



the gen z workplace blueprint

future focused,
fast moving.



randstad

partner for talent.

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executive summary.

Gen Z is ambitious and capable — but struggling to find a foothold. They enter the world of work at a time of disruption: despite rising talent scarcity, our research shows there is a steady decline in entry-level roles across sectors. Young workers face higher competition, technological change and uncertain growth paths.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is exacerbating this situation further by automating many tasks traditionally performed by junior talent. With entry-level job postings falling by 29 percentage points since January 2024, Gen Z is increasingly concerned about the impact of AI on the future of their careers. However, they are also excited by the opportunity it presents.

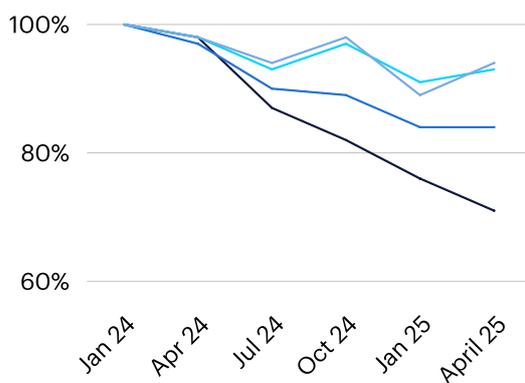
The complex work environment they are entering fosters a core paradox. Drawing on a survey of 11,250 talent and an analysis of over 126 million job postings globally, our research indicates a generation that is both determined and disoriented.

long-term goals, short tenures

Young people seek meaningful careers and focus strongly on their long-term career goals, but lack confidence in navigating a new world of work. Many feel under-prepared and unsupported, leading them to compromise on their dream jobs.

In the wake of this, tenure is shrinking: today's young workers are changing jobs faster than any previous generation. While employers may perceive this as a lack of loyalty, our findings suggest it's a reaction to unmet expectations and a keen desire for progression.

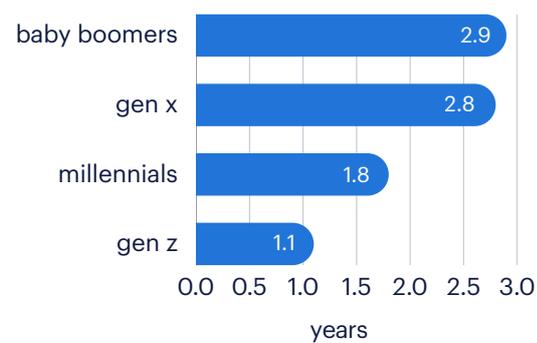
entry-level job postings decline while senior roles stabilize or grow*



- 0-2 years' experience
- 3-5 years' experience
- 6-9 years' experience
- 10+ years' experience

*Data shown as % of baseline job postings by experience level, where January 2024 = 100%. Based on analysis of over 126 million job postings globally.

average tenure during first 5 years of career



This creates a distinctive mindset: Gen Z is confident and enthusiastic about learning the ropes, but quick to move on when growth stalls.

They are naturally attracted to high-growth sectors such as IT, healthcare and financial services, seeking to align their own ambitions with the fast-paced expansion of these industries.

a generation reshaped by AI

Gen Z is stepping into the workforce just as AI is transforming the early career landscape. Entry-level roles are changing quickly, with younger workers expected to arrive already fluent in the tools shaping work.

At the same time, Gen Z talent is reshaping how work fits into life. Many are pursuing side hustles, be it driven by purpose, flexibility or financial needs.

Despite concerns about AI's impact on equity and long-term career stability, they are also optimistic about the technology's role in improving productivity.

As employers navigate this talent-scarce world, it's increasingly clear: Gen Z is not a challenge to manage or a problem to solve. In a workforce being reshaped by AI and ambition, they offer a new blueprint for what work can become.

For employers, the takeaway is clear: Gen Z is eager to grow and adapt but needs support that's accessible, inclusive, and aligned with their ambitions.

optimism and concern

While Gen Z strongly believe in their abilities — with the vast majority (79%) reporting they can learn new skills quickly — almost half say they have been rejected for roles due to a lack of skills.

Furthermore, 41% don't feel they can achieve their dream role due to their education or lack thereof, and 40% say that their personal background — their demographics or family circumstances, for example — prevents them from going after their ideal career.

While Gen Z clearly values career growth and advancement, many young professionals don't yet see that this ambition relies on ongoing skills development. Only 12% list it among their top priorities, highlighting an opportunity for employers to clarify the link between upskilling and long-term success.

Gen Z is enthusiastic about AI's potential, with 58% excited about AI in the workplace. 55% already use it for problem-solving at work — the highest across all generations. However, this enthusiasm masks a growing equity gap in AI training, with a gender disparity: 58% of men use the technology for problem-solving at work compared to 52% of women. This is further compounded by rising concern over AI's long-term impact on jobs, with 46% now worried, up from 40% as reported in our [2024 AI & Equity Report](#).



85% of Gen Z often or always consider long-term career goals when evaluating a new role



79% of Gen Z say they can learn new skills quickly

ambition and uncertainty

Gen Z talent enters the workforce with a focus on the future. They are the most likely generation to consider their long-term career goals when looking at a new role. And when looking at talent who changed jobs in the last year, Gen Z are also the most likely to cite a lack of progression opportunities as their motivation.

It is likely because of this future orientation that they are also the most mobile generation. More than half of respondents in this demographic say they are actively job hunting and just a third are planning to stay in their role for 12 months. Gen Z's average tenure stands at just 1.1 years in the first five years of their career (compared with 1.8 for Millennials, 2.8 for Gen X and 2.9 for Baby Boomers at the same point).

This desire to change jobs is driven by a perceived lack of career progression and a pragmatic need for higher pay, likely to keep pace with inflation — so much so that many will even compromise on personal values for a role that offers financial security. This is further illustrated by the fact that Gen Z talent are the least likely to say their job aligns with their dream role (56% vs. 63% Baby Boomers).

Yet, even while searching for new roles to meet that ambition, 68% still strive to perform effectively in their current roles. Organizations will do well to note this — and work with it for mutual benefit, including conversations that can cultivate retention.

Despite this apparent readiness to make a career change, Gen Z talent feel a striking sense of self-doubt, the data shows. Over two-fifths report that they lack the confidence to find another job.

navigating gen z paradoxes

For both employers and young talent, navigating these paradoxes is the key to future success. In the face of a challenging market, attracting and retaining this generation requires a strategic shift.

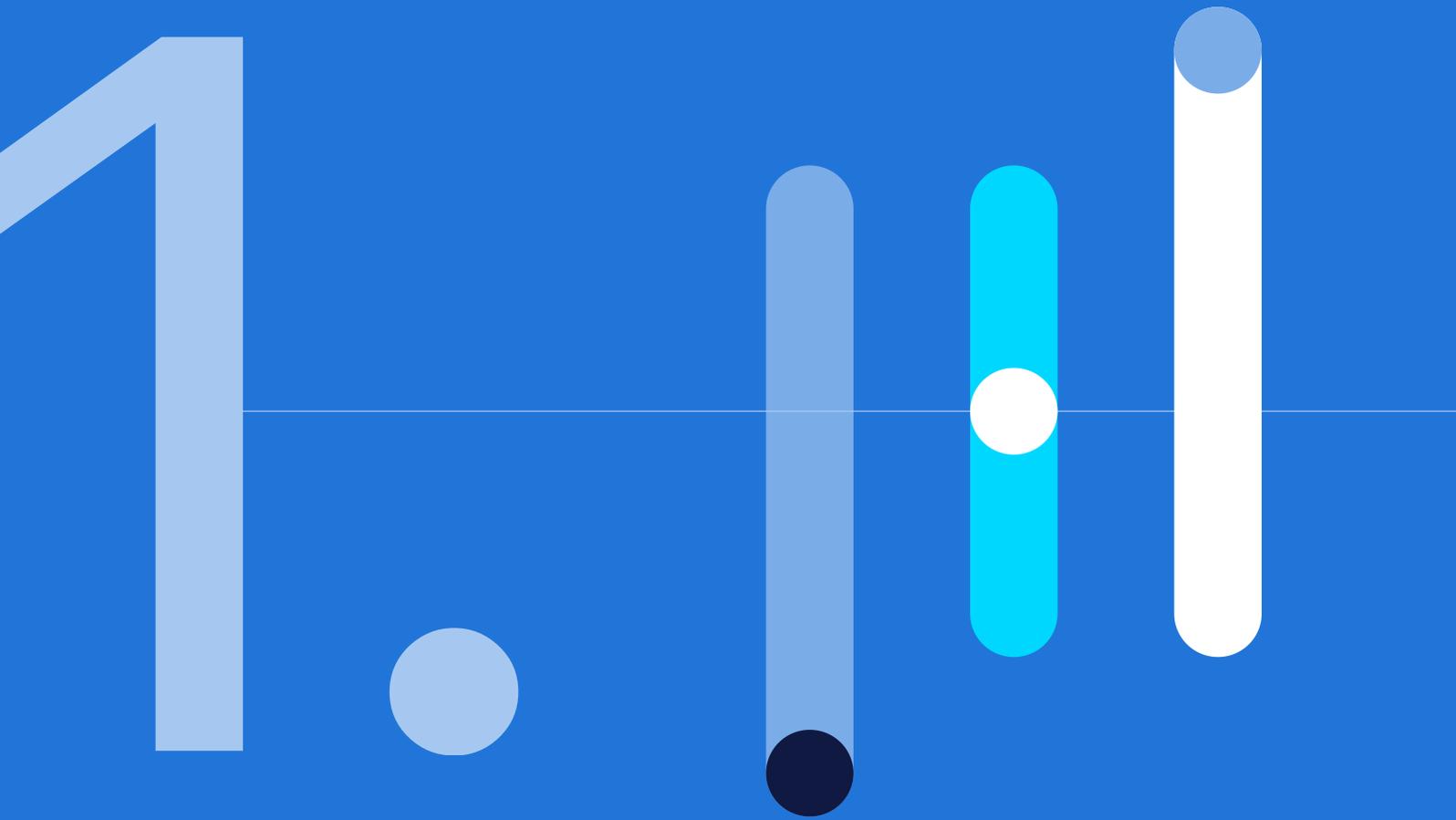
Investing in clear career opportunities will be key for employers — modernizing learning strategies and creating an equitable culture that builds confidence will provide organizations with a pipeline of productive, innovative future leaders.

Talent, meanwhile, should seek to strategically build and showcase the skills that allow them to thrive in this new landscape, creating a powerful partnership for mutual growth.

“Gen Z has entered the workforce at a time of immense change. While confident about their skills and ambitious for the future, they face technological disruption and economic uncertainty. In the face of talent scarcity, employers must take steps to better attract and retain young talent. This means adopting a collaborative approach, working with this generation to set out inspiring career paths.”

Sander van 't Noordende,
CEO, Randstad





a reality check

self-doubt
and a shifting
job market.

Gen Z talent are laser-focused on advancing their career path. Yet, in an environment of declining entry-level roles, they are also more likely to doubt their abilities and prospects than older generations. Employers need to be aware and adapt to these concerns to better attract and retain talent of this generation.

With AI and digital automation handling many traditional junior tasks, the very nature of an entry-level role is being reconfigured.

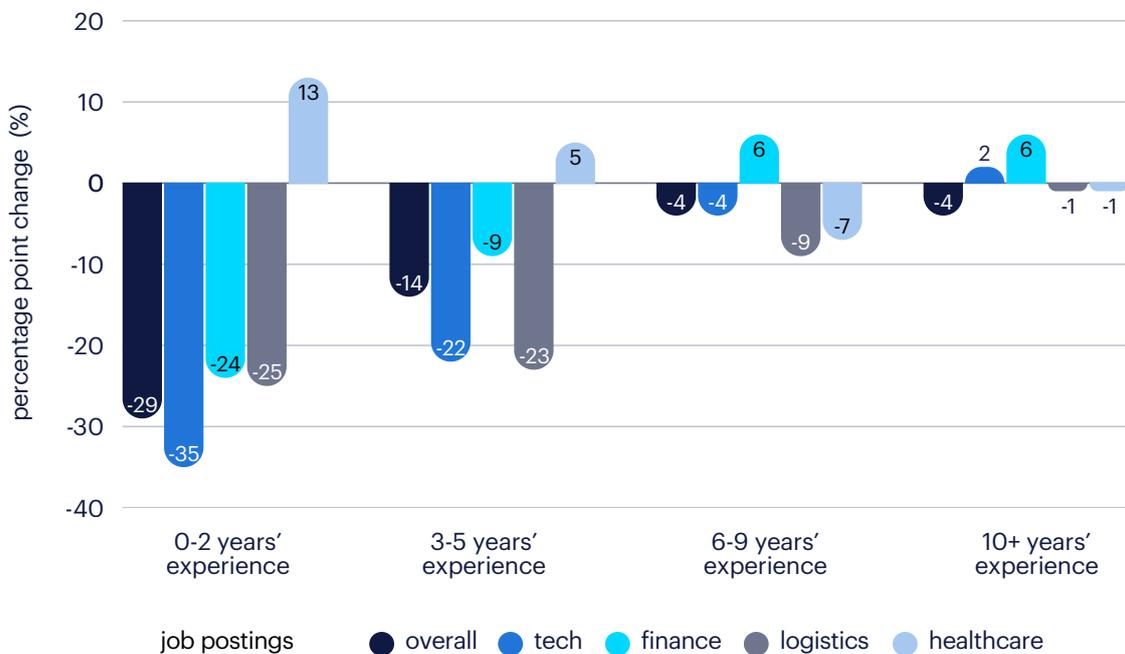
For talent, this presents a chance to leverage their digital skills to support business productivity and boost their career prospects when opportunities are provided. For employers, it's a clear signal to rethink how they onboard and develop their future leaders.

An analysis of global job postings reveals that vacancies for entry-level roles (0-2 years experience) have dropped by 29 percentage points since January 2024.

Conversely, demand for talent with a minimum of six years' experience is impacted far less, with some sectors even showing a growing demand in more senior roles. This trend is likely driven, at least in part, by the impact of increasing automation through AI and other digital technologies.

where are the jobs? hiring shifts across experience levels and sectors

Changes in the number of job postings for different experience requirements and industries, January 2024 - July 2025.



entry-level roles decline in most sectors

Notably, we also find this decline in Gen Z’s two preferred sectors, technology and finance. In technology, junior roles were down by 35 percentage points, with a 37 percentage point difference in demand between junior and senior talent.

The most complex and demanding jobs, like those focused on Machine Learning, do not yet provide many opportunities for junior talent.

Finance saw a 24 percentage point reduction in entry-level roles, with a 30 percentage point junior-senior gap. When looking at specific roles, the biggest difference occurred between the most junior and the most experienced underwriters (97 percentage points).

The logistics sector has seen substantial erosion, too, even affecting more experienced talent. Healthcare, meanwhile, bucks the trend with entry-level job posts rising 13 percentage points.

The latter is a reflection of healthcare settings’ urgent need to fill frontline jobs at all levels in care professions and technical roles (nurses, medical assistants, radiology technicians), while greater seniority is preferred when hiring physicians.

Outside of healthcare, with fewer ramp-up roles to build experience than previous generations enjoyed, employers need to rethink how they identify and develop future talent.

Gen Z has strong digital instincts, an openness to AI, and a willingness to progress, so employers have plenty to draw on. Success will depend on more efficient onboarding, targeted skilling and improved pathways that unlock early productivity while supporting long-term growth.

a lack of confidence persists

Perhaps reflecting their experience of a challenging job market, the data shows that Gen Z talent harbor concerns when it comes to pursuing new opportunities, with 41% saying they don’t have the confidence to find another job — the largest share among the generations surveyed. However, their concerns go beyond the fall in entry-level job postings.

Around two in five don’t feel they can achieve their dream role due to their education or lack thereof — markedly more than other generations.

Similarly, 40% say that their personal background — their demographics or family circumstances, for example — prevents them from going after their ideal career. This is nearly twice the share of Baby Boomers (24%) who express the same regret. This concern is also more prevalent in male Gen Z talent, with 43% feeling this way (compared to 38% of women).

Employers should note that this sense of self-doubt coexists with high mobility, suggesting that long-term career ambition often outweighs hesitation. Even when confidence is low, Gen Z talent may still pursue new roles if they feel their current environment lacks opportunity.

Confidence levels improve with age and experience, but with increasing talent scarcity, organizations must seek to create equitable work environments, tailored training and clear career paths that inspire young talent — and that make them feel confident they can succeed, regardless of background. Doing so will be key to building a sustainable talent pipeline.

I don’t have the confidence to find another job



compromising more, committing less

Gen Z’s job choices are often marked by trade-offs. Nearly half (44%) say their current role doesn’t align with their dream career: the highest among all generations.

Over a third (37%) already regret their sector choice. Financial pressures and limited entry-level options may be forcing them to accept roles that don’t fully reflect their goals.

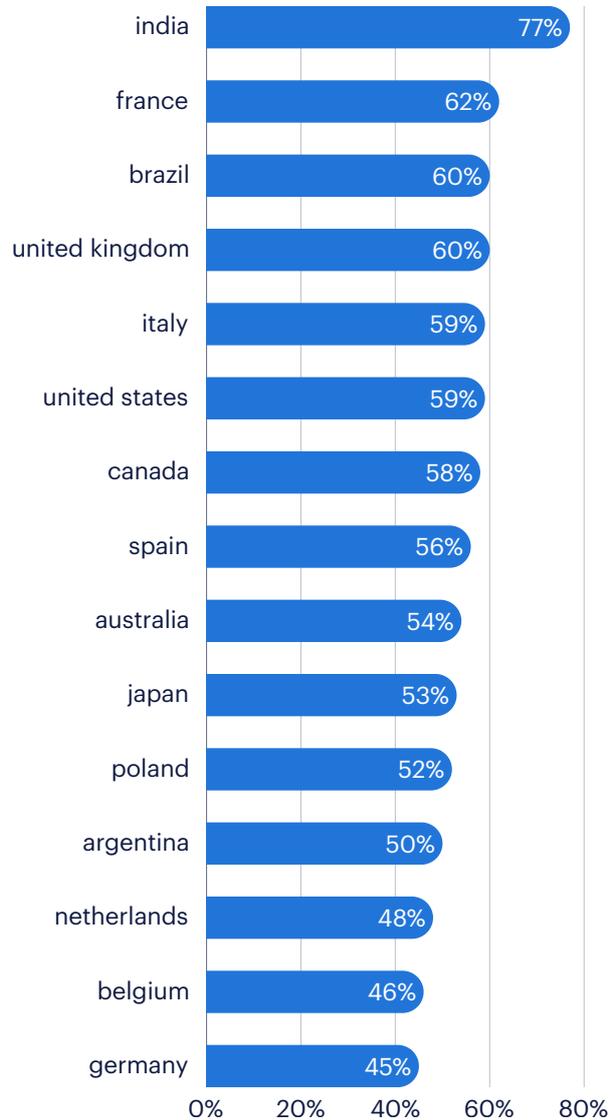
This willingness to compromise shows up in their values. Three in five Gen Z workers say they’d take a job that doesn’t align with their personal values if the pay and benefits were strong, significantly more than Baby Boomers (49%).

Even as they make these compromises, Gen Z talent continues to deliver: 68% say they work efficiently. But motivation is another story, as only 64% feel fully engaged and 54% regularly browse for new roles.

This mix of ambition, misalignment and short-term thinking is reshaping what loyalty looks like. Gen Z may be performing on paper, but many are already planning their exit.

For employers, this means traditional signs of disengagement may no longer apply — and retaining top talent will require clearer, faster career pathways aligned with personal purpose, not just performance.

percentage of gen z in different markets who say their current job aligns with their dream career



the rise of the 'side hustle'

The lack of entry-level roles may also explain why Gen Z is less likely to work in a traditional single full-time role than the global average (45% vs. 51%), and markedly less than Gen X (61%) and Millennials (60%). This trend is replicated across all countries we surveyed.

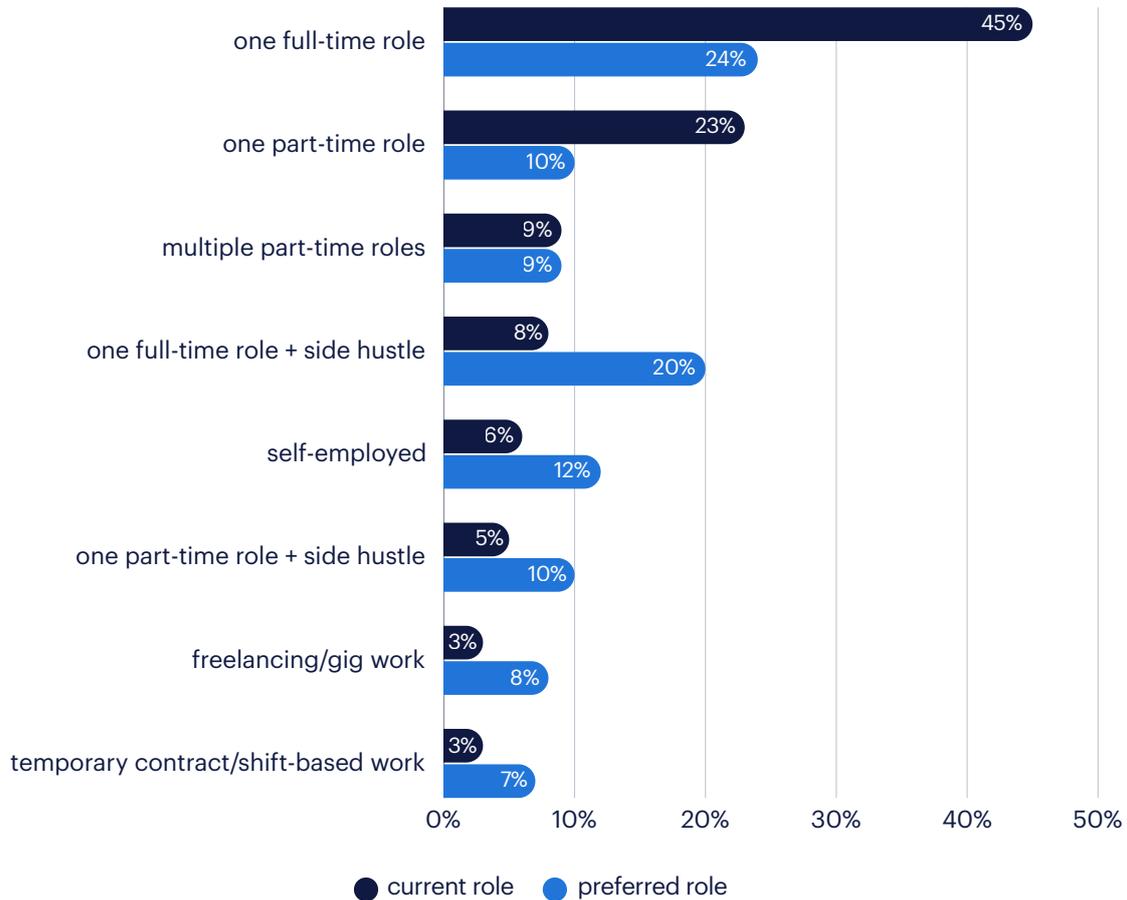
Yet, 24% of Gen Z respondents report that a full-time job is still their goal when it comes to employment, but the share is decidedly lower than among the older generations.

And among those Gen Z talent who are employed full-time, 31% would prefer combining a full-time role with a 'side hustle' — a second job such as tutoring, hospitality work or selling goods online — while only 22% say they want a traditional full-time role going forward.

These choices may be driven by financial pressures or personal ambitions that cannot be realized in their current job. For employers, this reinforces the need to create new, clearer and more interesting career paths and development opportunities that align with Gen Z's long-term motivations.

Reconfiguring talent strategies along those lines will be fundamental to developing a sustainable talent pipeline for the future.

which type of work gen z currently do vs. which type of work gen z prefer





a complex
relationship with
technology and AI.

Despite Gen Z’s future-oriented career planning and concerns about job opportunities, their relationship with technology and AI is complex. For a generation that could be ‘supercharged’ with AI as it enters the workforce, excitement about the technology is mixed with concerns about the impact it will have.

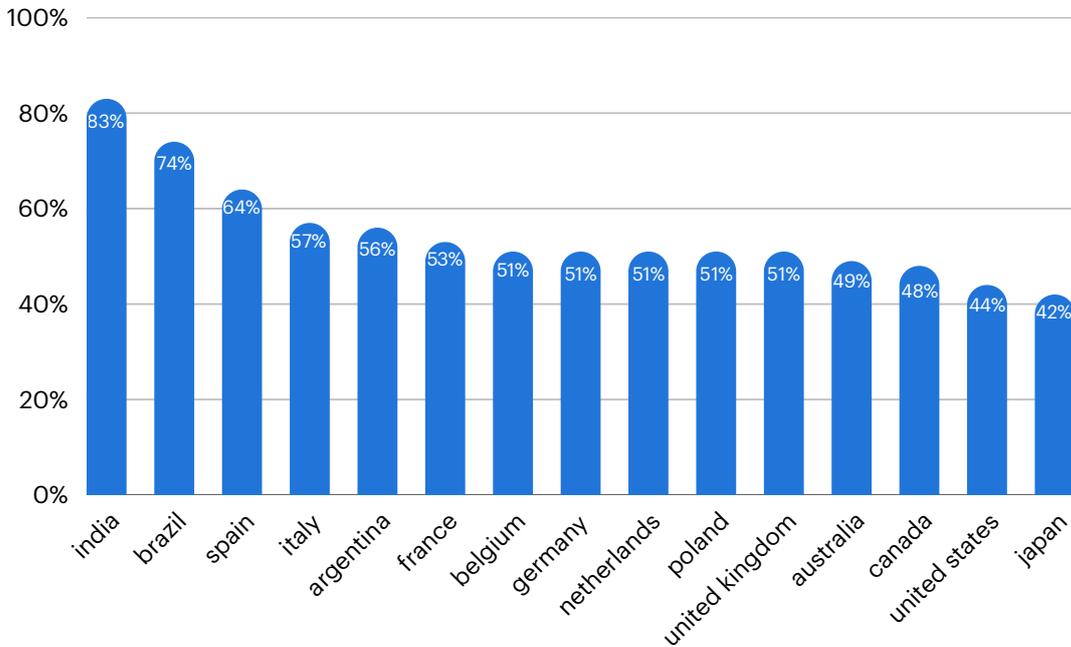
Gen Z talent are avid users and learners of AI. More than half already use AI to problem-solve at work (55%). This is well above the global average and the highest of all generations. It is also a significant jump from last year’s *AI & Equity report*, when only 48% of Gen Z said they were using AI in their job.

They are also particularly excited about its potential (58%), only slightly less than Millennials (60%), but ahead of Gen X (52%) and Baby Boomers (46%).

Many professionals are now leveraging AI in their job search, using it for tasks like writing applications and preparing for interviews. Gen Z is at the forefront of this trend, with half (50%) using AI in this way.

White-collar talent is much more likely to use the technology when looking for new roles, with 57% saying they have done so compared to 45% of blue- and gray-collar workers.

percentage of gen z using AI to problem-solve at work



savvy AI users

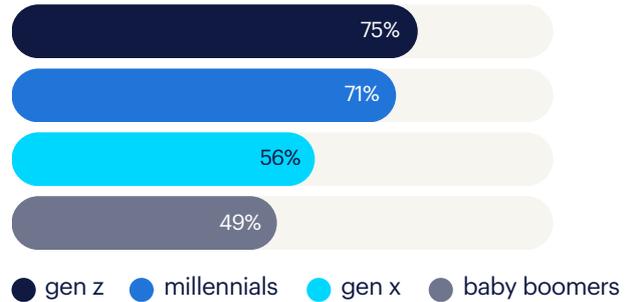
Younger workers are also more likely to be trained in AI than the global average (42% vs. 37%), on a par with Millennials.

AI tools were also a popular form of learning for 75% of Gen Z respondents, alongside on-the-job training (87%), learning from colleagues (83%), online courses (80%) and video platforms (76%).

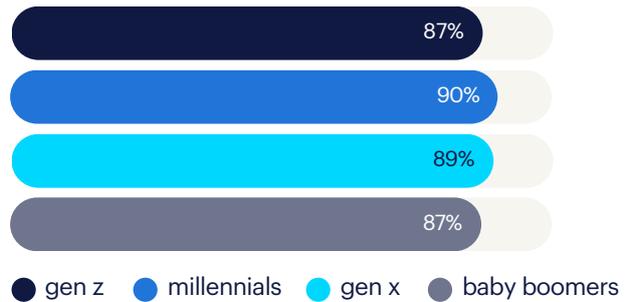
Again, white-collar Gen Z talent are more likely to use the technology to train, with 82% doing so compared to 70% of blue- and gray-collar workers.

Gen Z's enthusiasm for AI and technology puts them in a good position to meet growing market needs for tech and data skills. Our research finds a high prevalence among Gen Z of in-demand skills such as data analysis, AI and big data and programming.

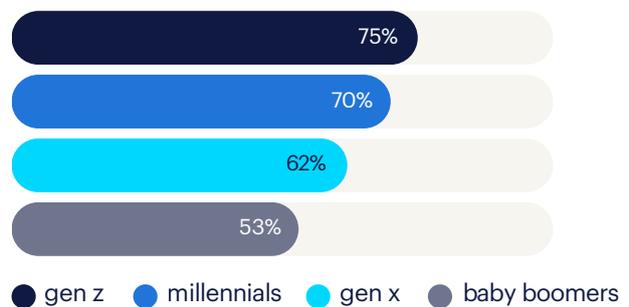
I learn through AI tools



I learn through on-the-job training



I learn through short-form video platforms



AI as an equity opportunity

Gen Z emerges as fast, adaptive and tech-fluent, expecting learning to be embedded into the flow of work and powered by modern tools. However, this tech fluency is not universal, with our research uncovering disparities between genders and across different work types.

The data reveals gaps along two key lines. The first is a divide between work types: Gen Z white-collar office talent are decidedly keener on AI (66%) than their colleagues in blue- and gray-collar roles (52%). This is mirrored by a second gap along gender lines, with men (61%) showing more enthusiasm for the technology than women (56%).

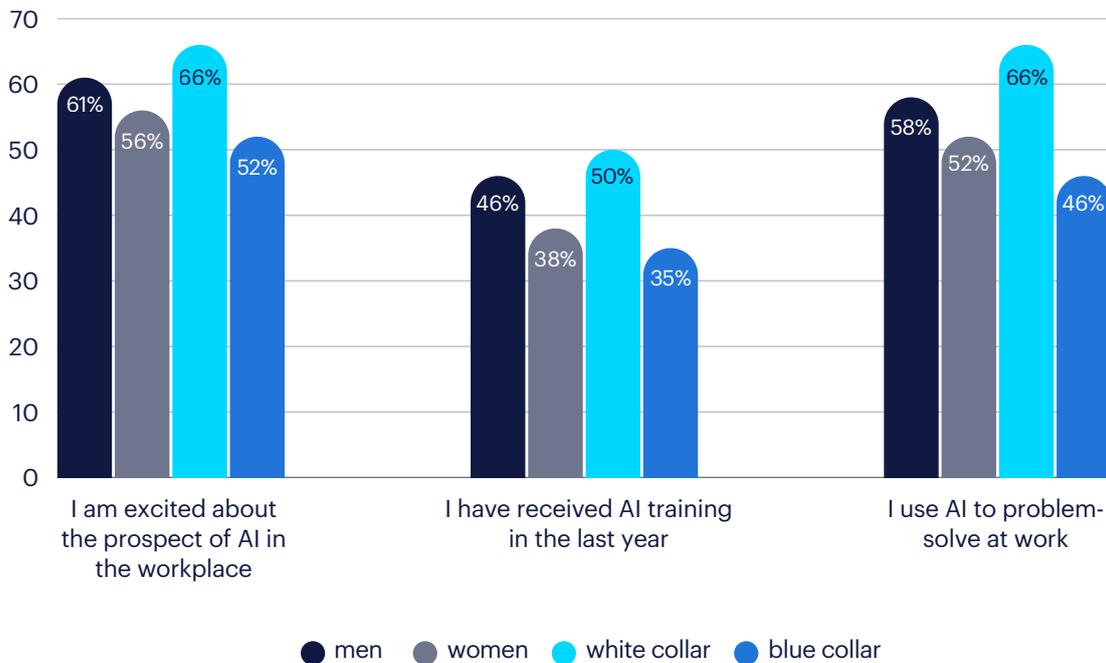
This may be linked to the different exposure these groups have to AI.

Gen Z office talent are more likely to use AI at work (66%) than their peers in operational roles (46%). Similarly, a usage gap exists between men (58%) and women (52%).

The same pattern holds true for formal training. Office talent are much more likely to have been trained in AI (50%) than their non-office peers (35%). Again, women are less likely to report having received AI training (38%) than men (46%).

Closing the gap between this high learning confidence and the reported inequitable access to AI training is a critical challenge. Future-proofing talent’s skillset will be vital for both Gen Z talent looking to progress their careers and employers facing a constricting talent pool. Addressing the skills equity gap will require a renewed focus on more inclusive development strategies on the part of employers.

gen z and AI across gender and work type



confidence versus career priorities

Gen Z reports high confidence in their ability to learn job-relevant skills (79%), yet they remain the generation most likely to be rejected for not having them.

Despite their digital fluency, 46% are worried about AI’s impact on their careers — up from 40% last year — revealing a growing sense of unease beneath the surface.

The disconnect between confidence and outcomes may also be affecting the importance Gen Z places on the different factors that would keep them in a role.

Gen Z talent rank flexibility, equity and mental health among their top retention priorities. But that doesn't mean career development is unimportant; it simply needs to be relevant and clearly tied to growth. Only 12% listed employability-related skills training as a top factor, highlighting the need to reframe learning as a driver of progression, not just a perk.

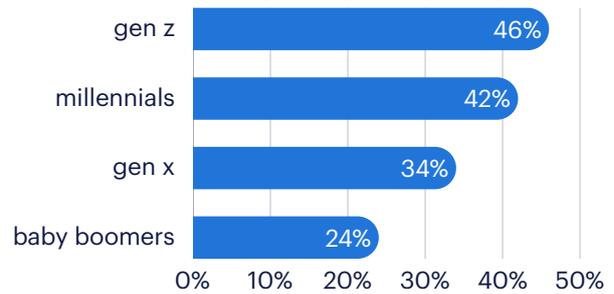
Gen Z’s challenges are also playing out unevenly. While rejection due to skill gaps affects both white- and blue- and gray-collar talent at similar rates (47% and 45%), men report it more often than women (48% vs. 44%).

Gen Z may feel ready to grow — but in many cases, they aren’t getting the opportunity.

harnessing the AI tension

Addressing this complex interplay of anxiety, confidence and career priorities requires a strategic shift from employers. Rather than offering generic training that Gen Z places lower priority on, leaders should create a development ecosystem that aligns with their motivations and bridges experience gaps.

I have been rejected for a job because I didn’t have the right skills

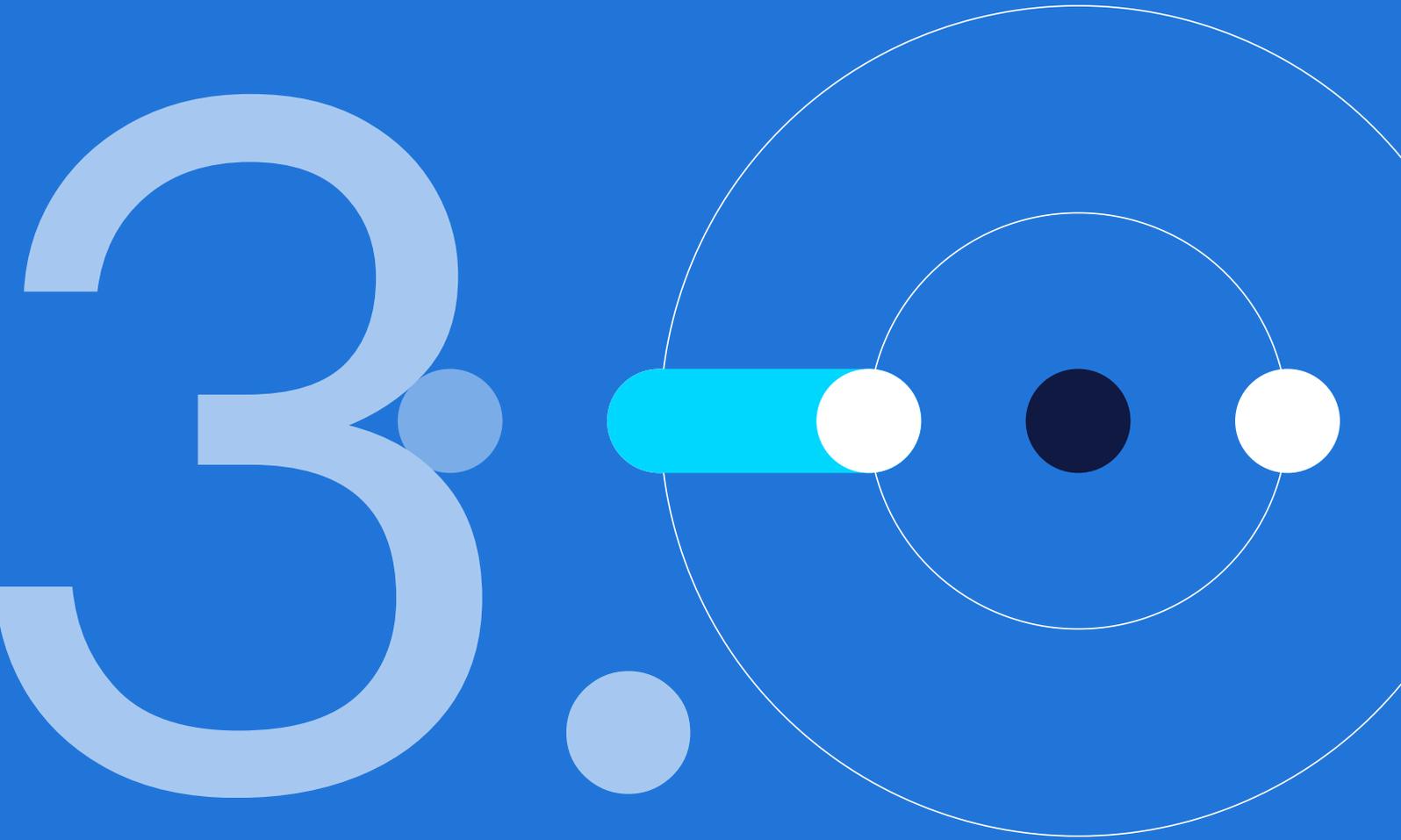


Gen Z thrives on digital-first content. To keep this generation engaged and future-ready, employers must modernize their learning strategies in ways that resonate with how this generation learns and engages. Integrating skill development into career pathways that align with Gen Z's immediate and long-term goals will be crucial.

While AI may contribute to the decline of traditional entry-level roles, it also opens the door for Gen Z to take on more strategic, value-adding tasks earlier in their careers.

With the right support, their digital fluency and ambition can be channeled toward innovation, problem-solving and agile learning — areas where human insight and adaptability matter most.

For employers, this shift may require rethinking how teams are structured and developed, but the potential payoff is clear: smarter workforce deployment, higher productivity and stronger long-term retention.



what drives gen z

long-term
career plans,
short stints.

Long-term plans, short stints: this is the central tension that defines Gen Z's career strategy. More than any other generation, and above the global average, they are likely to consider future career goals when evaluating a potential new role.

Economic volatility, declining entry-level opportunities and the impact of AI on skills profiles have not dampened Gen Z's appetite to advance in their jobs.

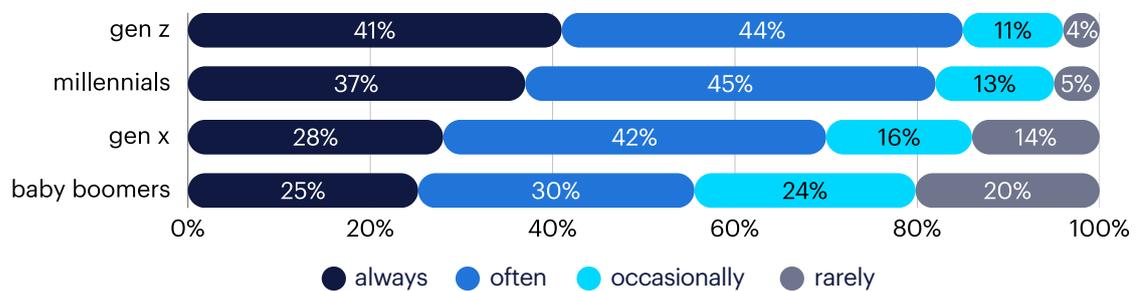
Our data reveals that they are willing to move quickly from job to job to realize these ambitions, making them a highly mobile and agile segment of the workforce.

Career progression is one of the top three factors in their long-term retention, along with better pay and flexible working hours.

Rather than allowing this to exacerbate talent scarcity, employers should maximize young workers' ambition by offering clear, achievable development routes within the company.

Gen Z respondents are more likely (41%) to "always" consider their long-term career goals when making job change decisions, compared to other generations.

When making decisions regarding job changes, how much do you consider your long-term career goals?



high attrition rates reinforce talent scarcity

Gen Z’s short job tenures aren’t a trend: they’re a warning sign. Amid shrinking talent pools, this generation is the most likely to leave early, driven by unmet expectations and unclear career paths.

Our research shows Gen Z has a 22% attrition rate over the past 12 months — the highest of any generation — and 54% are actively job hunting. One in three plan to leave their current role within a year, while only 11% say they intend to stay long-term.

Without action, this high turnover will only widen the talent gap. Career progression can’t be a future promise. To retain Gen Z, employers must ensure development is visible, actionable and continuous.

lack of progression drives early exits

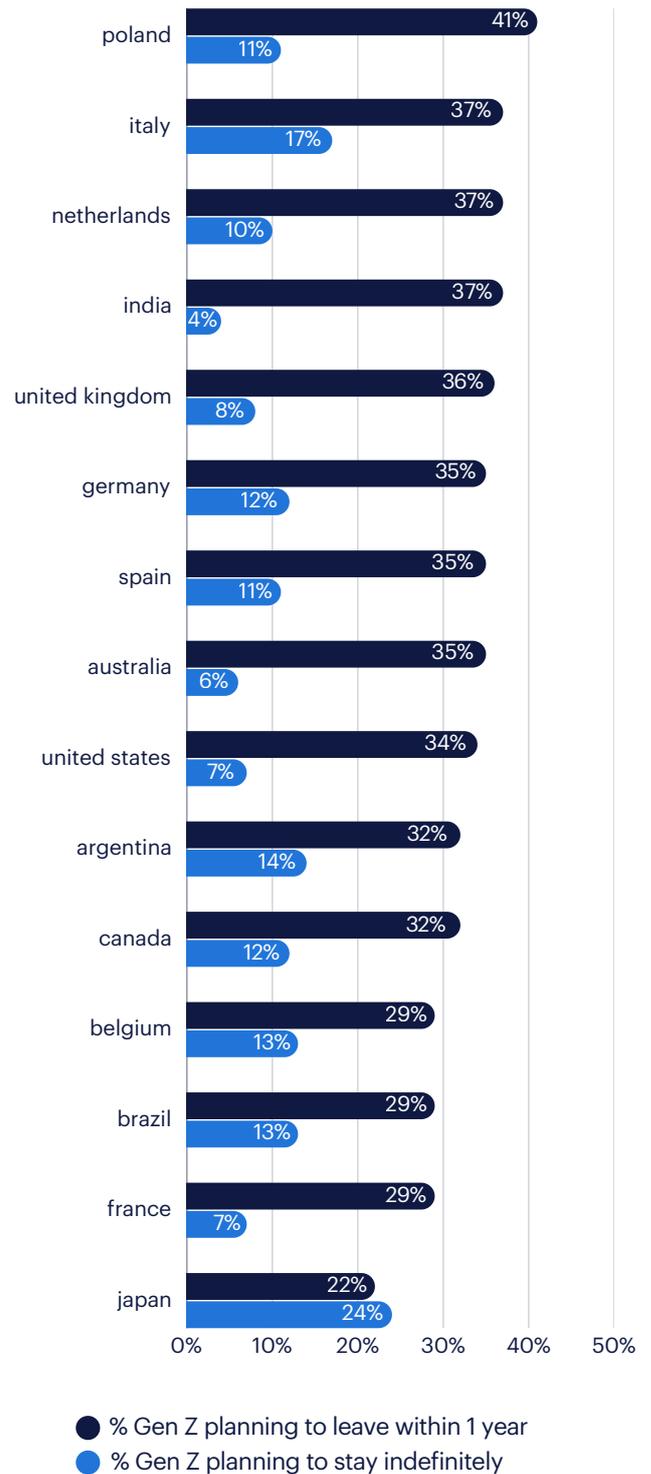
A key factor in this context is a lack of career progression: 14% of Gen Z say this is their strongest driver for changing jobs, second only to pay.

Yet, only 60% of Gen Z say they feel their employers genuinely care about their future, compared to 68% of Millennials, 72% of Gen X and 76% of Baby Boomers. A gap also emerges when looking at work types, with 63% of young white-collar workers agreeing, compared to 57% of blue- and gray-collar talent.

One explanation for this could be that rising living costs may be driving Gen Z’s short-term decision-making more than career ambitions. Without tangible rewards and visible career progression, they are prepared to look for new opportunities that provide them with growth paths and the chance to have an impact.

To retain Gen Z talent, leaders must look beyond performance metrics and invest in young people. They should create environments where talent feel engaged, heard and supported, and ensure effective knowledge transfer to counteract future talent scarcity.

gen z’s next move: a global comparison



the new tech-aligned career path

Our research shows Gen Z gravitating toward fast-growth sectors like IT, healthcare and financial services to achieve their long-term career goals.

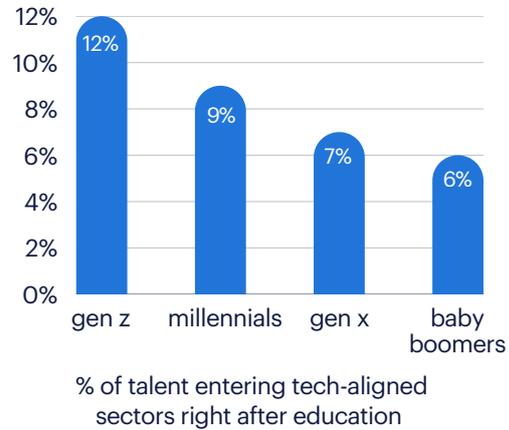
The technology sector in particular has become a primary destination. Even if they start their careers elsewhere, tech-aligned industries are the top destination for Gen Z talent. They have a net gain of 70%, indicating that for every 100 Gen Z workers who leave other industries, 70 move into tech.

A standout trend is their direct leap from higher education into the sector, outpacing all previous generations.

This signifies a fundamental change in the talent pipeline. It is happening even as traditional entry-level tech roles are evolving — with a 35% fall in such postings since January 2024 — making Gen Z's ability to enter the industry directly even more significant.

For employers, this highlights the need to build new, non-linear pathways that capture this ambitious and digitally-native talent pool.

direct entry into tech-aligned roles from higher education by generation

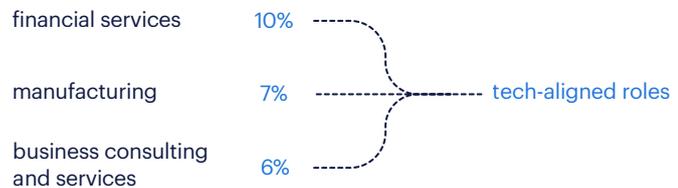


direct entry into different sectors from higher education by generation

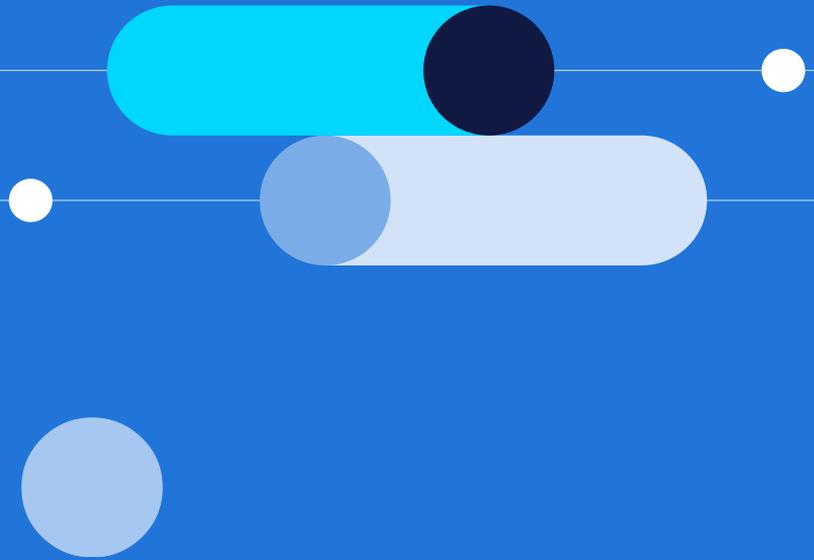
generation	common sectors of entry	net gaining sectors	drivers
gen z	retail, financial services	IT/tech, sustainability	flexibility, tech, wellness
millennials	retail, finance, consulting	software, IT, consulting	innovation, progression
gen x	retail, business, consulting	engineering, construction	stability, leadership
baby boomers	business, retail	construction, healthcare	expertise, continuity

gen z talent flow: from traditional sectors to tech

Significant numbers of Gen Z talent are transitioning into tech-related roles from other industries.



4



conclusion & recommendations

harnessing the ambition of gen z.

unlocking gen z potential: the play for employers

In the face of conflicting and contrasting perceptions of the working world, employers will need to make a strategic shift if they are to attract and retain Gen Z talent and shape the leaders of tomorrow.

These conflicting perceptions create a unique professional mindset: Gen Z is confident in their ability to learn, yet quick to leave if a clear path isn't visible; they are willing to seek new roles, yet lack the self-belief that their dream job is attainable; and they are optimistic users of AI, yet deeply concerned about its long-term impact on both their careers and the availability of entry-level jobs.

As talent scarcity mounts in the coming years, organizations must understand the concerns and needs of this demographic and react effectively. They will soon be needed in middle management roles as Millennials move into senior positions. Acting now is crucial for building the strong leadership pipelines needed for the years to come.

standing out from the crowd: the play for gen z talent

While economic volatility and technological shifts are making it harder to navigate early career paths, this challenging environment also creates a unique moment of possibility for proactive Gen Z talent.

The data, however, reveals clear avenues for getting ahead. While there has been an uplift in Gen Z talent using AI to problem-solve at work, only half are currently using AI to support their job search, and a quarter never use the technology to learn and develop their skills at work. Taking advantage of AI to boost knowledge and support the pursuit of new roles could become a key differentiator.

The strong attrition rates could also create an advantage for young talent willing to remain at an organization. Of course, employers will need to provide career progression paths to make this possible, but talent can take the initiative to hold open and frank discussions with line managers so that clear expectations can be set for both parties.

a new road ahead: how talent and employers can redefine career paths, together.

To guide both employers and young professionals, experts across Randstad have distilled these findings into four key phases to redefine career paths for Gen Z talent.

phase 1: entering a disrupted job market

Gen Z wants to feel a sense of forward momentum. If they do not believe they are on an upward trajectory, they won't hesitate to move on to a new opportunity.

action for employers:

By providing career pathways that clearly mark progression and offer regular, tangible rewards — be that pay rises or perks — employers can inspire confidence that their organization is a place Gen Z talent can develop for the future.

action for talent:

This transparency creates a two-way street, empowering talent to proactively ask about their trajectory and co-create their growth plans with managers.

phase 2: seeking growth, balancing purpose and pressure

Employers must make investments in early career development programs. While AI can now handle some of the tasks these roles would have traditionally performed, failure to create new pathways could lead to significant knowledge gaps in later years as older talent leave the workforce.

action for employers:

Nurturing talent now means redefining entry-level roles away from simple tasks and toward developing skills like critical thinking and creativity.

action for talent:

Where employers take responsibility to offer new projects, Gen Z talent must seize opportunities to demonstrate their unique, non-automatable value.

phase 3: using AI and self-directed learning

As a generation of digital natives, Gen Z expects their learning experience at work to reflect the methods and techniques they have become used to at school and in their personal lives.

action for employers:

Employers should provide practical, tech-enabled, digital-first skilling opportunities — including the use of AI tools.

action for talent:

Success here requires a partnership: employers can create forums for discussion, while talent should take the initiative to voice their preferred learning styles and use available tools to continuously upskill.

phase 4: redefining what loyalty looks like

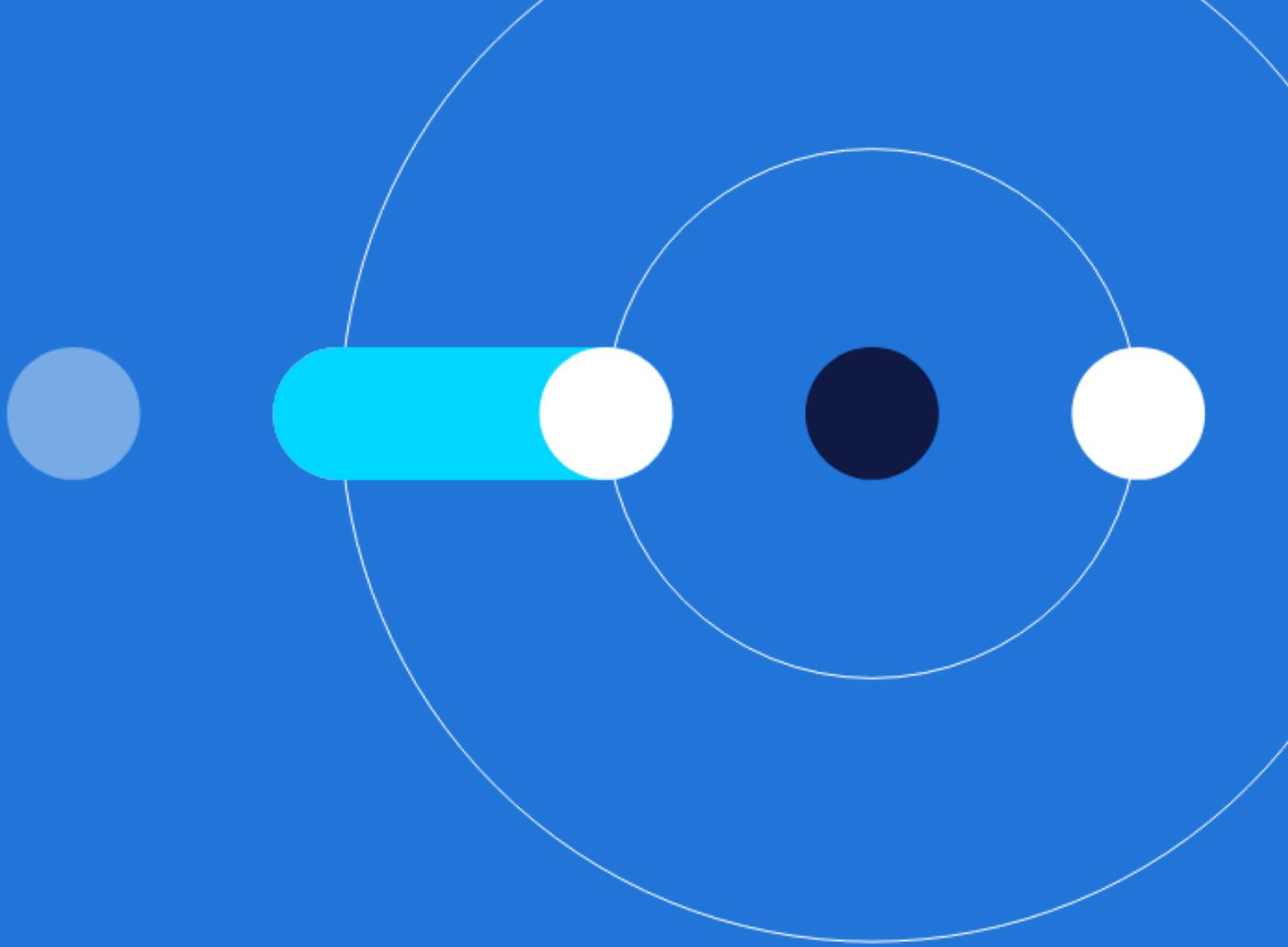
The data shows that Gen Z talent feels a striking sense of self-doubt. Development opportunities must go beyond skills, driving their self-belief and loyalty.

action for employers:

Building a culture that increases confidence and supports young talent in overcoming past disadvantages will develop a workforce prepared for the future.

action for talent:

When working within a supportive environment, talent can empower themselves to build their own resilience by seeking out mentors, tracking personal achievements, and building peer networks to navigate workplace stress.



let's start a
conversation.

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partner for talent.