

Gen Z at Work — Redefining the Modern Workplace



Source: Unsplash (2021)

Background

Gen Z—the digital-native generation born between 1997 and 2012—is now transforming traditional workplace culture with their fresh perspectives and job expectations (Forbes, 2025). Comprising 30% of the current global workforce, it is critical for contemporary human resource management to gain a deeper understanding of this new generational workforce (The HR Director, 2025). This case study will explore various trends associated with Gen Z work habits and the challenges modern HR faces in adapting to this evolving workplace culture.

Work From Home

The trend towards flexible work arrangements accelerated during the COVID-19 outbreak when many people spent most of their working hours at home (Forbes, 2025). Recent research indicates that, despite the global pandemic having ended some time ago, only 10% of Gen Z workers wish to return to the traditional five-day week in the office (The Times, 2025). While they acknowledge that time spent in the office fosters healthy team building, Gen Z emphasizes the importance of flexibility in working according to their own schedules (The Times, 2025). However, this preference presents a significant challenge for managers who struggle to ascertain whether their young employees are genuinely working. Studies reveal that a concerning 84% of Gen Z admit to watching TV shows or movies while working from home (HR Grapevine, 2025). Consequently, new approaches have emerged to guide managers and HR on effectively managing their remote workers. It is suggested that companies adopt a more results-oriented approach, allowing employees the freedom to choose how, when, and where they work as long as their work is delivered on time and meets quality standards (The HR Digest, 2025).

Micro-retirement

For young people in the early stages of their careers, the idea of waiting 40 years or more to retire might feel a bit dreadful (The Conversation, 2025). Traditionally, people have relied on sabbaticals, an extended paid leave agreed upon by their employer to take a break from their career (The Conversation, 2025). However, the current trend shows that young people are now taking unpaid leave or outright quitting their jobs to pursue 'micro-retirement.' Whether for traveling or simply taking a break to relieve their burnout, it has become increasingly popular among Gen Z to work for 3-5 years just to afford months or even years of not having to work, only to repeat this cycle (Business Insider, 2024). While micro-retirement encourages people to recharge and focus on personal growth, research also suggests that 18-36% of individuals would be more inclined to stay with their current jobs if sabbatical options were offered (Evrin Agac, 2025). However, the practice of micro-retirement poses an imminent threat to the integrity of the workforce and severely affects job continuity. Therefore, it is advised that employers interested in offering micro-retirement benefits develop clear guidelines and policies that facilitate open communication between employers and staff, thereby allowing companies to be alerted sooner and awarded sufficient time to arrange for temporary replacements or redistribute tasks (HR Daily Advisor, 2025).

4-Day Work Week

Over the past decade, '4-day work week' has been a hot topic for HR professionals around the world, with more than 10 countries experimenting with this new office model, including Japan, the country known for its "karoshi" culture of death by overwork (Conde Nast Traveler, 2025). Gen Z workers are strong supporters of this trend: 93% believe it would make jobs more attractive, and 34% say they would accept longer work shifts over 4 days in exchange for 1 additional day off (Facilitate, 2024).

Despite risking a potential pay cut, there is overwhelming support for the notion that a 4-day work week would reduce burnout and make them more motivated to work (The HR Director, 2025). However, while Gen Z advocates for a shorter work week, some companies like Samsung are calling for a longer six-day work week (HR Brew, 2024). HR leaders are advised to assess their organizational goals, workforce needs, as well as the sentiments of their workforce (HR Brew, 2024).

Discussion Questions

1. How can managers effectively remote staff and measure productivity in a home office environment, especially when traditional oversight is limited?
2. In what ways might micro-retirement influence the traditional concept of retirement, and how should HR adapt to this trend?
3. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of implementing a 4-day work week from an employer's perspective?
4. What are the feasibility and challenges of adapting such trends in the hospitality industry setting? What specific challenges might arise?
5. Are there other emerging workplace trends not mentioned in this case? What trends do you anticipate will shape the future of work for Gen Z?

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Keywords

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- Work Life Balance
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