

# Defining the Modern Workplace



Hall & Partners

IPA



## Foreword

The world of work has changed irrevocably in the last few years, driven by a confluence of factors that include COVID, economic instability and technological advancement.

These changes have permeated every sector, and the communications industry is no exception. Historically known for its agility and innovation, the industry now faces the challenge of adapting to these evolving economic and societal conditions, while at the same time welcoming a new breed of worker into the fold as office demographics shift.

And as Gen Z become a more powerful force in the workplace, their unique perspectives and values are beginning to reshape traditional work environments and shakeup established understanding of client-agency relationships.

To ensure continued success for both agencies and their clients, to guarantee clients get the best people for their business, and to help the industry navigate challenging market conditions, it's essential we understand how to create an environment to help Gen Z workers flourish best. One that fosters strong, ongoing partnerships between clients and young talent.

But what do Gen Z value and how does this contrast with current ways of working? How have the demands of recent years impacted their perceptions? What will keep young talent engaged with client's businesses? And what should client-agency relationships look like in 2024 and beyond?

To answer these questions, insight agency Hall & Partners undertook a qualitative research study at the beginning of 2024, connecting with over 30 young agency professionals from creative, media and brand agencies, client leads, and recruiters to hear directly how we can optimise these relationships.

This report delves into their experiences, highlighting the generational shifts that are redefining workplace norms and relationships. By exploring these insights, we aim to provide food for thought around bridging generational gaps and enhancing collaboration within the industry. Different generations working successfully together to continue to deliver outstanding creativity for clients is the goal.

We'd like to thank all participants and contributors for their time and input in developing this paper.

# A new type of worker has emerged, engendered by changing values and challenging economic and societal circumstances

Gen Z (those born between 1997 and 2012; currently aged between 12 and 27 years in 2024) account for approximately 12% of the UK working population, however this is expected to shoot up to 35% in 2033, which is over a third of the working population.

As with every generation before them, Gen Z have a unique set of values and attitudes, all of which shape and define how they approach their lives, and in turn how they perceive work.



## We uncovered that the key attributes of Gen Z are:

Passionate about social justice and activism

---

Prioritise mental health and wellbeing

---

Crave authenticity and transparency

---

Digital natives

Seek flexibility and balance

---

Less tolerant of authoritarian environments

---

Embrace change

---

Competitive and driven

## Influences shaping Gen Z

Many of these values and attitudes are likely influenced by Gen Z's experiences of epic changes to society in their formative years. While every cohort experienced these global events, Gen Z's youth meant that they defined their early lives, and early careers, more wholly than for other generations.



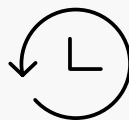
### COVID-19

Only the oldest of Gen Z experienced the pre-pandemic work environment. Many entered the workforce amid lockdowns, having no perception of prior work practices previous generations experienced.



### Economic turbulence

Ongoing economic instability triggering a 'cost-of-living crisis' in the UK creates a challenging backdrop for Gen Z, making milestones like home ownership and vacations abroad seem out of reach however hard they work.



### Learning from the past

Observing and rejecting the 'workaholic' and 'work hard, play hard' culture of previous generations, Gen Z values a balanced approach to work.

In essence, these experiences and learnings have prompted Gen Z to bring a new set of values to the workplace and, unlike older cohorts, they feel more confident in setting distinct boundaries at work that define how they choose to work, who they work with and the type of work relationships they have.

## Redefining work norms based on personal boundaries

Many of these values and attitudes are likely influenced by Gen Z's experiences of epic changes to society in their formative years. While every cohort experienced these global events, Gen Z's youth meant that they defined their early lives, and early careers, more wholly than for other generations.

### Work-life rebalance

It's no longer about living to work or being seen working late to show commitment. The concept of working over and above the hours contracted without a clear rationale

is unappealing and no longer guarantees a good return. Instead, Gen Z desire balance and flexibility, in order to keep their mental and physical wellness in check. They are driven and strive to work for successful organisations and would welcome greater involvement in collaborative working to help achieve the company goals. If brought into the conversation early, with a clear purpose, understanding and work orientation, they are willing to be flexible as these working hours then serve a purpose, allowing them to learn collaboratively and to win together.

## Fostering ambition and rapid progression

Driven and ambitious, Gen Z seeks diverse experiences and rapid feedback alongside skills development, preferring merit-based advancement over tenure. Due to the current demands of the economy, Gen Z see value in job-hopping to ensure salary as well as skills development. They are not accepting the argument that career development and new experiences will come with loyalty and tenure. They have redefined the meaning of 'ambitious'; they work hard and strive for progression but are mindful of the impact of stress and pressure on health and wellbeing.

As a tech-savvy generation, they are embracing new technology to improve their work-life balance and will push for this change within the companies they work for. Work today needs to provide a stimulating, rewarding experience coupled with the flexibility to make adjustments to ensure healthy growth. Employers should consider greater workplace recognition and altered office configurations to allow for more productivity on-site and on demand learning programmes for employees to feel they are adapting for long lasting careers.

## Value-driven work

Gen Z seek inspiration and alignment with personal values in their work. They want to work with clients that correspond to their personal beliefs and values (opting for brands that mirror their passion for diversity and sustainability, and largely avoiding companies that are ethically or sustainably ambiguous), and most importantly, their interests (for example, opting for brands in the fashion, automotive or music space if these are their passions outside of work).

This directly aligns with their need for authenticity. As such, agencies need to consider their corporate values and how these align with the clients and work they take on to retain Gen Z staff. This is in addition to giving employees the option to opt-out of certain sectors/industries with the breadth and ability of a client mix that can align to their personal interests.

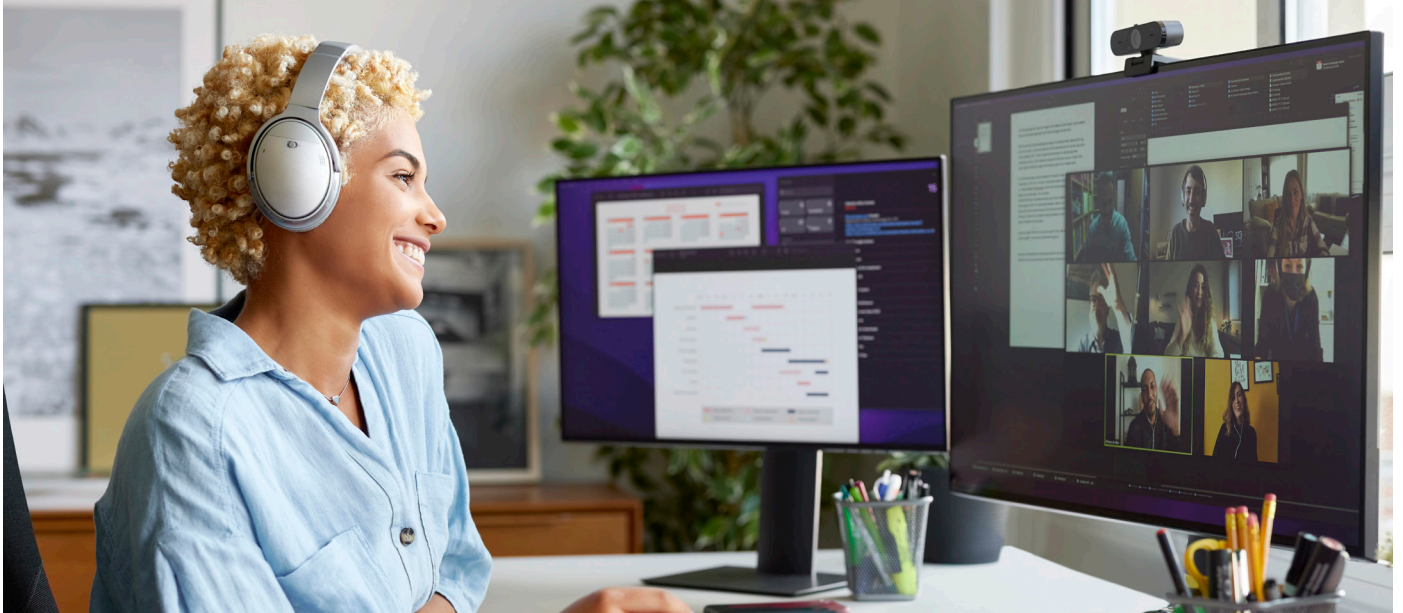
## Authentic collaboration

The pandemic forced a new way of working which included the ability to connect and collaborate digitally across the globe. For many Gen Z employees this digital environment, together with a 'test and learn as you go' hybrid model, is all they know. But meaningful collaboration is crucial, with a desire for in-person interactions that foster genuine connections and learning. In particular, Gen Z reject coming into the office just to take calls virtually; instead, they want opportunities to connect and collaborate which they cannot achieve whilst working from home.

Additionally, traditional learning and relationship-building opportunities that once existed, such as visiting client offices and on-the-job training with senior colleagues have been replaced with structured, online training sessions and few in-person connections. Most in-person client connections are now reserved for only senior people. Agencies need to consider ways of facilitating more in-person collaboration opportunities, learning through role modelling and rebuilding client relationships beyond project delivery.

## Everyday appreciation

Recognition and appreciation are essential in supporting Gen Z's focus on wellbeing and development in their role. Regular feedback sessions with senior colleagues, structured business-wide reward and recognition practices, and inclusion in key celebrations help them feel valued and acknowledged. Gen Z also see themselves as playing an important part in their client's development and success; this does not come from a place of arrogance, instead they recognise themselves as the future of this industry. As the first truly tech-savvy and globally-connected generation, they can play a key role in developing solutions to help clients.



## Generational misalignment can be a barrier to building strong agency-client relationships

So, what happens when you are working with someone who holds very different views on the work practices that you, and generations before them, have followed? Naturally, misalignment and misunderstanding occur, and agency-client relationships are not immune to this, especially if these relationships bridge the generational divide.

### Experience vs. Novelty

Clients are generally at a more advanced stage in their careers or themselves switch roles in 24-36 months, so they tend to value agency staff who can bring deep knowledge and experience of their brand.

This experience is viewed as vital in fast-tracking solutions to inform challenging and strategic discussions. As would have been the case with other cohorts when they were younger, Gen Z are not yet experienced enough to offer this level of expertise, and instead see value in a diversity of new experiences and bringing a fresh perspective to the challenge.

### Working vs. Nurturing

Clients may not be overtly focussed on helping to nurture future agency talent as they are often viewed as the juniors on the team. However, supporting Gen Z's growth, ambitions and expectations of the workplace will benefit both parties in the long term.

### Specialisation vs. Generalisation

Clients often seek specialised skills from their agencies, such as SEO, whilst Gen Z prioritise diversifying skills and experiences in their early career. They embrace change and adopt new skills and emerging tech fast, which should be viewed as a positive addition to the team dynamic. Being a generalist is particularly important for Gen Z, as they try and thrive in a slow-moving job market where having more strings to your bow is important to help you progress early on.

### Exclusive vs. Inclusive

The definition of collaboration has changed. Many clients define collaboration in the 'traditional' sense, reminiscent of pre-COVID-19 approaches, often purely offline and result-oriented. However, for Gen Z, collaboration must be meaningful. Key attributes of meaningful collaboration involve bringing in multiple viewpoints (from different employee levels and roles) and utilising technology (such as digital whiteboards and hybrid calls) to facilitate maximum involvement for all.

## Bridging the gap

To attract and retain the best young talent on their business, clients and agencies need to start meeting Gen Z in the middle. Clients must appreciate how the needs of employees have shifted, that some traditional work practices are no longer sustainable or aspirational, and a new spin must be applied to ensure the industry leaders of tomorrow can thrive.

Suggested approaches both from Gen Z agency employees and senior clients alike include:



### Immersive onboarding

Thorough onboarding of agency teams including secondments for new starters to learn the client's business inside-out, or face-to-face immersion sessions, could help Gen Z better understand the client's strategy and foster collaboration from the outset.

### In-person connections

Prioritising face-to-face connections in a post-COVID context builds relationships, enhances learning, and facilitates more seamless collaboration. Both clients and their agency account teams should consider the benefit of stepping away from Teams and email, to work from the other party's office once a week or at least fortnightly. For Global teams, book time for building connections and relationships away from Teams/Zoom project meetings.

### Shared focus on work-life balance

Both agencies and clients should prioritise employee wellbeing and the impact of extended periods of demanding work. Some clients are already treating agency staff as part of their team and provide care packages when times get tough.

### Mutually challenging relationship

Relationships founded on a culture of continuous learning, development, feedback, and innovation benefits both clients and agency staff. Gen Z staff should be invited in across the account and project relationship, including pitches, and ensuring they are not losing the art of planning is key.

### Celebrating wins and marking success

Recognising everyday achievements fosters a sense of value, connection, and appreciation, beyond just big industry awards.



# It is in the interest of both Clients and Agency Leaders to meet Gen Z halfway

Both parties must unpick the disconnect between the needs of clients and Gen Z agency talent and consider how best to work alongside each other if they want the best talent working, and staying, with their business. In doing so, and adapting to their needs, agencies and clients can cultivate environments where all generations thrive, leading to more effective partnerships and successful outcomes. Considering new boundaries and assessing how these clash with current expectations could help reduce churn, lead to more successful working relationships, but also ensure the industry remains dynamic, competitive, and forward-thinking.



## What can you do?



Remind ourselves of the IPA Pitch Positive Pledge: a resource to align client-agency expectations.



Implement a Gen Z steering committee to aid change and drive and collaboration between agency and client.



Incorporate Gen Z talent into Chemistry Meetings.



Reassess and implement a People First Promise: your companies declaration that you care about your people and help make them aware of these resources. **Preach what you practice!**



Ensure a safe environment for employees to raise concerns. Raise awareness and provide access to Mental Health First Aiders or encourage employees to join an Employee Resource Group (ERG).



Offer access to CPD best practice, prioritise ongoing evaluation, check ins, 360 feedback and regular catch ups. It's not only about inductions but about ongoing feedback.

JOYCE KELSO, DIRECTOR OF AGENCY VALUE, IPA

At Hall & Partners, we partner with agencies and brands across the brand planning cycle, from creative development to performance assessment, to identify insights, act as a foundation for campaigns, and develop creative work.

## **Why Hall & Partners?**

Born out of adland and founded by a charismatic advertising planner over three decades ago, Hall & Partners are the insight agency known for weaving creativity with discipline.

As champions of creativity, we combine our understanding of the pivotal role of communications agencies with our expertise in brand performance and strategy to deliver actionable insights to leading brands.

Our 30-years of experience working directly alongside agencies uniquely positions us to understand the evolving landscape of the industry, and how agencies and brands can and must work together.



axis x

15°

15°



44 Belgrave Square  
London  
SW1X 8QS

020 7235 7020

[ipa.co.uk](http://ipa.co.uk)

Catchpell House  
Carpet Lane  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6SP

020 7235 7020

## Hall & Partners

Woolyard  
52–56 Bermondsey Street  
London  
SE1 3JG

020 8618 2500

[hallandpartners.com](http://hallandpartners.com)

JULY 2024