



The Gen Z Effect on the U.S. Workplace

Understanding your newest employees' views on work, corporate culture, automation and you

Gen Z is the largest generation in the United States, and they're becoming influential drivers of social, political and economic change.¹ **While workplaces are responding to Gen Z's professional emergence, employers are largely sailing without a compass.** For almost two decades, business recruitment, engagement and retention policies have revolved around the preferences and working habits of Millennials.² But Millennials have reached maturity, and **Gen Z is the working world's new freshman class.** Does that mean employers should abandon the Millennial playbook?

Now that Gen Z's oldest members have spent roughly three years in the professional workforce, **Nintex saw an opportunity to go straight to the source.**³ We wanted to directly engage with both current and soon-to-be Gen Z employees in the U.S. — as well as their managers — **to get a first-hand look at Gen Z on the job.**



¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/797321/us-population-by-generation/>

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues>

² <https://trainingmag.com/how-will-gen-z-change-workplace-created-millennials>

³ For this study, we defined Gen Z's oldest members as being 23 as of April 2019, when we conducted our surveys. This age cut-off was informed by Pew Research Center data: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins>





What does Gen Z look for in an employer?

What keeps them around, and what sends them packing?

As the first true digital natives, what are Gen Z's feelings toward AI and automation-driven solutions?

What does Gen Z need from their employers to do their best work?

To address these questions and understand what Gen Z means for today's workplaces, Nintex conducted two surveys: first, a survey of both current and soon-to-be U.S.-based Gen Z employees, and second, a survey of U.S. business decision makers.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Gen Z

We surveyed **500** current and **500** future Gen Z employees. All Gen Z respondents were between the ages of **18** and **23**. We defined current Gen Z employees as graduates of a **four-year** university degree program who now have a job where they use a computer for **5+ hours** a day. We defined future Gen Z employees as either current enrollees in four-year university degree programs who will actively seek full-time employment upon graduation, or graduates of a four-year university degree program who are actively seeking full-time employment. We also asked Gen Z what they fear most about entering the workforce. Their answers appear in quotes throughout this report.

1000

CURRENT
AND FUTURE
GEN Z
EMPLOYEES

18-23 YEARS OLD

4 YEARS UNIVERSITY
DEGREE PROGRAM

5+ HOURS USING A
COMPUTER AT WORK



SURVEY LOGISTICS

Decision makers

We surveyed **500** business decision makers. All decision makers surveyed work at a company with more than 250 employees, and are at the management, VP/director, or C-suite level. To qualify for the survey, decision makers had to be directly involved in selecting or helping their organization select and implement new technologies.

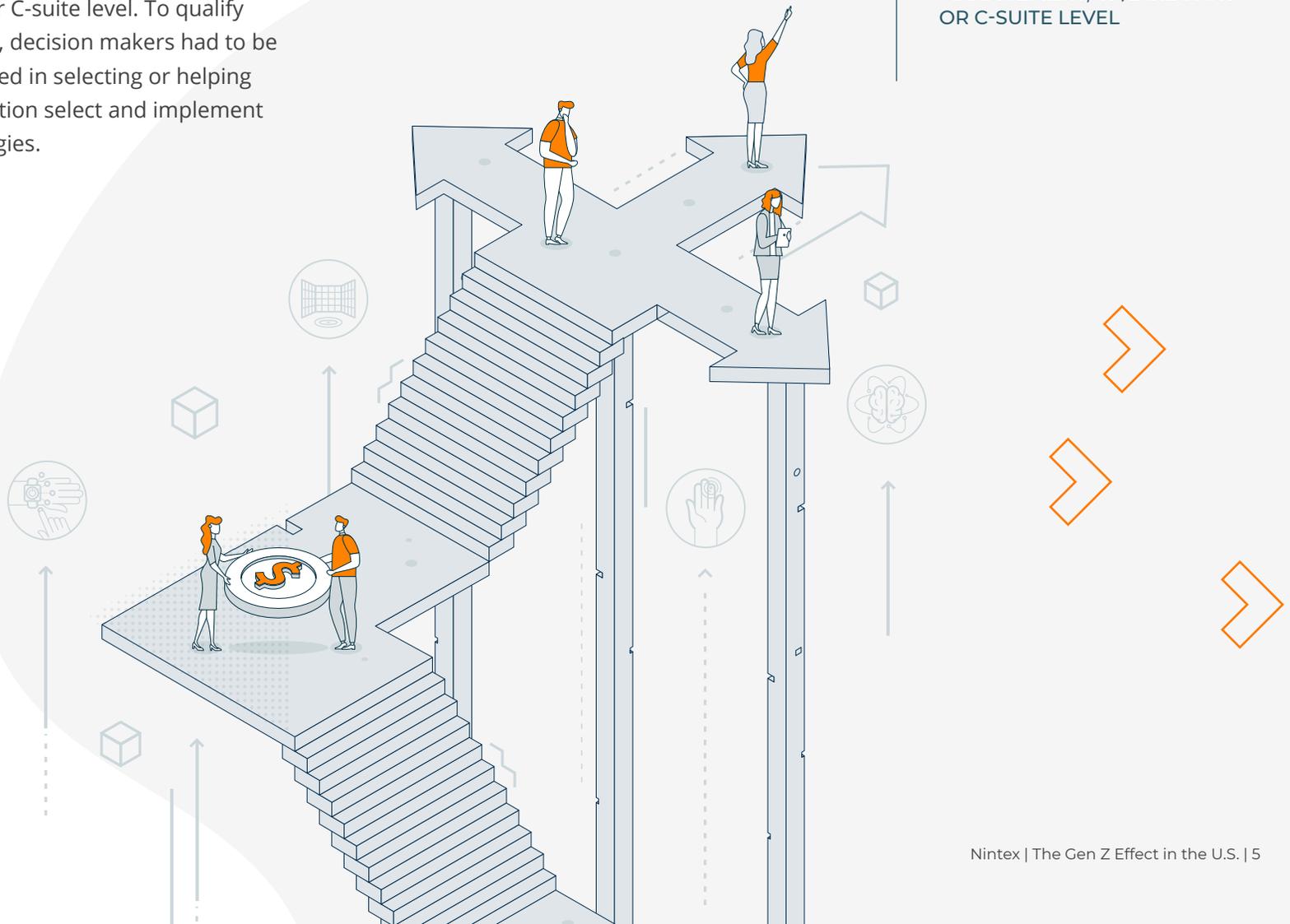
500

BUSINESS
DECISION
MAKERS

250+

 EMPLOYEES

MANAGEMENT, VP/DIRECTOR
OR C-SUITE LEVEL





THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Gen Z won't disrupt the workforce, they'll quietly elevate it. Through a combination of tech aptitude, pragmatism and collaborative spirit, Gen Z has the DNA to drive the next generation of enterprise efficiency. But companies must provide them with an environment to grow — and an opportunity to work with AI and automation, rather than have it loom as a threat.

Key findings



Gen Z doesn't want to job-hop

They're ready to commit to one company. But in order to stick around, they need to see a long-term path to professional growth.

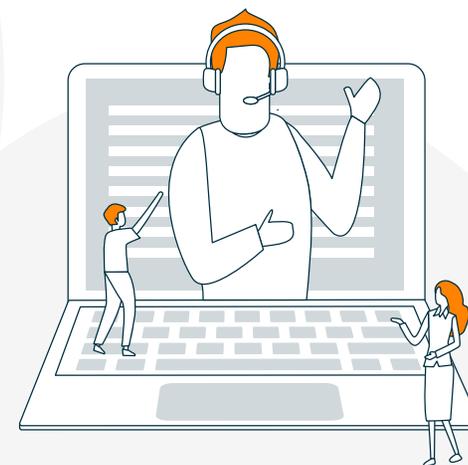
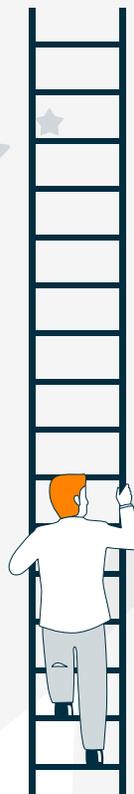


They want face time, not FaceTime

We found weekly, in-person check-ins to be the optimal cadence for both employee happiness and productivity.

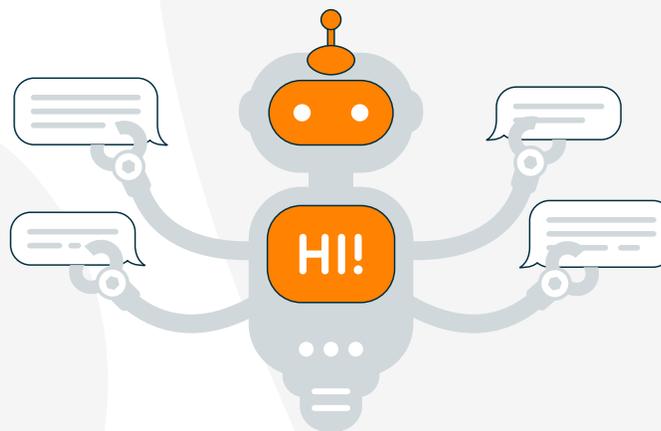
They expect prompt promotions

This is driven by their acute awareness of debt, living costs and economic instability — not generational entitlement.



They'll be your resident tech experts

They know it, and so do their employers, who proactively adopt technology and tools suggested by Gen Z.



They're afraid AI and automation may cost them their jobs, and this fear holds them back from fully embracing these technologies.



Gen Z at college

Edification over earnings

Gen Z grew up acutely financially aware — not that they had a choice. As they attended elementary and middle school, their Gen X parents absorbed the worst impact of the 2008 global financial recession.⁴ And once they entered college, Gen Z faced crisis-level student loan debt.⁵ But even with this forced financial responsibility, Gen Z approached college with an eye toward learning over earning.

⁴ https://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2013/EMPRetirementv4051013finalFORWEBpdf.pdf, P.2

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2019/02/25/student-loan-debt-statistics-2019/#4403799f133f>

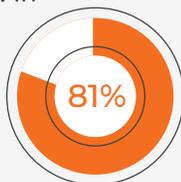
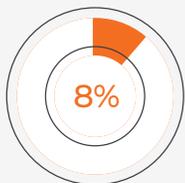


Education for its own sake

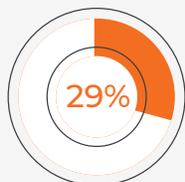
The strong majority of Gen Zers (**63%**) say they selected their college major due to personal interest, not because it prepares them for a specific career path, while only



8% of Gen Z decided their major from the standpoint of long-term earning potential. In terms of the influencers behind their selection of major, Gen Z is again driven by what's personally interesting (**81%**).



Yet even as college students, many (**29%**) also considered the state of the economy.



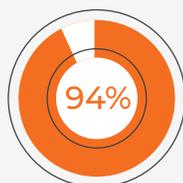
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I'm worried about not liking my job and wasting my degree.

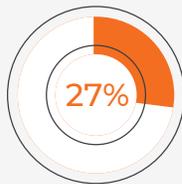
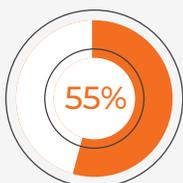


Collaboratively fluent, preferably independent

For Gen Z, collaboration tools like “Google Docs, GroupMe and Facebook Messenger” are top choices for completing class assignments. **Ninety-four percent** say they either used or currently use these tools frequently to complete class assignments, while **59%** used them extremely frequently.



But while Gen Z is collaboratively fluent, that doesn't mean they like sharing assignments. A majority of Gen Zers — **55%** — say they prefer (or preferred) individual assignments in college over group work, with over one-quarter (**27%**) having a strong preference for individual assignments.



“
I'm scared of not
performing to
my expectations.”



Gen Z on the job

Tendencies and expectations

The vast majority of enterprise decision makers told us they view Gen Z as a separate and distinct generation, not as Millennials 2.0. They're wise to have this perspective. While Gen Z and Millennials both value company culture, other Millennial stereotypes — like constant job-hopping — won't apply to Gen Z.



The decisive debt factor

Taking on debt doesn't impact their choice of major. We found a 2:1 ratio of major selection based on "personal interest" over "preparation for a specific career path", and this ratio holds across Gen Zers with and without debt. But debt does play a decisive role as Gen Z enters the workforce.

“ I'm worried I won't get paid enough to cover my debt.

CURRENT GEN Z EMPLOYEES WITH DEBT ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO



Gen Zers with debt

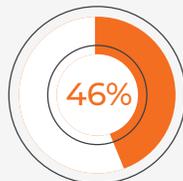
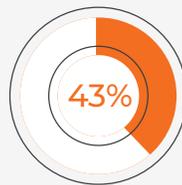
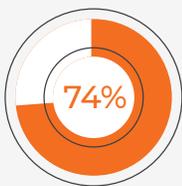
Gen Zers without debt





Not default negotiators

Gen Z is more likely than not to accept a job offer without negotiation. While nearly three-quarters of prospective Gen Z employees (**74%**) say they plan to negotiate their salary for their first job, only **43%** of current employees told us they actually did. The rate at which Gen Z negotiates salaries is less than that of their older decision-maker counterparts (**46%**).



“

I'm concerned I won't be able to negotiate a livable salary.



Company-centric values over individual enrichment

Like their Millennial predecessors, Gen Z cares deeply about their work environment.⁶ After salary, Gen Z ranked company culture, values, and reputation as the most important factors in selecting their first job. By contrast, Gen Z ranked factors that could be classed as “individual enrichment-focused” — such as work flexibility, potential for new learning and work-life balance — lower on their list.

⁶ <https://hbr.org/2016/05/what-millennials-want-from-a-new-job>

“

I’m scared about being in an environment where people stop being creative, and where it becomes more about surviving than thriving.



The case for weekly, in-person check-ins

The majority of current Gen Z employees (**55%**) are meeting with their managers for formal check-ins at least biweekly. But we found that weekly check-ins are the preferred cadence for Gen Z. Of those with different check-in frequencies — daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly and more — those with weekly check-ins were most likely to characterize the cadence of check-ins as “Optimal.” And when it comes to in-person versus virtual check-ins, there’s no competition: **Nine out of 10** Gen Zers want their check-ins to happen in-person, while a mere **4%** of Gen Zers want to totally virtualize check-ins.

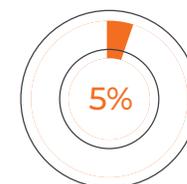
“ What if I’m seen as an underdog and am not well-liked?”

PREFER IN-PERSON
CHECK INS

9/10



PREFER VIRTUAL
CHECK INS





GEN Z MANAGEMENT TIP

WHEN IN DOUBT, SCHEDULE
CHECK-INS MORE OFTEN AND
FACE-TO-FACE

Fewer than **10%** of employees feel they're meeting with their manager too often.

By contrast, **1/3** feel they're not meeting with their manager enough.

Employees who meet with their managers more frequently are more likely to view their managers as extremely open to new suggestions.

58% of those with daily or weekly check-ins feel their manager is extremely open to new suggestions compared to only **41%** of those with semi-monthly or biannual check-ins.



Turning tech suggestions into change

Gen Zers are your company's resident tech experts — something they, and their managers, know. **Seventy-two percent** of managers agree that, "In general, Gen Z employees are more tech-savvy than me." Notably, it's Millennial managers — not Gen Xers or Baby Boomers — who are most likely to "strongly" believe Gen Z is more tech savvy: **31%** of Millennial managers strongly believe Gen Zers are more tech savvy compared to **29%** of Gen X and **16%** of Baby Boomer managers.

Meanwhile, **eight out of 10 Gen Zers (81%)** have been asked to fix a tech problem by their manager, with almost one-third of this group (**29%**) saying this happens "extremely frequently." Companies are responding positively to Gen Z's tech aptitude by proactively adopting technology and tools suggested by Gen Z: **80%** of decision makers said their company has adopted a technology or tool specifically because it was suggested/requested by Gen Z employees.

“

I'm worried
about
stagnation.



Gen Z doesn't want to job-hop, but they do expect reasonably prompt promotions

Gen Z isn't looking to job-hop: **60%** of Gen Z said they expect to remain at their first job past the one-year mark, with **71%** of that group planning to stay past the two-year mark. Only **31%** said they plan to leave at or before the year mark. The majority of Gen Z (**53%**) anticipates a promotion within one year of starting their first job and **three out of 10** expect a promotion within nine months. It's easy to dismiss a statistic like this as generational entitlement and young people not wanting to pay their dues. But our findings tell a different story: On top of the fact that **six out of 10** Gen Zers graduate with debt, there's also the significant cost of living in major cities relative to average entry-level salaries, and the prospect of a major economic downturn.⁷

⁷ <https://fortune.com/2019/06/04/next-recession-2020-predictions>

“

Will I be able to grow in the workforce?





Economic Considerations

Gen Z is aware of and notably influenced by these economic considerations: As one prospective Gen Z employee told us, her greatest fear about entering the workforce is that, “I won’t be able to get a job that allows me to support myself financially.” Another said he feared that, “My industry will collapse as soon as I begin working.” Many others shared similar sentiments: “I fear I will not be able to make a living with the field I’m entering”; “I’m worried about not being able to pay off my loans”; “I’m scared of a changing economy”; and “I’m concerned I won’t be able to sufficiently support my family.” These quotes reflect the broader sentiment of those we polled, painting a picture of a financially pragmatic generation driven more by informed economic considerations than by generational entitlement.

“

I fear I will not be able to make a living with the field I’m entering.



Using the best app for the job

IT departments traditionally serve as arbiters of workplace tech, while the employee practice of circumventing IT has been demonized as “Shadow IT.” While this term has fallen out of favor in recent years — as companies increasingly prioritize flexible app policies — Gen Zers are the ones who will really drive it into obsolescence.

When deciding between two apps — the app their company tells them to use and the one they know will most effectively handle the task — the overwhelming majority of Gen Z (**79%**) will go with the latter. The point here isn't that Gen Z is looking to circumvent established processes; it's that they're hardwired for app efficiency. In their daily lives, if one app doesn't measure up, there are many others to take its place. The same principle applies at work. Why settle?

Gen Z's digital nativity also helps explain why, when they're faced with a tech-related problem at work — say, trouble with an app or computer glitch — fewer than half (**48%**) submit a formal IT request. Instead, most either attempt to solve the problem themselves by Googling or by trial and error, or they ask a colleague for help.

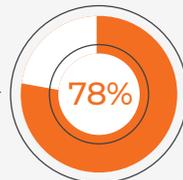
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I'm concerned
I will not have the
right tools.



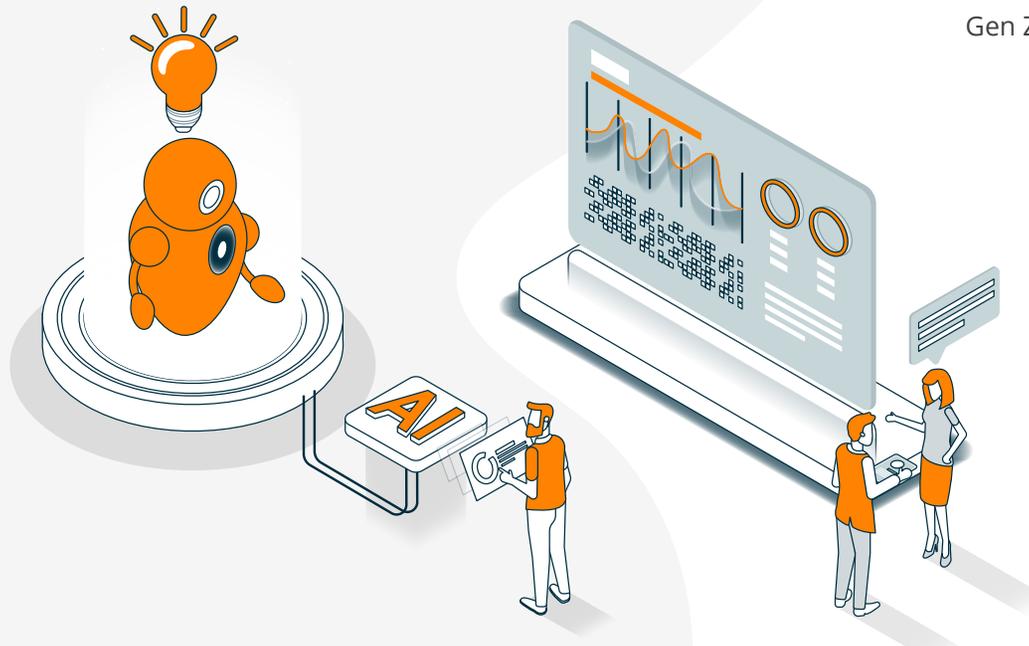
AI and automation: More risk than reward?

The vast majority of companies (**78%**) use automation tools to a moderate or very significant extent. But there's a duality to how Gen Zers and those who manage them regard AI and automation. On the one hand, both are optimistic about its potential to simplify work. On the other, they're scared it'll cost them their jobs.

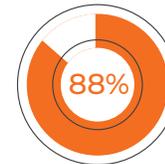


Recognizing the AI opportunity

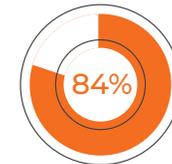
By and large, Gen Zers — **88%** of them — see AI and automation as a resource that will make their jobs easier, while half of that group say it will make their jobs significantly easier. Similarly, **84%** of decision makers see AI potentially making their jobs easier.



AI AUTOMATION AS A RESOURCE



Gen Zers

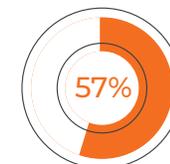


Decision makers

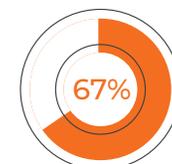
Fearing the consequences

But both Gen Zers and decision makers fear automation as well. **Fifty-seven percent** of Gen Z is concerned about AI and automation impacting their job security; **23%** are very concerned. Similarly, over two-thirds of decision makers (**67%**) are concerned automation and AI-driven tools could impact their job security.

CONCERNED ABOUT AI AND AUTOMATION IMPACTING THEIR JOBS



Gen Zers



Decision makers





Meeting Gen Z:

A working playbook

Gen Z enters the workforce determined to work hard and to grow — to elevate more than disrupt. The rise of Gen Z is an opportunity for companies to foster a committed new class of employees. But to do that, they must offer workplaces worth sticking around for.

Here's how enterprises can best meet Gen Z's workplace expectations

INVEST IN GEN Z'S INCREMENTAL CAREER GROWTH.

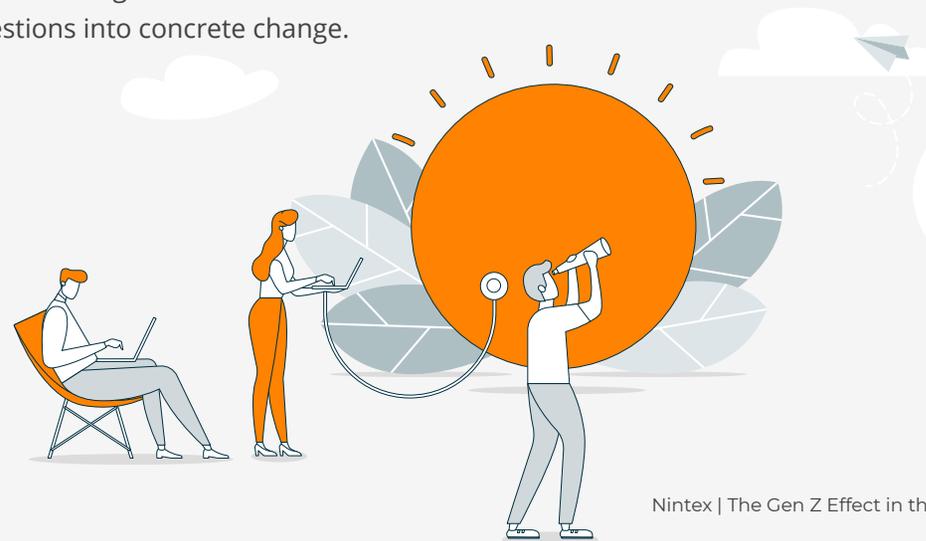
Gen Z doesn't enter the workforce planning to job-hop, but a lack of opportunity for growth at their company will send them packing. They are prepared to put in the time to grow at their first employer, but they want to be quickly rewarded for their efforts. If employers want to retain their Gen Z talent, they should examine their career paths. Are there opportunities to advance at the one-year mark? Or even the nine-month mark? Could salaries be better aligned with the cost of living? These are questions companies should ask, because Gen Z certainly is.

CULTIVATE AN IMPROVEMENT CULTURE — ONE IN WHICH CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION IS THE NORM.

Like their Millennial predecessors, Gen Z cares deeply about company culture. Create a culture defined by continuous process improvements — one in which Gen Z can play an active role in evolving processes and tools. For their part, decision makers are already moving in the right direction with their openness to Gen Z's process-based suggestions, and their willingness to turn Gen Z suggestions into concrete change.

BUILD AN EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE AROUND AI AND AUTOMATION.

Gen Z — and everyone else, for that matter — sees the potential in AI and automation but need to know it won't eliminate their jobs. Companies should utilize AI and automation as a partner, not a competitor, and a tool to augment, not replace, people.





THE LAST WORD

Gen Z is poised to evolve the workplace. They will collaborate effectively with previous generations while also recruiting their singular tech aptitude to drive innovation and lasting value. But their employers need to recognize and reward those contributions with timely growth opportunities and a chance to do work they enjoy.

As one Gen Zer told us, their biggest fear about entering the workplace is of being “tied down and strapped in for life.” Gen Z is here to work — but they want to make that work count.

Gen Z across geographies

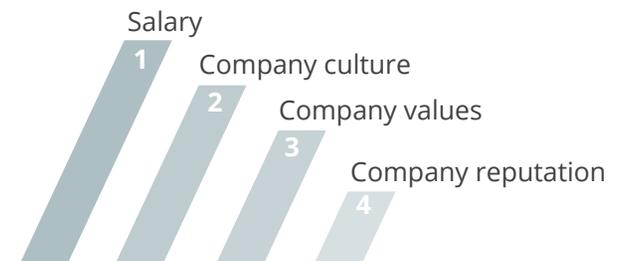
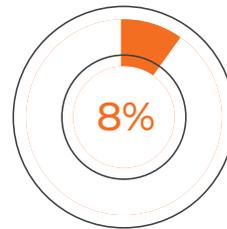
In addition to surveying a U.S. audience, Nintex polled Gen Zers in the UK and Australia/New Zealand. Here are some of the notable points of contrast across the three geographies we studied.

INFLUENCERS BEHIND SELECTION OF MAJOR

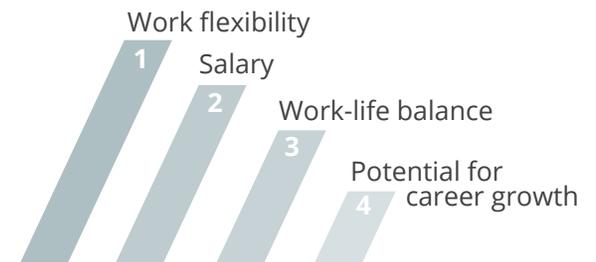
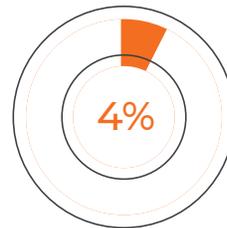
WHAT PERCENTAGE OF GEN Z SELECTS THEIR MAJOR BASED ON LONG-TERM EARNING POTENTIAL?

THE TOP 4 FACTORS THAT LED GEN Z TO THEIR CURRENT JOB

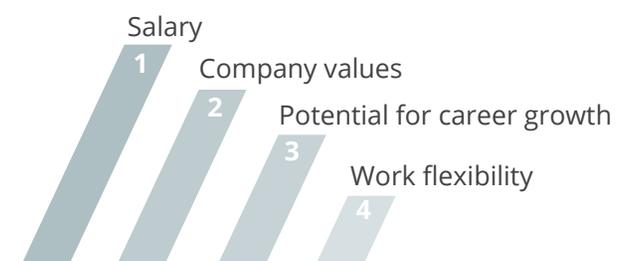
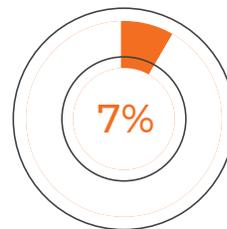
U.S. Gen Zers choose their major based on “Personal interest” and “Influence of parents,” followed by the state of the economy.



Gen Zers in Australia and New Zealand ranked “Influence of peer group” much higher than the state of the economy.



Gen Zers in the UK ranked “Influence of college professors” toward the top of their list, while placing “Influence of peer group” at the bottom.



About Nintex

Nintex, the trusted global standard for process management and automation, enables IT, operations and business leaders to more quickly and easily manage, automate and optimize simple to sophisticated business processes. More than 9,000 customers in 90 countries turn to the Nintex Process Platform to drive productivity and accelerate business results. We have the fastest way to build applications, lowest total cost of ownership, and the highest overall satisfaction among our peers.

In 2019, Forrester Research named Nintex a Leader in The Forrester Wave™: Digital Process Automation For Wide Deployments, Q1 2019. We welcome the opportunity to discuss your business needs and demonstrate our industry-leading approach to workflow automation, robotic process automation, and document automation with the capabilities of the Nintex platform:

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- Forms & Mobile Apps
- Advanced Workflow
- Nintex RPA
- DocGen®
- Nintex Sign™ powered by Adobe Sign
- Process Analytics

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