

British Gen Z bucks “The Great Rejection” of work trend

Gen Z (currently aged 12-27) already accounts for the largest proportion of the global population of any generation, at around 2 billion globally, according to the UN. By 2025, it will account for the biggest generational workforce too, at 27% of the global workforce.

Temps de lecture : minute

23 August 2024

However, multiple reports and articles suggest that people from Gen Z are lazier and less inclined towards hard work than previous generations – dubbed by one commentator as an *‘employer’s nightmare’*.

New data from consumer predictions consultancy *Foresight Factory* challenges the myth of the ‘lazy’ Generation Z (“Gen Z”), particularly in the UK.

While it’s true that 49% of global Gen Z agree with the statement “I crave a slower pace of life than I have now,” Foresight Factory finds that the picture of Gen Z in the workplace is far more nuanced than current discourse suggests; in the UK especially, it sees a very different picture emerging of Gen Z in the workplace.

Gen Z’s “The Great Rejection” is not a global trend

“The Great Resignation” might as well be called “The Great Rejection” when it comes to young people. On TikTok, the hashtag #quittok has

more than 40 million views, with users sharing in real time their experiences of leaving a job. Phenomena like “quiet quitting” and “bare minimum Mondays” are being led by younger, mainly American consumers, and Chinese social media is awash with the anti-work “lying flat” and “letting it rot” movements.

Indeed, the proportion of Americans aged 16-24 who easily accept the authority of their boss has declined significantly between 2016 and 2023, from 45% to 30%. And the proportion who reject outright the authority of their bosses – a notably strong view to take – has increased from 7% to 17% in the same time period. Foresight Factory does not see such a dramatic change or negative sentiment toward bosses in any other age group or market, although the trend is reflected elsewhere: Chinese Gen Z (38%) are also 6 percentage points less likely than the global average to say they accept the authority of their bosses easily.

Between 2017 and 2024, the proportion of US 16-24 year-olds who say that the phrase “Made in America” means nothing in the modern world almost doubled, from 16% to 30%. Similar shifts are not seen among older Americans, or indeed among British Gen Z when it comes to the concept of “Made in Britain,” suggesting a wider cynicism, malaise and rejection of national authority among American youth specifically.

However, Gen Z is not the same the world over – far from it, in fact. In the UK, Gen Z workers aged 16-24 are significantly more likely than Americans of the same age to accept the authority of their bosses. The proportion of British 16-24s who do so has risen since 2016 from 33% to 37%, unlike in the US where it has fallen significantly, from 45% to 30%. In addition, a relatively high proportion of European Gen Z view their bosses as authority figures: 66% in Sweden, 50% in Germany, and 47% in France.

Gen Z 'Lazy Girl' is a myth

Contrary to reports that have suggested young workers are simply "in it for the paycheque," as characterised by the viral "*lazy girl job*" movement, work is an important part of Gen Z identity in the UK. British workers aged 16-24 are more likely to say that their job is important to their personal identity (28%) than Brits over 45 years of age (15%), reflecting the fact that work plays a larger role in the lives of Gen Z than older groups, who may have wider interests and priorities in life. British Gen X ranks nationality, the area they live in and holidays as more important to their identities than Gen Z.

This can partly be explained by the social currency that comes from being seen as a self-starter, in a work context, which is especially meaningful to Gen Z. Globally, more than 1 in 3 Gen Z (35%) say that the statement "being seen as successful by others is important to me" describes them well, compared with 34% of Millennials, 24% of Gen X and 18% of Boomers.

When it comes to the much-discussed "return to the office," British Gen Z are more likely than older Brits (59% vs 25% Baby Boomers) to say that they enjoy working from home and have everything they need to do it easily (60% vs 33% Baby Boomers) - and also to say that they expect to work from home more in the next 12 months than they did pre-pandemic (25% vs 18% Gen X and 4% baby Boomers).

However, the desire for flexible home working does not necessarily translate to a desire for flexible hours. According to Foresight Factory's data, 16-24 year olds are no more likely today than they were in 2015 to say they value flexible working hours at work (48% in 2015 and 2022). Millennials (54%) and Gen X (56%) are both more likely than Gen Z (46%) to say that flexible working hours are important to their professional wellbeing.



À lire aussi

Ordered back to the office? Your boss might be trying to show you the door

How should businesses and brands respond?

It's clear that when it comes to attitudes to work, workers' country and culture might play a more important role than their age group. Gen Zs are not all the same - businesses who employ Gen Z workers, as well as brands who want to communicate with them, should take notice.

Meabh Quoirin, CEO and Co-Owner at Foresight Factory, says:

“Generational analysis has a tendency to make sweeping statements and drive stereotypes. Clearly this data offers a contradiction to what we've seen (in the press) and more context is required. To offer a parallel - we see lots of CMO positions being deleted or diminished.

“But in the same way that this is less likely to be to do with the role and more to do with performance in many cases, Gen Z's rejection of an authority figure is likely less about work and perhaps more about corporate culture or values that simply don't chime the way they once might have. Or dare we suggest, bad bosses. In fact, many young Brits

deeply value work and professional success as core to their identity, and want to learn from authority figures at work.”

Foresight Factory recommends brands take the following approaches:

Rethink authority: As Gen Z becomes a more significant part of the US labor force, companies will increasingly have to grapple with this generation’s apparent aversion to hierarchy and traditional power structures in the workplace. For brands, this could mean a reassessment of their tone of voice within this new landscape. It could also mean treating employees more as stakeholders, giving them a meaningful voice in how the company is run, rather than subordinates to be told what to do.

Don’t make global generalisations: Gen Z is not the same the world over, and in some cases it varies significantly in its attitudes to work depending on geography. Even between the UK and the US, there are diverging attitudes to the authority of bosses at work. Be sure to nuance messaging accordingly to avoid alienating some Gen Z and possibly provoking a social media backlash.

Consider Gen Z’s influence on work culture: while Gen Z is often credited with driving trends such as “The Great Rejection”, older generations are notably evolving and benefitting from them. For instance, flexible working practices are actually more valued by older groups. Meanwhile, older generations are increasingly having to get used to working for a Gen Z boss, and adapting their working styles accordingly. Be sure to consider the welfare of interests of workers of all ages, and don’t fall back on age-related stereotypes.

Create opportunities for Gen Z to develop their leadership skills: The hybrid work landscape is a challenging one for career-starters, who may have less of an opportunity to develop through in-person mentorship and

training. Could you earn a reputation as an educator brand in this space by delivering bite-sized and accessible tutorials in the career areas Gen Z care about?

- While 49% of global Gen Z agree with the statement "I crave a slower pace of life than I have now," Foresight Factory's findings show that the picture of Gen Z in the workplace is far more nuanced than current discourse suggests
- British Gen Z workers are significantly more likely than American Gen Z to accept the authority of their bosses. In the UK, the number of 16-24s who do so has risen markedly since 2016 - whereas in the US, it has fallen significantly
- Work is also an important part of Gen Z identity in the UK: Brits aged 16-24 are more likely to say that their job is important to their personal identity than those over 45 years of age
- Brits aged 16-24 today are no more likely to say they value flexible working hours at work than they were in 2015
- Globally, 1 in 3 Gen Z say that being seen as successful by others is important to them, compared with 30% of Millennials, 21% of Gen X and 15% of Boomers

Meabh Quoirin is the co-owner and CEO at *Foresight Factory*



MADDYNEWS UK

The newsletter you need for all the latest from the startup ecosystem

JE M'INSCRIS

Article écrit par Meabh Quoirin