

Generational Differences, Attitudes and Motivations in the Workplace

How experience across four generations can shape attitudes to work, and how employers can respond without stereotyping anyone by age.



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01

Introduction

Most UK workplaces now bring together people from four generations. Their careers began in very different economic, technological and social conditions, and those conditions can influence how people approach communication, flexibility, leadership, development and financial security.

This guide profiles Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers. For each, we summarise the attitudes and motivations that research commonly associates with the group, the circumstances that helped shape them, and the strengths and challenges employers most often report.

One principle runs through every page. Generational patterns describe broad tendencies across millions of people. They say nothing reliable about any one individual, and they should never be used to judge a candidate or colleague by age. Used properly, they help employers ask better questions and design workplaces that suit a wider range of people.

Facilities management teams are a good example of why this matters. A single FM function can include apprentices, experienced engineers, workplace coordinators and senior leaders at very different career stages, all of whom need to work well together under operational pressure.

**Tendencies
inform.
Evidence
decides.**



02

How to Use Generational Research Responsibly

Generational labels are a convenient shorthand, not a scientific category. Birth-year boundaries vary between sources, and the people at either edge of a generation often have more in common with their neighbours than with the middle of their own group.

This guide follows the widely used Pew Research Center convention: Baby Boomers born 1946 to 1964, Generation X 1965 to 1980, Millennials 1981 to 1996 and Generation Z 1997 to 2012. Other sources draw the lines a year or two differently, so treat these dates as approximate.

Many differences attributed to generations are better explained by life stage, circumstances or the job market people entered. A preference for flexibility may reflect caring responsibilities rather than birth year. A focus on pensions may reflect proximity to retirement rather than a generational trait.

- **Variation within a generation is larger than the variation between generations.** Two people born in the same year can want completely different things from work.
- **Life stage matters as much as birth year.** Early-career, mid-career and late-career priorities shift for everyone.
- **Circumstances shape attitudes.** Housing costs, pension changes and economic shocks affect people differently depending on when they happen in a career.
- **Age is a protected characteristic.** Under the Equality Act 2010, recruitment, promotion and management decisions must never be based on assumptions about age.

TENDENCIES, NOT RULES

Use this guide to widen your thinking about what people might value, then ask individuals directly. The answer from the person in front of you always outranks the generational profile.



**Manage the
person, not
the **birth year.****

03

Generation Z

Profile

Generation Z, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, is the youngest generation in the workforce and is still establishing itself. Commonly reported communication preferences include instant messaging, video calls and social media.

Research generally describes this group as comfortable with technology, analytical and adaptable. Many are reshaping career paths by prioritising flexibility, purpose and growth over stability alone. Data suggests they can be quicker to change jobs or industries, and many pursue side projects or temporary work. Digital fluency and easy access to online learning support this move towards varied, evolving careers.

Motivations and Attitudes Towards Work

Generation Z is making a noticeable impact on the UK workforce. Having grown up online, many are highly confident with technology and at ease with remote and hybrid working. Diversity, inclusion and individuality are often high priorities. Many expect inclusive workplaces and look for alignment between their own values and their employer's purpose.

Flexible schedules and work-life balance tend to matter a great deal. Many are less defined by job titles and more focused on personal fulfilment and wellbeing. Having come of age during a period of disruption, and amid growing awareness of psychological health, many expect support systems, open conversations and a culture that takes wellbeing seriously. Toxic environments and burnout are clear warning signs, and research suggests this group is more willing than earlier generations were at the same age to leave roles that damage their mental health.

Their view of work is often pragmatic. Many are financially cautious and value stability, yet will move on if expectations such as flexibility or purpose are not met. Career development and continuous learning rank highly. Many are sceptical of traditional career ladders and look instead for varied experience, mentoring and opportunities to build skills quickly. They tend to see a career change as growth rather than instability.

Research also suggests an entrepreneurial streak. Side projects, freelancing and temporary gig work are seen not only as extra income but as a way to explore interests, build skills and gain independence.

Having grown up with smartphones, social media and instant access to information, many adapt quickly to new digital tools and expect modern systems as standard. Messaging apps and collaboration platforms are often preferred to email or phone calls, and many will suggest digital fixes to improve efficiency. Those skills strengthen multigenerational teams, although some may have had fewer opportunities to build confidence in face-to-face communication.

Financial pressure is significant. High living costs, student debt and limited housing options lead many to prioritise security and long-term benefits, such as fair pay, health cover and pensions, over short-term salary gains. That pragmatism shapes their career choices and expectations.

Many are socially conscious and politically aware, and expect employers to take clear positions on issues such as climate change, diversity and mental health. They are drawn to organisations whose values they share and are prepared to walk away from those they do not. Their demand for transparency and accountability is pushing workplace culture towards being more ethical, inclusive and people-focused.

Strengths Employers Often Report

- **Confident with technology:** quick to adopt new tools, platforms and remote working environments.
- **Innovative and entrepreneurial:** willing to bring fresh ideas and question the status quo, with many self-starters among them.
- **Inclusion-minded:** often push for fairness, representation and cultural awareness at work.
- **Socially conscious:** motivated by purpose and drawn to organisations with strong ethics and a positive impact.
- **Resilient and adaptable:** many developed a pragmatic approach to uncertainty after entering work during economic and social disruption.
- **Keen learners:** often seek out online courses, workshops and mentoring to build new skills.

Challenges Employers Often Report

- **High expectations:** strong expectations of rapid progression, meaningful work and flexible conditions can clash with traditional structures.
- **Openness to moving on:** many are willing to change jobs frequently, which can be difficult for employers seeking long-term commitment.
- **Wellbeing needs:** greater openness about mental health means employers need credible wellbeing support and empathetic management.
- **Less in-person experience:** some began their careers largely remotely and may have had less exposure to office-based professional norms.
- **Low tolerance for hierarchy:** a preference for collaboration can mean resistance to rigid authority or micromanagement.
- **Information overload:** constant digital input can lead to distraction, fatigue or difficulty prioritising in fast-paced settings.

INVEST IN PRESENCE

Where early-career colleagues have had less in-person exposure, structured shadowing, site walks and time with experienced colleagues build confidence quickly. In FM, that exposure is often where operational judgement is learned.

04

Millennials

Profile

Millennials, born roughly between 1981 and 1996, form one of the largest groups in the UK workforce. Commonly reported communication preferences include instant messaging, video calls and email.

Research generally describes Millennials as well educated, trainable and ambitious. On average they have tended to stay in roles for shorter periods than older generations did, which has sometimes been read as lower loyalty to a single employer. They are also widely described as the most diverse generation in the workforce to date.

Motivations and Attitudes Towards Work

Millennials are often described as diverse and socially conscious, with a strong desire for purpose-driven work. Many want more than a salary. They look for meaningful roles in which they feel connected to the organisation, their manager and their colleagues.

Regular feedback, recognition and clear development opportunities tend to matter. Many have high expectations around promotion and progression, and are more likely to say so when those expectations are not met. That is not necessarily a lack of loyalty. It often reflects a proactive approach to personal and professional growth.

Millennials may be more inclined to move on if they feel disconnected from an organisation's values. When they find alignment with its mission and culture, engagement and performance can be exceptional. Many value a sense of belonging and want to feel their work contributes to something beyond profit.

Working Together

Research suggests Millennial professionals may lean more heavily on support and feedback from peers and managers. That can occasionally be read as reduced independence, but it goes hand in hand with strong performance in collaborative environments and a willingness to bring fresh perspectives to a team.

For this generation, technology is part of everyday life. Rather than asking for the right tools, many simply expect employers to provide them. This is sometimes misread as entitlement, but it usually reflects a wish to work efficiently and stay productive.

The diversity of this generation, across ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds, has helped make many workplaces more inclusive and open. It has also raised awareness of equality, representation and wellbeing. A wider mix of perspectives can occasionally produce different expectations or communication styles, but it generally leads to richer team dynamics and more innovative thinking.

Financial Context

Many Millennials in the UK have faced rising living costs, slow wage growth and poor housing affordability. Over recent decades, average house prices have risen far faster than average earnings after inflation, making home ownership considerably harder to reach than it was for earlier generations at the same stage.

Despite this, many are breaking old taboos by discussing money openly, prioritising financial literacy and seeking support. That openness builds resilience, although economic pressure continues to affect wellbeing and long-term security for many.

Strengths Employers Often Report

- **Technology proficiency:** having grown up alongside the internet, smartphones and social media, many adapt quickly to new platforms, remote collaboration tools and automated systems.
- **Purpose and values:** strongly motivated by organisations that match their values and take social responsibility seriously, and more likely to perform well when their work has visible impact.
- **Adaptability and learning:** growing up amid rapid change has made many highly adaptable, with a commitment to lifelong learning through courses and mentoring.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** many actively support inclusive cultures and expect employers to uphold equity and representation, which shapes their view of leadership, policy and team dynamics.

Challenges Employers Often Report

- **High standards and expectations:** research suggests high expectations around progression and pay, which can cause frustration if growth feels slow. More frequent job moves in search of better opportunities or culture fit can be read as limited long-term commitment.
- **Work-life balance:** a well-documented priority. Many favour flexible arrangements over a fixed nine-to-five, which helps prevent burnout but can clash with rigid cultures or expectations of after-hours availability.
- **Feedback and structure:** a wish for ongoing feedback reflects a focus on development, but can be misread as needing close supervision. Scepticism of traditional authority and a preference for flatter structures can create tension in hierarchical organisations.
- **Wellbeing and burnout:** a strong desire for purposeful work, combined with pressure to succeed early, can contribute to strain. Many are open about these issues, yet face a higher risk of burnout when aspirations and workplace realities do not match.



People stay where their progress is visible and their work matters.

**Every
generation
brings
strengths
worth
keeping.**



05

Generation X

Profile

Generation X, born roughly between 1965 and 1980, now holds a large share of senior and mid-career roles. Commonly reported communication preferences are face-to-face conversation and phone calls, with video calls and email readily accepted.

Research suggests employers generally perceive Generation X professionals as independent, efficient and hardworking. Job longevity is often valued, and many take a deliberate, unhurried approach to deciding whether to look for a new role. Many were raised by parents known for a strong work ethic and employer loyalty, and learned the value of independence early.

Motivations and Attitudes Towards Work

Research describes many Generation X professionals as highly independent and self-reliant, a trait often linked to growing up in dual-career households where independence was encouraged early. Self-motivation and resourcefulness carry directly into their working lives.

Diligence and a results-oriented approach are frequently cited. Many prefer clear, short-term objectives to abstract long-term plans. Throughout their careers they have typically been held accountable for measurable outcomes, and they prioritise getting things done efficiently and effectively.

On authority, many value autonomy and productivity over hierarchy. They tend to do their best work when trusted to run projects independently and take ownership of their responsibilities.

Balancing work and personal life is important. Many prioritise family and flexibility over relentless career advancement. The familiar 'work hard, play hard' ethos reflects commitment during working hours and clear boundaries around personal time, and it has helped create more relaxed, informal workplace cultures.

Job stability remains a priority, and many are acutely aware of financial pressures, particularly retirement planning. That awareness shapes their approach to career security and long-term goals. Overall, many bring a practical, no-nonsense attitude that emphasises independence, meaningful contribution and a healthy balance.

Bridging Analogue and Digital

Generation X grew up alongside the steady evolution of communication and digital technology, and had to adapt continually as a result. Many have navigated several major shifts in workplace technology and often act as a bridge between colleagues with longer careers and those who have always worked digitally.

Many entered the workforce during a period of social change and balanced careers with complex family responsibilities, including single parenthood. More women from this generation moved into full-time and leadership roles, helping to widen diversity and inclusion at work. These experiences built resilience, adaptability and independence.

Financial Pressures and Pension Uncertainty

Generation X has faced significant financial challenges across its adult life. Economic uncertainty, recessions, job-market instability and wage stagnation have left many with a less secure foundation than earlier generations. The decline of traditional pension schemes and a growing reliance on personal retirement saving have added to concerns about long-term security.

Steady rises in the cost of living have made it harder for many to save adequately, affecting retirement planning and reinforcing a pragmatic, self-reliant mindset. In response, many prioritise financial independence, adaptability and careful spending.

Pension schemes and employer contributions can therefore weigh heavily in this group's career decisions. Active membership of private-sector Defined Benefit (DB) schemes has fallen steeply since the 1990s. Many in Generation X started work expecting the stability of a DB pension, then saw a shift towards Defined Contribution (DC) schemes that place more risk and responsibility on the individual. The result, for a generation caught between two very different pension worlds, has been uncertainty about retirement and long-term security.

EXPLAIN THE WHOLE PACKAGE

When recruiting experienced professionals, set out pension contributions and longer-term benefits clearly and early. Vague answers on benefits can lose a strong candidate at offer stage.

Strengths Employers Often Report

Often seen as the bridge between the analogue past and the digital present, Generation X has a reputation for being self-reliant, adaptable and hardworking. Like any generation, it also faces its own set of challenges.

- **Self-reliance:** independence and resourcefulness, often attributed to growing up with more autonomy than later generations.
- **Adaptability:** direct experience of the shift from analogue to digital, and comfort adjusting to new technology and working environments.
- **Strong work ethic:** diligent, reliable and committed to getting the job done.
- **Pragmatism and realism:** grounded, practical and focused on results over hype.
- **Technological versatility:** comfortable with both traditional and modern tools, often bridging colleagues at different career stages.
- **Loyalty:** generally stable in long-term commitments to employers.
- **Balanced leadership:** as managers, many blend structure with flexibility and value both results and autonomy.

Challenges Employers Often Report

- **Financial strain:** recessions, rising living costs and fewer generous pension options leave many concerned about retirement readiness.
- **Feeling overlooked:** sometimes described as the 'forgotten middle' between larger generations, with a sense of under-representation in strategic conversations.

- **High stress levels:** many juggle career demands, raising children and caring for ageing parents at the same time.
- **Scepticism towards authority:** healthy scepticism can become resistance to top-down management or slow institutional change.
- **Keeping pace with change:** confident with technology but not raised with it, which can occasionally create gaps in fast-moving digital environments.
- **Work-life imbalance:** a strong work ethic combined with multiple responsibilities can make balance hard to maintain.

06

Baby Boomers

Profile

Baby Boomers, born roughly between 1946 and 1964, are the most experienced generation still in the workforce, and many now work in part-time, advisory or late-career roles. Commonly reported communication preferences are face-to-face conversation where possible, and phone calls.

Research generally describes Baby Boomers as confident, optimistic and committed to their work. Many place a high value on longevity in a role and have made fewer career moves than later generations. They were the first generation to enter the post-war workplace, many starting work young, and their work ethic helped define how many workplaces still operate today.

Motivations and Attitudes Towards Work

Research suggests many Baby Boomer professionals strongly believe that hard work leads to success. Many are used to long hours and to investing personal time in professional growth, even without recognition. Experience is highly valued, and time served is often seen as a measure of contribution.

Some may assume things are going well unless told otherwise, and expect hard work to lead naturally to promotion, which does not always match how modern organisations operate. Many are competitive and career-driven, with a strong link between professional achievement and personal identity. Having started work young, many regard success as essential and take failure seriously.

Experience of the physical workplace is a clear point of difference. Many spent most of their careers in traditional office settings, so hybrid or remote working may be seen less as a major benefit than it is by some colleagues earlier in their careers.

From Traditional to Modern Offices

For much of their working lives, many Baby Boomers worked in traditional offices, often in enclosed individual rooms or cubicles. Open-plan layouts designed for informal conversation and collaboration represented a significant change, and adapting to them often meant adjusting to new etiquette and management styles as well as new surroundings.

Many have also adapted from traditional communication to collaborative technology. While some may find rapidly changing tools less intuitive, many took readily to video calls once they became standard, valuing the way they kept human connection alive.

Finances, Flexibility and Purpose

As a group, Baby Boomers hold more wealth than younger generations, and ONS data shows relatively high median household wealth among households headed by people aged 65 to 74. As a result, some are motivated more by flexibility and purpose than by pay, and look for part-time or purpose-driven roles. Others still value financial reward, whether to top up pensions or supplement retirement income.

That focus on flexibility and purpose can make part-time and advisory arrangements work particularly well. Experience adds real value, and financial stability means some are less driven by salary alone.

Financial security is not universal, however. Research shows that a significant proportion of this generation believe they may need to work beyond retirement age, sell assets or accept a lower standard of living because of insufficient pension provision. Although many hold Defined Benefit pensions offering more predictable income, uncertainty remains a real concern.

Across their careers, Baby Boomers have also witnessed major change in workplace dynamics, most notably the steady rise of women in management. That shift reflected broader social change and has influenced family finances and retirement planning.

Strengths Employers Often Report

- **Depth of experience:** extensive workplace knowledge and a natural role as mentors, passing on valuable industry and technical knowledge.
- **Strong work ethic:** a willingness to commit time and effort to getting the job done.
- **Communication skills:** having built careers before digital channels dominated, many have highly developed face-to-face and telephone communication skills.

Challenges Employers Often Report

- **Risk of burnout:** equating commitment with long hours can increase the risk of burnout, and may create tension with colleagues who approach work-life balance differently.
- **Views on seniority:** research suggests some may associate seniority closely with authority, which can create friction where reporting lines do not follow length of service, including when a younger colleague is their manager.

CAPTURE KNOWLEDGE EARLY

In FM, long-serving colleagues often carry undocumented knowledge of buildings, systems and suppliers. Plan structured handovers and mentoring well before anyone steps back, rather than in their final weeks.



**Ask people
what they
value. Then
listen.**

07

Managing a Multigenerational Workforce

Taken together, these profiles show why a single approach to communication, reward, development and workplace experience rarely works equally well for everyone. People have grown up with different technology, job markets, economic conditions and expectations of leadership.

The practical lesson is not to manage by age. It is to recognise that flexibility, communication, development, benefits, purpose and management style can be valued differently by different people at different career stages, and to build enough choice into the way you work to accommodate that.

Communication

Offer more than one channel and agree norms as a team. Instant messaging suits quick coordination, calls and face-to-face conversations suit anything sensitive or complex, and email suits decisions that need a record. Asking people how they prefer to be kept informed is simpler and more accurate than guessing.

Development and Feedback

Regular, specific feedback benefits everyone, not only those who ask for it most. Two-way mentoring works well in mixed teams. Experienced colleagues pass on operational judgement and supplier knowledge, while colleagues who are newer to the profession can share fluency with digital tools and fresh perspectives.

Reward and Benefits

A single benefits package will land differently across a team. Pension contributions, flexible hours, wellbeing support, learning budgets and part-time or phased arrangements each matter more to some people than others. Explaining the full package clearly is as important as what it contains.

Leadership Style

Autonomy, clear objectives and trust tend to be valued widely. Where some colleagues prefer flatter structures and others expect clearer lines of authority, be explicit about who decides what and why. Clarity reduces friction far more effectively than hierarchy alone.



Manage the person, not the birth year.

**Experience
and fresh
thinking
belong in the
same team.**



08

Applying This in Recruitment and Retention

Understanding generational tendencies can help you design recruitment processes and employee propositions that appeal to a wider pool of candidates. It must never become a shortcut for assessing individuals. Every candidate should be judged on evidence of competence, judgement and fit for the role.

- ✓ Remove age-coded language from adverts, such as 'young and dynamic', 'digital native' or 'recent graduate' where a degree year is not genuinely required.
- ✓ Describe flexibility, development and benefits specifically, so candidates at every career stage can see what matters to them.
- ✓ Use structured interviews with consistent questions and scoring, so decisions rest on evidence rather than assumptions.
- ✓ Ask candidates what they value in their next role instead of inferring it from their age or career length.
- ✓ Offer a range of working patterns, including part-time and phased arrangements, where the role allows.
- ✓ Build two-way mentoring and knowledge transfer into onboarding and succession planning.
- ✓ Take wellbeing seriously for everyone, with credible support and managers trained to use it.
- ✓ Review exit and stay conversations for patterns by career stage, while treating each person's reasons individually.

Is it lawful to consider generational research when recruiting?

It can inform how you design your proposition and where you advertise, but it must never influence decisions about individual candidates. Age is a protected characteristic, so selection must rest on evidence of ability to do the job.

Should we tailor our offer to different generations?

Tailor it to different needs, not different ages. Offer choice in how people work, develop and are rewarded, then let individuals tell you what matters to them.



**Flexibility is a
career-stage
need, not an
age.**

09

Building Teams That Work Across Generations

Every generation brings strengths shaped by the conditions it grew up and started work in. Generation Z brings digital confidence and a demand for purpose, Millennials a focus on development and collaboration, Generation X independence and pragmatism, and Baby Boomers depth of experience and communication skill. Every one of those tendencies is found, to varying degrees, in people of all ages.

The organisations that benefit most use generational research to broaden their thinking, then make decisions person by person. That means clear communication, fair and structured selection, flexible ways of working and deliberate knowledge transfer.

Maxwell Stephens has specialised in facilities management, estates and workplace recruitment since 2006. If you are building or strengthening an FM team, contact us on 0207 118 4848 or info@maxwellstephens.com, or visit maxwellstephens.com.

**Knowledge
transfer
should start
long before
handover.**



THE EVIDENCE

What the Data Says

What UK data shows about flexibility, wellbeing and retention across today's workforce.

1.1 million

Around 1.1 million UK workers say they left a job in the last year because of a lack of flexible working.

[Source: CIPD, Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2025](#)

25%

25% of UK employees say their work has a negative or very negative impact on their mental health.

[Source: CIPD Good Work Index 2025](#)

34%

Average annual churn among UK workers is 34%: 27.4% move to a new employer and 6.6% are not working a year later.

[Source: CIPD, Benchmarking employee turnover: What are the latest trends and insights?, 2024](#)

35%

The most common employer-brand action by UK organisations was increasing flexible working opportunities (35%).

[Source: CIPD, Resourcing and talent planning report 2024](#)

95%

95% of candidates placed by Maxwell Stephens remain in role one year after appointment.

[Source: Maxwell Stephens, 2026](#)

Sources were checked in September 2026. Select a source to open the original research. Maxwell Stephens figures are drawn from our own published vacancies and placement records.

CASE STUDY

See It in Practice

Senior Facilities Manager Recruitment for Toyota GB

Toyota GB appointed Maxwell Stephens to recruit a Senior Facilities Manager after the existing postholder announced their retirement. The role covered the Burgh Heath head office and the Burnaston Academy, with responsibility for outsourced providers, significant budgets, health and safety, projects and sustainability. We ran a full search and assessed candidates on their ability to provide continuity while bringing new thinking, with cultural alignment weighted as heavily as technical experience. The appointment delivered a managed succession, and Toyota GB went on to recommend us to its FM service provider, Dalkia.

It shows how a well-run succession balances the knowledge of a long-serving leader with fresh thinking, a challenge every multigenerational team faces.

[Read the full case study](#) · [Browse all case studies](#)

FROM THE BLOG

Related Reading

- [Understanding Generation Z in the Workplace](#)
- [Employee Retention Strategies for 2026: How to Keep Your Best People](#)
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