



Younger generations at work

An inquiry into employers' experiences

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www.AreYoo.com



We asked 11 very diverse employers from 4 countries during the summer and autumn of 2025 to talk to us about their experiences of younger generations (18-35s).

We are deeply thankful to all our contributors and hope we convey their insights accurately in this report.

1. **Strengths to keep in balance**
2. **Needs and attitudes requiring new management approaches**
3. **Entitlement - or healthy selfishness?**
4. **What young people need**
5. **What employers need**
6. **Who needs to adapt to whom?**
7. **What have you done to set them up for success?**
8. **How AreYoo measures up**



Strengths to keep in balance

Many of the characteristics raised by employers could be experienced as both a strength and a drawback and as a result require an appropriate level of balance.

Comfort with digital: Pace, speed and the creative ways in which younger generations approach problems are a realised and potential asset in a context where most organisations are becoming tech organisation with the advent of AI. On the weakness side, some young people are seen as lacking basic office etiquette, have a short attention span, multi-task during meetings and communicate in short digital messages.

Authenticity: Leaders appreciate a healthy surfacing of issues and the freshness of getting a clearer view of what's going on. On the other hand, younger generations' authenticity also means they don't do 'flowery' communication or see the need to adapt how they behave to hierarchy.

"5 o'clock. It's like
the Alamo.
They're out of the door"

Whole selves at work - Inclusivity and boundaries: Young people expect a workplace that it is inclusive. They are aware of their rights and able to call out unfair or unacceptable behaviour. They may however overdo this by failing to understand accountabilities in the power structure and may, for example, misconstrue a 'no' as bullying. They are protective of their work-life balance and tend not to be willing to put in the overtime of prior generations.



2

Needs and attitudes requiring new management approaches

Mental health: Several contributors commented on young people's anxiety in the face of problems and setback, and this from individuals in their 30s with strong capabilities or quite senior in their organisation.

They also see a reluctance to speak out in group settings despite bringing very sound ideas in one-to-ones. Younger generations are however very open to sharing their mental health challenges.

They appreciate a supportive coaching by their superiors, although not all line managers are able or willing to devote the time needed to provide this accompaniment. They benefit from a healthy comparison with their peers.

There is a reluctance to speak out in group settings despite bringing very sound ideas in one-to-ones

One contributor deplored that some organisations "have put in wellbeing interventions that medicalised anxiety by making counselling the way forward".

It is important to acknowledge that problems can reach unsustainable levels that are very difficult for any line manager to address, including drug use at the weekend regularly affecting performance at the start of the week, in a dramatic example shared with us.

Flexible work practices: There can be a battleground around the return to the office with older leaders drawing up 'return to the office' policies they assume will be good for younger people's mental health, while perhaps causing additional anxiety or resentment and potentially losing good candidates (both younger professionals but also people with family responsibilities).

Seeking meaning and mastery:

Younger generations are very keen on feeling a sense of purpose in what they do. They ask themselves questions about 'fit' and may leave if the answers to these questions do not satisfy them.

3

Entitlement - or healthy selfishness?

Many leaders shared that younger people could come across as entitled, wanting to advance quickly without mastering the fundamentals. Yet soon after naming it, our contributors also empathised with, reframed or explained this entitlement as:

- A consequence of a linear, prescriptive education system creating expectations that “if you tick the criteria for success in a job, you will automatically progress”.
- A “positive, healthy shift in mindset for us to adopt as a race” that younger generations are “no longer at the mercy of employers and expect a more balanced and thoughtful employer-employee relationship”

Contextual factors

Other contextual factors were raised to explain the broader behaviours and mindsets of younger generations.

Organisation Culture

“It is actually organisational culture that drives behaviour” (at every age). “How a young person acts all comes down to what the senior leadership are doing”.

“It is actually
organisational
culture that drives
behaviour”

They have grown up experiencing multiple fiscal shocks and facing significant financial burdens such as high university debt and difficulty affording housing, at the same time as technology opening up career paths other generations never had e.g. building their own business or generating income through social media.

20–25-year-olds are facing geopolitical and climatic change, are feeling disillusioned and frightened about the future and worry about being able to offer their future children the same advantages they grew up with.

These external pressures explain the need for and practice of ‘side hustles’, which in turn may explain the need to leave work on time.

The impact of a country’s labour laws or a country’s dominant work culture as a predictor of behaviour. Young people in the US being terrified of losing their job and therefore not challenging senior leaders. Talented Italian professionals are leaving the country or rejecting job offers from small and medium size organisations owned by older, more command-and-control leaders unwilling to adapt to them.



4

What young people need

Psychological safety – More than other generations. It starts with inclusivity but also with help to connect to others and encouragement to contribute.

Coaching - “They need people there to talk to openly, that they can discuss problems with”. This takes leadership effort, skill and willingness. “Do leaders have the skills to do that”, in particular new managers?

Learning to learn - “We probably need to unpack how you learn on the job” because learning by overhearing others cope with problems might no longer occur.

Peer learning - “It's really important that they learn from each other... that way any coping strategies and tips will be relevant to how they see and experience the world”.

Support during the transition into employment - They don't always know what work is like. We need to provide an environment they experience as safe.

“We noticed that people in their first role had high attrition rates around 120 days. It was about the onboarding experience, about the attachment to the organisation, about feeling welcomed”.

“They need to learn a habit of accountability and performance”

Then, there is a learning curve to adapt to work. “They need to learn a habit of accountability and performance. Basically, they need to grow up”, a process that one leader was clear took 18 months to 2 years.

Three transitions Leaders highlighted three periods in times when young people may ask themselves questions, sometimes leave if the answers don't satisfy them (which may actually be the right thing for both parties if recognised in good time):

1. The first time they recognize that their talent is not being rewarded
2. When they are a square peg in a round hole and their employer's culture is not a good fit
3. When they become parents and priorities change (for both parents).





What employers need

Soft skills and relationship building –

“In our assessment practice, we’re much more focused on those human capabilities versus any level of technical competency. You don’t need to code anymore... The things we’ll be left with are the judgement, the ethical, the foresight, the storytelling and the shaping and leading with empathy”.

Communication and conflict management - “I need my team to tell me how they’re doing, what’s working, what’s not, where they’re struggling and not, and where they need support and not necessarily waiting for me to ask”.

Young people “need to understand that you can disagree with someone, you can even have a conflict and then work it out and it’ll be OK”.

“Young people are leaving saying ‘We just can’t get anything done here’”

Intergenerational collaboration - They need to learn office etiquette, to know when and how to adapt their style, “to surface those ideas and needs in a credible way that sticks and resonates with a more mature population”.

Understanding organisational change and pace - “The working world is quite cumbersome and lethargic compared to the consumer products they experience”.

“Young people are leaving saying ‘We just can’t get anything done here’, but they need to understand legacy, the change management process, and expectation-setting”.

Ecosystem awareness and connectivity - They need to see the bigger picture much earlier in their careers, more T-Shaped Leadership rather than I-Shaped. In some roles, they need an awareness of the ecosystem both within and outside their organisation.



6

Who needs to adapt to whom?

Some of our leaders acknowledge that workplace cultures will shift as younger generations becomes a dominant group. Employers and senior leaders need to understand them and adapt their leadership approaches accordingly.

Currently, seniors can be frightened of juniors, of their digital skills, their authenticity, their mental health issues and their expectations of inclusivity. Younger generations also need to understand that they may also need to shift the way they work in order to succeed.

“Companies should do better in organising mentorship between seniors and juniors because they have difficulties in communicating... They have different paradigms”.





What have you done to set them up for success?

One contributor whose organisation noticed attrition rates at the 120 days mark shared:

“We changed onboarding, the way they were welcomed, building relationships at a department level quite quickly and we got really good results. So, the question is, what have you done to set them up for success?”

Many spoke about **reaching out and staying connected** through coaching and one-to-ones (especially critical in virtual teams), weekly team catch-ups to manage pressure points on workload, away days and arranging ‘coffee roulette’ (random pairings to connect for 30mins over coffee).

Several spoke of **creating a common language and understanding** using training in people management and/or in understanding individual differences.

Others put in **specific mechanisms to enable success**:

- Creating brainstorm meeting situations where any idea is a good idea. Making quarterly reviews neurodiverse.
- Changing job descriptions from list of bullet points to behaviours and outcomes and putting in place Mental Health First Aiders.

One leader saw **culture-building** and leaders living organisational values consistently as the principal factor affecting employee performance and retention.

Finally, one contributor launched an **innovative reverse mentoring programme** for under 30s where “a panel of 16 younger people each reverse mentored somebody on one of our boards. They had real input and it also lifted the veil a bit in terms of ‘this is why this decision was made’. Confidentiality was key to make it work and it really helped break down barriers”.





How AreYoo can help

One contributor said it perfectly:

“The programme you’re offering could help set up a generation for success in the workplace — which would give confidence and assurance to leaders that they can draw on their expertise and fresh thinking.”

We convened this inquiry to road-test our assumptions about the value of our transformational programme for younger generations.

Our impact data collected three months post programme confirms that AreYoo:

- Increases participants’ self-esteem, social confidence and reduces their anxiety and loneliness.
- Yields significant self-reported increases in soft skills, communication skills, especially around managing conflict.
- Builds trust and belonging quickly.
- Provides learners with alternative sources of support for learning, problem-solving and resilience through peer coaching.
- Is appropriate for both line managers and first-time job holders.

What was new for us

- The need to address etiquette in the form of written communication and adapting to hierarchy (which we will add to our design).
- Realising AreYoo could become a support for intergenerational connection by creating a common language and expectation around human communication and relationships. We see AreYoo as having the potential to act as a ‘bridge’ of understanding between generations in organisations, by inviting older managers to take part in a shorter AreYoo version suited to their experience level.
- Find out more on our website and contact us to explore how AreYoo could contribute to your success.

Email: hello@AreYoo.com



Thank you

We thank our contributors for their time and thoughtful insights. They are:

- Senior civil servant in a large Government department, UK
- Talent/Performance/Inclusion specialists in a UK news company
- MD of a small Insurance Service company, UK
- Experienced Head of People & Culture and Leadership Development Expert, UK
- Senior Recruitment Specialist, Italy
- Senior product innovation leader in various startups, Silicon Valley, California
- Former Employee Experience Expert in the NHS, UK
- Founder of an FMCG Baby Brand, Netherlands
- Global Head of Talent, multinational consumer healthcare, UK
- Senior leader, fast-growing Insurtech company, US
- Senior Director in a global media and advertising company, UK