

The growing influence of Gen Z in the workforce

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Dr. David Drewery is the associate director of the Work-Learn Institute—a research, education and consulting unit at the University of Waterloo that advances work-integrated learning programs for employers and higher education institutions.

His current research investigates how employers can connect with Gen Z's work values to attract and retain talent through work-integrated learning programs. We asked Drewery how Gen Z can help create equitable and resilient economies in the future.

Worldwide, four out of five employers struggle to find talented people. This is a massive problem for the [global economy](#) because it means organizations need more talent to solve [complex problems](#).

When asked about the drivers of this problem, many employers point to "Gen Z," the generation born after 1997. Some employers mention that Gen Z lacks commitment, and others assert that Gen Z lacks fundamental workplace skills.

If these claims stand up to scrutiny, we may be in trouble. The Baby Boomer generation is quickly transitioning out of the labor market and Gen Z is replacing it. In fact, in the coming years, Gen Z will make up at least a third of the global workforce.

Fortunately, the research my colleagues and I conducted suggests a way out. The issue is that employers misunderstand what Gen Z wants out of their work. If we can resolve this misunderstanding, we might help employers find talent and can help Gen Z access meaningful work.

What does Gen Z want?

Here at the Work-Learn Institute, we have explored Gen Z work values which are qualities about a job or [employer](#) that a person might find important, such as prestige or [work-life balance](#).

Our research suggests that Gen Z values organizational support for training and development and for equity, diversity and inclusion. Gen Z also values jobs with work-life balance, job security and financial

rewards. So, Gen Z wants to work in stable roles and for employers that offer room to grow and to be one's authentic self.

Gen Z work values may differ from the values of past generations. For instance, compared to millennials, Gen Z places greater emphasis on job stability and security. This is a critical insight for employers: understanding Gen Z's values will give them better access to talent.

How can work-integrated learning help?

So, how can we help employers better understand Gen Z work values? My colleagues and I believe work-integrated learning (WIL) can help. WIL brings Gen Z together with organizations to work together in authentic work settings. This helps employers understand Gen Z's work values, which are on display at work.

WIL also provides an opportunity for Gen Z to educate employers, creating spaces in which they can communicate what is important to them and comment on opportunities for organizations to do better. Employers then can update policies and practices to become a more attractive destination for the next generation of workers.

Our shared [economic prosperity](#) relies on thriving organizations. As Gen Z quickly becomes a major force in the [labor market](#), the challenge will be for organizations to think about how they can connect to younger workers. WIL programs may be an important tool to bring employers and Gen Z together, to create mutual understanding and strengthen our economic futures.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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