highlights a desire for non-hierarchical, robust relationships that offer navigation assistance through the complexities of a modern career. This relational core provides the necessary human context and continuity that short-form, dispersed digital content cannot deliver alone, ensuring that fast-paced learning is anchored by deep professional guidance.

Recommendations for a Gen Z Learning Strategy

Based on the findings in this report, the following four recommendations are proposed to successfully engage and develop the Gen Z workforce:

1: Explain the 'Why' of any Training Programme

Justification: There is clear evidence of a strong link between Gen Z engagement and the perceived purpose and values alignment of their work. Without a clear "why," training is viewed as an obligatory task, potentially leading to low engagement and poor knowledge retention.

Actionable Steps:

Create a Purpose Statement: Every single training program, module, or even micro-lesson should be accompanied by a clear, concise statement answering: "How will this skill improve your career, and how does this skill contribute to our company's mission or values?" This should be clear and concise and could be in text or video format.

Contextualise Learning Outcomes: Frame learning outcomes not merely as knowledge acquisition (e.g., "Learners will understand the new CRM system") but as impact statements (e.g., "Learners will be able to use the new CRM system to halve client response time, directly improving customer satisfaction scores and enabling personal performance bonuses").

Align with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Where possible, directly connect professional development to the company's social or environmental goals. For example, show how efficiency training reduces waste or how leadership training improves team equity. This connects the learning to the broader value system Gen Z seeks in their employers.

2: Providing Content in Multiple Formats

Justification: The challenge of shorter attention spans and the need for content that matches Gen Z's digital consumption habits means that long-format, one-size-fits-all content (e.g., a two-hour webinar) is no longer fit for purpose.

Actionable Steps:

Use Innovative Techniques to Deliver Content:

One of the L&D professionals interviewed explained how their organisation now designed three types of learning content:

- Core: The essential, foundational knowledge presented in long-format. This might be a textbook, video recording or PDF.
- Alternative: The same content as core but provided through a different medium. This could be a series of audio files produced from the chapters of a textbook.
- Complimentary: This provides additional, short-format learning resources. This could be a 60-second video, a short quiz, or an infographic of key concepts.

Where possible learning content should be broken down into small segments (microlearning), and short-form video should be the medium of choice.

3: Giving Regular Coaching-style Feedback

Justification: Feedback was identified in the research as a key tool for learning support. Traditional, infrequent feedback fails to meet the need for immediate, growth-oriented guidance required by a generation accustomed to instant digital affirmation and correction.

Actionable Steps:

Emphasise Development: Redefine feedback as a coaching process, focusing on future potential and skill improvement rather than solely on assessing past performance. This requires managers to ask open-ended questions and collaboratively set goals.

Increase Feedback Frequency: Ensure that feedback is delivered in frequent, short 'touchpoints' to ensure learner progression and foster engagement.

Feedback as a Conversation: Don't just provide feedback to your learners but elicit feedback from them on their learning experience.

4: Robust Mentoring and Peer-to-Peer Learning Structures

Justification: The research underscores the desire for relational learning, and the importance of mentoring and learning from others is consistently cited. Gen Zs seek guidance and stability in the face of rapid career changes, and they value the experience and wisdom of others, provided the relationship is authentic and supportive.

Actionable Steps:

Establish a Formalised, Flexible Mentoring Programme: Move beyond informal pairings. Create a structured program that uses defined goals, expectations, and a minimum engagement frequency. However, ensure flexibility, allowing mentees to have more than one mentor for different aspects of their career (e.g., technical skills vs. leadership soft skills).

Foster Peer-to-Peer Learning Communities: Utilise internal digital tools (e.g., dedicated chat channels, internal forums) to create self-sustaining communities of practice. Encourage Gen Z employees to lead lunch-and-learn sessions or create short-form content for their peers, leveraging their natural inclination toward collaborative, informal learning.

Train Mentors in Coaching Skills: Ensure all employees designated as mentors are trained in the principles of coaching-style feedback and active listening, rather than simply advising. The goal is to facilitate the mentee's own discovery and growth, not to dictate their path.

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About This Study

The way we learn is evolving. This study explores how Generation Z - the first truly digital-native workforce - is redefining learning expectations, engagement, and purpose in the modern workplace.

Drawing on original research from WorkJuggle and the Learnovate Centre at Trinity College Dublin, this report highlights how employers can better connect with, develop and retain early career talent through learning that feels relevant, purposeful, and human.

Prepared by the Learnovate Centre, Trinity College Dublin, for WorkJuggle.

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