

Why the office still has a purpose (especially for Gen Z)

With the rise of hybrid working post-pandemic, many employees are now enjoying the flexibility of a part office, part home set-up. Yet, despite the benefits of such an arrangement, it would be foolish to write off the importance of the office in the future.

Although almost three quarters (73%) of those we surveyed across Europe in our *'Generation Z and the lure of the office'* report said they had no issue working remotely, an even higher number (81%) felt increasingly disconnected from their colleagues when not physically in the workplace. And for younger workers in particular, the lack of office time resonates strongly given their inability to build those all-important work relationships, which are so fundamental to learning, development and career advancement.

These results also dispel some of the commonly held myths associated with Gen Zers, namely that these 'digital nomads' would rather work from anywhere other than the office. In reality, this could not be further from the truth. Interacting socially and the ability to collaborate with their colleagues were all elements cited by this demographic as missing from a remote working world. In fact, 80% of this generation would be more likely to go into the office if their colleagues were also there.

The workplace also seemingly has a positive role to play on the mental

wellbeing of this generation. Almost one in four 18–34-year-olds from our study revealed that working from home had a negative impact on their mental health. While for many the lack of social interaction in a virtual world will certainly have influenced this, we also cannot overlook the fact that many are likely to have a less-than-ideal home office set up that requires them to work from their bedrooms or in noisy flat-shares.

Office space

While Gen Z clearly place significant value on the office, rather startlingly, only 11% of respondents are happy with their offices in their present incarnation. And herein lies the crux of the matter. If employers want to encourage their staff back to their physical premises, they need to rethink their current set-ups. But this needs to address the nuances of the five generations all currently active in the workforce, for the first time in our modern history. As we've already shown, it's easy to make assumptions as to what each generation wants from the office, but the most accurate picture will be developed by going straight to the source and asking your people what they want.

From the result of our study, we know that on a broader scale, Gen Z want to see more of the following: access to outdoor spaces, areas for social gatherings, and separate collaboration spaces.

What is interesting to note is that the majority (81%) of Gen Zers would be encouraged back to the workplace if there were separate spaces for collaborative work and quiet zones, the latter of which they can complete deep-focus work. From our survey, it was noted that 45% of younger workers find it easier to concentrate in the office. Essentially, Gen Zers want the buzz and energy of the office, but equally they value the ability to get their heads down when they need it without distractions.

Apart from the design elements of what the office of the future ought to look like, there are other factors at play that this generation want from their working environment. The vast majority would like to have flexi starting times (83% vs. 69% for older workers), which again reinforces the desire for more autonomy at work. The other big draw of the office is access to training and development, highlighted by 80% as a desirable element of the workplace. Indeed, according to Deloitte's *'Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial'* survey, three in 10 said that this was their top reason for choosing an employer.

Yet for all the benefits highlighted, Gen Z staff do not want to be in the office all of the time. Almost two thirds (62%) of those in the 18-34 age group want to continue with a hybrid work pattern – only 30% would prefer a full-time return to the office.

Choice destination

If employers are to entice workers back to the office, they need to rethink their designs and layouts to provide a better experience, creating an environment that's conducive to both in person socialisation and more quiet, concentration time. The office clearly holds its value for Gen Z and those firms that do not recognise the full impact that the workplace has on this demographic will find that they struggle to attract and retain emerging talent.

Attracting and retaining top Gen Z talent is a huge challenge for organisations, especially in today's tight candidate-led labour market. Leaders need to accept that the world of work has changed (for the better) and they must offer flexible working options to improve the wellbeing of their people. But perhaps more importantly, businesses need to turn their offices into true destinations that provide an experience you just can't find at home.

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