

Generation Z: Reshaping the Workplace

C1/C2 •
SOCIOLOGY &
BUSINESS

75-90 minutes

Vocabulary

Reading

Listening

Speaking

Lesson Objectives

- ✓ **Vocabulary:** Master and apply 6 C1/C2 sociological terms (digital native, pragmatism, virtue signaling, side-hustle, work-life integration, eco-anxiety) plus advanced word forms.
- ✓ **Listening:** Analyze authentic reporting on Gen Z workplace data, distinguishing correlation from stereotype.
- ✓ **Reading:** Read and analyze an academic-style article on Gen Z's disruption of global brands, locating advanced vocabulary in context.
- ✓ **Speaking:** Debate generational workplace dynamics and negotiate a resolution, using target vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.

1 Warm-Up: The Generational Spectrum

Briefly define the following cohorts. Which generation do you feel you most align with professionally?

Baby Boomers	Born approx. 1946–1964. (The "Stability" seekers).
Generation X	Born approx. 1965–1980. (The "Latchkey" independent generation).
Millennials (Gen Y)	Born approx. 1981–1996. (The "Digital Pioneers").
Gen Z (Zoomers)	Born approx. 1997–2012. (The "Digital Natives").

2 Vocabulary Match: The Lexicon of a New Era

Match the C1/C2 terms (1-6) with their correct definitions (A-F).

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Digital Native ____ | A. The practice of appearing to support social causes for branding rather than conviction. |
| 2. Pragmatism ____ | B. Someone who has grown up under the omnipresence of the internet and technology. |
| 3. Virtue Signaling ____ | C. An approach that assesses the truth or meaning of theories in terms of the success of their practical application. |
| 4. Side-Hustle ____ | D. The blurring of lines between one's professional life and personal identity/values. |
| 5. Work-Life Integration ____ | E. A piece of work or a job that you get paid for in addition to your main job. |
| 6. Eco-anxiety ____ | F. Extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment. |

3 Word Form Transformation

Complete the following sentences by changing the form of the word in brackets to fit the context.

1. We need to be _____ about our budget for the Q3 campaign. **PRAGMATISM**
2. She is quite _____ about the company's new sustainability claims. **CYNICISM**
3. We have developed a _____ plan in case the shipment is delayed. **CONTINGENT**
4. He spoke _____ about his desire to lead the new project. **EARNESTNESS**
5. The audience responded _____ to the emotional brand story. **VISCERAL**

4 Watch & Reflect: Gen Z Job Data

Gen Z job data: How 'picky' can young workers be? — Euronews · "Europe in Motion"
· published 18 September 2025

This short video reports on new workforce data from the recruitment firm Randstad, examining Gen Z job tenure, entry-level hiring trends, and attitudes toward AI at work.

Watch: <https://www.euronews.com/video/2025/09/18/watch-the-video-gen-z-job-data-how-picky-can-young-workers-be>

- 1** Tenure Contrast: According to the report, how does Gen Z's average job tenure compare to that of Millennials and Baby Boomers?
- 2** Reframing "Job-Hopping": How does the report reframe Gen Z's tendency to change jobs quickly — as disloyalty, or something else?
- 3** The Entry-Level Squeeze: What has happened to entry-level job openings globally, and which two sectors were hit hardest?
- 4** The Exception: Which sector defied this trend, and by roughly how much did junior roles grow there?
- 5** AI at Work: What percentage of Gen Z say they use AI at work, and what percentage worry about its long-term impact on the job market?

5 Reading: The Gen Z Disruption of Global Brands

A. The rise of Generation Z has ushered in an era of "radical transparency" that heritage brands like Levi Strauss are now forced to navigate. Unlike their Millennial predecessors, who were often swayed by aspirational lifestyles and polished aesthetics, Gen Z operates with a certain cynicism toward traditional advertising. They view the world through a lens of pragmatism, forged by the fires of economic instability and a global pandemic. For these digital natives, a brand is no longer a static logo; it is a living entity that must prove its moral worth daily.

B. In the corporate sphere, this generational shift manifests as a total rejection of the "hustle culture" that once defined the early 2000s. Gen Z employees are increasingly vocal about work-life integration, prioritizing mental health over the climb up the corporate ladder. This is not to say they are unmotivated; rather, their motivation is contingent upon purpose. They are searching for the "why" behind the work. If a company's internal culture does not align with its external marketing — a phenomenon often called "brand hypocrisy" — Gen Z will be the first to call it out on social media, potentially causing irreparable reputational damage.

C. From a consumer standpoint, the "Zoomer" cohort is driving a massive surge in the circular economy. They have a visceral aversion to "fast fashion," favoring instead vintage pieces, upcycled denim, and sustainable production lines. This puts legacy brands in a unique position: they must leverage their history to prove quality while simultaneously innovating at lightning speed to meet strict environmental standards. For Gen Z, sustainability isn't a "nice-to-have" corporate social responsibility (CSR) bullet point; it is a non-negotiable prerequisite for brand loyalty.

D. Ultimately, the challenge for modern leadership lies in bridging the "communication chasm" between older management styles and Gen Z's desire for authenticity. Management must move away from top-down dictates and toward a collaborative, coaching-based approach. This generation values earnestness and vulnerability in their leaders. They don't expect perfection, but they do demand accountability. For a global professional, mastering this nuance isn't just about learning new slang; it's about understanding a fundamental shift in the human contract between employer and employee.

6 Comprehension Check

Answer these based on the text to practice C2 summary skills.

- 1 How does the text contrast the "aspirational" focus of Millennials with the mindset of Gen Z?
- 2 What is the "contingency" mentioned regarding Gen Z's motivation in the workplace?
- 3 How has the definition of "sustainability" changed from a corporate perspective according to the third paragraph?
- 4 In the final paragraph, what is suggested as the "new human contract" in the workplace?

7 C1/C2 Vocabulary Search

Scan the text to find the words that match these definitions.

- A.** (Para 1) An inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self-interest; skepticism. (C_____)
- B.** (Para 2) Dependent on or conditioned by something else. (C_____)
- C.** (Para 3) A deep, inward feeling; instinctive rather than intellectual. (V_____)
- D.** (Para 3) A thing that is required as a prior condition for something else to happen. (P_____)
- E.** (Para 4) A profound difference between people, viewpoints, or feelings. (C_____)
- F.** (Para 4) The quality of being sincere and intense in conviction. (E_____)

7B Gap Fill: Understanding the New Workforce

Complete the paragraph with a term from the box. There are two extra terms you don't need.

digital native	side-hustle	work-life integration	virtue signaling
eco-anxiety	pragmatism	chasm	prerequisite

Younger employees are often described as **(1)** _____s, having grown up fully immersed in technology. Many balance a full-time role with a **(2)** _____ on the side, blurring the boundary between work and personal projects — a pattern some call **(3)** _____. When companies promote sustainability without real commitment, employees are quick to call out this kind of **(4)** _____. Meanwhile, growing awareness of the climate crisis has fuelled widespread **(5)** _____ among young professionals, and above all, they expect employers to demonstrate genuine **(6)** _____ rather than empty slogans.

7C Find the Word: More Synonyms in the Reading

Look back at the reading in Part 5. Find a word or short phrase that means the same as each definition below.

- 1 led in, brought about (paragraph A) → _____
- 2 influenced strongly, won over (paragraph A) → _____
- 3 shown itself, appeared in a particular form (paragraph B) → _____
- 4 cannot be undone, permanent (paragraph B) → _____
- 5 use something to full advantage (paragraph C) → _____
- 6 impossible to negotiate or change (paragraph C) → _____

7D Sentence Rephrasing: Key Word Transformation

Complete the second sentence so it means the same as the first, using the word given. Use between **one and eight words**, including the given word.

1. Millennials were strongly influenced by attractive, aspirational images.

SWAYED

Millennials were _____ by aspirational lifestyles.

2. A brand scandal can cause damage that can never be fixed.

IRREPARABLE

A brand scandal can cause _____ reputational damage.

3. Companies must use their history to their advantage.

LEVERAGE

Companies must _____ their history to prove quality.

4. Sustainability is now something companies absolutely cannot avoid.

NON-NEGOTIABLE

Sustainability is now a _____ prerequisite.

5. This shift shows itself in a rejection of hustle culture.

MANIFESTS

This shift _____ as a rejection of hustle culture.

8 Idioms & Phrasal Verbs: Workplace Slang

These informal expressions come up constantly in real discussions about generational workplace dynamics. Try to use at least one in today's final debate.

Job-hop	To move frequently from one job to another, rarely staying long. <i>"She's job-hopped three times in the last two years."</i>
Burn out	To become exhausted from overwork or chronic stress. <i>"He burned out after months of unsustainable hours."</i>
Quiet quitting	Doing only the minimum required at work, without officially resigning. <i>"Quiet quitting became a viral term describing employee disengagement."</i>
Golden handcuffs	Financial incentives that make it hard to leave a job, even if you want to. <i>"The stock options acted as golden handcuffs, keeping her at the company."</i>

9 Discussion Points (C2 Nuance)

- 1** The "Pick a Boss" Philosophy: The video concludes with the advice to "pick a boss, not a company." Based on your own experience, do you agree that an individual manager has more impact on your growth than the global brand policy?
- 2** The Emotional vs. Results Divide: Older generations focus on results, while Gen Z focuses on the "emotional right now." In your role, how do you balance achieving KPIs with the emotional well-being of a diverse team?
- 3** Do you see a difference between Gen Z in Western Europe versus Gen Z in your own country or region? Is the generational gap wider or narrower where you live?
- 4** Ghosting Culture: Gen Z has been criticized for "ghosting" in professional settings. Do you think this is a lack of professionalism, or a boundary-setting mechanism?

10 Generational Roundtable Debate (Production)

Scenario

Imagine a roundtable discussion between a Gen Z employee and older management about a proposed in-office attendance policy. Play the Gen Z employee's role and negotiate toward a resolution.

- Uses at least three target vocabulary items correctly (e.g. contingent, virtue signaling, work-life integration, chasm).
- Includes at least one idiom or phrasal verb from Part 8 (e.g. job-hop, burn out, quiet quitting, golden handcuffs).
- Reaches a clear outcome — either a concrete agreement or an honest statement of where the disagreement remains.
- Maintains a respectful, earnest tone even while disagreeing — no dismissiveness toward either generational perspective.

“Let’s start with something concrete: what does “being at the office” actually need to achieve — for each of us?”

11 Wrap-Up

Key Expressions to Remember

VOCABULARY	IN-CONTEXT VOCABULARY	WORKPLACE IDIOMS
Digital Native Pragmatism Virtue Signaling Side-Hustle Work-Life Integration Eco-anxiety	Cynicism Contingent Visceral Prerequisite Chasm Earnestness	Job-hop Burn out Quiet quitting Golden handcuffs