

Unlocking Gen Z at Work:

A Generational Impact Study 2024



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Background

I'm captivated by and dedicated to working with and studying what motivates and inspires different people in their work and in life. It's become a mission that's manifested into Marlee, a data-led collaboration and performance AI for individuals and teams to bring out the best in *everyone*, right in the flow of work anywhere, anytime.

Utilizing more than 20 years of evidence-based data and research, we've developed novel human data models to predict (with 90%+ reliability) people's personal and team motivations, behaviors, and performance at work. At Marlee, we're driven by a desire to help everyone embrace each other's differences and do their best work. Yet the conversation in the media landscape tells a very different story.

Later generations, particularly Generation Z (Gen Z), have been on the receiving end of an endless critique of negative feedback and sensationalized headlines. Yet the future depends on Gen Z's capacity to lead and solve a complex web of inherited problems, like the climate crisis and the effects of rapidly evolving technology, just to name a few.

This paper presents key findings from two decades of quantitative research into the attitudes and motivations of different generations at work. This study shifts the narrative for later generations by illuminating what attitudes and motivations have changed over time, and how everyone at work can use these findings to design a forward thriving future.

Because without addressing the current status quo, the future of work might not be the promising utopia we've been led to believe it could be.

– **Michelle Duval**,
Founder & CEO, **Marlee**





Background



Executive Summary

How can we best equip Gen Z for the future of work? And conversely, how do we equip workplaces to evolve to support Gen Z? For leaders, the answer to this question might shock you.

To date, the conversation of Gen Z at work has been dominated by negativity, scare tactics and a focus on what they're *not* doing (rather than their strengths).

Research into this unique generation has focused largely on their demographics and opinions. Yet what's missing from this picture are their actual attitudes and motivations and how they differ from previous generations in the workplace.

From the findings of this first-of-its-kind generational study into what motivates people at work, this paper summarizes:

- Trends in motivations at a global level and in the United States (US)
- Connection and engagement between teammates of different cohorts
- Motivating Gen Z at work
- Boosting collaboration across the generations
- Developing Gen Z's performance
- Matching Gen Z to the right roles
- Inspiring Gen Z to lead, and
- Creating nourishing workspaces for Gen Z.

Background

Previous Research

The majority of prior studies on Gen Z in the workplace have focused on understanding this generation's personality (Seemiller and Grace, 2024), characteristics (Hinduan, Anggraeni, and Agia, 2020), work values (Maloni, Hiatt, and Campbell, 2019), expectations (Chillakuri, 2020) and mental health (Twenge, 2017).

In prior research, Marlee has studied the attitudes and motivations of working cultures in 20 countries; and the specific attitudes and motivations correlated with early and growth stage founders' success.

Instead, this study looks at the attitudes and motivations that distinguish each generation in the workforce today: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the differences between these generations when working with Gen Z.

In this study, motivation refers to a preference, style, or attitude. Different from fixed 'personality traits,' motivations filter our day-to-day experiences. They determine what we pay attention to and how we derive fulfillment and satisfaction. Motivation can change with context.

Research Questions

- 01** *To what extent have work attitudes and motivations changed across the generations globally and within the US?*

- 02** *Are there any variations in attitudes and motivations of self-identified genders that can be observed across the generations?*

Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

In the last 50 years, the way we work has changed dramatically. So too have the attitudes and motivations that drive us.

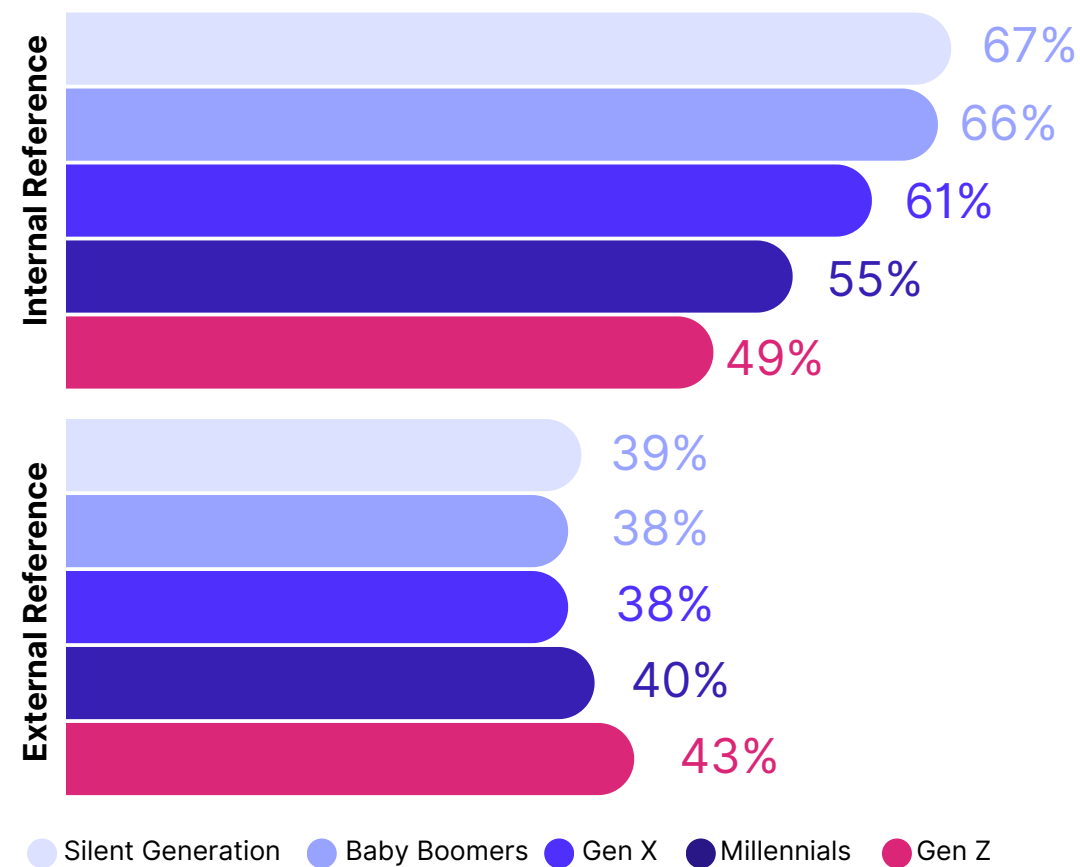
This study uncovered huge global shifts across the generations which affect not only what's happening now but also carries bigger implications into the future of work.

The tide begins to turn significantly with Gen X as later generations err toward trusting information and other people's opinions more than their own intuition.

Where the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers thrive on being revolutionary and pioneering new pathways, Gen Z has less appetite for change.

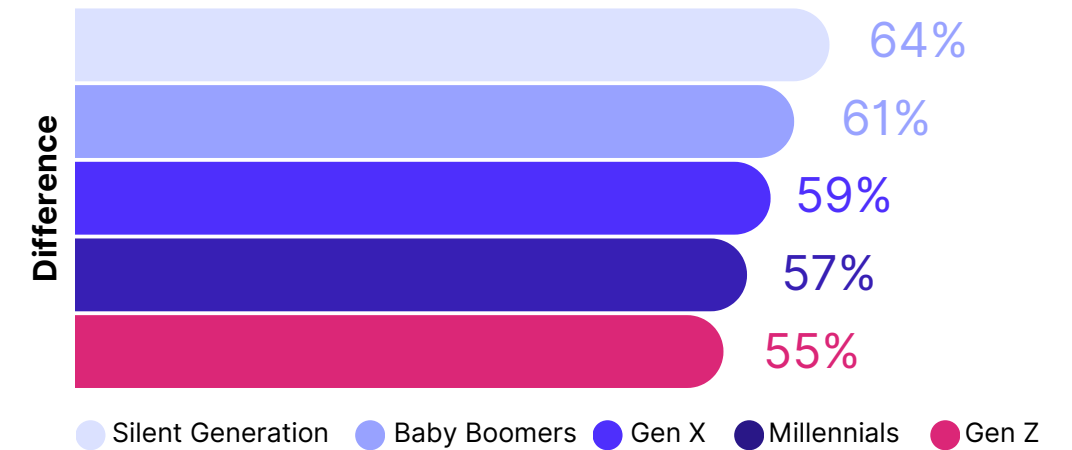
Authority

*absolute values



Change

*absolute values



The tide begins to turn significantly with Gen X as later generations err toward trusting information and other people's opinions more than their own intuition.

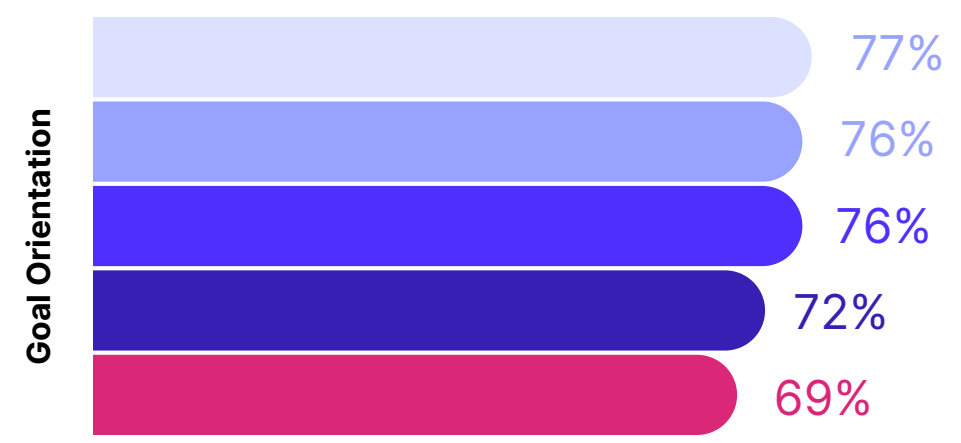
Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

Where earlier generations champion 'blue sky thinking,' Gen Z is detail-oriented and least energized when setting and achieving goals.

Action Direction

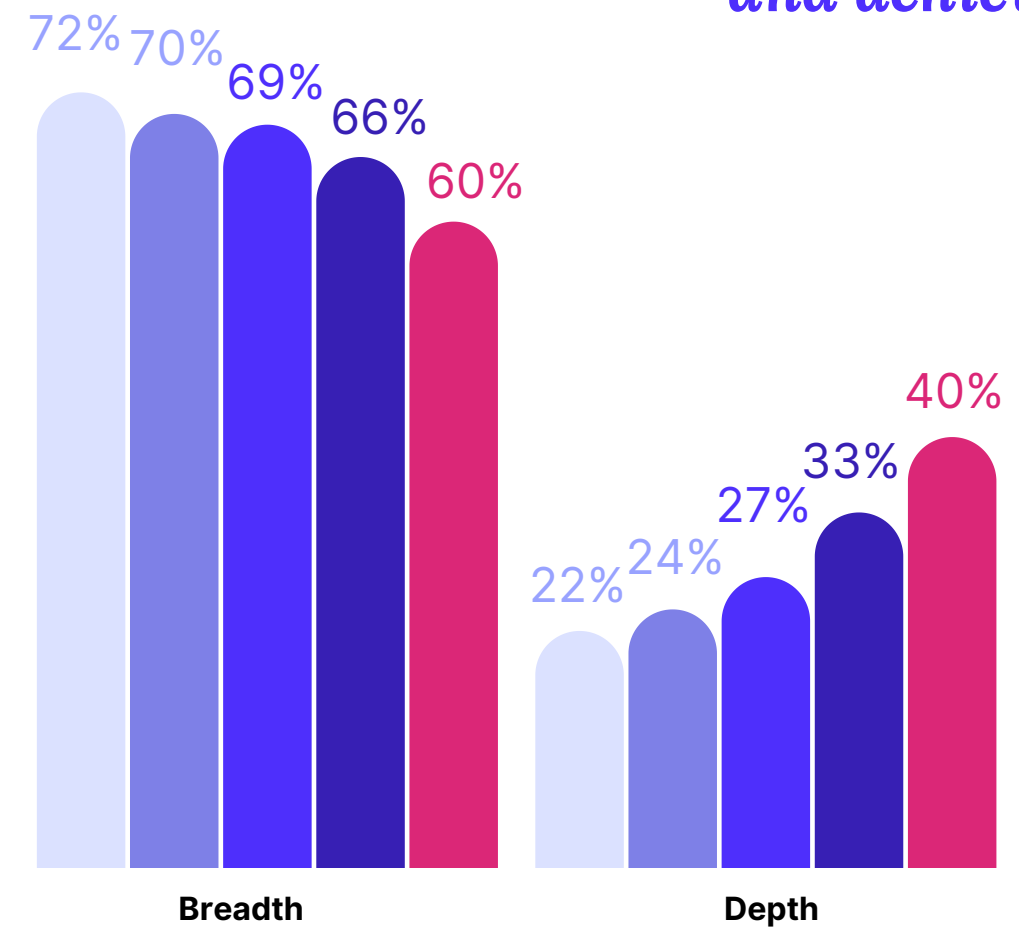
*absolute values



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

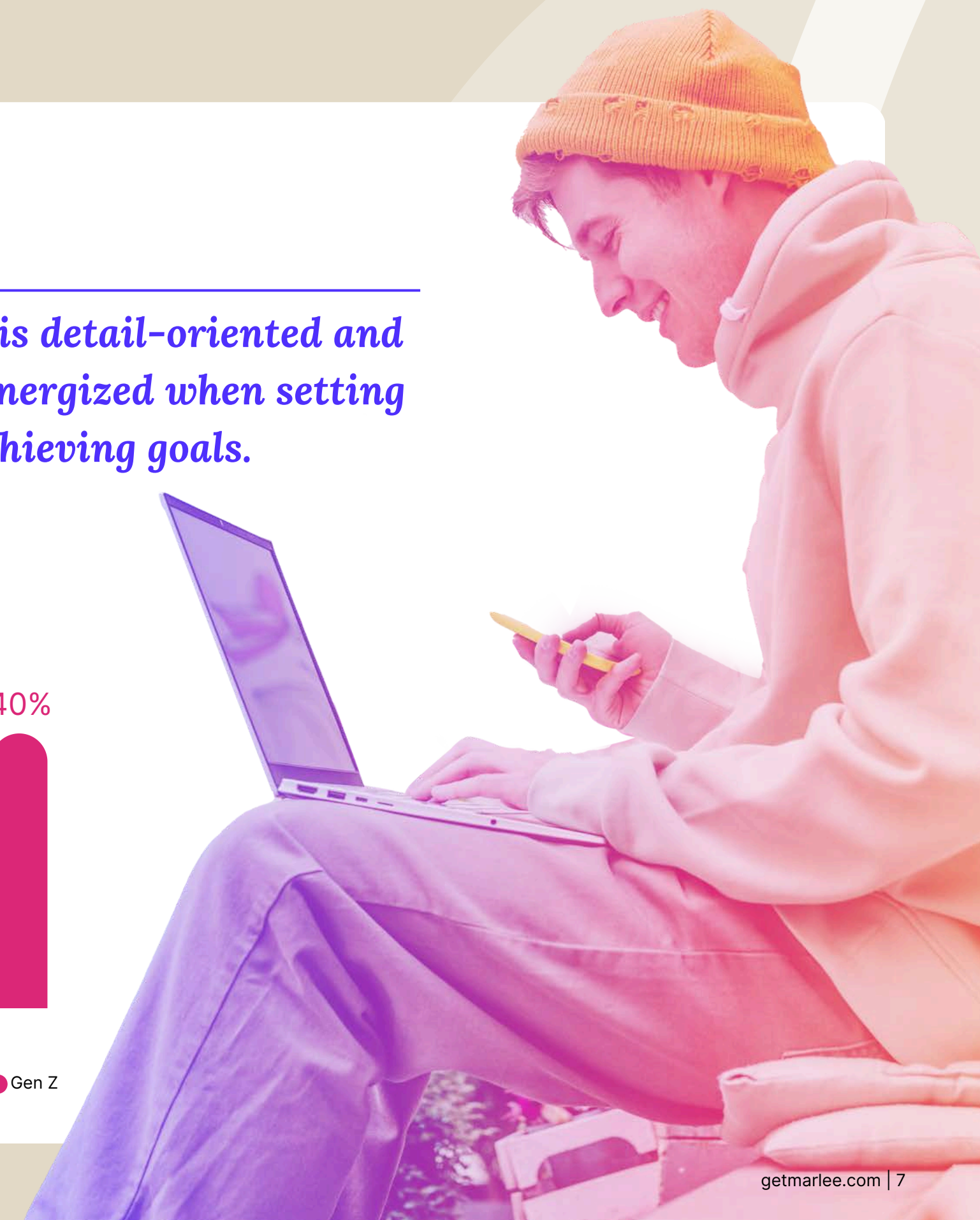
Scope

*absolute values



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

Gen Z is detail-oriented and least energized when setting and achieving goals.



Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

When making decisions, earlier generations only need partial information before being able to decide, a trend that decreases by Gen Z, who is far more skeptical.

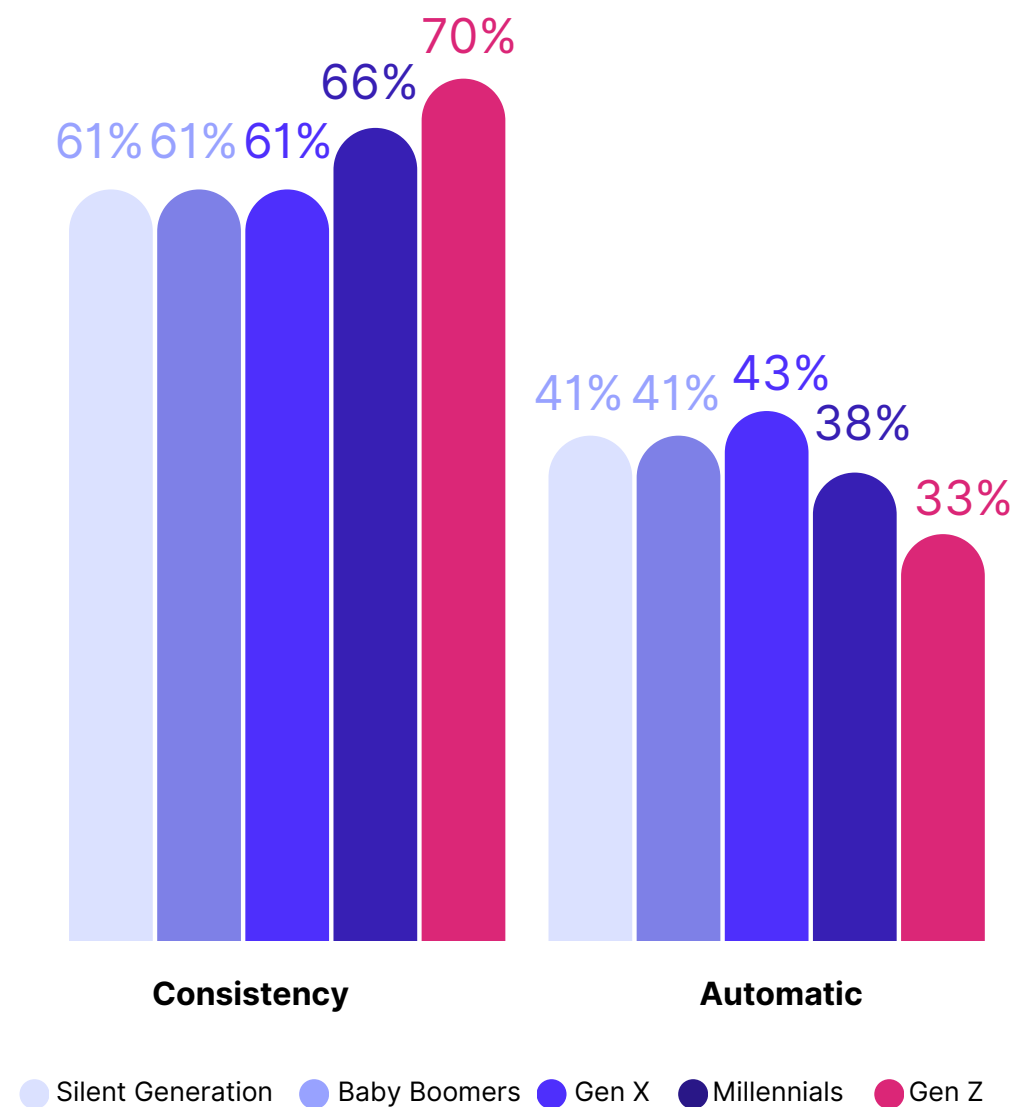
And when earlier generations are being convinced, they need to see information visualized, talk things through and get 'hands on' to understand.

Millennials and Gen Z are the opposite, instead preferring text and written information over other forms of communication and diving into action.

Millennials and Gen Z are the opposite, instead preferring text and written information over other forms of communication.

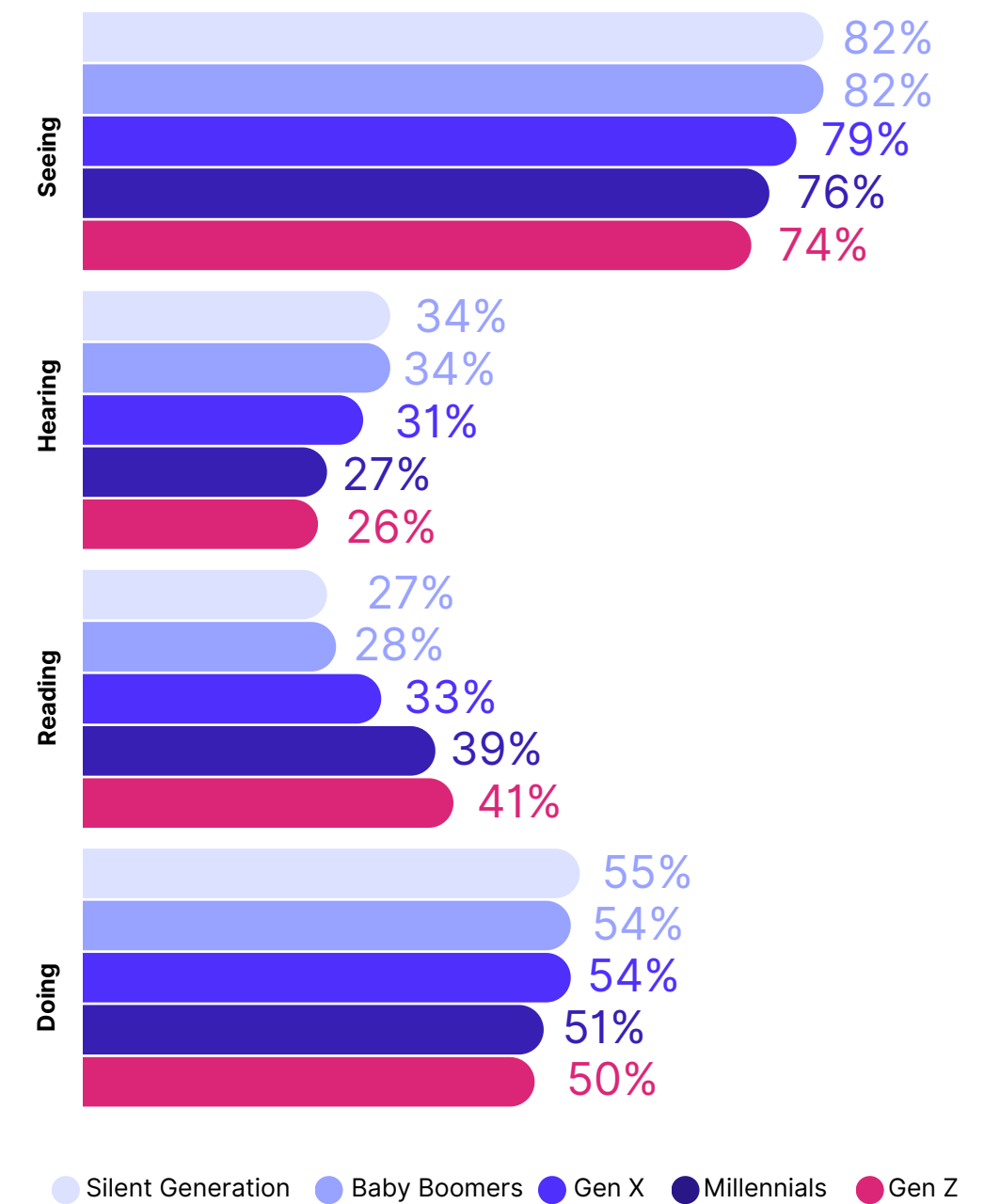
Convincer Process

*absolute values



Convincer Inputs

*absolute values



Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

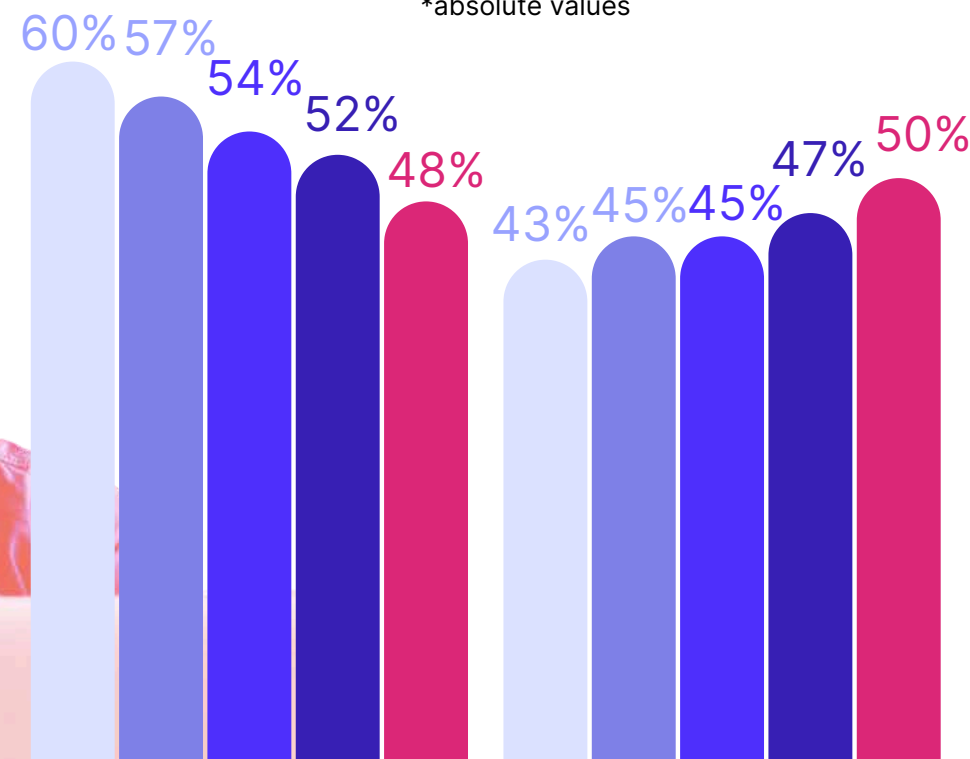
The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers and Gen X thrive when handling ambiguity at work and taking a creative approach to tasks, even if the current way of doing things is already successful. They'll be the first ones to turn an idea into reality, but may struggle to take action without first understanding the overview fully.

The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers and Gen X thrive when handling ambiguity at work and taking a creative approach to tasks.



Action Level

*absolute values



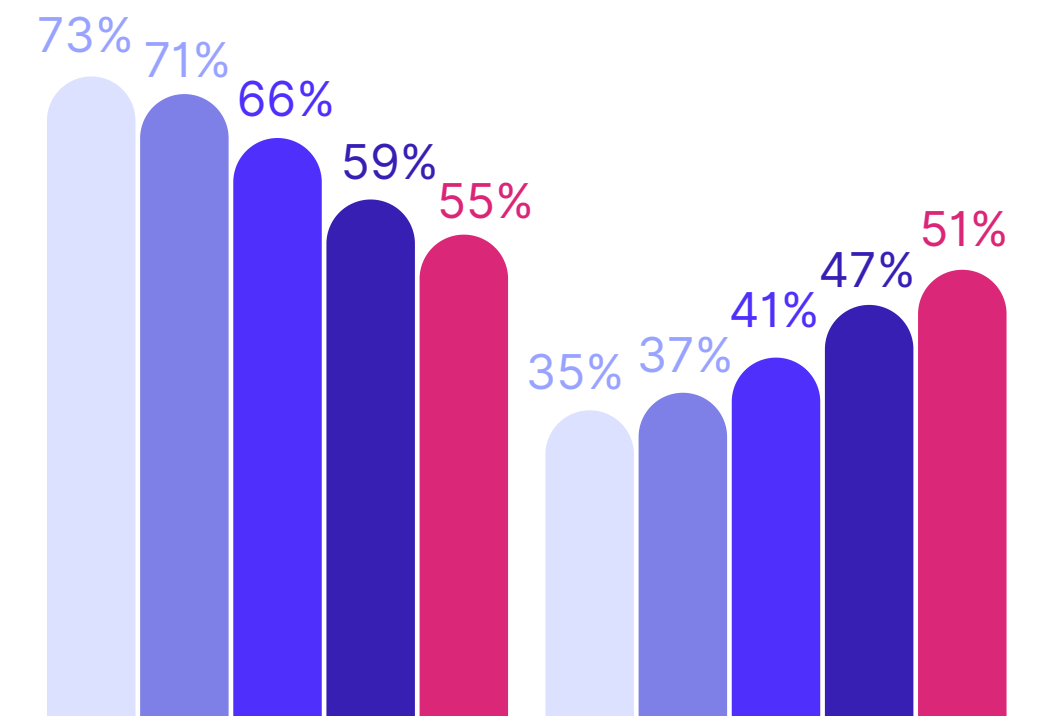
Initiation

Reflection & Patience

● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

Task Direction

*absolute values



Alternatives

Procedures

● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

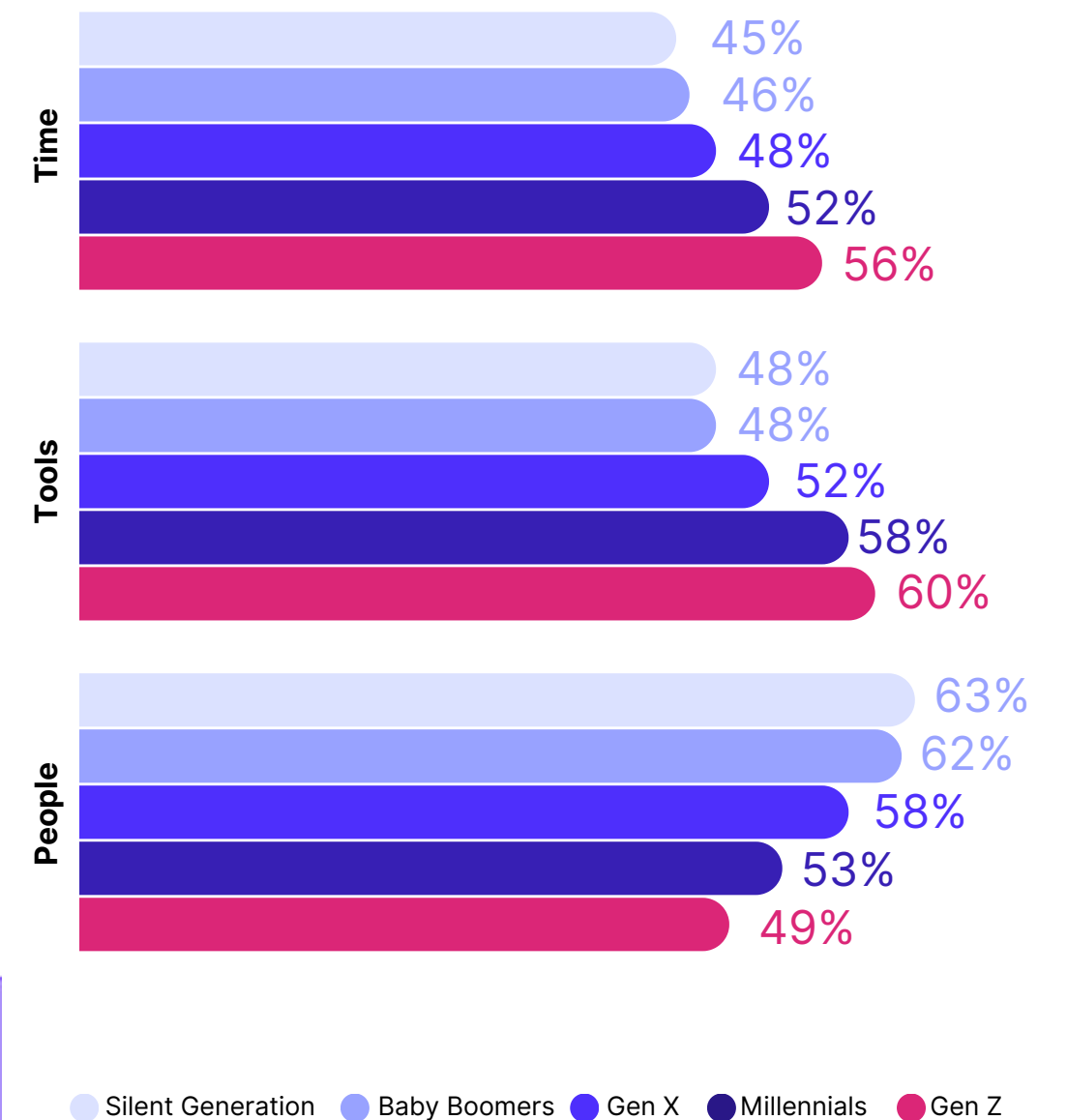


Millennials and Gen Z are different, desiring step-by-step repeatable frameworks, the right tooling and ways to maximize their schedule. Additionally, Gen Z doesn't like to be rushed, preferring instead to take extra time to think things through before acting.

Millennials and Gen Z are different, desiring step-by-step repeatable frameworks.

Interest Filters

*absolute values



Findings



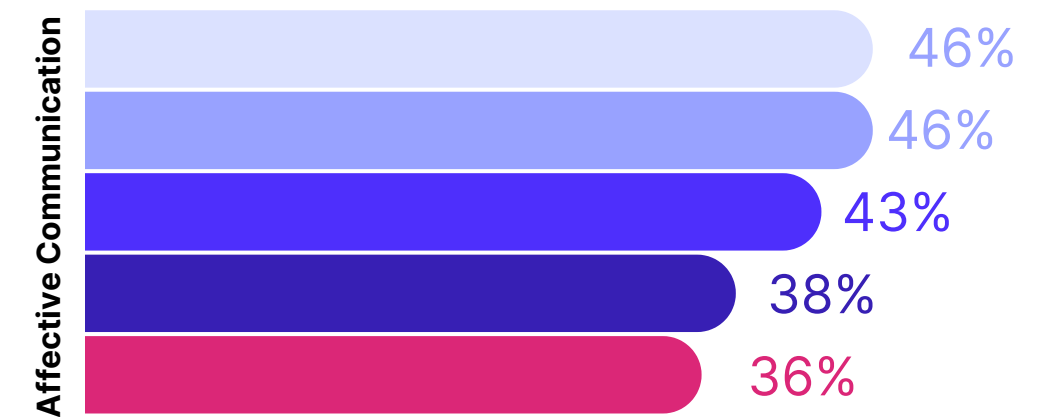
Global shifts in what motivates people at work

In the work environment, earlier generations still prefer to work around people, likely in an office or hybrid setup, enjoying fruitful conversations and talking things through with their teammates. Conversely, Gen Z can sometimes struggle to notice the non-verbal cues in communication and aren't as productive as earlier generations in workspaces with lots of activity and people. This is mirrored in another finding that identified that the interpersonal parts of work are far more draining than they used to be for later generations.

Gen Z isn't as productive as earlier generations in workspaces with lots of activity and people.

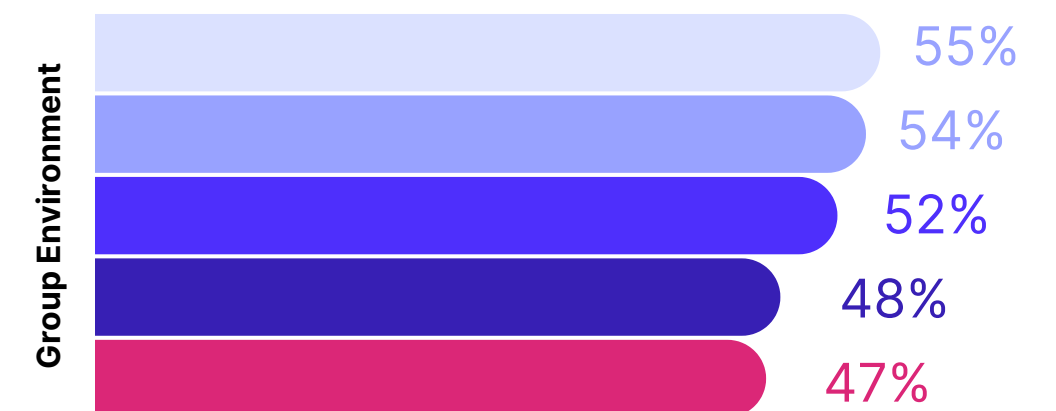
Communication

*absolute values



Environment

*absolute values



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

Findings

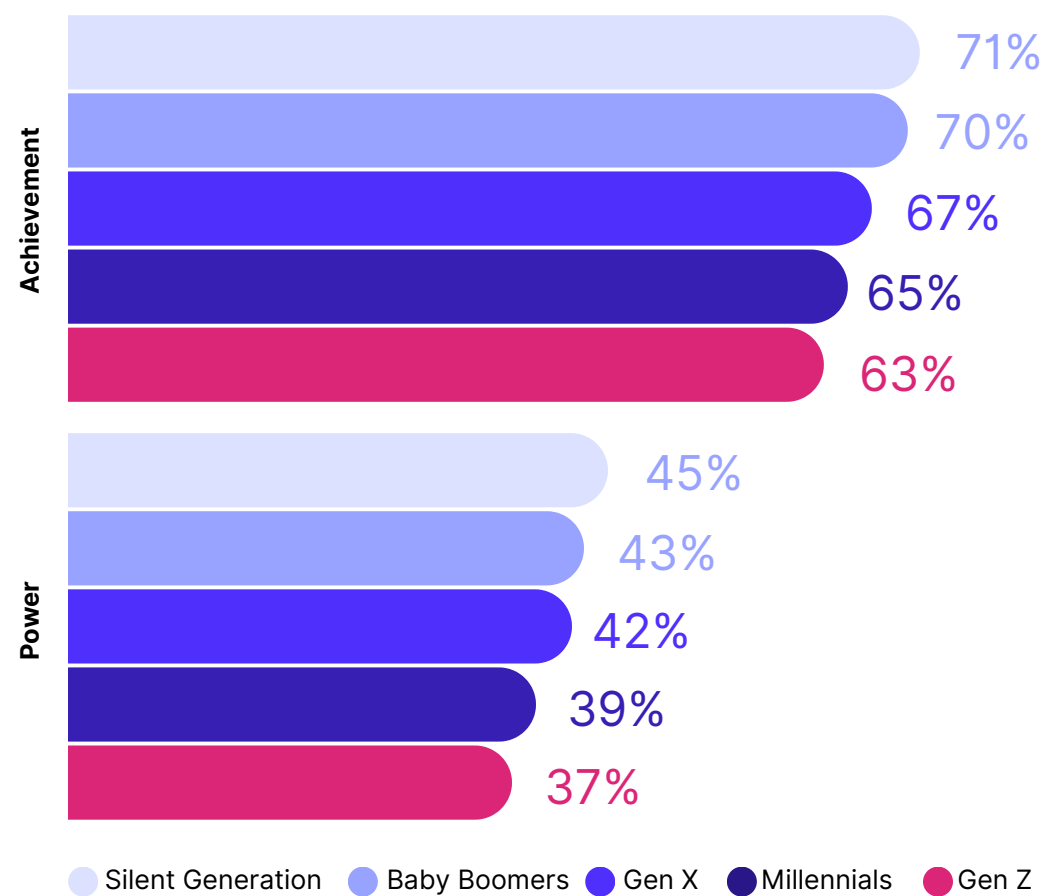
Global shifts in what motivates people at work

When it comes to leadership, there's a very noticeable decline in the desire to step up and lead and achieve results, at least in the traditional sense that earlier generations do.

There's a very noticeable decline in the desire to step up and lead.

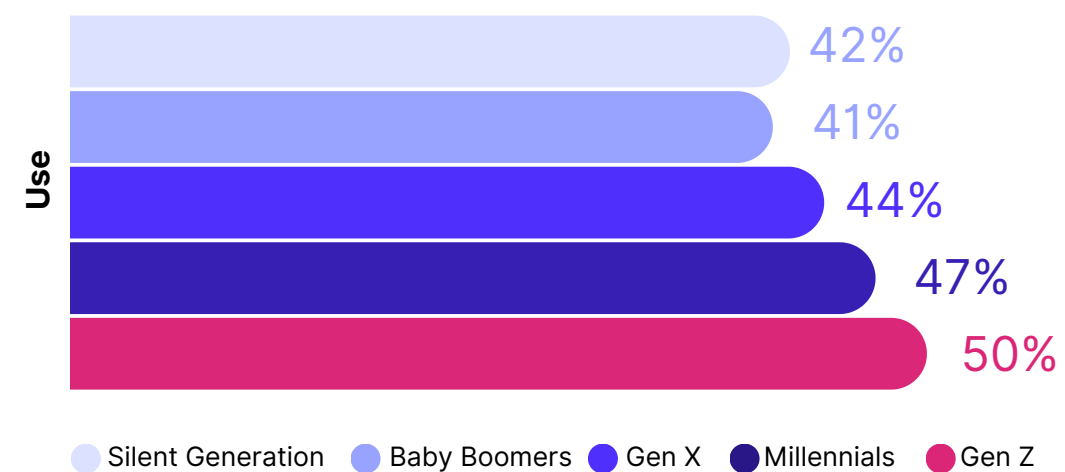
Influence

*absolute values



Work Approach

*absolute values





Findings

Global shifts in what motivates people at work

The 'big picture' is less energizing for later generations who are instead much more detail-oriented. Achieving a big audacious vision is less of a driver, which may make coping with uncertainty a challenge for future leaders, particularly in the face of complex problems, like the climate crisis and technology's impact on work.

Similarly, a key difference here is that earlier generations are more focused on achievement and respond to their teammates' role title as a way to understand hierarchy and determine authority, but later generations do not.

Achieving a big audacious vision is less of a driver, which may make coping with uncertainty a challenge for future leaders, particularly in the face of complex problems.



Findings

What's happening across the generations in the US

The study revealed similar trends across the generations in the US. Gen Z is most different in motivation to the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers respectively, and more similar to Millennials. Gen X is caught firmly in the middle, which has its own implications in the workplace, especially when it comes to leadership and communication.

The modern workplace requires creativity, adaptability and lateral thinking. More than any other generation, Gen Z is extremely focused on the details, working from the bottom up. This can cause friction with earlier generations who are much more inclined to chase big goals and get energized by the 'bigger picture'.

“More than any other generation, Gen Z is extremely focused on the details, working from the bottom up.”



Similarly, Gen Z doesn't operate via 'gut feel', preferring instead to seek feedback and information from their team, the Internet or any other external source. Where Gen X and Baby Boomers want to create their own rules and use their job titles to establish authority at work, Gen Z is the opposite. They're motivated by 'best practice' and don't care for organizational politics, often finding the interpersonal aspects of working with people quite draining.

While Gen Z share many similarities with their Millennial teammates, there are some

differences. Unlike Millennials, Gen Z won't naturally visualize information or need images or graphs to inform their decision-making. They won't readily put their hand up to kick-off a project and tend to be quite set in their approach to tackling the work. Millennials are, however, more excited by creating new ways of working, which can frustrate Gen Z who prefer to be more methodical. And, where the commercial aspects of their role are concerned, they also won't be as interested as Millennials in budgets or using money as a motivator for success.



01

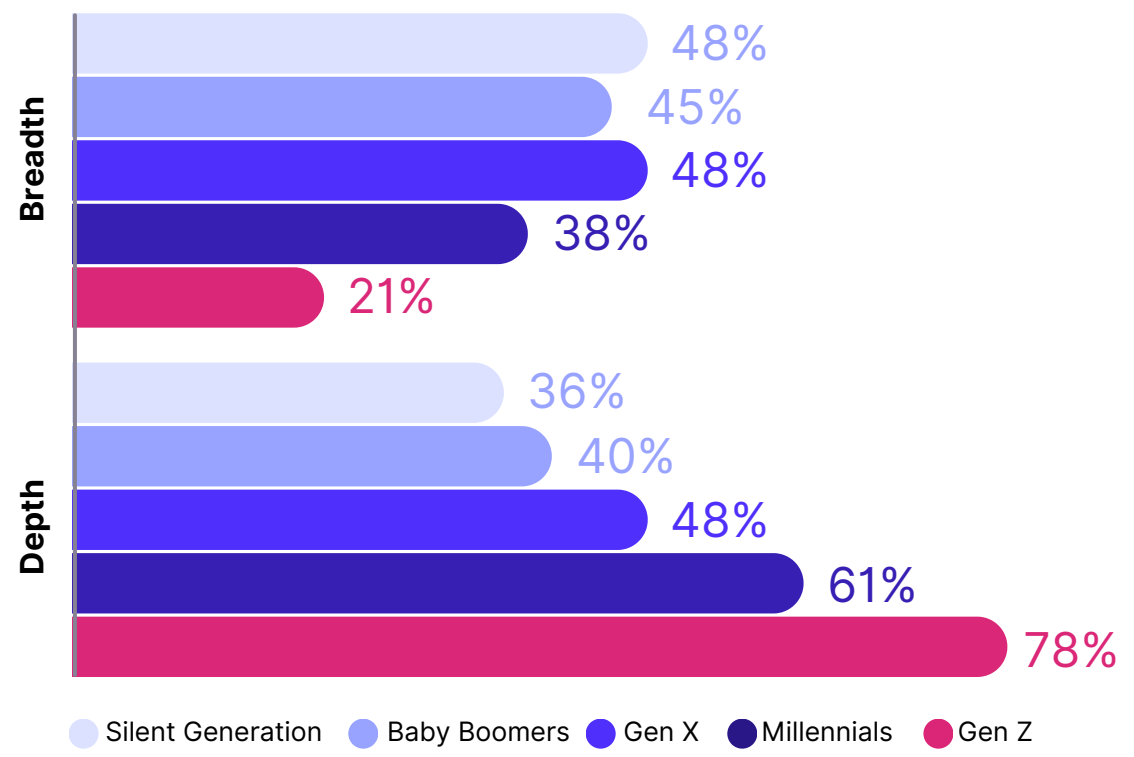
Connecting and engaging at work

Connecting and engaging at work

How people connect and engage with each other across the generations has radically changed. For the earlier generations, in-person conversations are paramount, where meaning is communicated and interpreted via tone of voice and body language. However, the trend starts to shift with Millennials. With Internet-free childhoods, they were the first generation to widely use smartphones in their young adult years, beginning a move towards a language of connection based on text.

Scope

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



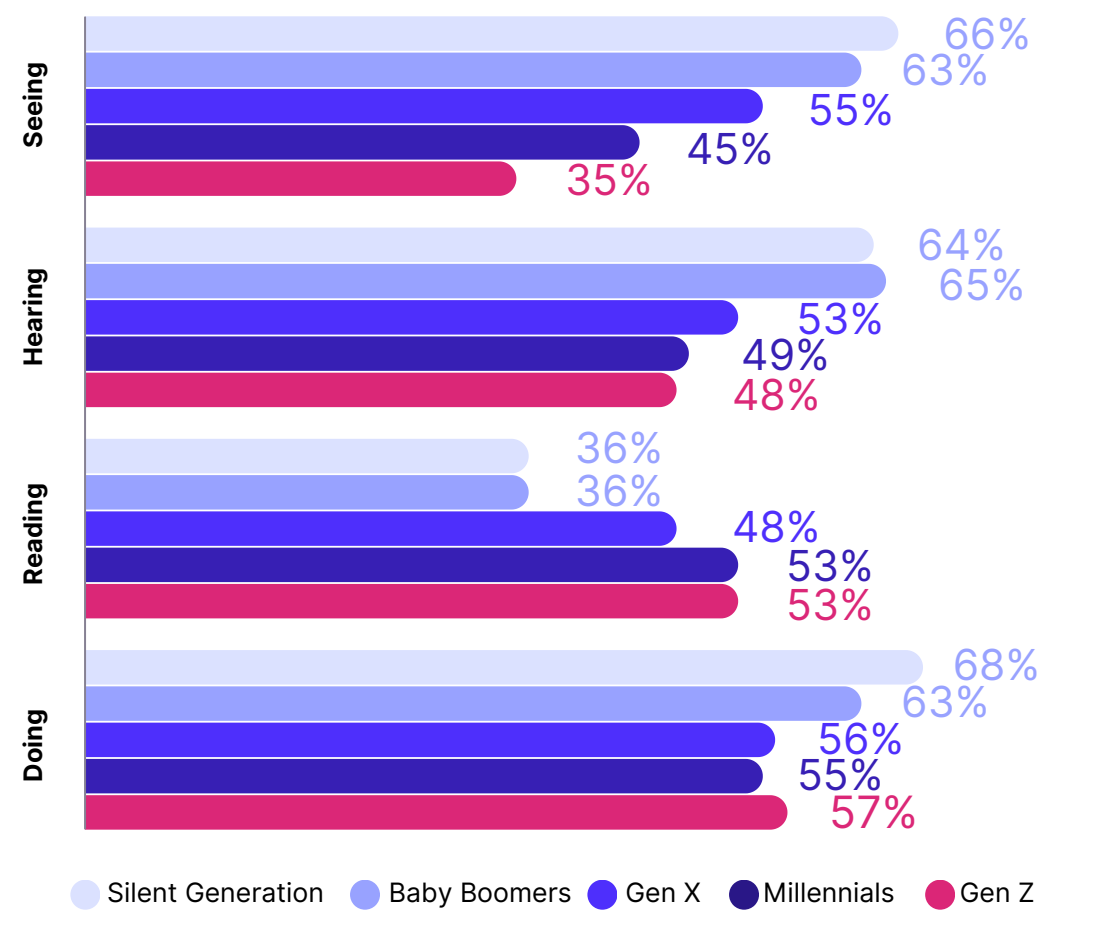
Much like Gen Z, individuals with ADHD* are highly motivated to drill into specifics.

*SOURCE: Marlee ADHD Study

One of the most significant findings in the study that impacts how the generations align has to do with the way they conceptualize the scope of work. **There's been a 56% decrease across the generations away from 'big picture thinking', and a 120% increase in a focus on being detail-oriented.**

Abstract goals and a lack of clarity around expectations will create a situation where Gen Z will disengage and struggle to find the motivation to stay on track. For early generations, they connect via aspiration and abstract ideas, an approach that Gen Z will struggle to adopt. In 2024, Gen Z now has the highest preference to connect via writing and reading.

Convincer Inputs



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded

This has increased across the generations by **44%**, while the desire to connect via speaking to others in voice has dropped by a massive **45%**. With such wildly different preferences, the probability of misinterpretation and miscommunication between the generations is high, but it's also an opportunity for growth.

Connecting and engaging at work

Impact for workplaces

In a meeting, for example, earlier generations may rely more on in-person or video communication to connect and get their point across. However, Gen Z likely won't feel the same pull to connect in that way, feeling more at home on text-based tools, like Slack, where they can prioritize word choice to express themselves.

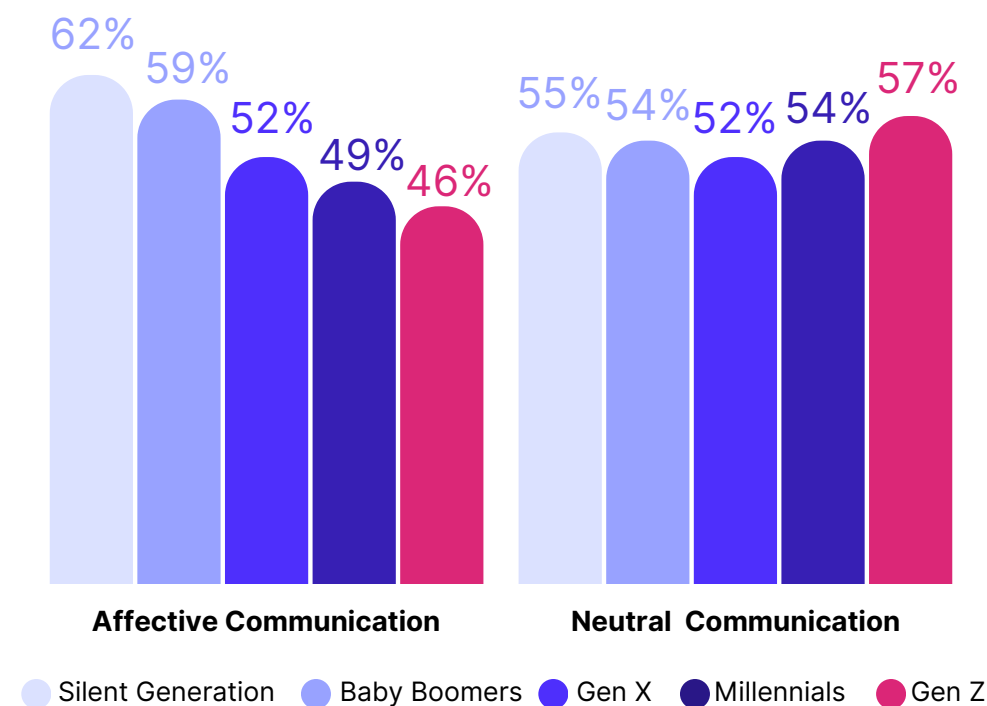
So how do you bridge the gap so that all teammates feel connected?

For Gen Z

When Gen X teammates communicate, they won't place as much importance on their word choice as you, so you might take what they say literally. When this happens (and you feel offended), check-in with your Gen X teammates to make sure you've interpreted their words correctly. For greater connection and understanding, a quick chat with Gen X teammates goes a long way.

Communication

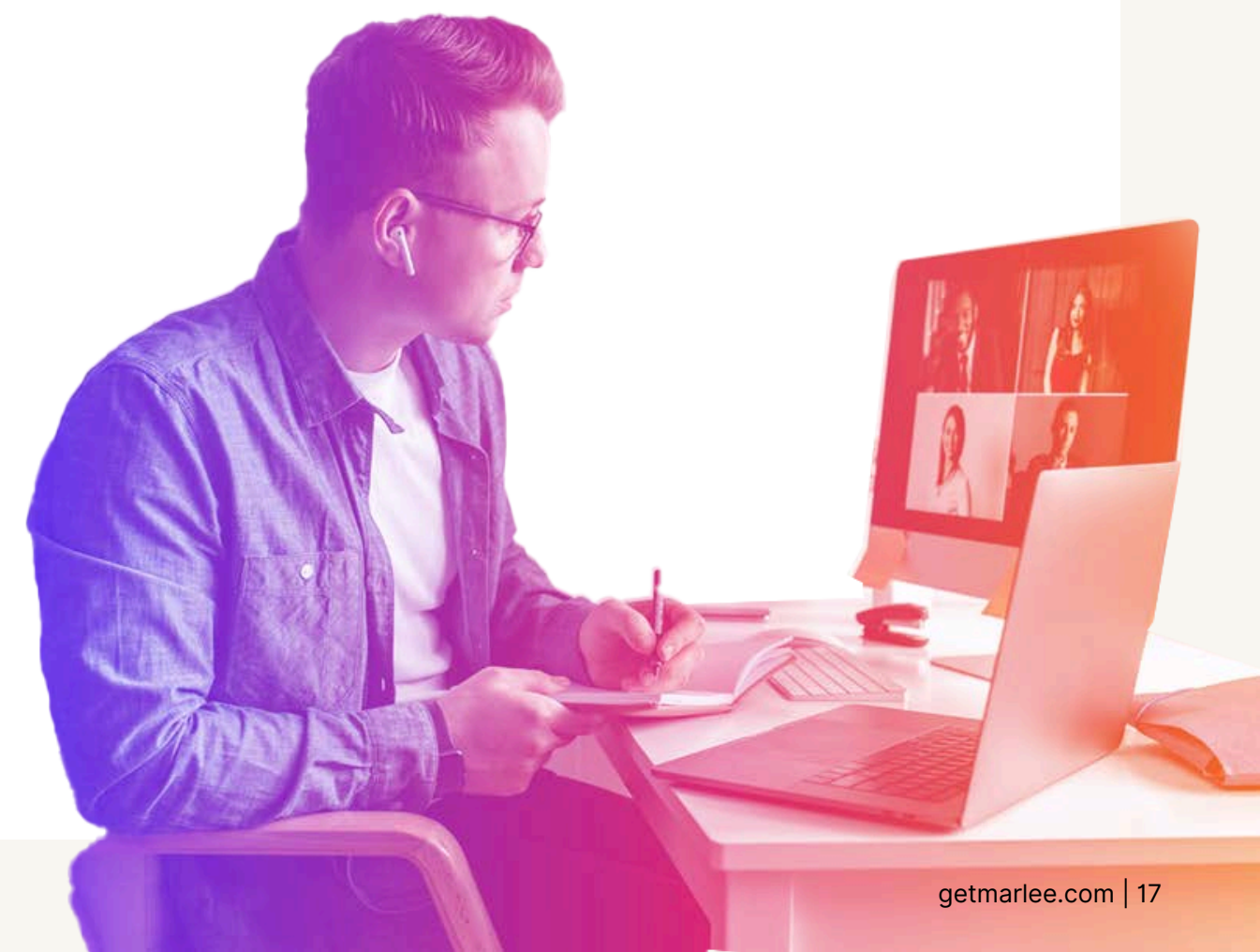
*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



For leaders

For Gen X leaders, you can feel more connection at work via in-person or video meetings with your team.

However, to make sure your message is received by your Millennial and Gen Z counterparts, present information in a document or deck, followed up by an email or Slack afterwards to clarify. What's key to remember here is this: more than other generations, Gen Z is likely to take what you say literally. So if you've got a sensitive or important message to get across, spend a little extra time choosing the right words.





02

Motivating Gen Z at work



Motivating Gen Z at work

What motivates the different generations at work has dramatically changed over time. Earlier generations are self-starters, energized by aspirational goals and clear objectives, more than a desire to find and solve problems. This trend flips with Gen X and progressively increases with Millennials and then Gen Z.

So much so, that across the generations there's a 42% drop in the desire to jumpstart initiatives and a significant 69% rise in the propensity to predict, prevent and solve problems. So with different generations aspiring to move in virtually opposite directions, it raises the question: **how do you motivate everyone to move forward together?**

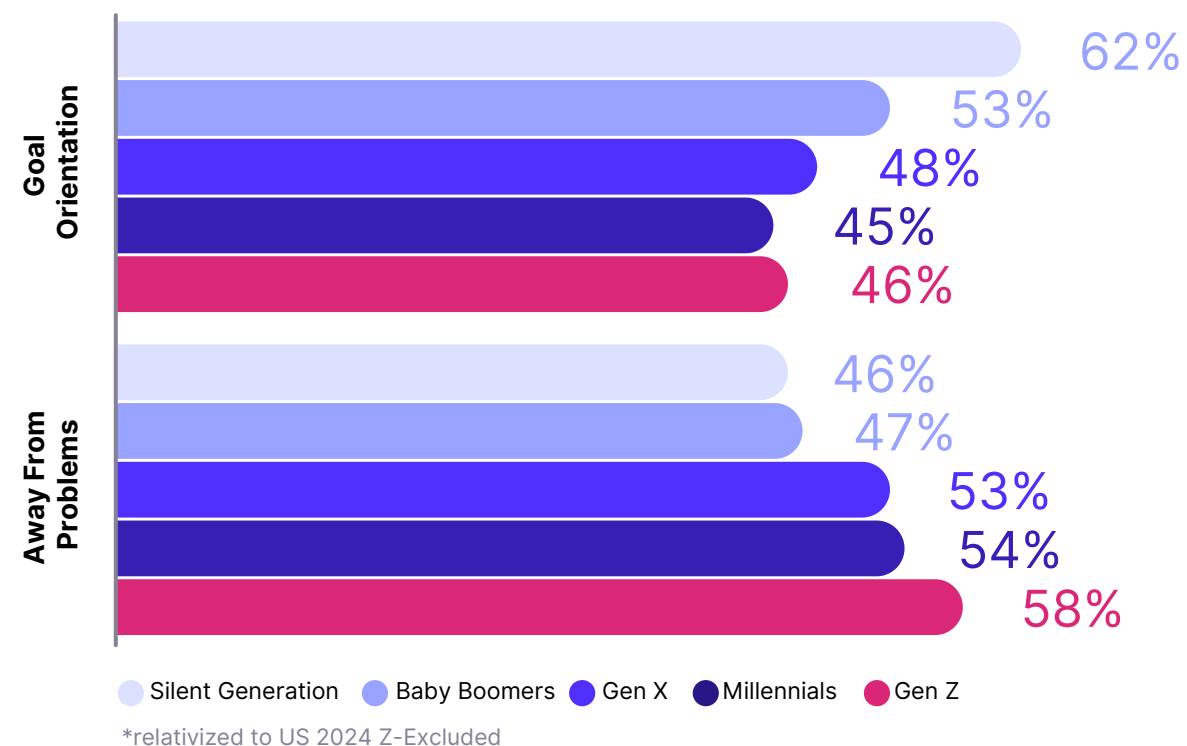
Interesting finding; individuals with ADHD are similarly motivated as Gen Z to solve and identify problems at work.

Impact for workplaces

Earlier generations are action takers – they likely won't wait for a 'right time', instead preferring to just jump in and get started. They often get frustrated if they have to wait, especially if it gets in the way of their big audacious goals.

However, Gen Z tends to prefer (and often need) more time to think before they act, yet will naturally follow others if there's not enough time to consider all the factors. Masters of troubleshooting and spotting obstacles (often before they appear), Gen Z will naturally want to pump the breaks – but for a good reason.

Action Direction



For leaders

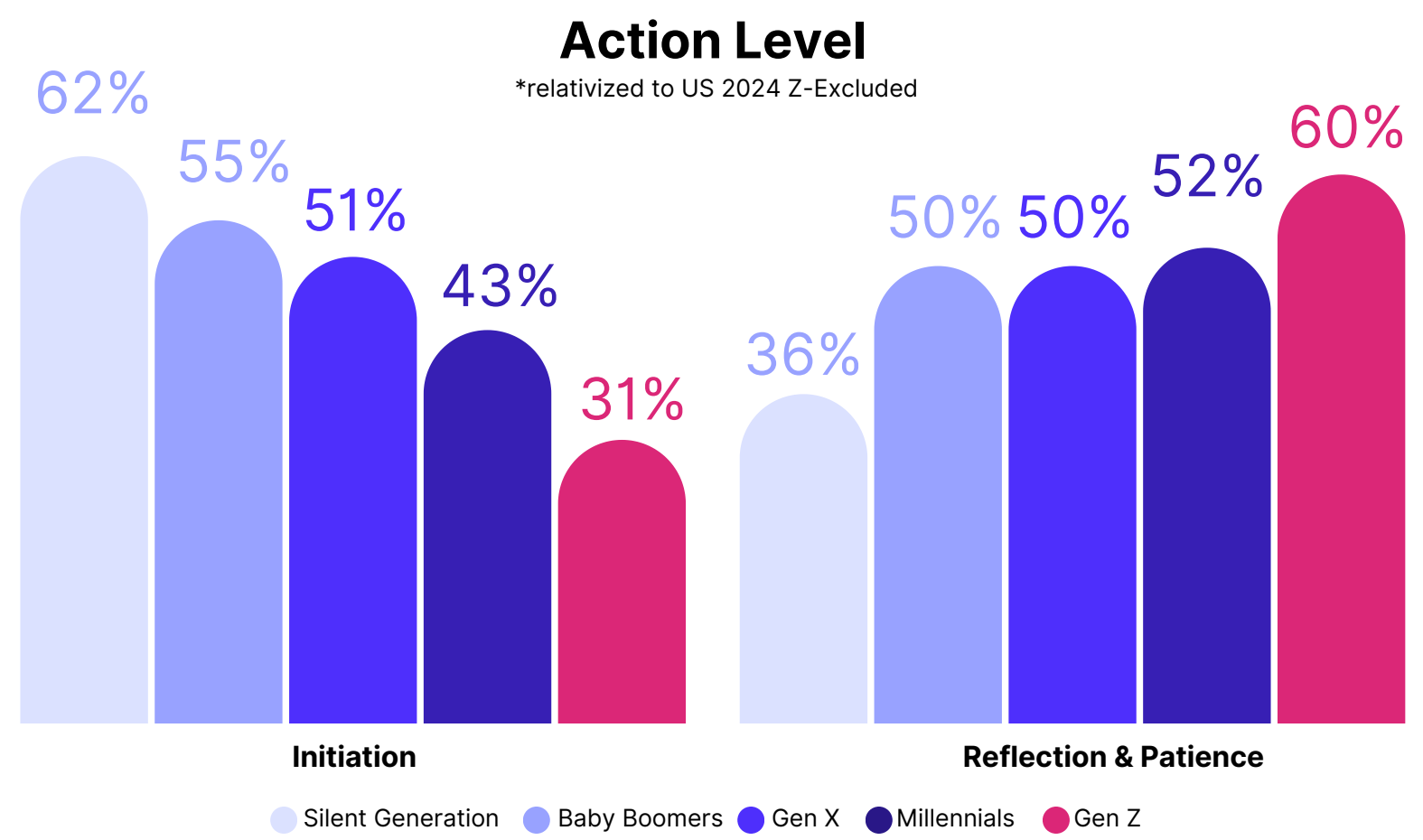
Moving so fast with your eyes on the prize means you may skip over or miss important details, especially when it comes to risks. Turn to your Gen Z teammates who have a superpower for spotting what should be avoided, minimized or removed. With your powers combined, you can carve a clearer path towards your goals and get back in flow.

Motivating Gen Z at work

Impact for workplaces

For Gen Z

If you're in a situation where you need to build momentum at work, turn to your Baby Boomer and Gen X teammates. They love to move fast and can light a fire under you. They'll also be able to help you prioritize tasks in a way that shifts your focus away from what could potentially go wrong to what you might achieve.





03

Boosting collaboration with Gen Z teammates



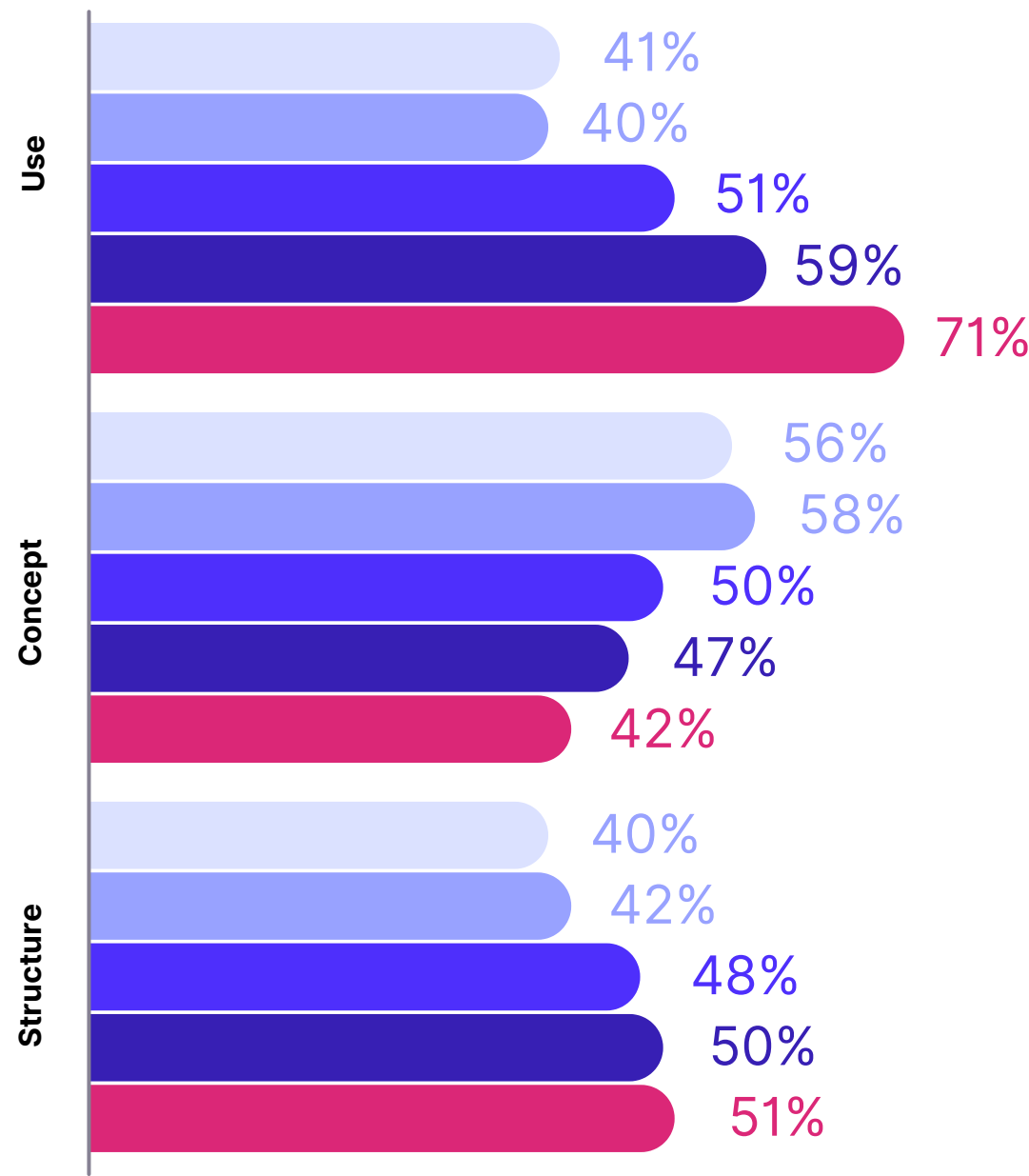
Boosting collaboration with Gen Z teammates

Each generation has different needs when it comes to collaboration. It's a complex puzzle with many moving parts. The findings show that earlier generations are far more excited by the 'bigger picture', creating new ways and inventing possibilities at work, preferring to follow their gut and understand the 'why' before diving into any project.

At 71%, Gen Z love diving head first into a project or task.

On the other hand, later generations are far more detail-oriented, preferring to follow step-by-step frameworks, bounce ideas off one another and a preference for diving head first into a project or task. Significantly, more than any other generation before them, Gen Z is very detail-oriented. Rather than skimming the surface, they want to dive deep into things, unsatisfied by overviews or simplistic explanations.

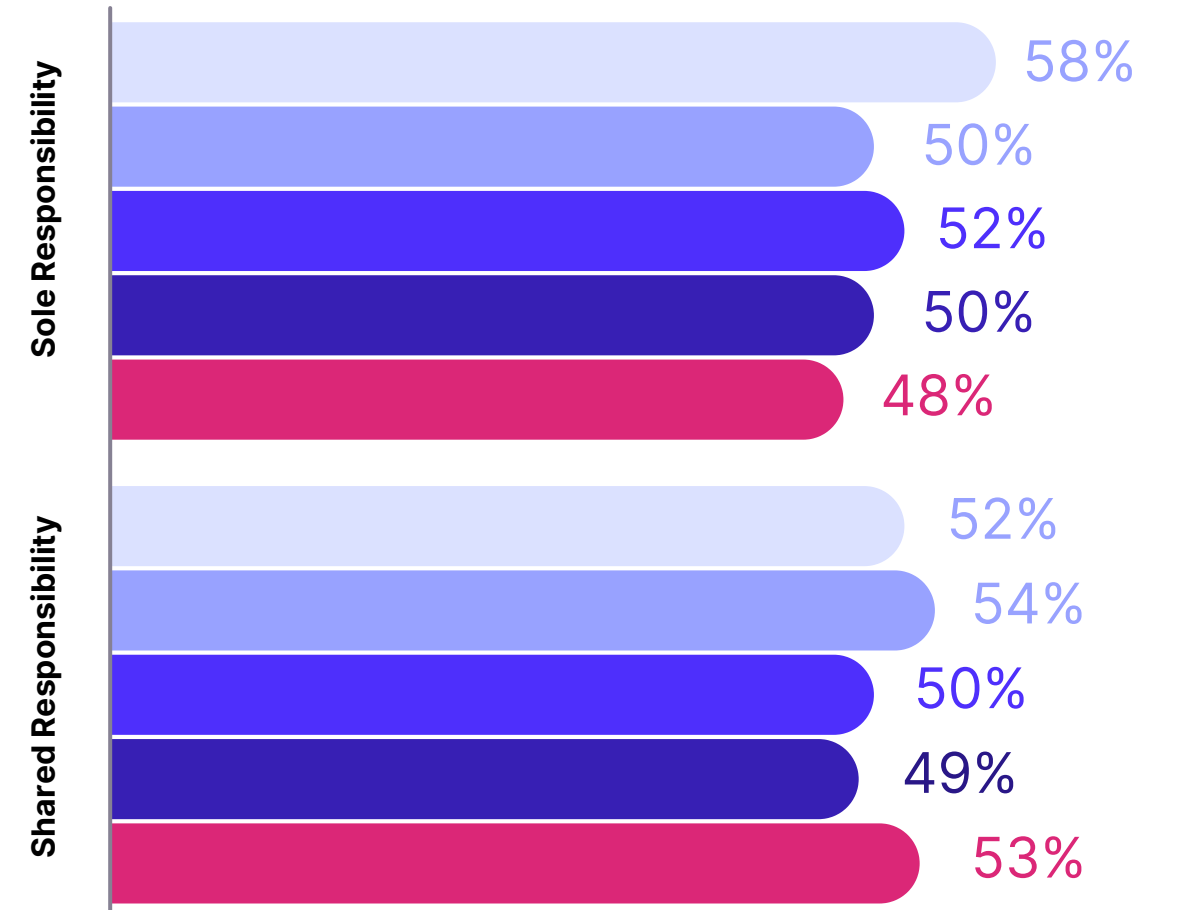
Work Approach



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded

Responsibility



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

It's a trend that's skyrocketed by 120% across the generations. In tandem with this, the abstract information and 'big picture' thinking of earlier generations has decreased 56%, which may have contributed significantly to the



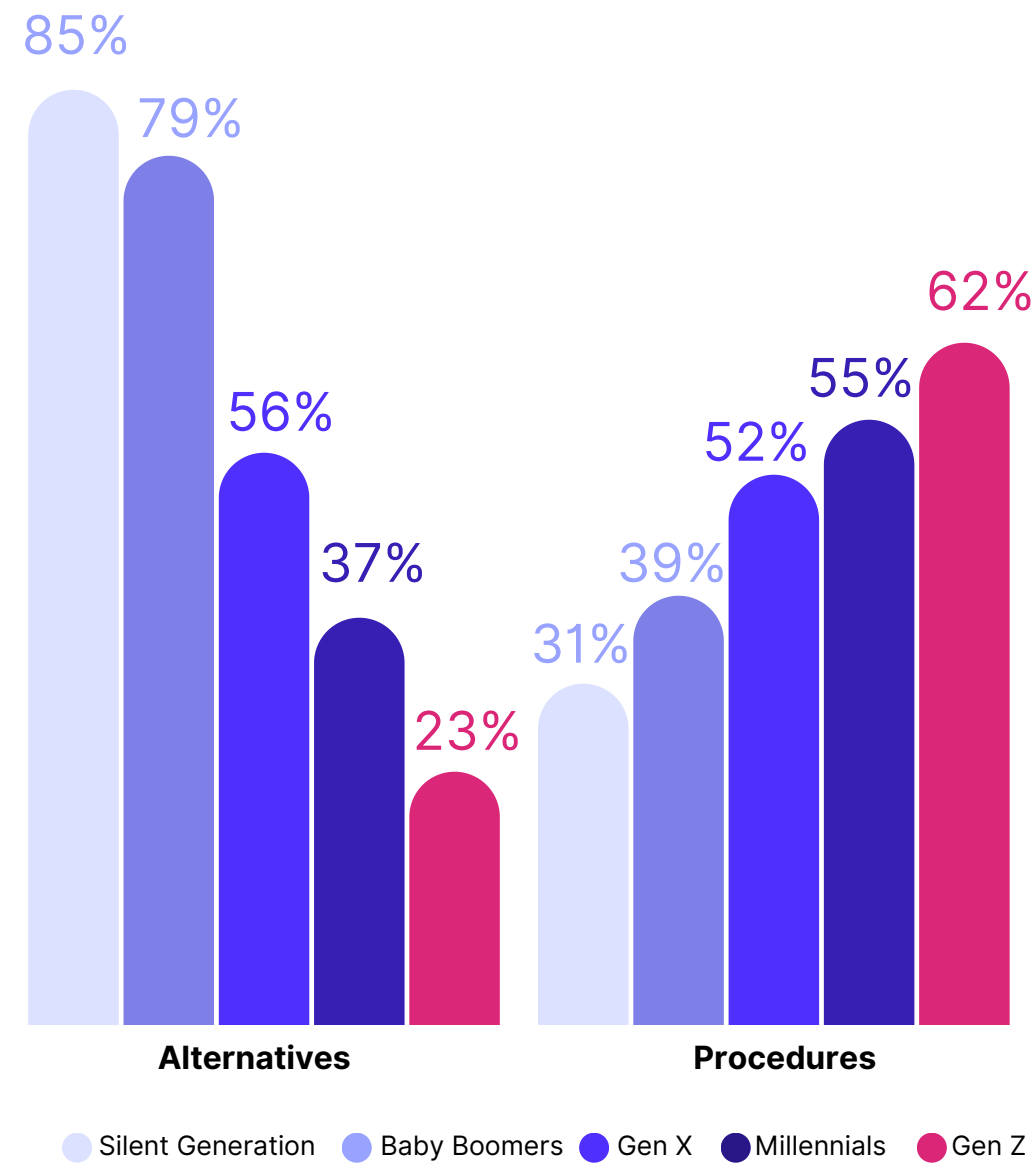
Boosting collaboration with Gen Z teammates

anxiety (see Previous Research) and overwhelm Gen Z feels at work. Because of this trend, in situations where Gen Z only has details to work with, they'll find it very hard to prioritize. It's the 'big picture' that determines which details are important and which ones are not. Additionally, without any details, the path forward can feel vague and unclear. Gen Z doesn't trust their inner compass either, so they'll struggle to figure out the details if left on their own without anyone to bounce ideas off or nut out options and solutions.

The need for step-by-step frameworks has jumped by 100%.

This isn't just a lack of motivation: it's a genuine blindspot for Gen Z. However, we can use these attitudinal shifts to support Gen Z to increase their confidence and reduce overwhelm in the workplace.

Task Direction



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded

In addition to their attention to detail, Gen Z is highly methodical. The study uncovered a 100% increase in their desire for best practices: they really care about doing things the right way at work. Coupled with a **73% drop** in the importance of options and different ways of doing things, it's the recipe for a generation that doesn't want to waste time or resources, always seeking the most efficient ways of working.

Interestingly, Gen Z won't naturally stick their neck out unless they've got the data and research to back up their opinions. They don't enjoy operating by gut feel or intuition, a motivation that's diminished by **60%** compared to earlier generations. What they do find stimulating is consuming the thoughts and data of others, like their teammates or managers, an attitude that's increased by **56%**. As they naturally seek everyone's input, it makes them valuable collaborators, but it's worth noting that they won't be excited by being the ones solely responsible for the work.



Boosting collaboration with Gen Z teammates

Impact for workplaces

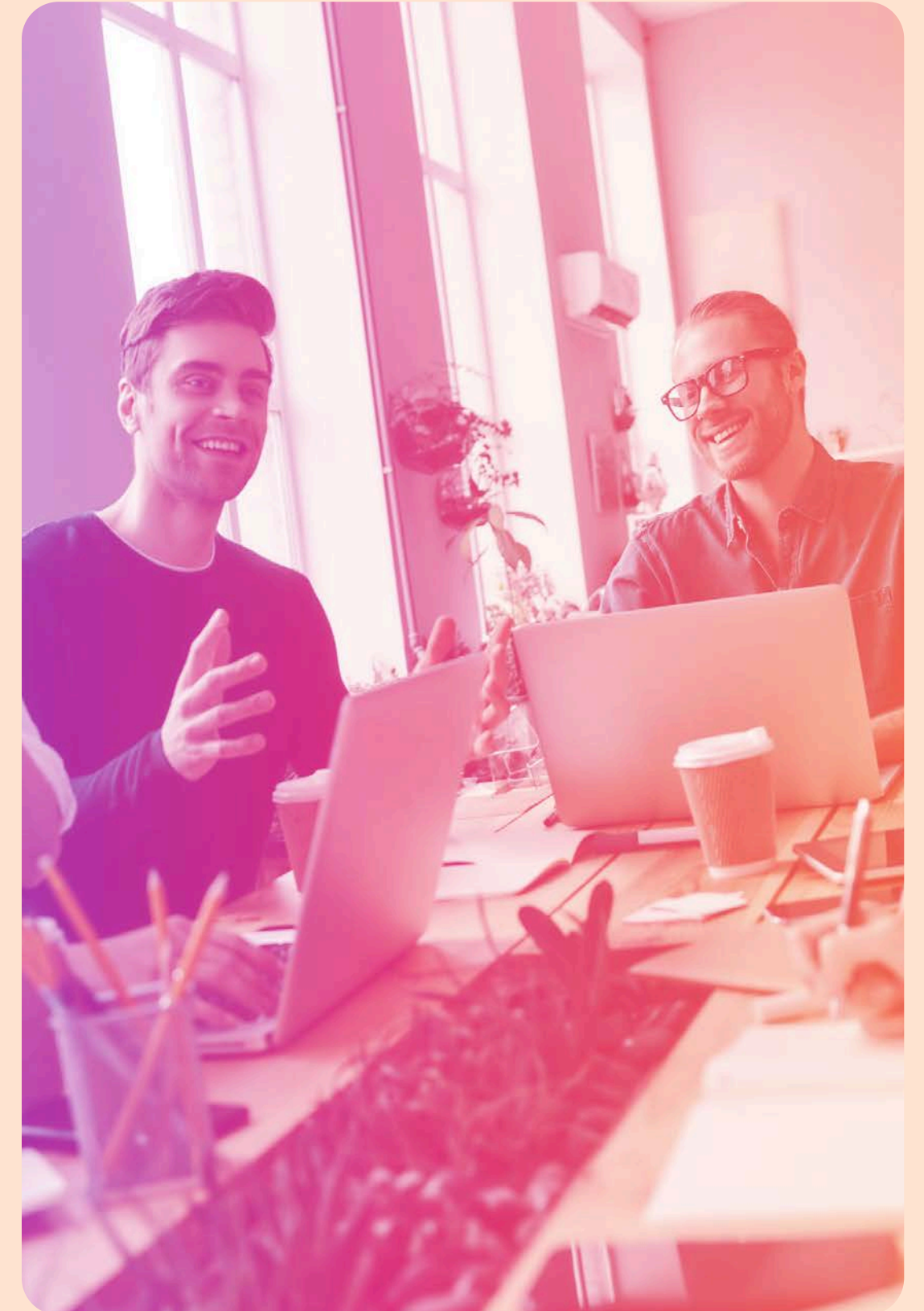
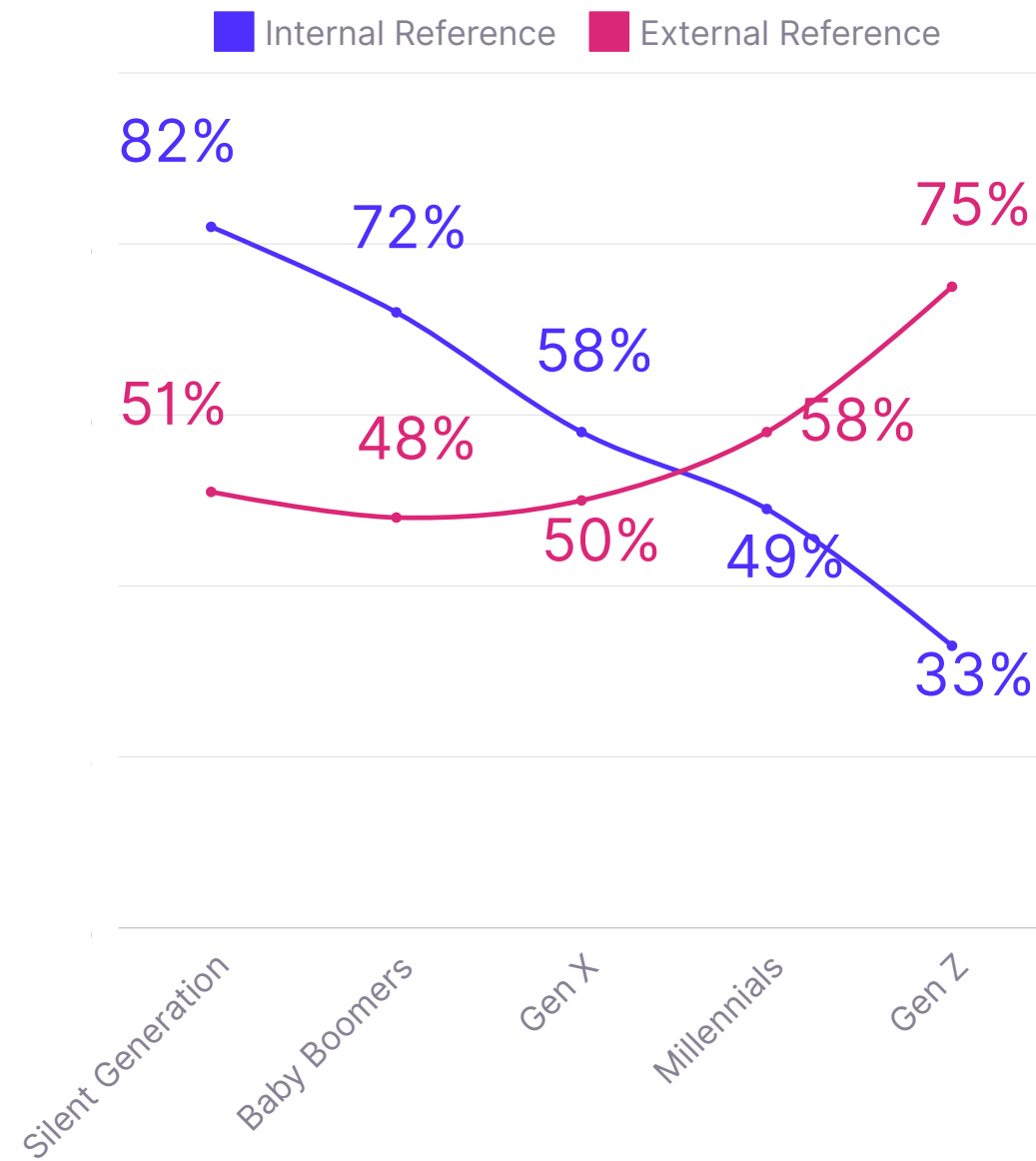
The explosion of startups in the last decade, largely Founded by Gen X and Millennials, has changed the nature of work, but also how teams collaborate. Gen Z may struggle in remote teams that need to invent new ways of doing things or move lightning fast because of a high motivation for details and repeatable step-by-step frameworks.

Additionally, according to the findings, a Gen Z that's highly motivated for 'big picture thinking' is like a diamond in the rough. Any Gen Z early-stage founders with big inspiring visions need to be fiercely protected and nurtured.

In the workplace, when earlier generations constantly seek options or ask for new ways of working, their Millennial and Gen Z teammates might burn out from constantly shifting goal posts. And in project work, Gen Z won't readily take the lead – even though they may be highly capable – paying more attention instead to the expectations of their teammates.

Authority

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



Boosting collaboration with Gen Z teammates

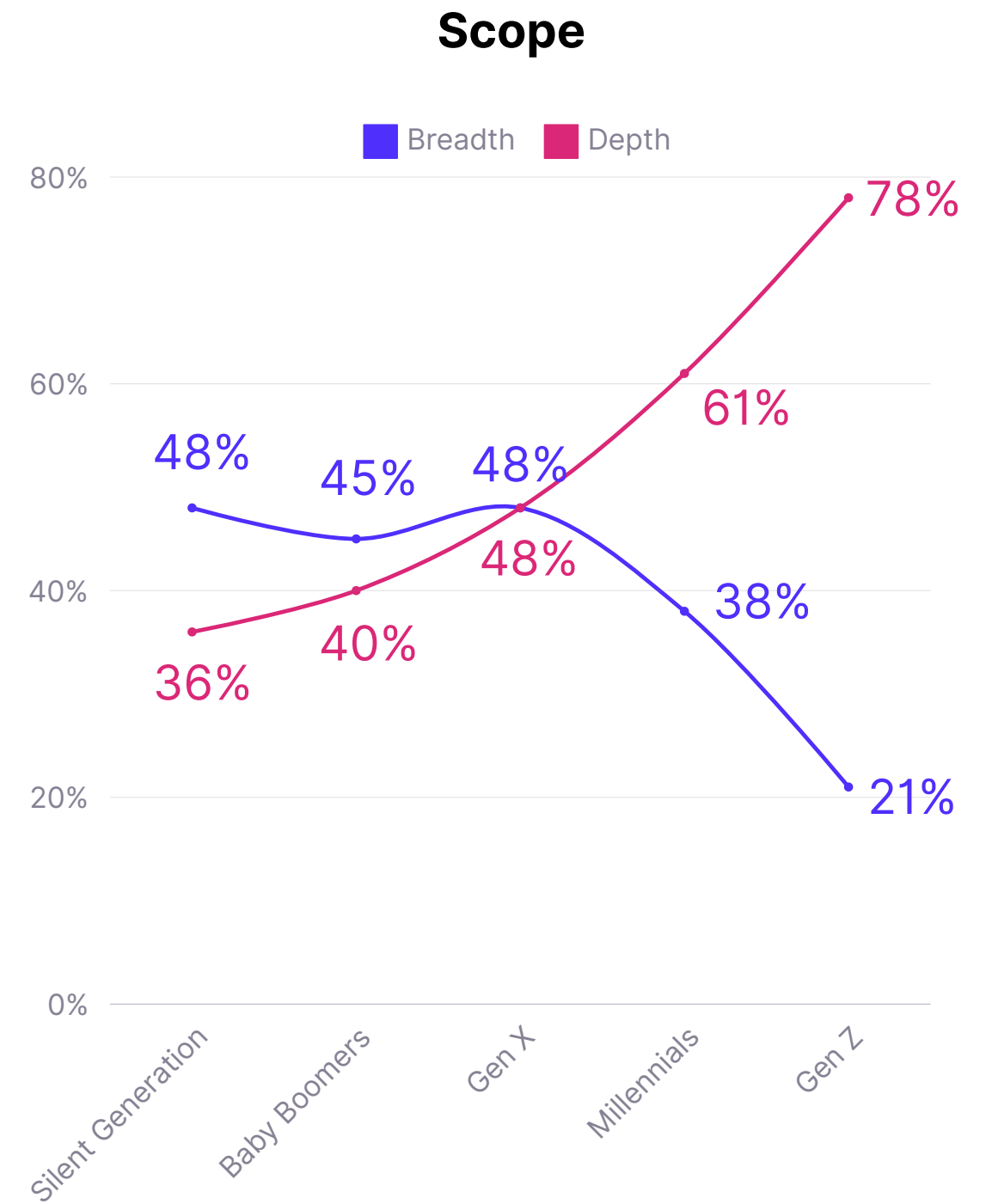
Impact for workplaces

For leaders

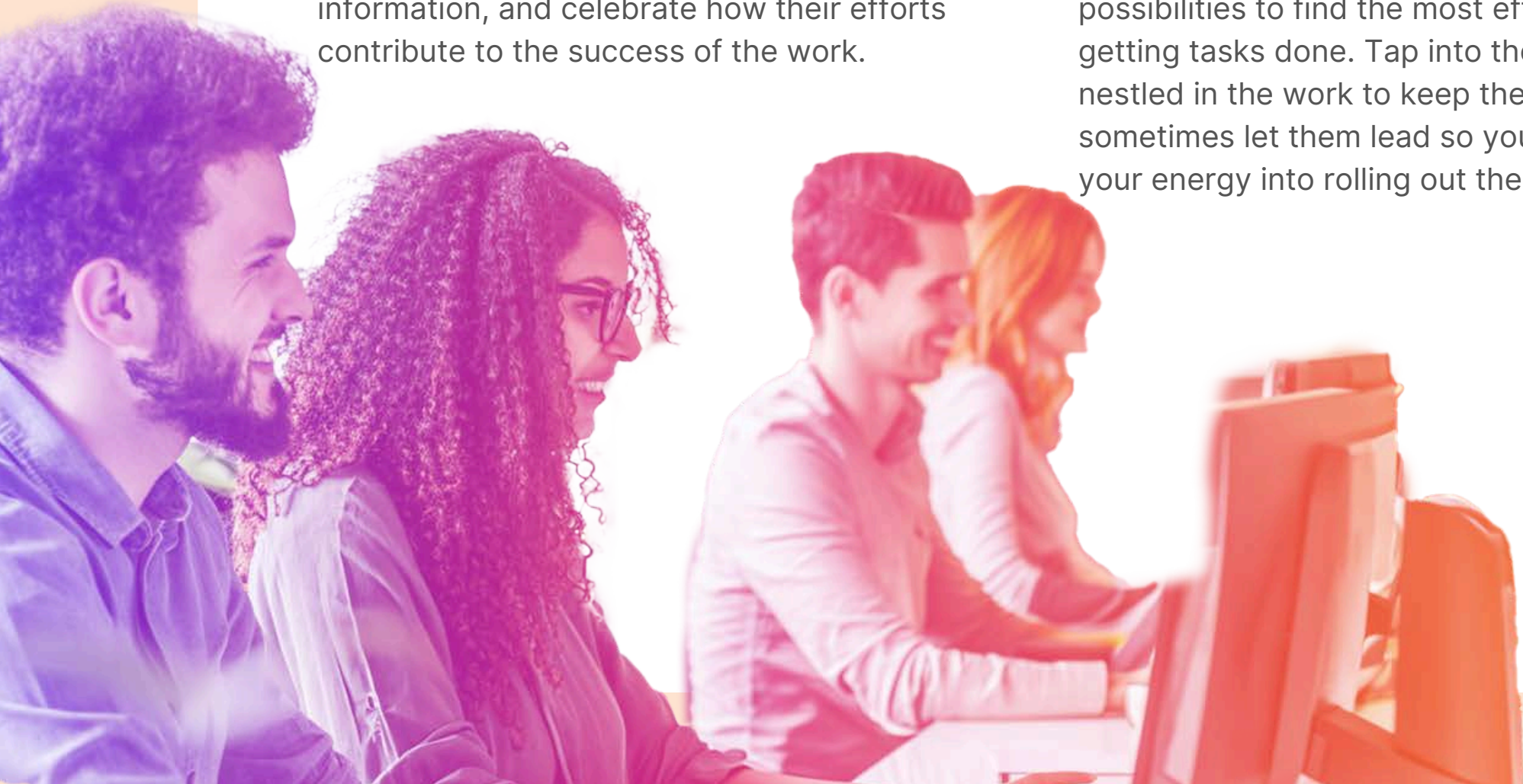
When collaborating with Gen Z, start by setting clear expectations and mapping out a step-by-step plan. This can give them the boost of energy and confidence they need to get work done – don't be surprised if they take it and run with it! Lean into their natural motivation for pulling together research and information, and celebrate how their efforts contribute to the success of the work.

For Gen Z

Your natural desire to be inclusive and ask for other people's input makes you a natural collaborator. However, bear in mind that your Baby Boomer and Gen X teammates tend to trust their gut more than you do and they're energized by creating new ways of doing things. Leverage their ability to invent possibilities to find the most efficient way of getting tasks done. Tap into the deeper 'why' nestled in the work to keep them focused and sometimes let them lead so you can channel your energy into rolling out the project plan.



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded





04

Developing Gen Z's performance at work

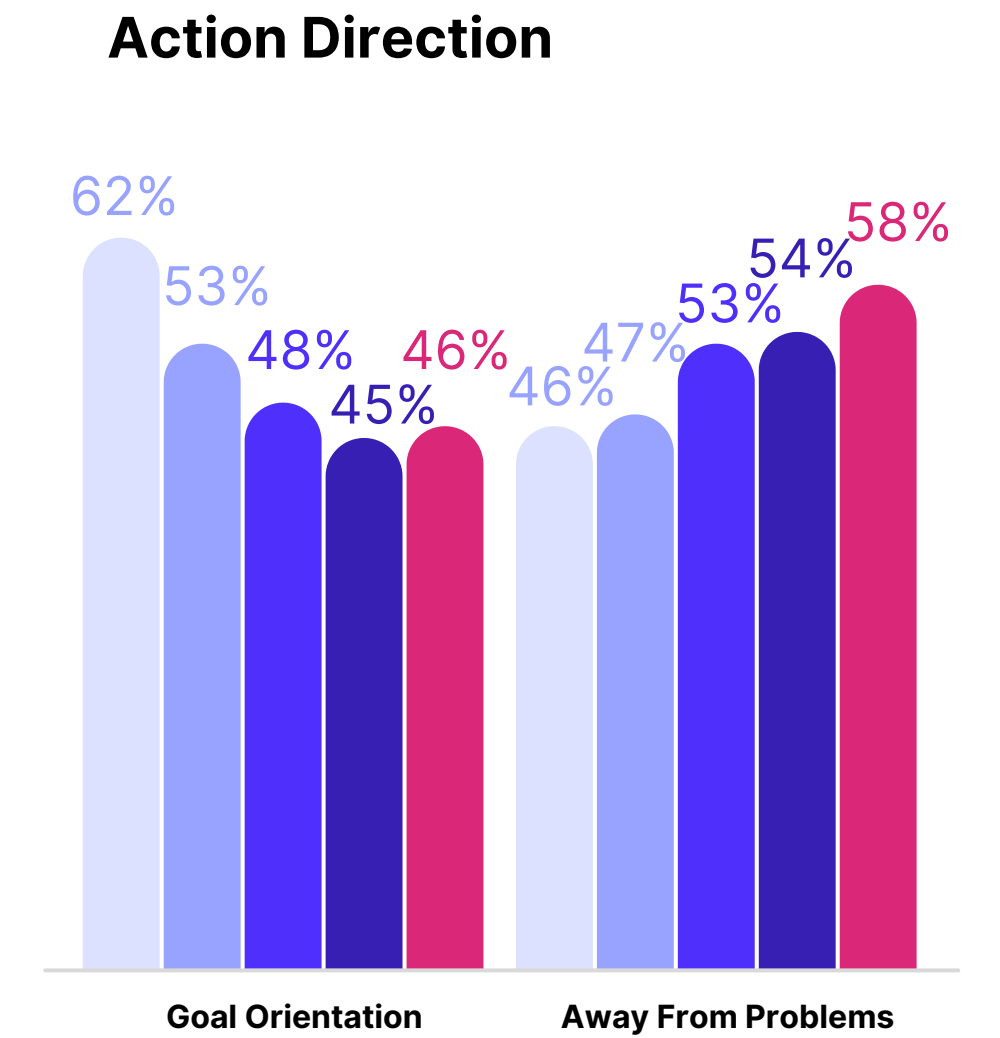
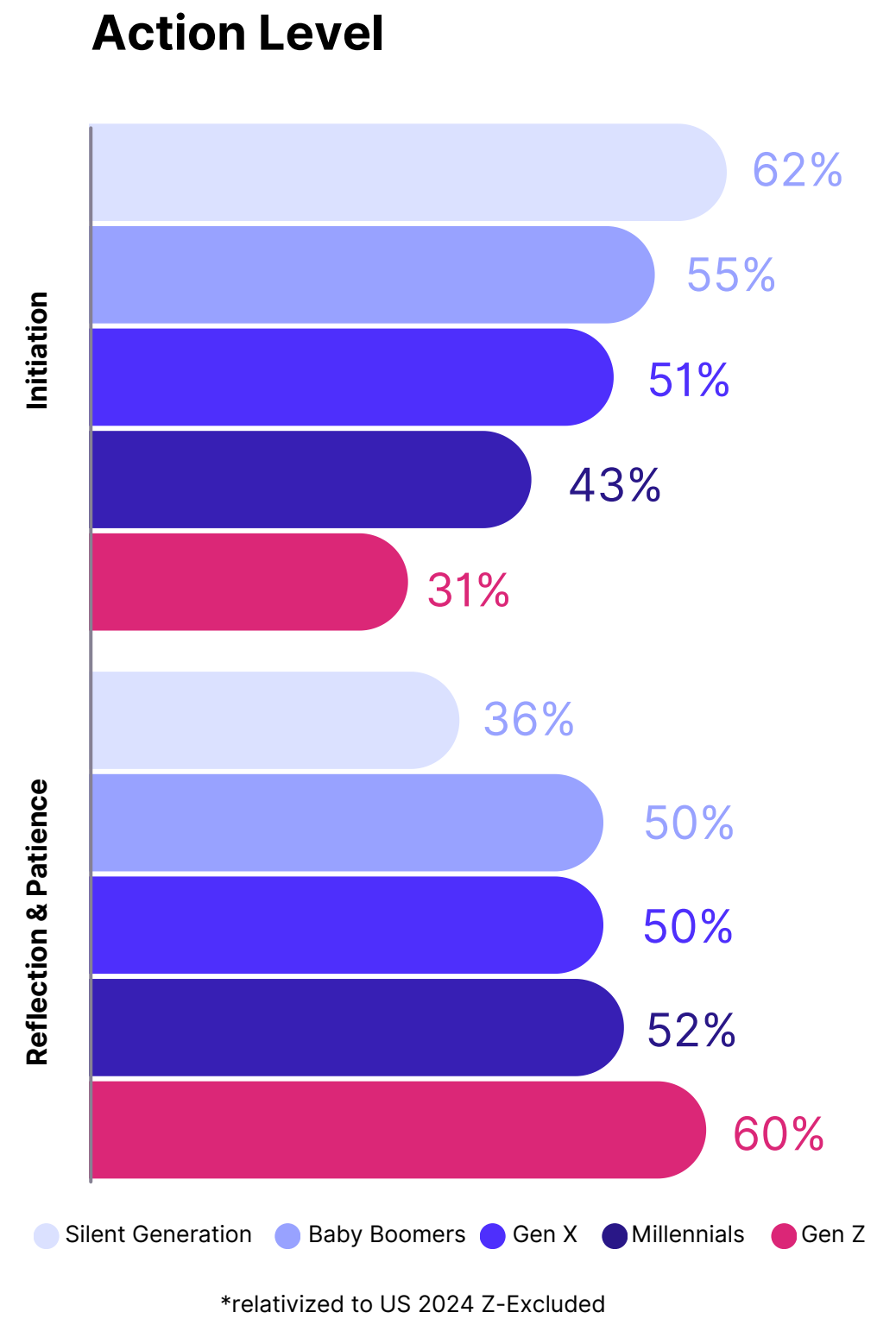


Developing Gen Z's performance at work

There's a clear trend in the findings that highlights different perspectives on change in the workplace and how the generations approach goals, skills building and job performance. Earlier generations are hungry for diverse ideas, independent thinking and developing new skills, while later generations are demotivated by the constant flux, instead desiring more stability and routine.

The study revealed a significant 45% drop in an appetite for newness and constant change.

Across the generations, the study revealed a significant 45% drop in an appetite for newness and constant change, and a 32% increase in a desire for things to stay the same at work. For Gen Z, innovation and divergent thought can feel threatening and uncomfortable, making them appear inflexible or unproductive to their teammates. In addition, Gen Z has a much greater appetite to move away from problems.

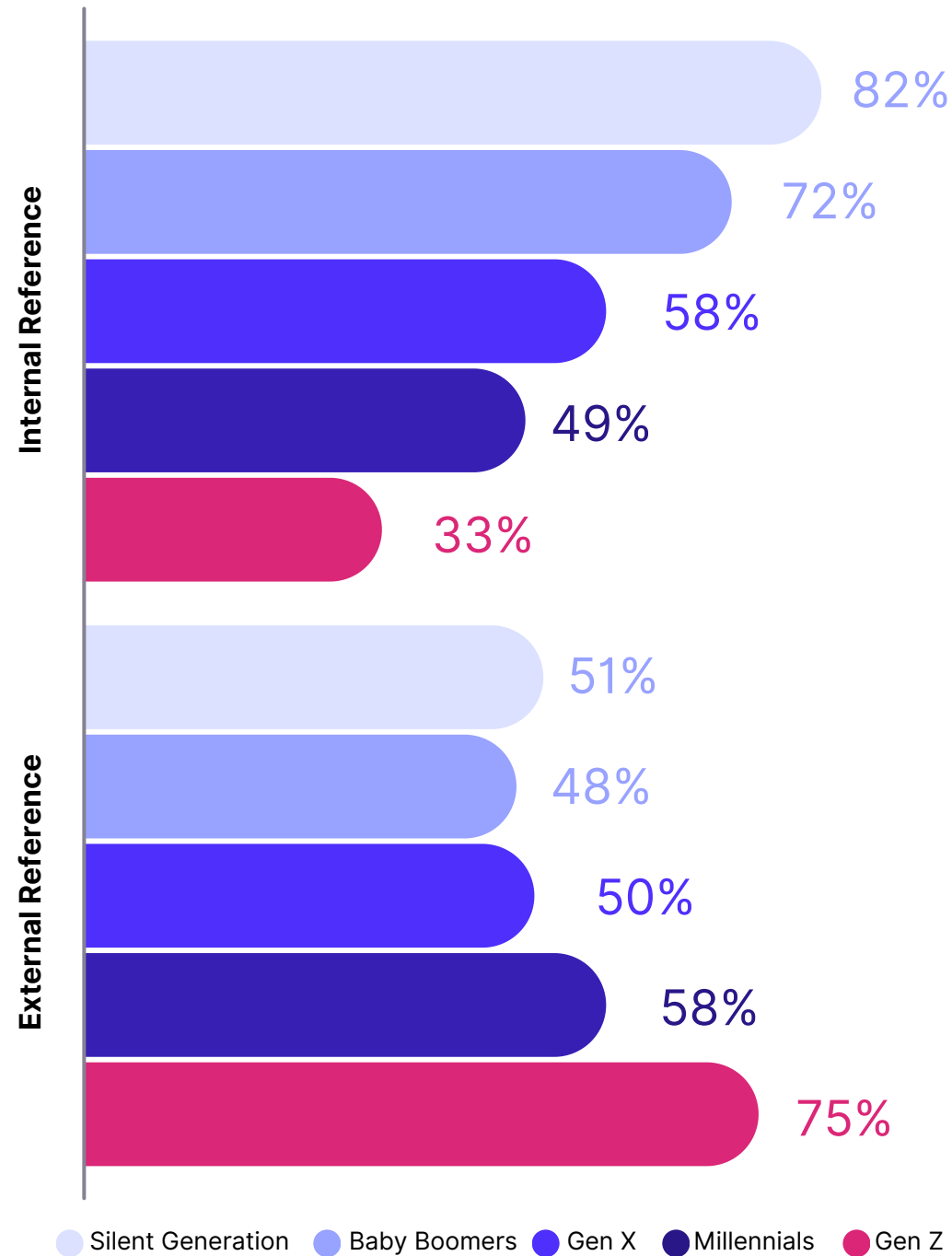


When it comes to change, they're not so motivated by the 'vision' of the new, but rather the push and need to change because something has become so unbearable that it *must* change. This means they might leave things to the last minute, especially if they don't believe the change to be necessary.



Developing Gen Z's performance at work

Authority



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded

Impact for workplaces

When you have leaders who love to act fast and thrive on constant change managing teams that require more consistent routines and more time to digest, there's bound to be friction. It's imperative to find common ground. Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z can find options and lots of different points of view overwhelming or even threatening to their sense of safety.

Workplaces need to create a culture of stability first and foremost, one marked by supervision and support, so that Gen Z feels comfortable enough to hear different perspectives and move with the winds of change.

Casting our gaze forward, when Gen Z steps into leadership roles down the track, without support now they may find coping with constant change extremely overwhelming.

Unlike earlier generations who actively seek out change and are goal-oriented, Gen Z's focus on what could go wrong has the potential to dramatically hinder progress, especially when coupled with their desire to pause and analyze every last detail. Similarly, Gen Z leaders may know that something needs to change, but will likely procrastinate until they're forced to do something about it because the situation has become intolerable. While this is a superpower in many contexts, prioritizing obstacles at the expense of opportunities is a blindspot for future Gen Z.

Workplaces need to create a culture of stability first and foremost, one marked by guidance and support.



Developing Gen Z's performance at work

Impact for workplaces

For leaders

For Gen X and Millennial leaders, finding ways to help Gen Z establish a feeling of certainty and safety so they can embrace change is crucial. For any upcoming changes at work, be sure to not only communicate the exciting opportunities, but also offer reassurance on what's going to stay the same.

This applies to developing their skills and capacity to prioritize, too. Encourage Gen Z to watch YouTube video tutorials to build skills, learn from their teammates or attend workshops with diverse groups of people. Over time, you can help them become more comfortable with change and differing perspectives.

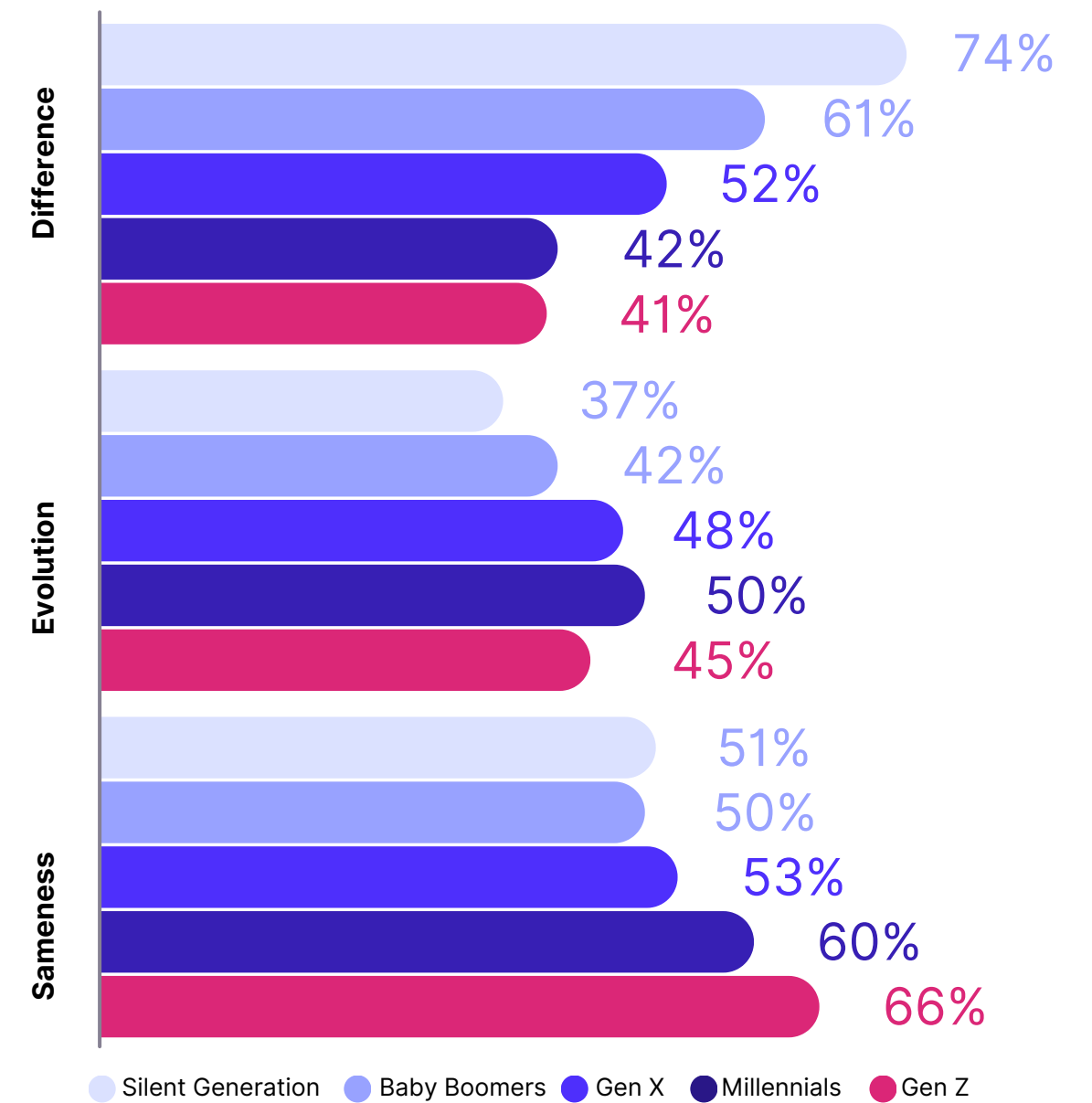
For Gen Z

To build resilience for change and become more comfortable with uncertainty, brainstorm possible outcomes for goals and future plans with your Baby Boomer and Gen X teammates. You may find their excitement for change is infectious and can help you come to terms with the things you find unnerving at work.

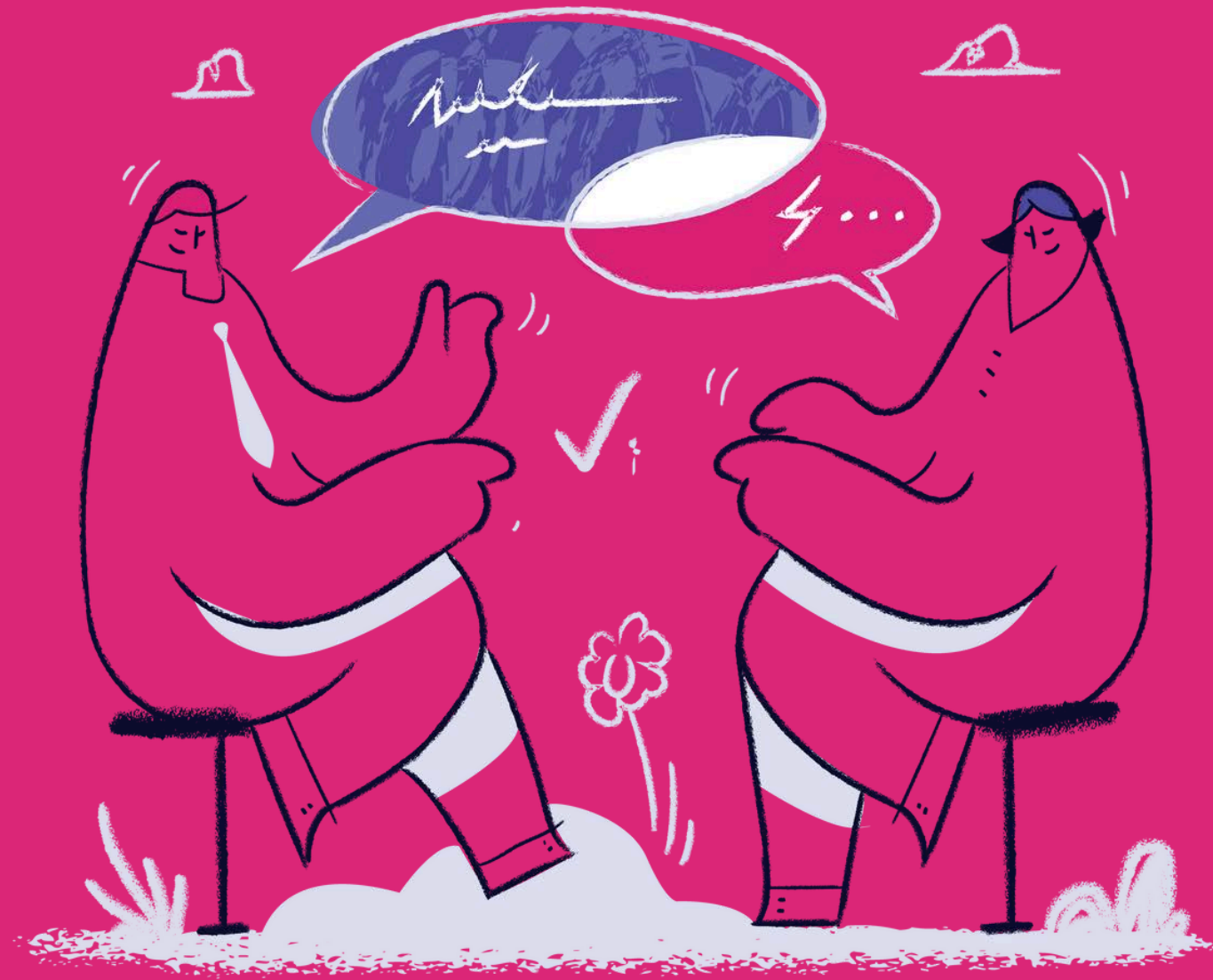
Moreover, ask them for a step-by-step breakdown of how they've implemented changes at work to see if that resonates with you. And when it feels like everything is moving too fast, consider finding a Gen X or Millennial mentor whose ability to rely on their inner compass can help you orient yourself.

Encourage Gen Z to watch YouTube video tutorials to build skills, learn from their teammates or attend workshops with diverse groups of people.

Change



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



05

Matching Gen Z to the right roles and teams



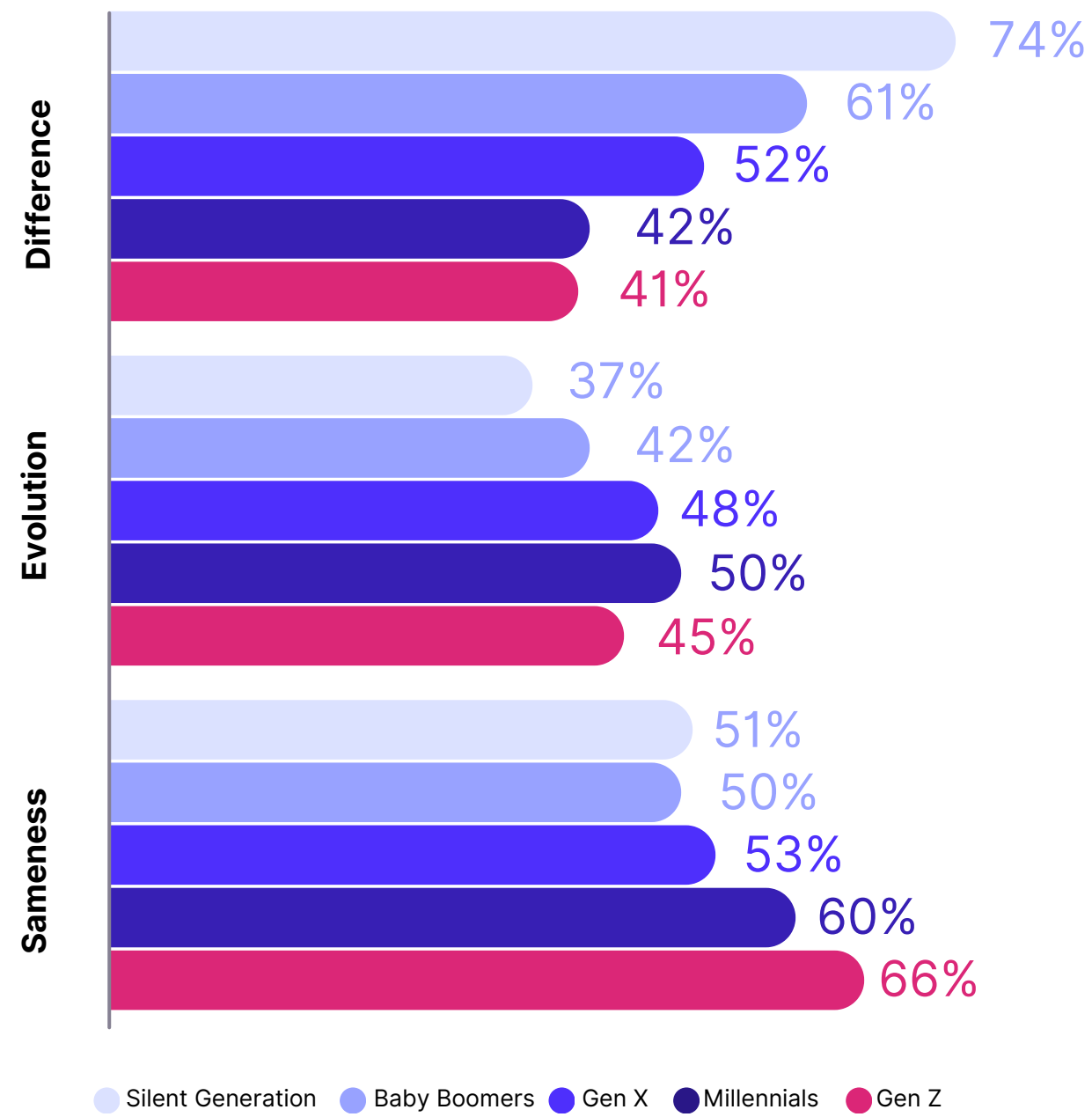
Matching Gen Z to the right roles and teams

Supporting Gen Z to find the workplace where they can thrive is a combination of a number of factors. The study uncovered that what they need from a role and a work culture is different to previous generations.

Later generations, however, place greater importance on inclusivity, a trend that's increased by 45% across the generations.

Earlier generations are more motivated by job titles, achievement and walking to the beat of their own drum. Creativity and innovation are the dominant flavor of their working lives, coupled with a deep interest in the inner emotional worlds of their teammates and roles that expand their knowledge. Later generations, however, place greater importance on inclusivity, a trend that's increased by 45% across the generations.

Change



*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded

They desire workplaces that are authentic and make it safe for everyone to be themselves, working in ways that bring out their best. So much so, that they'll actively seek out a sense of belonging in prospective workplaces. It's a noticeable shift from 'me' to 'we' at work also reflected in the findings.

When Gen Z searches for a new role, they'll be looking for a clear hiring process with lots of step-by-step detail. They want to know what tools they'll have or get to use, what a typical day looks like and how inclusive a company's culture is.

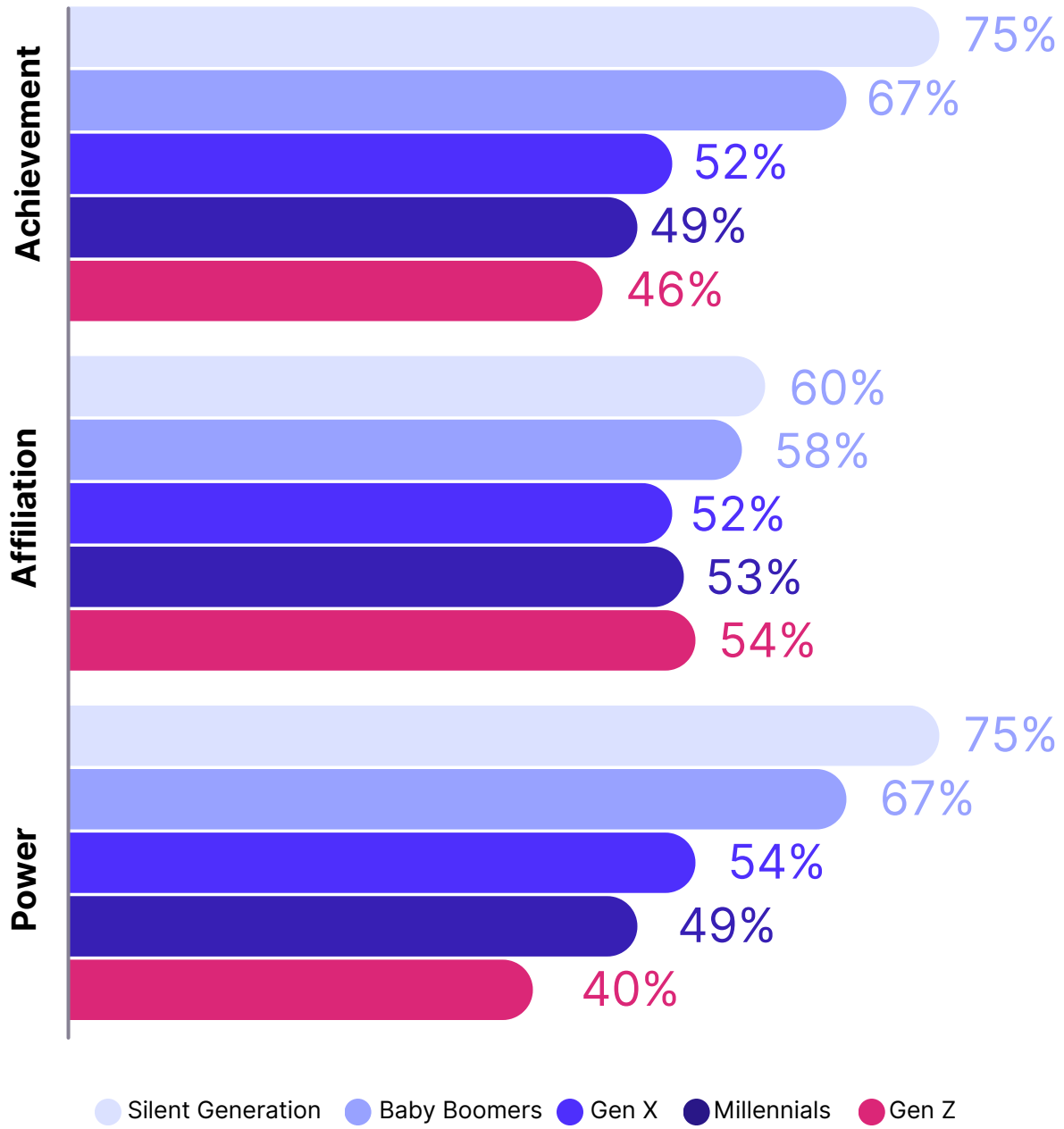
They can thrive in workplaces that are driven by deadlines and schedules, but only if there's adequate time for problem-solving. However, they can be prone to anxiety about timelines and can often procrastinate until the last minute because they're not motivated by moving towards milestones or goals.

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is less concerned with organizational politics, the commercial aspects of work and accumulating knowledge.

Matching Gen Z to the right roles and teams

Influence

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



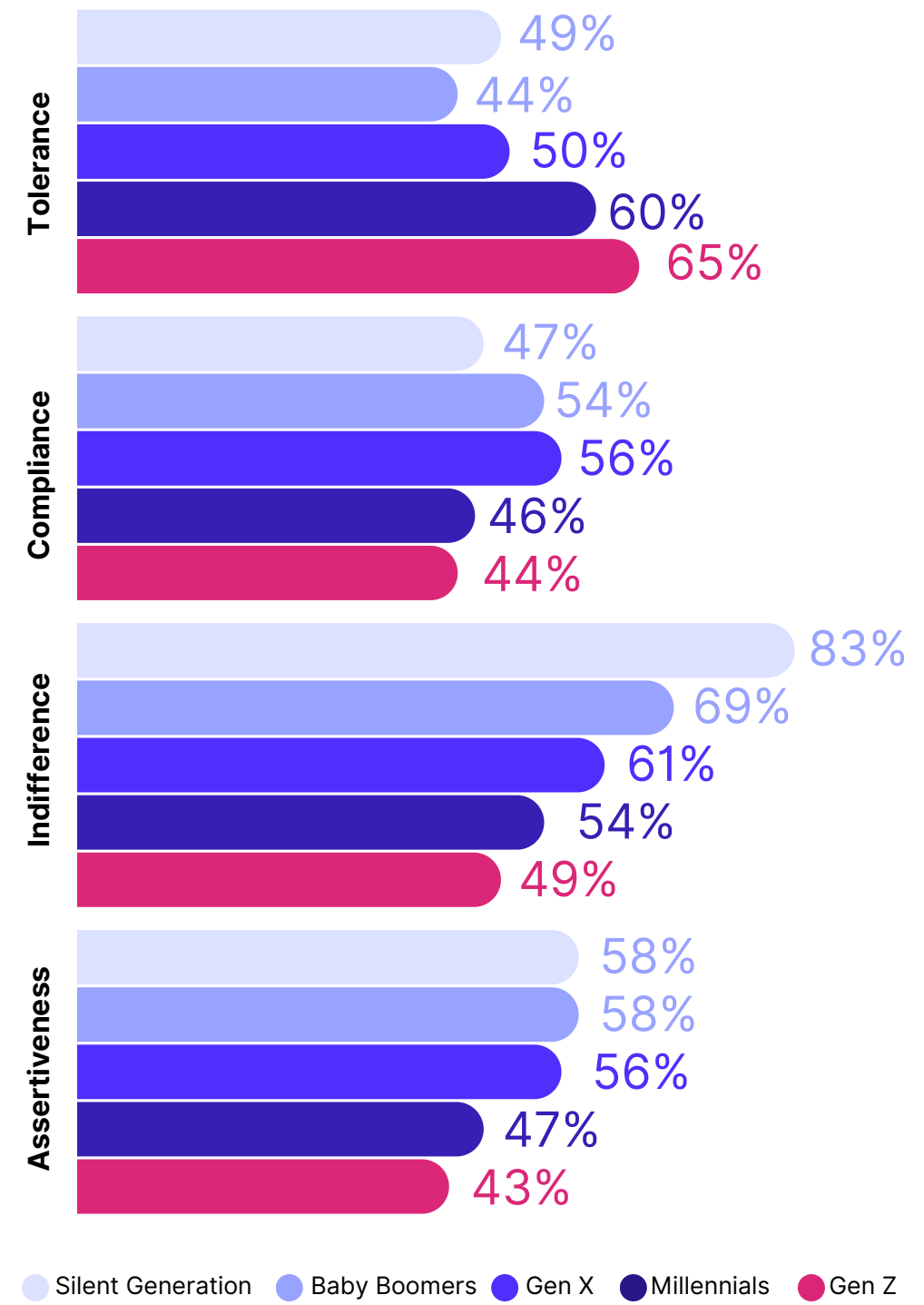
Temporary or contract work might not be appealing due to their desire for stability and resistance to constant change. Yet they'll be magnetized to healthy and diverse work cultures that give them room to be authentically themselves.

From onboarding to leadership development, Gen Z does best paired with someone who can offer immediate feedback on their performance.

Impact for workplaces

Bringing Gen Z talent into a workplace has implications for culture and how hierarchy is conceptualized. Where Baby Boomers and Gen X respond to and respect role titles as a means of establishing authority, their Millennial and Gen Z teammates will mostly only follow people they like and feel personally connected to.

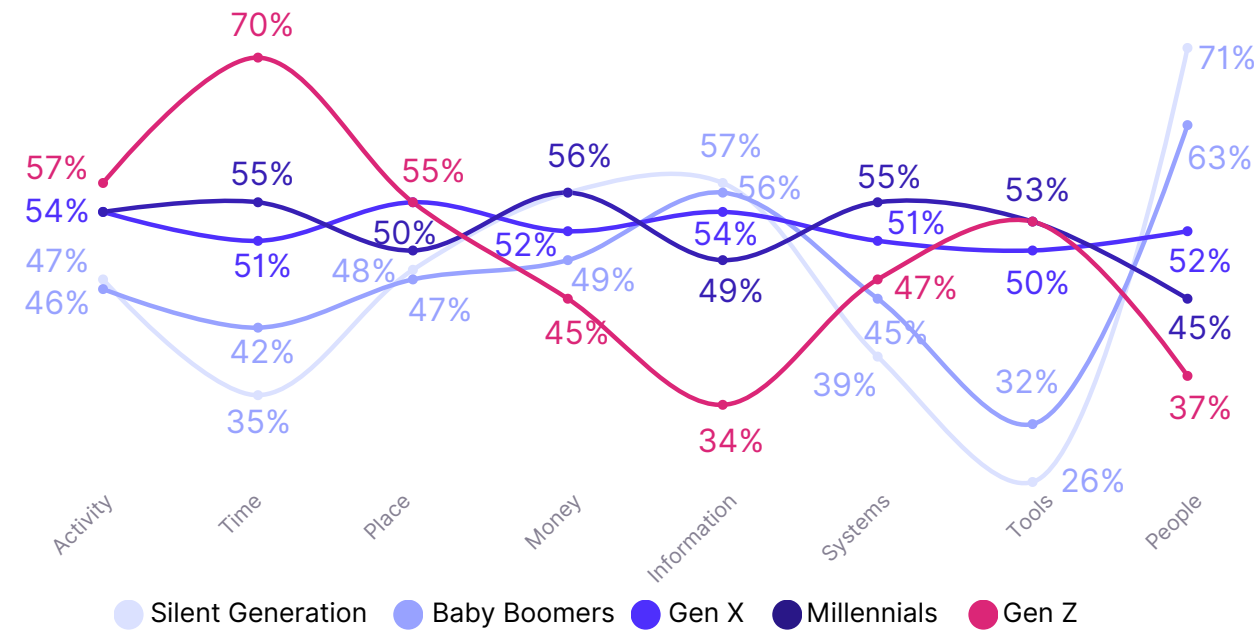
Rules



Matching Gen Z to the right roles and teams

Interest Filters

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



It's no longer about how an individual can fit into a culture, but more so about what new energy and value they can add.

From onboarding to leadership development, Gen Z needs to be paired with someone who can offer immediate feedback on their performance. Remote setups can make this challenging, so it's vital companies install the right tools and tech to facilitate greater connection and opportunities for real-time feedback across teams.

Impact for workplaces

For leaders

To attract Gen Z talent into your company, talk up the tooling you use and what a typical workday at your company looks like. Highlight the regular routines and rituals you do as a team and what kind of tasks they'll likely be working on in the role. Don't forget to tell a compelling story about work culture and the 'vibe', being clear on what you expect from Gen Z before they interview.

Additionally, Gen Z views work as a marathon, not a sprint, so be mindful of their natural inclination to move slower than earlier generations. For Gen X leaders, you can act as their sounding board and help them build momentum by generously sharing your thoughts and feedback.

Similarly, when Gen Z starts a new role, they'll benefit from a structured onboarding plan with an assigned buddy so they can ask all their questions. And, once fully onboarded, make sure there are regular touch points for scheduled feedback to help them be successful in their role.

For Gen Z

Your ability to look beyond role titles and embrace people's uniqueness makes you a great collaborator, but it may come across as disrespectful to Baby Boomer and Gen X leaders. Acknowledge their position in the company and past achievements to foster connection and when you're feeling uncertain about direction, ask them to weigh in with their ideas. Similarly, when you're feeling uncertain, ask for feedback to constantly calibrate with your team, rather than trying to figure things out on your own. This can help you accelerate onboarding into a new company and move to thriving in your new role.

When Gen Z starts a new role, they'll benefit from a structured onboarding plan with an assigned buddy so they can ask all their questions.

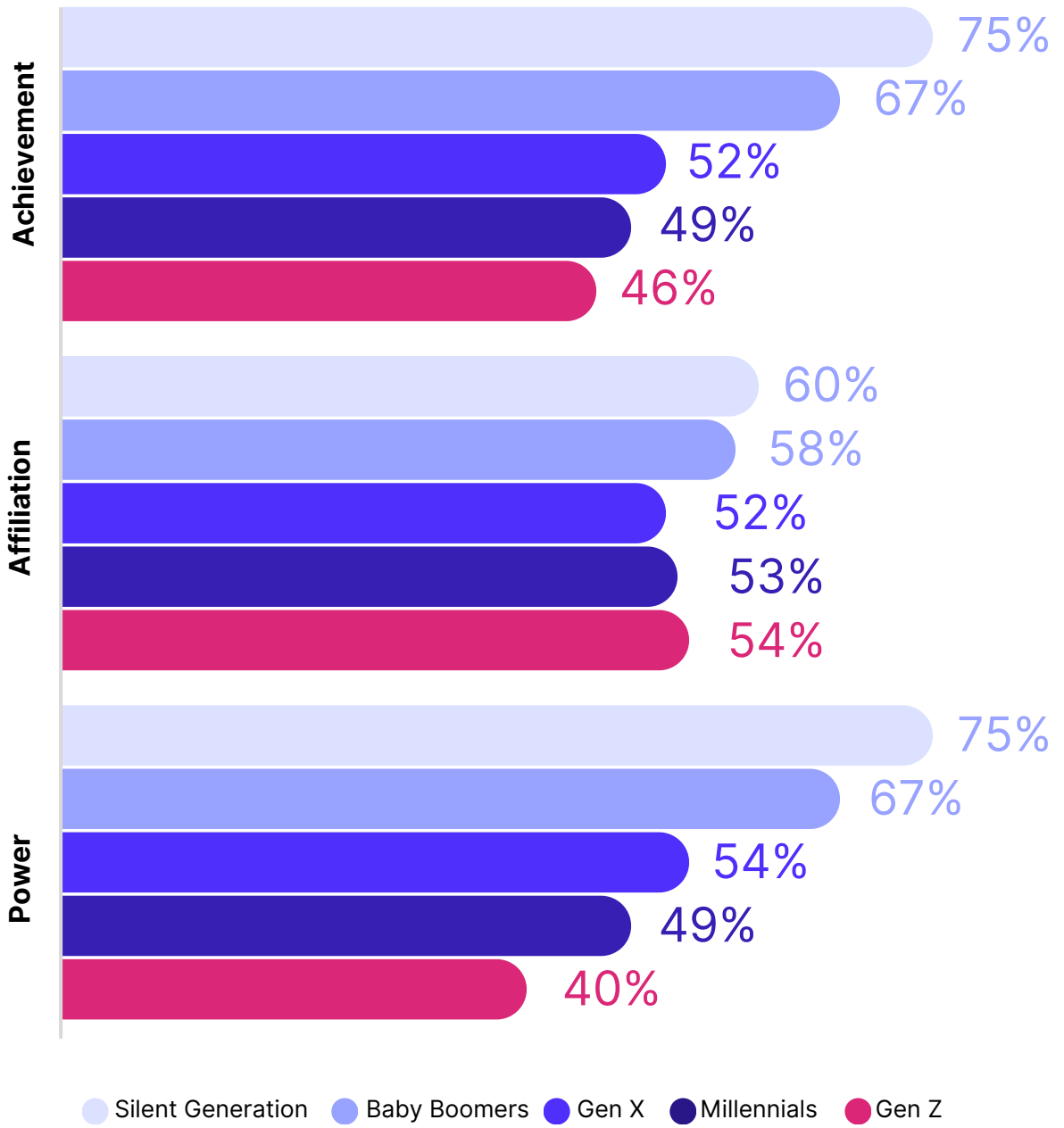


06

Inspiring Gen Z to lead

Inspiring Gen Z to lead

Influence



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

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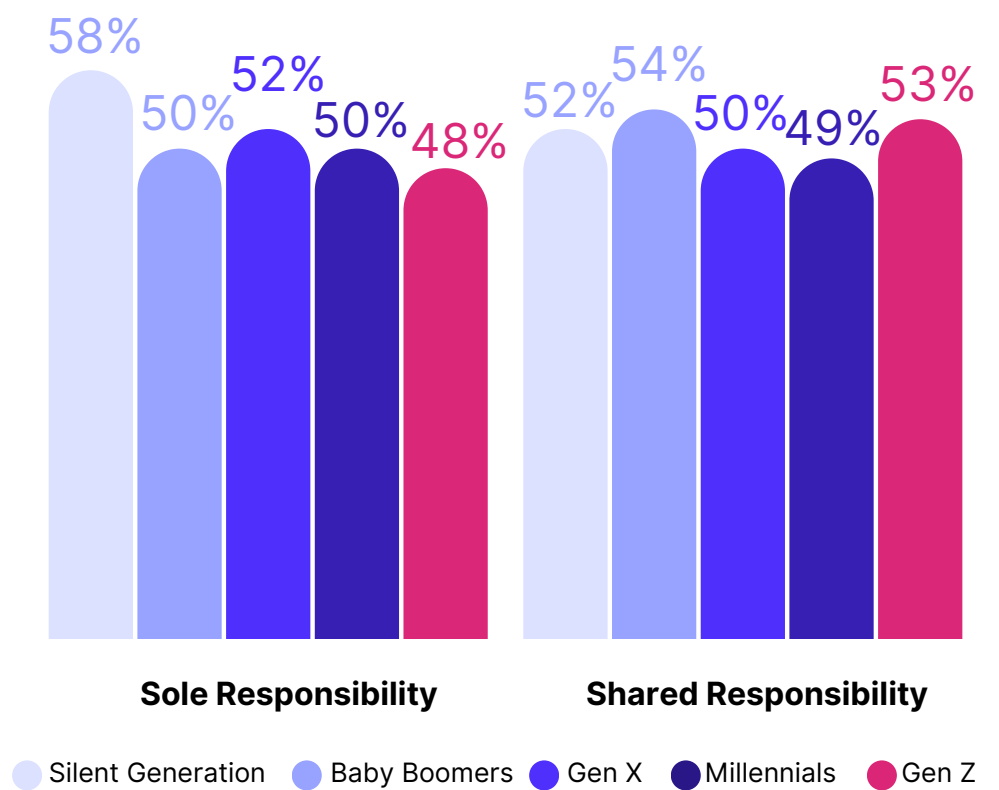
The study found an alarming trend in leadership across the generations. Earlier generations have a strong desire to lead by example, motivated by their own impact and authority in positions of influence. They like to be in charge, enjoy being empowered and empowering others to achieve big audacious goals. Trusting their gut comes naturally and they can make fast decisions when they have to. They aren't afraid to take full ownership of outcomes and use achievement as a benchmark for success. The story for the later generations is markedly different.

From Gen X onwards, there's less motivation to step up and lead.

For Gen Z specifically, they prefer to keep the peace and belong to a group, rather than risk standing out. As highly analytical and problem-focused teammates, Gen Z's desire to validate their own decisions before feeling confident enough to move forward may affect their ability to embrace the responsibilities of leadership.

Similarly, the later generations are less interested in achievement as a measure of success, which can create a ripple effect on performance in a team if they're in a leadership position. They also don't possess the same energy for having a vision or chasing big goals as earlier generations do, which in a leadership context, can halt progress.

Responsibility



● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Gen X ● Millennials ● Gen Z

Inspiring Gen Z to lead

Impact for workplaces

Without inspiring and creative leaders, workplaces fail. If action isn't taken now to support and cultivate the leaders of tomorrow, future Millennial and Gen Z leaders will struggle to cope with the demands of uncertainty.

Without a strategy, the details can become too overwhelming for Gen Z leaders.

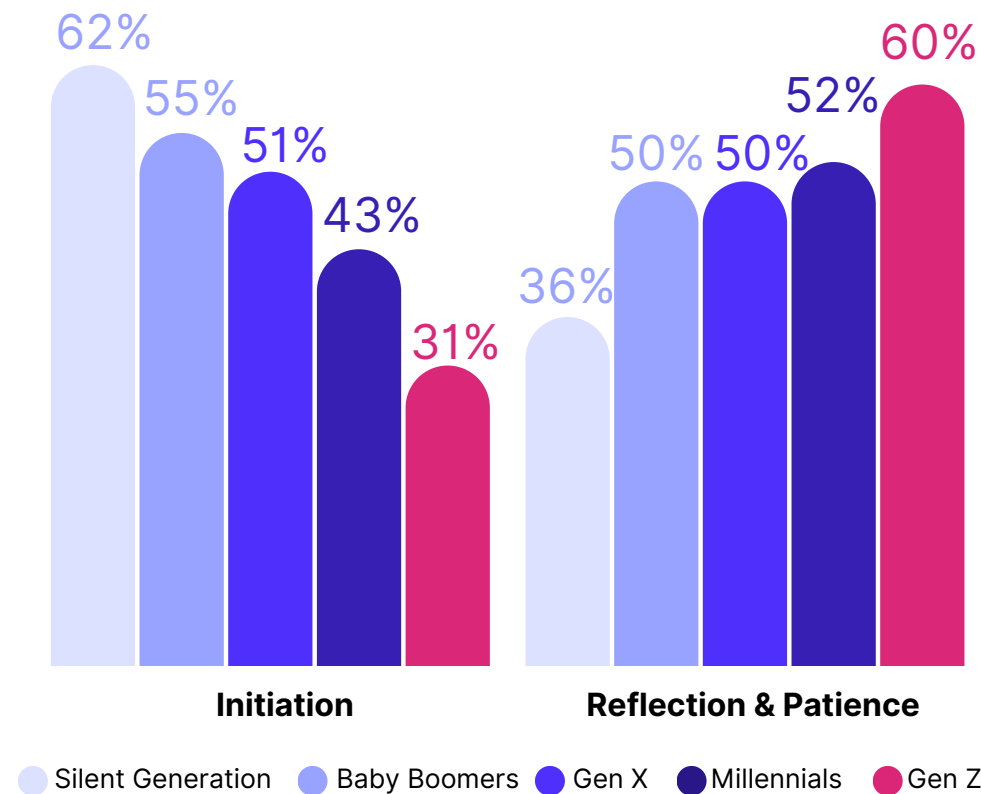
Gen Z is less motivated by strategic roles which, to date, have been associated with leadership. The 'big picture' that often defines good leadership offers a broader view, connects the dots between things and helps people see through all the details to know what's important. This is crucial to strategic roles and when we look at the biggest challenges Gen Z faces, their leadership will be the ones to address complex and abstract issues, like the sustainability of the planet and the impacts of artificial intelligence (AI).

And without a strategy, the details can become too overwhelming for this generation.

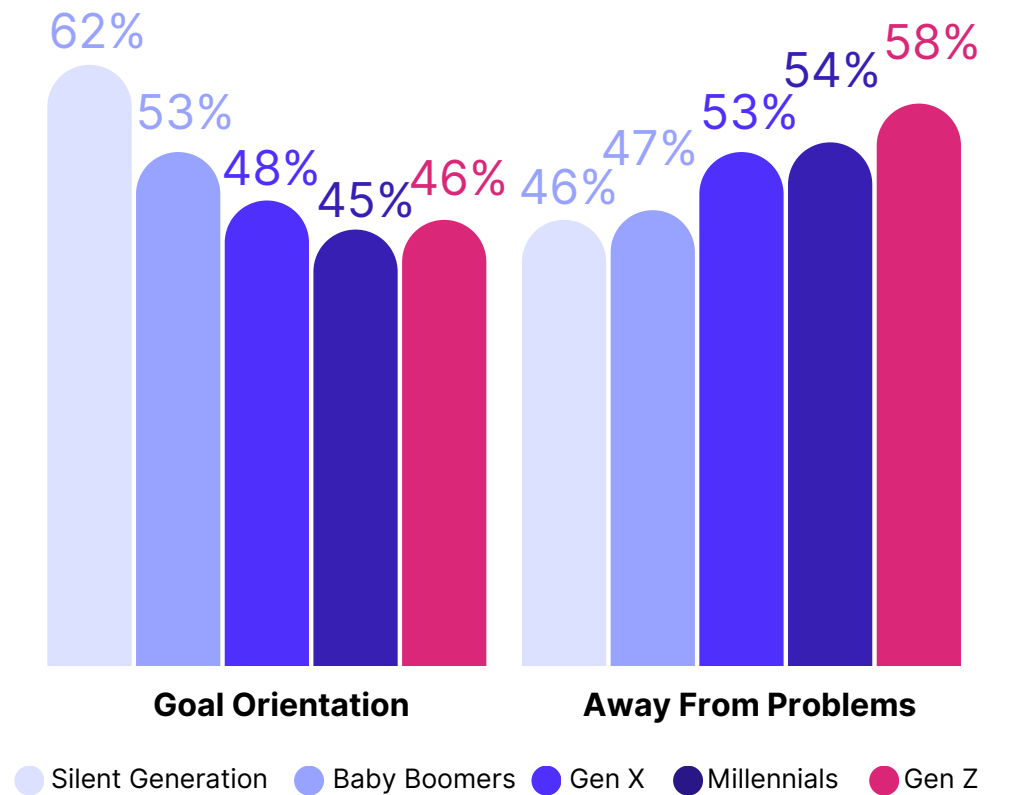
Additionally, the findings mirror a potential shift in workplace hierarchy away from a traditional model into a more flat structure. As discussed above, later generations look beyond job titles and are more accepting of the diversity that individuals bring, which may influence the way they lead in the future.

Action Level

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Action Direction

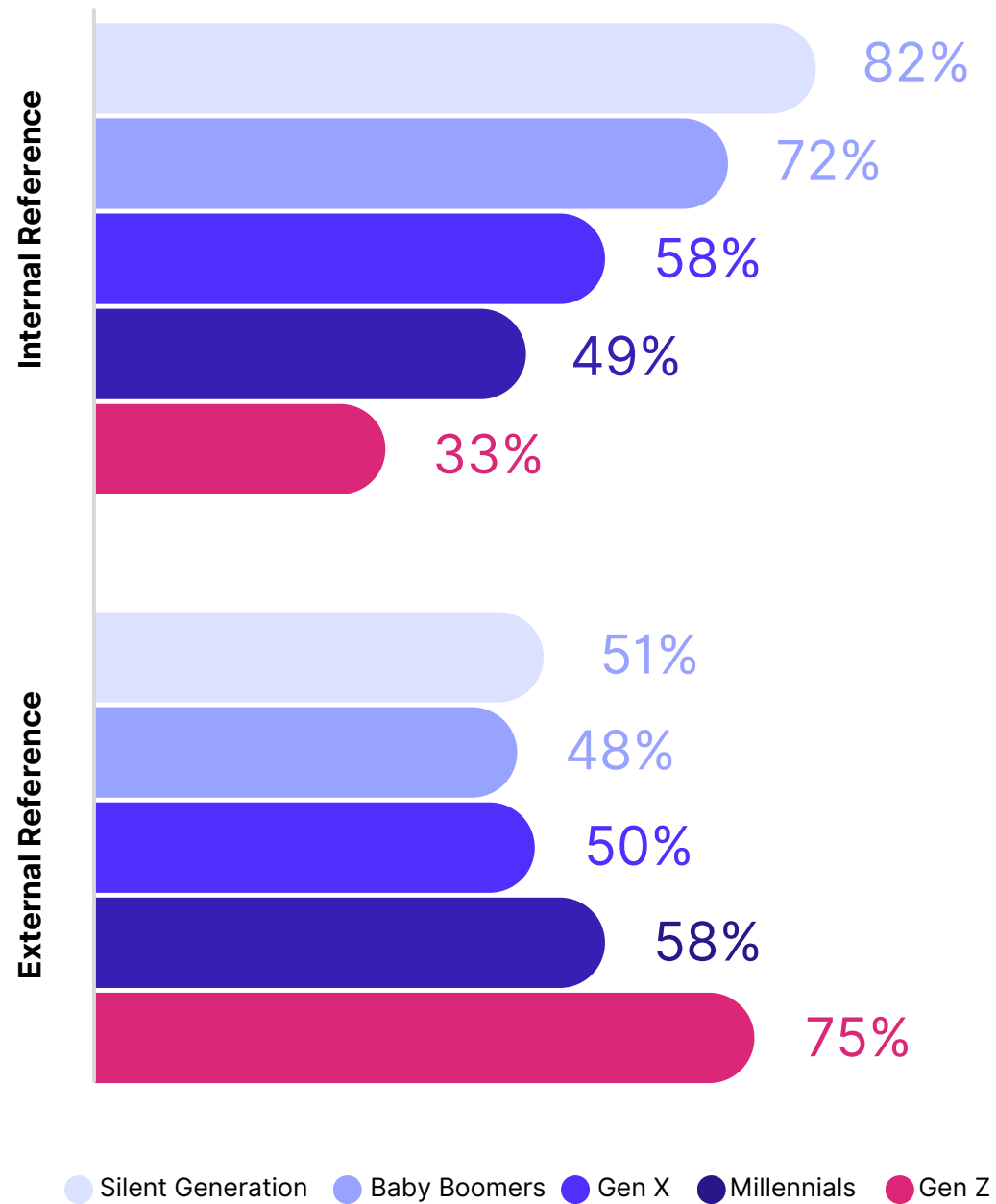


Without confident leadership, there's a danger that 'groupthink' can define teams and workplaces, inhibiting innovation and creativity. However, a flatter hierarchy can yield better communication and relationships between teammates, both of which would suit Gen Z's natural motivations. A shift in organizational structures may be needed in order to grow with the changing attitudes towards work identified in the study.

Inspiring Gen Z to lead

Authority

*relativized to US 2024 Z-Excluded



Impact for workplaces

For leaders

For Baby Boomer and Gen X leaders, developing future leaders is an exercise in patience. They need time to build confidence incrementally because they're less motivated by chasing goals, starting fast on ideas and the big picture. Ruling with an extreme work ethic won't yield the results you crave with Millennial and Gen Z teams either.

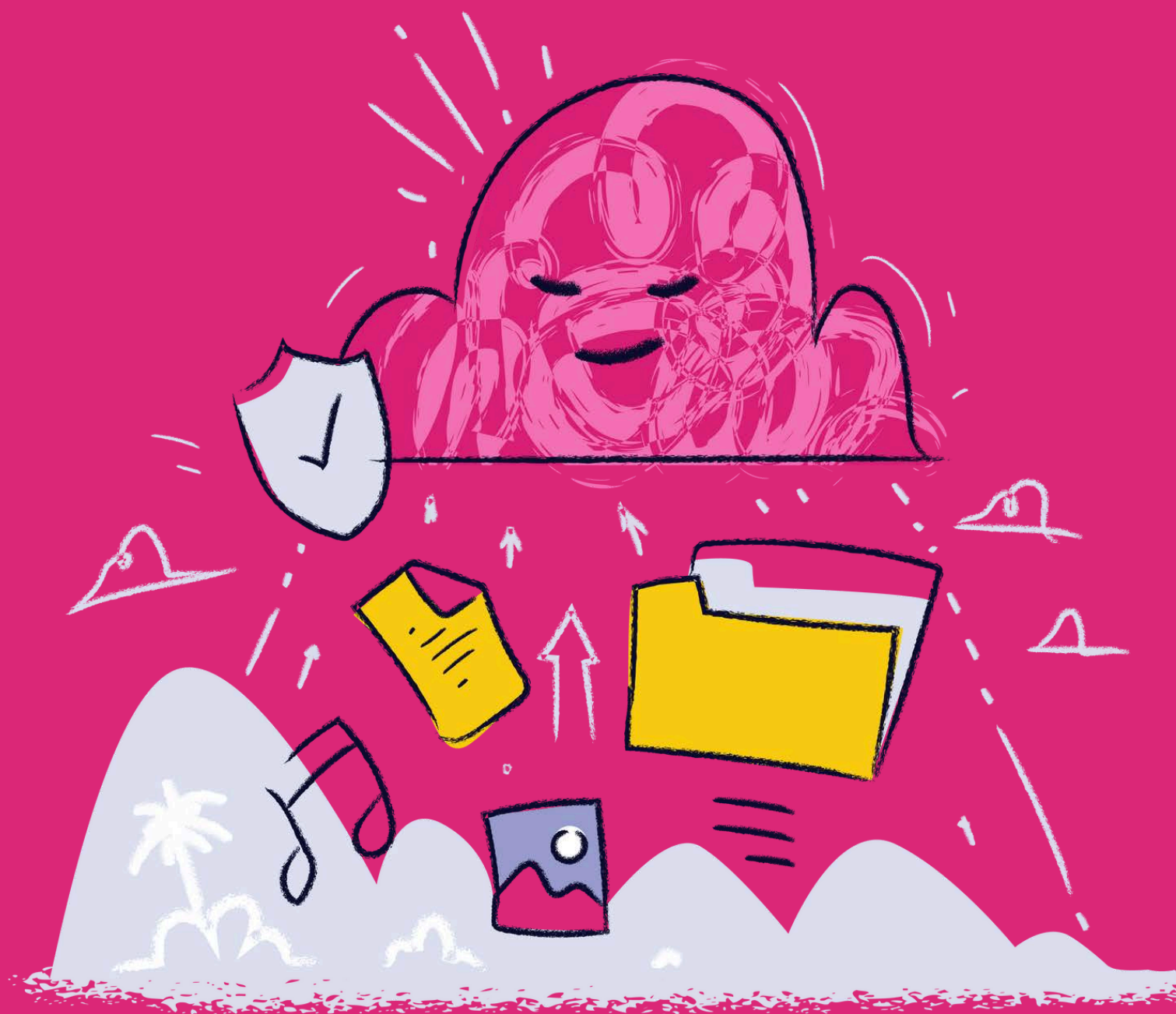
Neither will micromanagement. These generations don't respond to authority the same way you do; they need to feel like they belong and *like* who they're working for. They'll develop leadership skills more readily by learning from people they feel connected to, not from a person with an important title giving them a lecture. Consider creating opportunities to pair them up with people they look up to and admire.

For Gen Z

While you might feel uncertain about the future and your capacity to lead right now, you can develop the skills you need. Your natural energy for sourcing feedback and devouring other external sources of information is a superpower, so don't be afraid to use it to your advantage. Ask Gen X leaders for step-by-step explanations for how they articulate their vision, know what to work on and see initiatives through from start to finish.

Lean into how you can become more comfortable with ambiguity and big picture thinking, where you don't have all the answers before you begin. Start exploring ways to speed up the time it takes to turn your ideas into action. And cultivate your bravery to set big goals, even if you're not sure yet on the steps to get there.

Gen Z's natural energy for sourcing feedback and devouring other external sources of information is a superpower, so don't be afraid to use it to your advantage.



07

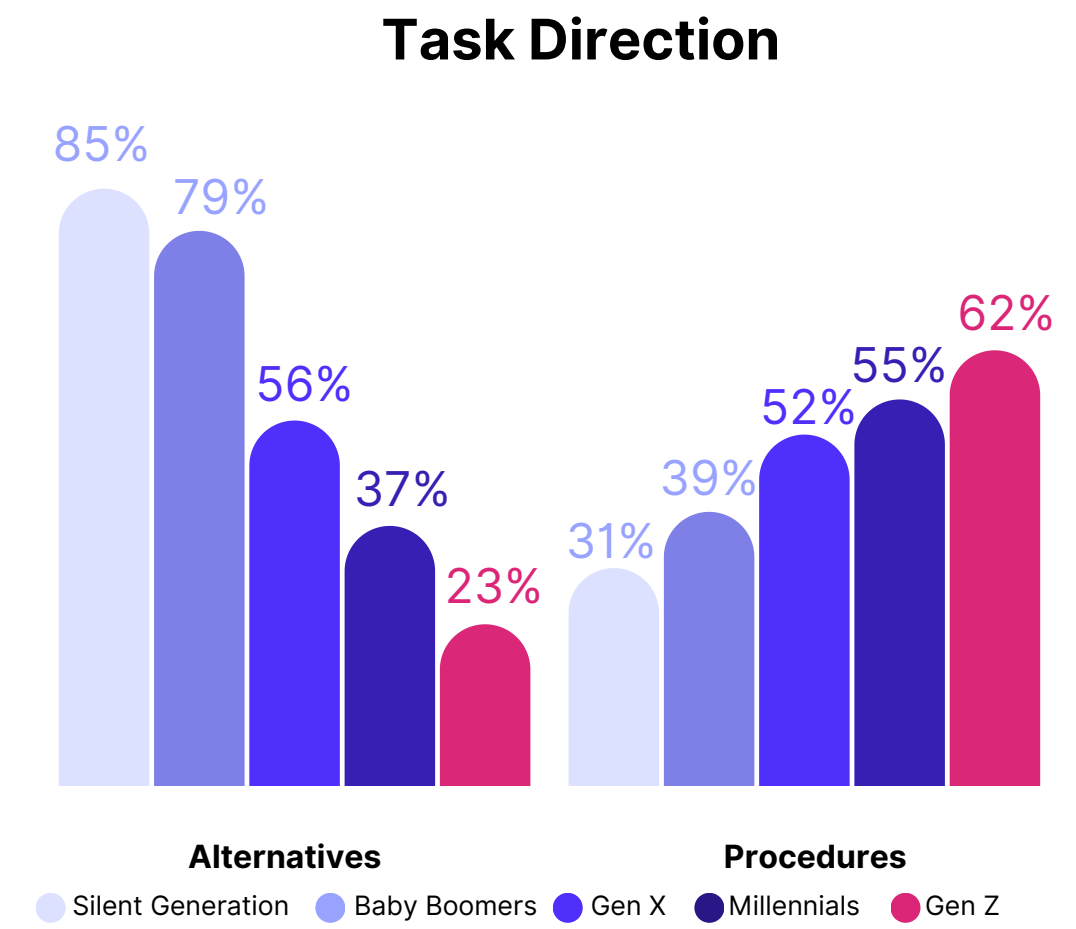
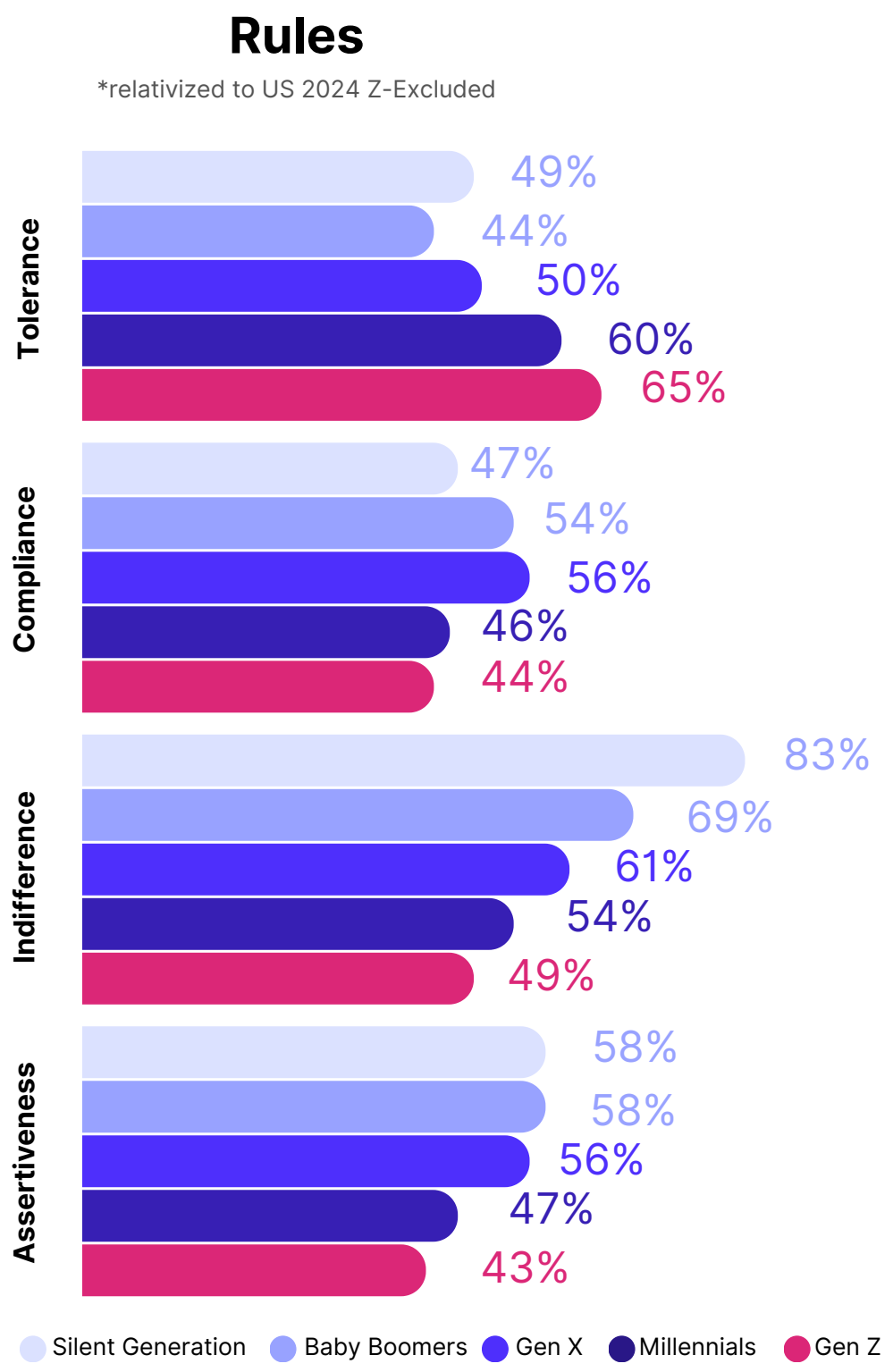
Creating a nourishing workspace for Gen Z

Creating a nourishing workspace for Gen Z

It's no secret that the work environment has evolved. Across the generations, the study showed a 17% decline in a preference for working in environments where social interaction is a part of daily work. Earlier generations are very comfortable working in-person in offices alongside their teammates, whereas later generations are more productive in spaces where they can be alone with minimal disruptions to workflow. This could be a private space within an office, like a closed pod or quiet nook, or a working from home setup.

The rise of hybrid and remote working has impacted the kind of environments conducive to peak performance across the generations. The study highlights that although there's a shift towards more solo working environments for Millennials and Gen Z, all generations still gain some energy from being connected and engaged with each other at work. In terms of work culture, Gen Z feels connected to their team via the digital tools they use, like Slack, online communities, WhatsApp and video calls.

Gen Z wants to work in a culture where everybody is treated as an individual, but one that's supported by strong principles and values.



So while a call to return to a 100% in-person office environment may feel natural for earlier generations to build culture, it likely feels unnecessary for Gen Z. Gen Z wants to work in a culture where everybody is treated as an individual, but one that's supported by strong principles and values. They want to belong to a culture that stands for something important and know that it's not a place where everyone is just doing their own thing.

Creating a nourishing workspace for Gen Z

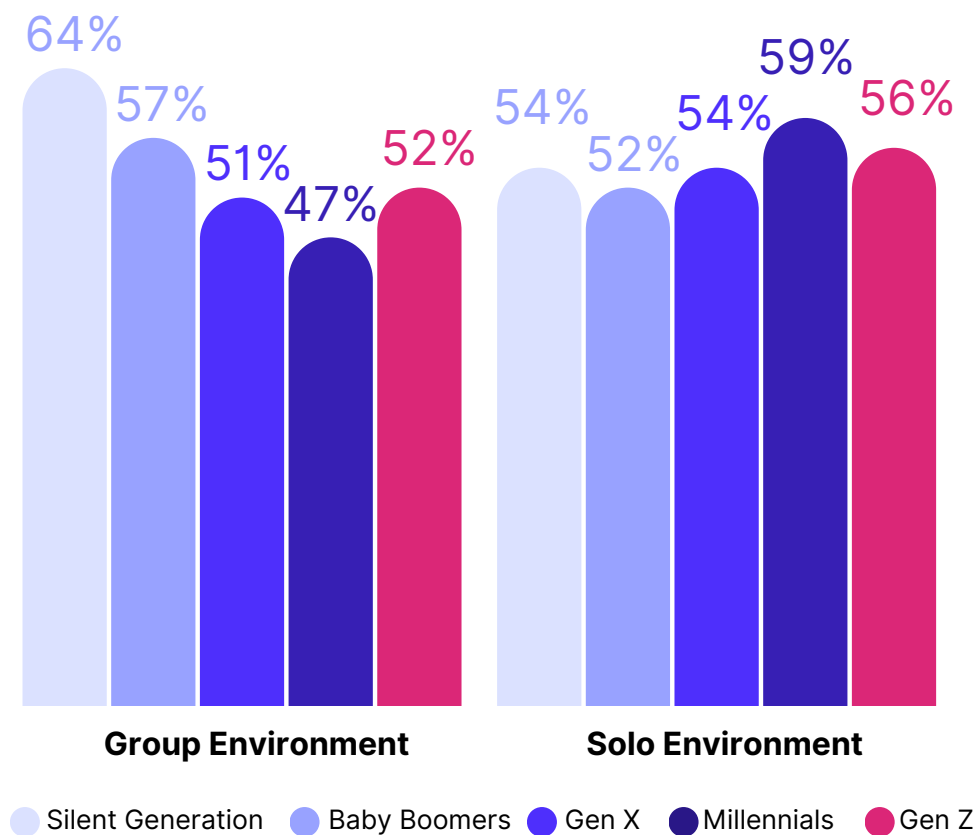
Impact for workplaces

For remote and hybrid teams, it's vital to have tools and technology that facilitate connection, no matter where teams are working from. Without regular contact, earlier generations will become disengaged and unmotivated. Yet if there's too many meetings and not enough 'deep work' time,

later generations are at risk of burnout and can become equally disengaged. There's a balance to be found between working together and working apart. In-person connection is crucial for cultivating a sense of belonging across the generations but be mindful of not making too many changes to the environment which will be very disruptive for Gen Z. A big challenge workplaces will need to address is that Gen Z needs time to learn by observation and by directly engaging with feedback from others. This can help them to onboard rapidly and thrive, especially if they also have time in solo spaces to do their best work.

Environment

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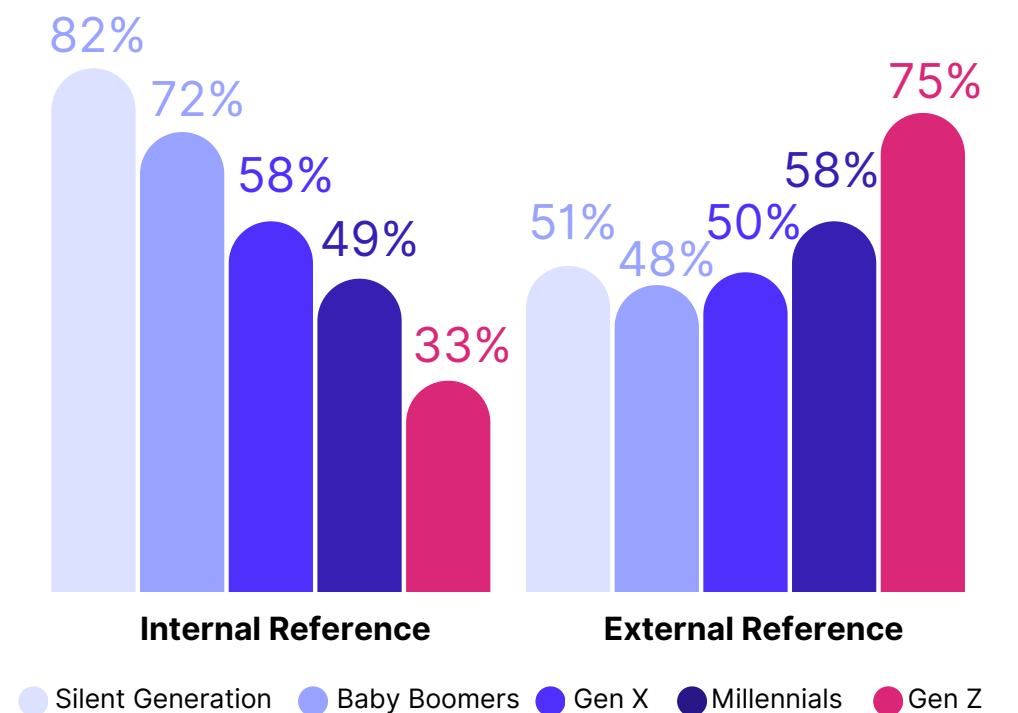


For leaders

For Gen X leaders, make sure your Millennial and Gen Z teammates have regular periods of time where they can work uninterrupted. They don't enjoy last minute meetings or surprise interruptions, so if you want to bring everyone together, schedule it ahead of time.

Gen Z needs time to learn by observation and by directly engaging with feedback from others.

Authority



For Gen Z

Your Baby Boomer and Gen X teammates enjoy catching up and being social as an energizing part of their workday. Let them know when you need time for 'deep work' and when you're available for chit-chat. Communicate your schedule or use cues like emojis in your Slack status to show what you're working on to make it easier for your team to feel connected to you, even when you're not in the same room.



US Gen Z female,
male and non-
binary motivational
differences

US Gen Z female, male & non-binary differences

In the study, we compared the motivations at work in self-identified females, males and non-binary cohorts. For Gen Z females, the findings mirror the trends found in the overall Gen Z cohort, with increases and decreases in motivations moving in the same direction. Yet when we take a look at different comparisons across the generations, there are some significant and interesting findings to unpack.

Gen Z Female vs Gen Z Male

There are few major differences between Gen Z males and females. While both genders are exceptionally detail-oriented (like the rest of the Gen Z cohort), females are more so than males. When it comes to change in the workplace, males will want more stability and routine, even though females will also find rapid change unsettling.

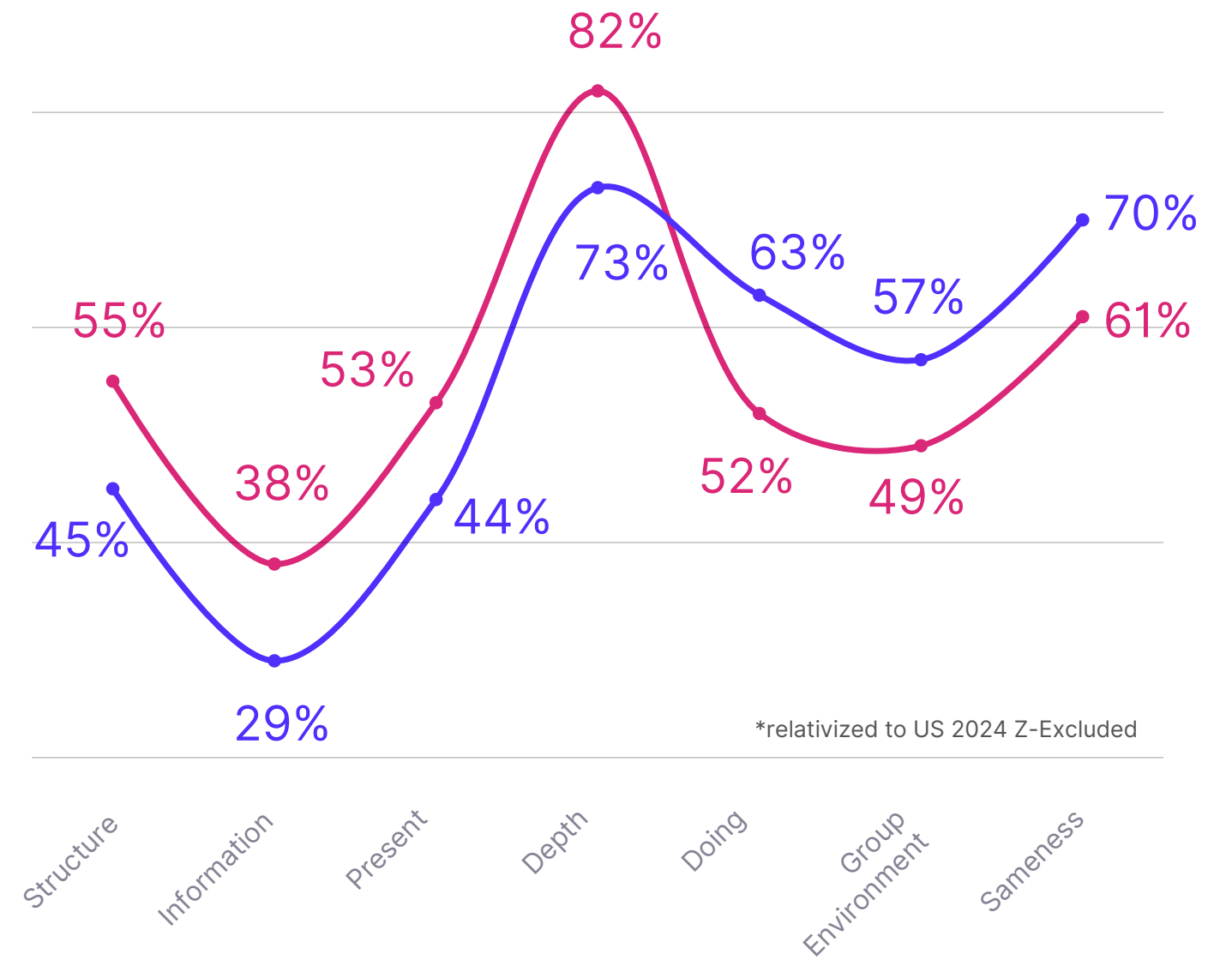
In the work environment, males (more than females) are productive when working around, and being social with, other people.

Females are more concerned with the here and now than their male teammates, paying attention to finding immediate and practical solutions.

They also have a stronger preference for starting with the structure of their work first, and are more interested in working with knowledge and data. Males, however, are more energized by a 'hands-on' approach, needing to experience things first-hand.

Gen Z Female vs Gen Z Male

♀ Gen Z Females ♂ Gen Z Males



US Gen Z female, male & non-binary differences

Gen X Non-binary vs Gen Z Non-binary

Two generations that have fascinating key differences are Gen X non-binary and Gen Z non-binary. Gen X non-binary is more motivated by knowing and following company rules, kickstarting projects, inventing new ways of working and making fast decisions with limited information. All of these activities will zap Gen Z non-binary's energy at work, as their motivation is drawn from other parts of their working life.

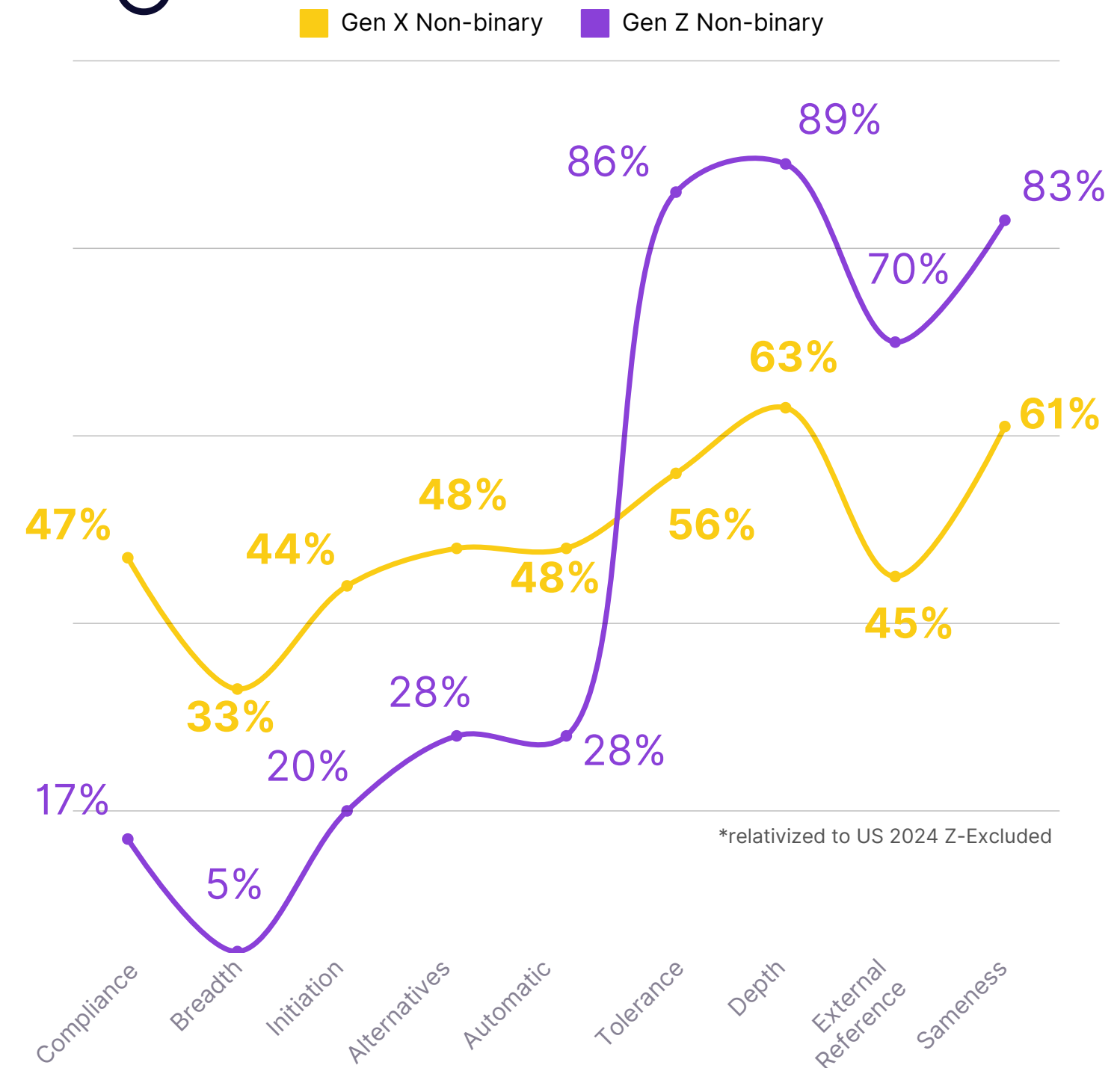
Both Gen X non-binary and Gen Z non-binary do share some commonalities. They're both comfortable in stable routines and find change disruptive in the workplace, especially Gen Z. They both will also find 'big picture thinking' significantly draining, Gen Z even more so. This is likely influenced by the large amount of attention both generations give to drilling down on the specifics. Gen Z non-binary in particular will thrive when immersed in the details, a motivation they share with the Gen Z cohort overall.

For Gen Z non-binary, they're incredibly inclusive at work and enjoy making room for everyone's unique individuality.

They also will need feedback and other pieces of information to support their decision-making, instead of relying on their own intuition, which is where they differ from their Gen X non-binary teammates.



Gen X Non-binary vs Gen Z Non-binary

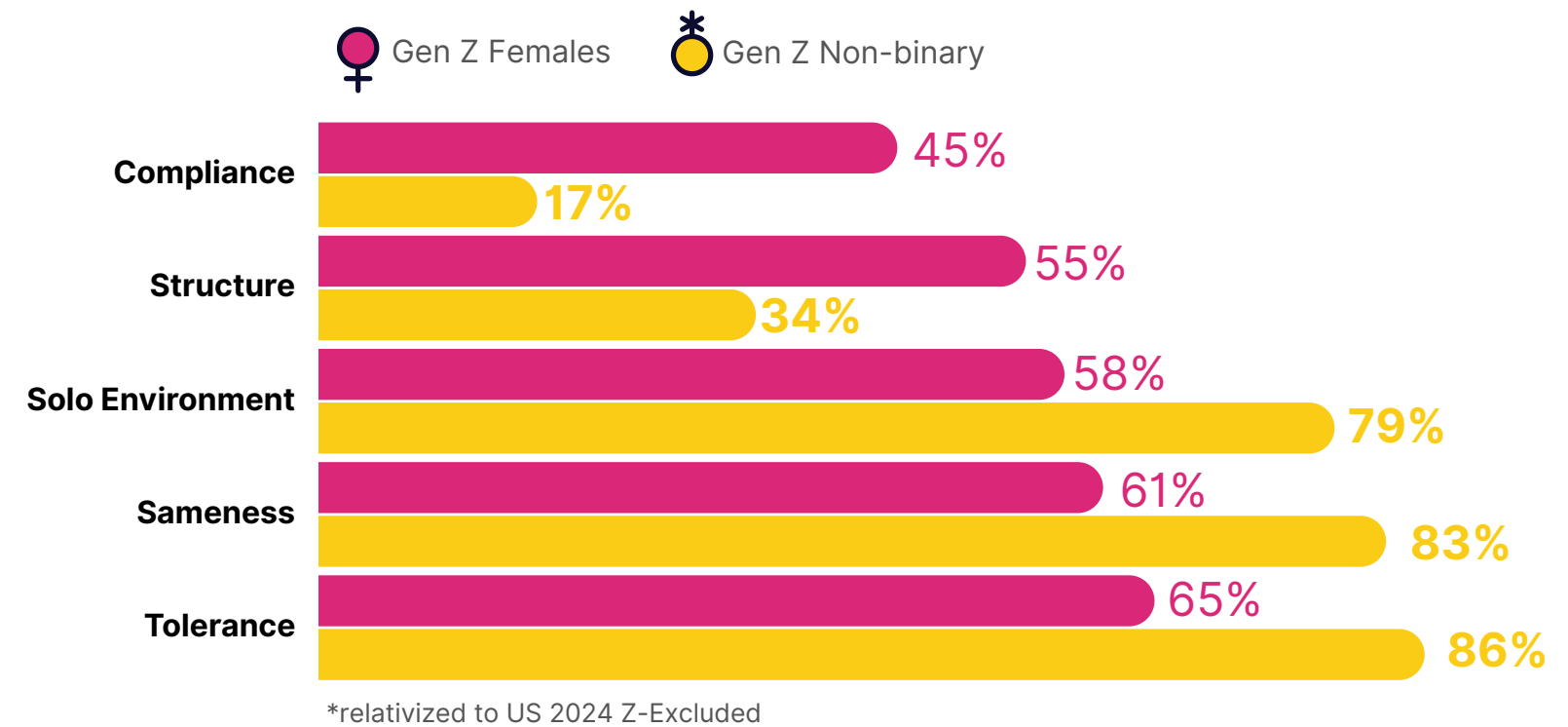


US Gen Z female, male & non-binary differences

Gen Z Female vs Gen Z Non-binary

The difference between these two cohorts is subtle yet still significant. Gen Z non-binary finds company rules very demotivating when compared to Gen Z females.

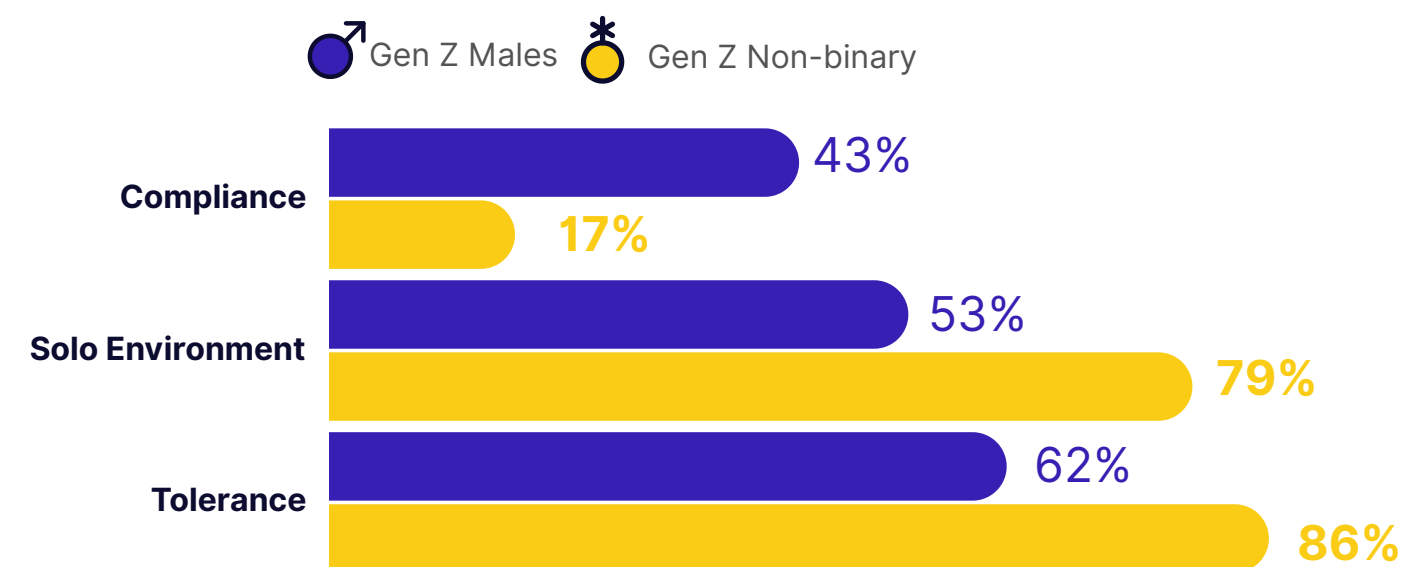
Both Gen Z females and Gen Z non-binary value inclusivity at work, Gen Z non-binary more so, and both cohorts will find sudden changes stressful, preferring stable routines over constant disruptions to their workplace. Similarly, both will need uninterrupted solo time at work to focus, which is particularly important for Gen Z non-binary. And in terms of tasks, Gen Z females like to start by structuring their work out more than Gen Z non-binary does.



Gen Z Male vs Gen Z Non-binary

An interesting finding that the study revealed is that the differences between Gen Z males and Gen Z non-binary in terms of following rules and work environment. This is also mirrored in the differences that US Gen Z males and females have with Gen Z non-binary.

Gen Z males prefer learning, following and reinforcing company rules more than Gen Z non-binary does. Solo workspaces are far more productive for Gen Z non-binary than Gen Z males. And additionally, inclusivity is prized more highly by Gen Z non-binary, despite it still being important to Gen Z males.





Recommendations

Future research

The study has highlighted the opportunity and need for further research into how future generations can be supported to develop the motivations, skills and mindsets required for the future of work, such as:

- A study of the attitudes and motivations of Gen Z entrepreneurs and business-builders
- The influence of neurodiversity at work
- Impact of AI and technology on work motivations
- Gen Z longitudinal study
- Gen Alpha longitudinal study
- The future of organizational studies.

Partner with Marlee

to supercharge your research and gain valuable insights about what motivates people in your workplace












Recommendations

Finding Common Ground - Cheat Sheet

This cheat sheet is designed to help you work more productively with your teammates. It's a tool you can use when you collaborate, are in meetings or want deeper alignment with others in the workplace.

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
 Connection & Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to visuals & diagrams Enjoys talking things through Gets 'hands on' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gets 'hands on' Responds to visuals & diagrams Enjoys talking things through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loves lots of detail Gets 'hands on' Responds to written text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs lots of details Gets 'hands on' Responds to written text
 Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal-oriented Takes action fast Avoids problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal-oriented problem solvers Takes action at various speeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem solvers Pauses before taking action Won't enjoy starting projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem solvers Slower to take action Won't naturally start projects
 Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to know the 'why' Loves options & inventing new ways Highly intuitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very intuitive Enjoys a step-by-step plan Takes sole responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wants to dive right into work Energized by details Needs feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wants to dive right into details Loves a step-by-step plan Needs immediate & constant feedback
 Developing Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values independent thinking Follows intuition Values lots of changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values independent thinking Needs regular check-ins Introduce change gently, providing support & encouragement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys solving problems Values feedback Introduce change gently, providing support & encouragement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly values feedback Introduce change gently, providing support & encouragement Performs effectively when solving problems
 Hiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accumulates achievements Role title is very important Drawn to highly creative / strategic roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys autonomous roles Needs clear rules & expectations Role title is important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive culture is important Drawn to creative / strategic roles Craves stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Craves stability Inclusive culture is important Deadline & schedule driven
 Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads by trusting their gut Respects hierarchy Focuses on outcomes / goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads by internal compass Respects hierarchy Focuses on solving problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads by empowering others Considers feedback & multiple perspectives before deciding Focuses on solving problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads by empowering others Enjoys shared responsibility Sources feedback before deciding
 Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys in-person workspaces Loves inventing new ways to work Needs to think outside of the box 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works autonomously Flexible in ways of working Needs some step-by-step processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prefers uninterrupted spaces Avoids holding people to rules Thrives with feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoids holding people to rules observation Thrives with feedback Prefers uninterrupted workspaces

Methodology


Quantitative methodology was used to measure cultural differences in attitudes and motivations at work between global samples of each generation between and including, The Silent Generation to Gen Z and US samples of each generation between and including, The Silent Generation to Gen Z.

With a construct reliability of 95%-98% (Harshman and Merlevede, 2010) the method used the 40-question *Inventory of Work Attitude and Motivation* (Powell, 2009) to specifically measure attitude and motivation in the context of work. Participants answered 40 questions, ranking 5 possible forced answers into a hierarchy of highest to lowest preference, resulting in a total of 200 items, measuring all 48 motivational preferences at least 4 times (Powell, 2009).

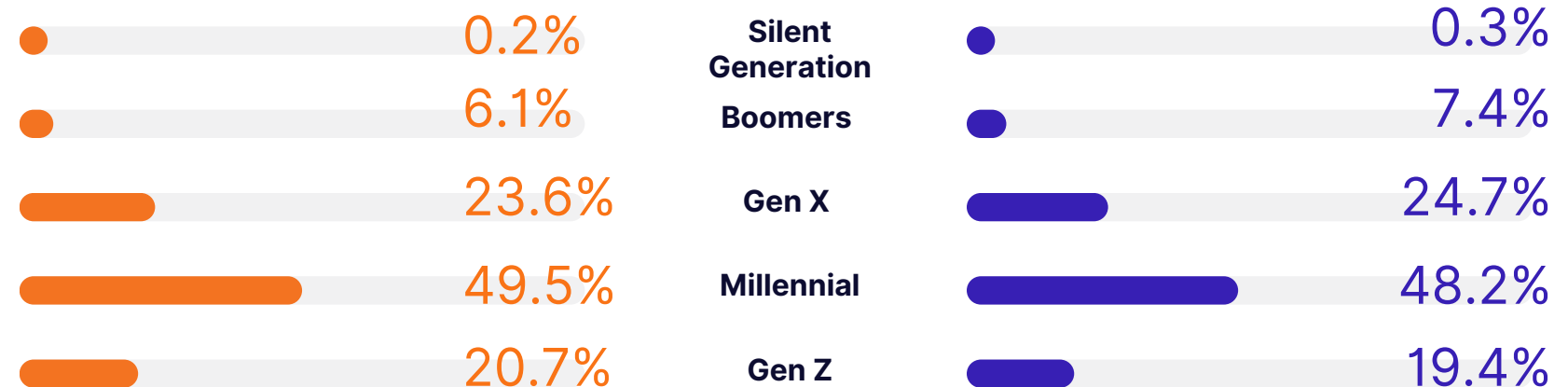
Comparative analysis was run between global generations and US generations for all 48 motivational preferences including Absolute and Relative Mean Percentage, Relative Distance Percentage, Standard Deviation, Standard Error, T-test, F-test, Statistical Significance and Effect Size between Generations and also relative to a probable stratified sample of the 2024 US Workforce with Gen Z excluded. All findings shared in this white paper reflect findings with statistical significance between $p < .05$ and $p < .001$. Detailed statistics have not been published in this paper.

Sampling

Global & US Generational Samples

Global Generation Attitudes and Motivation Samples
 n=395,266 

US Generation Attitudes and Motivations Samples
 n= 88,393 

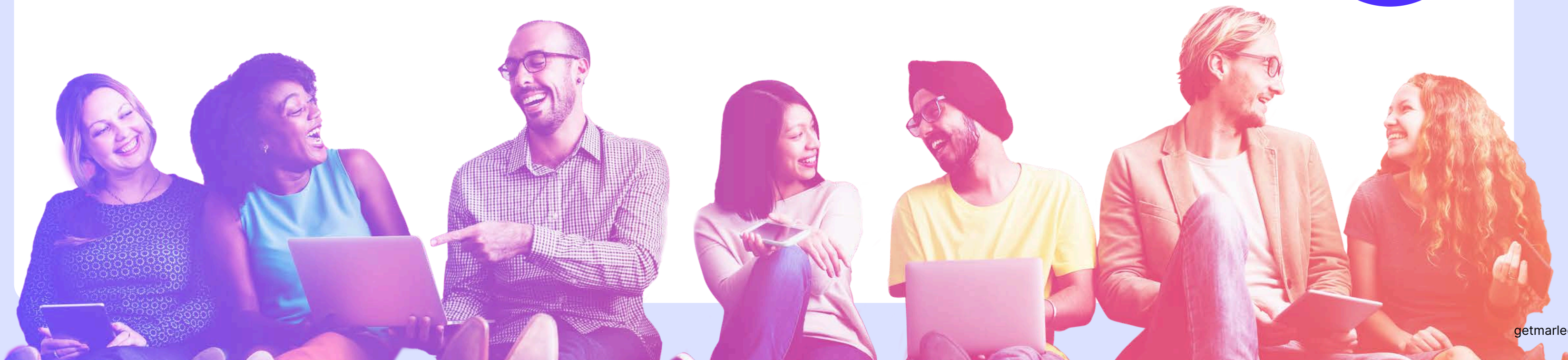
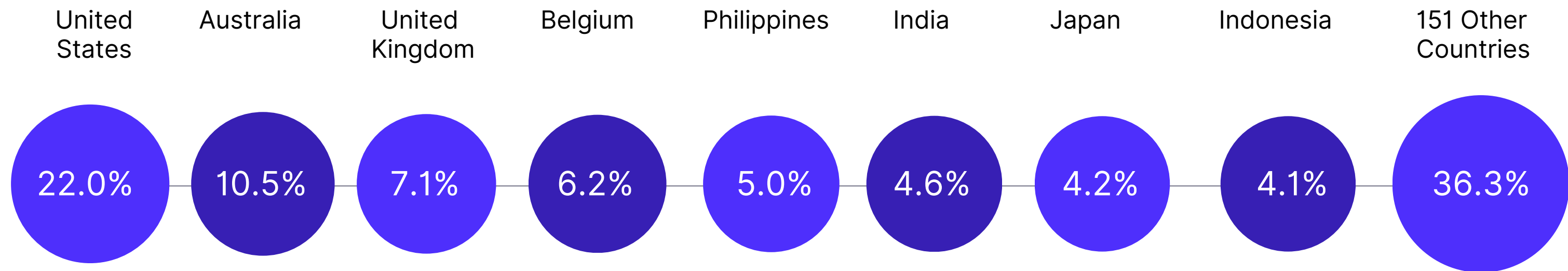


US Working Population Sample

One probable stratified sample was created for the attitudes and motivations of the current US workforce (n=47,735). Stratified fractions used in the sample were used as a guide from the most recent occupations reported on by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics published in July 2024. US Generation Z were then removed from probable stratified samples to result in a final US Standard Workforce (2024) without Gen Z (n=35,987).

Demographics

Countries in Global Generation Sample

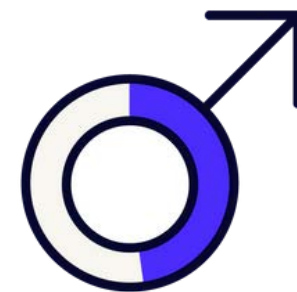




Global Generation Gender Samples



Females
50.3%



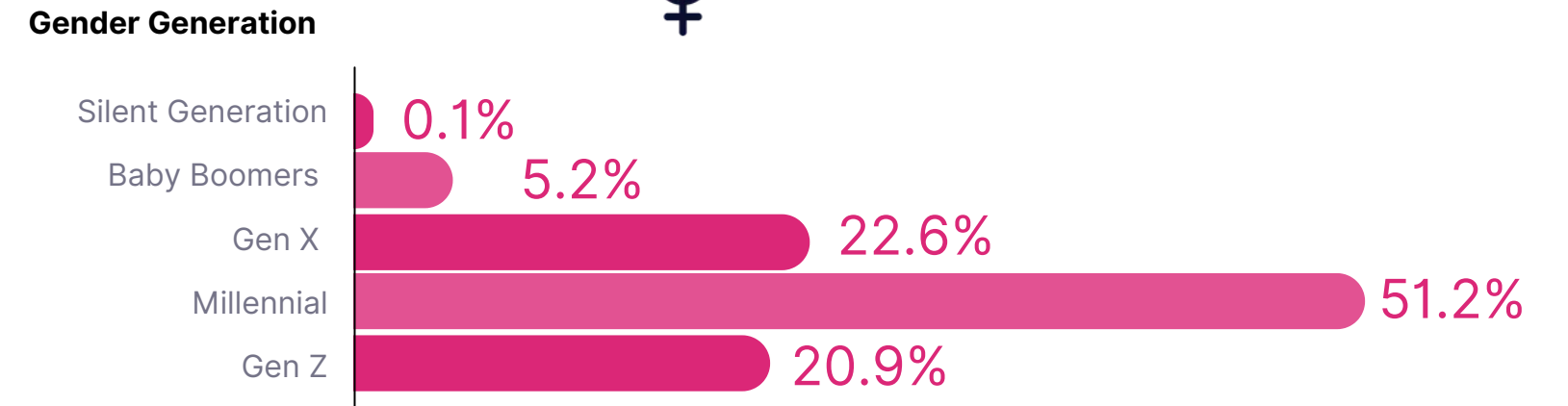
Males
48.4%



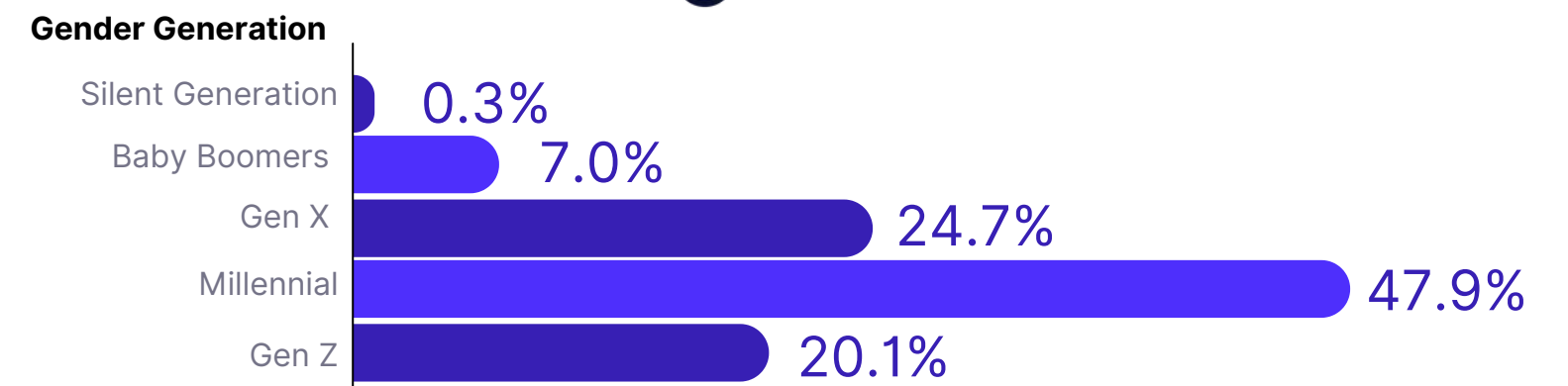
Non-binary
1.3%

Demographics

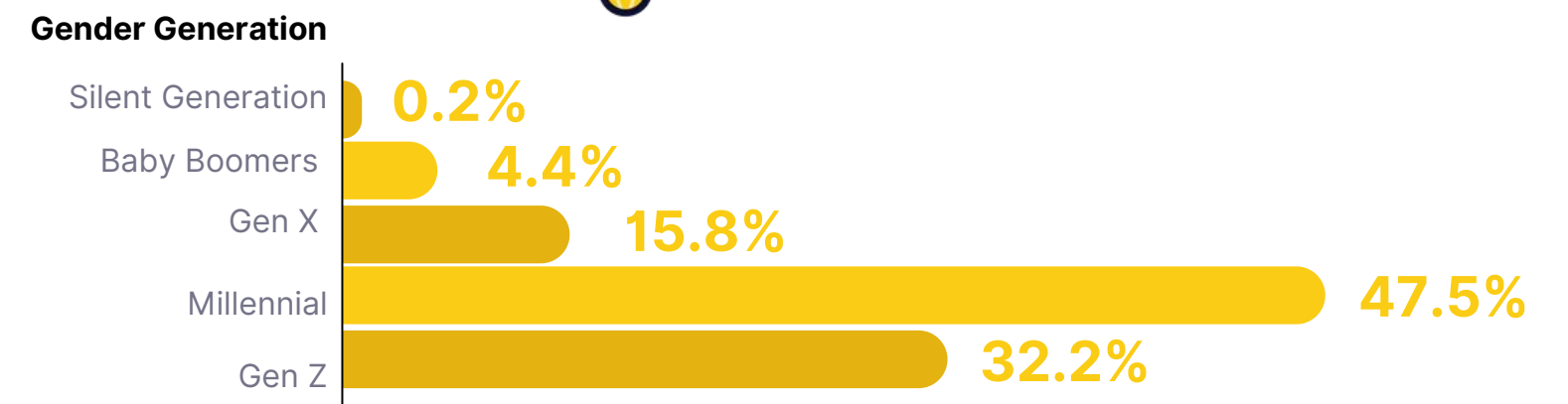
♀ Global Female



♂ Global Male



⚡ Global Non-binary



Demographics

US Generation Gender Samples

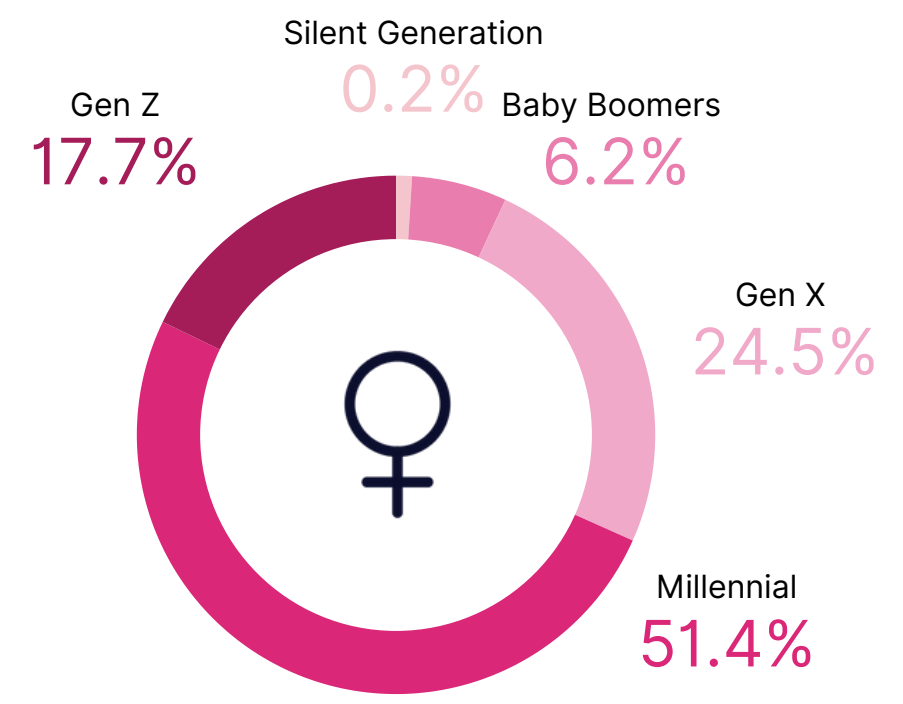


US Non-binary
1.6%

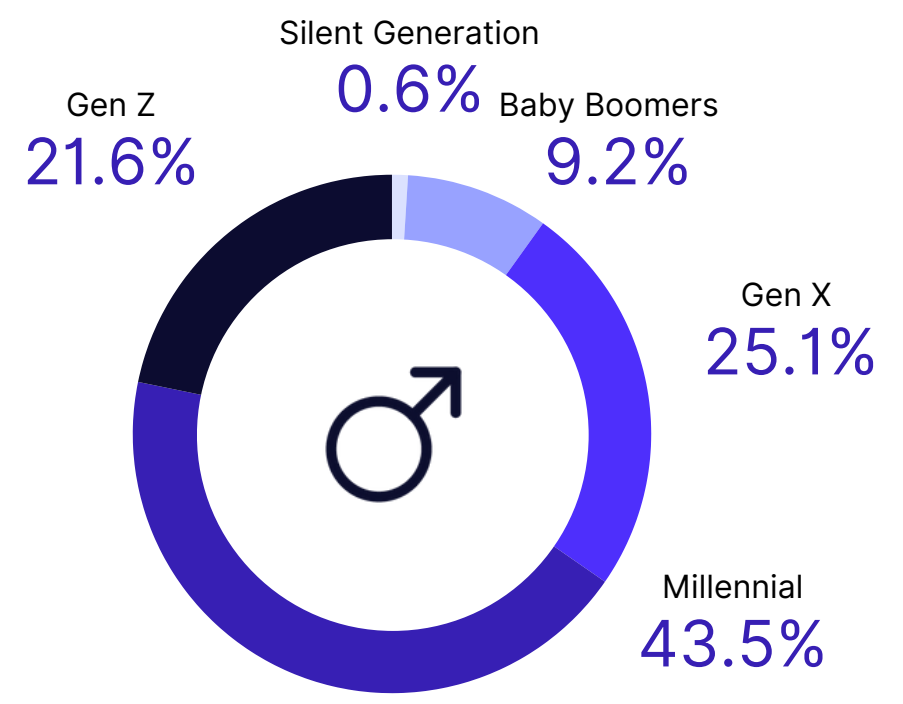
US Males
39.0%

US Females
59.4%

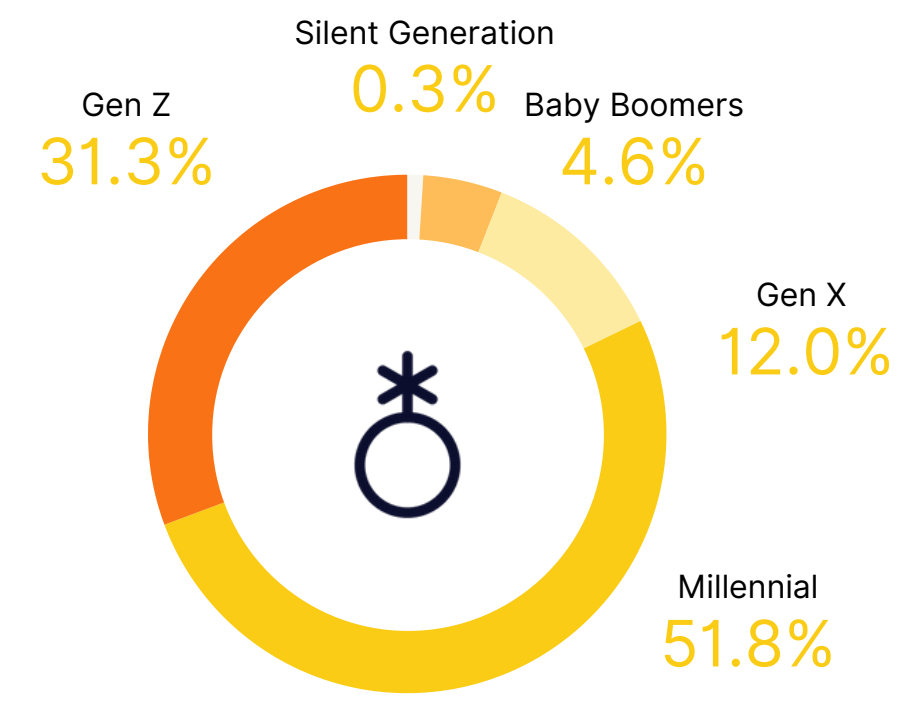
US Female Gender Generation



US Male Gender Generation

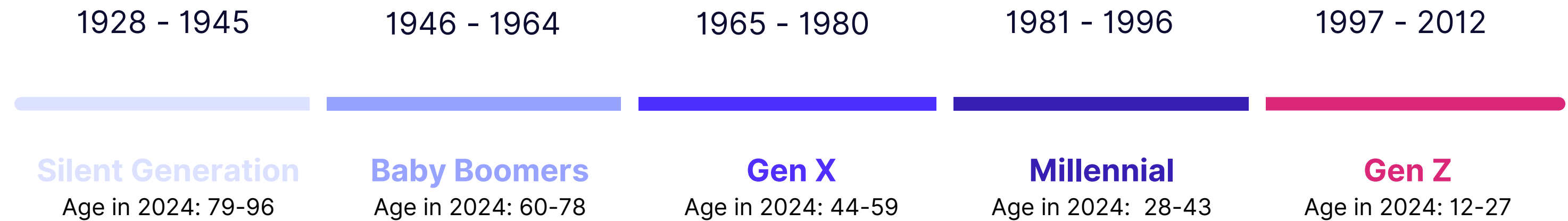


US Non-binary Gender Generation



Demographics

Age Range



Pew Research Center. (2015). The whys and hows of generations research.

About Marlee

Research Team

Marlee's Research team's mission is to deeply understand people's motivations worldwide so that *everyone* can thrive in the future of work. We see a future where cognitive diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively celebrated in the workplace.

Through scientific methods and analysis, we prioritize research programs with the hopeful intent to find key insights that can help to design and cultivate thriving work cultures. This study has a particular focus on Generation Z's unique needs.

By leveraging Marlee's proprietary global data set on human motivation and our data models and benchmarking tools, Marlee provides actionable insights in beautiful data visualizations. These are available in whitepapers and are also accessible for individuals and teams to personally benchmark themselves in the Marlee web app.

The Marlee Culture Map allows leaders and workplaces to study the unique culture of the entire company and the teams within it. The report provides a strategic overview of organizational culture, enabling data-driven decisions to optimize workplace collaboration and employee satisfaction.



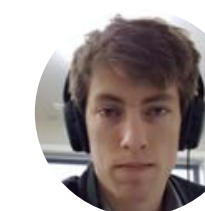
Michelle Duval
Research Design



Dr Marion Piper
Research Writing



Jack Rowland
Analysis



Daniel Frenda
Data & Analysis



Emily Willis
Content



Tania Schoeman
Design



Dr Carl Harshman
Methodology



**Bethany Cutmore
Scott**
Product



**Edward
Thomson**
Design & Product



**Dr Hannah
Clark-Younger**
AI & Ethics



Hazel Watson-Smith
AI



Mekyal Amiri
AI



Jade Grimwood
Leadership
Operations



**Patrick
Merlevede**
Methodology



**Jon
Whitby**
Data

About Marlee

Marlee is a collaboration and performance AI that helps individuals and teams bring out the best in each other.

Providing personalized insights in just minutes, with Marlee, you can:



Motivate yourself and your team:

Gain higher self-awareness about your motivations and unique work styles.



Help your team perform at their best:

Marlee unlocks key insights, enabling team members to feel seen and accepted so everyone feels safe to be themselves at work.



Collaborate more effectively:

Marlee's science-backed questions reveal communication styles for each team member, enabling seamless collaboration.



Hire top talent:

Narrowing down a huge field of job applications can be overwhelming. Marlee helps you pinpoint high performers.

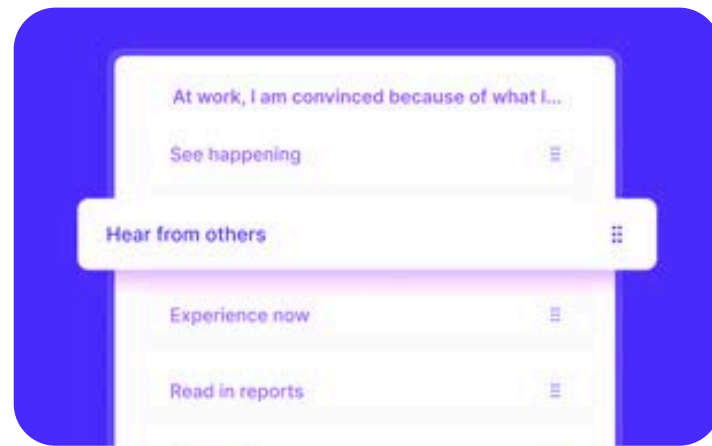
Marlee is used by teams from more than 90,000 organizations in 190+ countries (and 90% of Fortune 100 companies).



About Marlee

How Marlee works

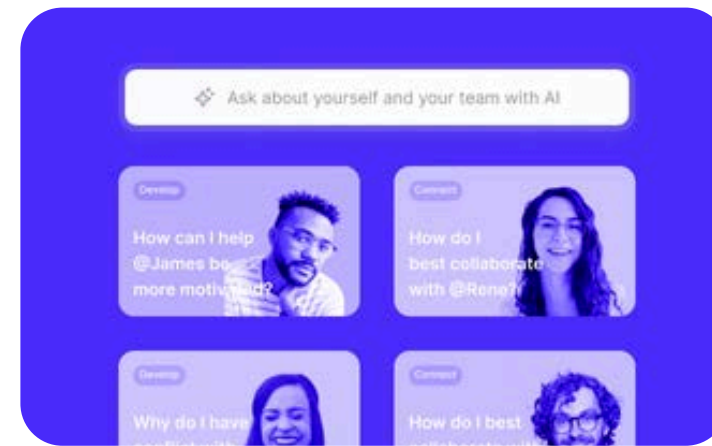
Discover what motivates you



The more questions you answer on your work style, the more accurate Marlee's feedback and coaching will be.



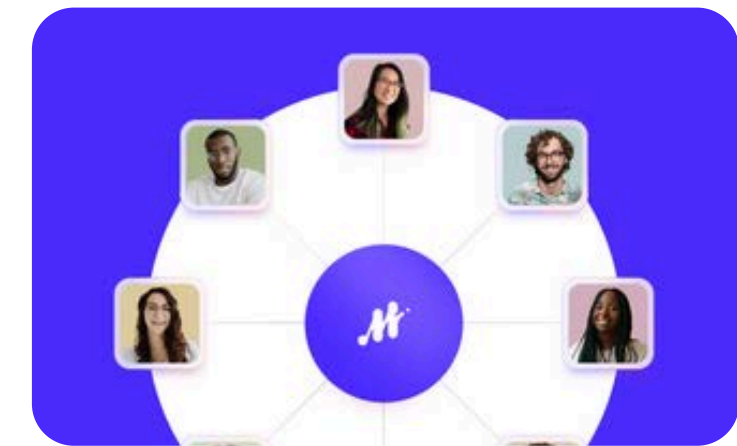
Gain insights about yourself



Ask Marlee questions like "What is my biggest blind spot?" for personalized insights based on your motivations.



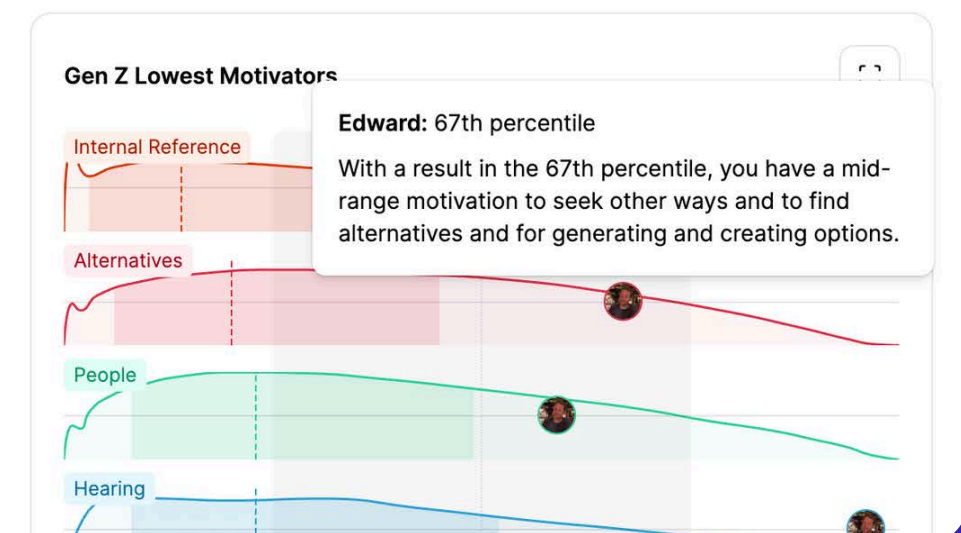
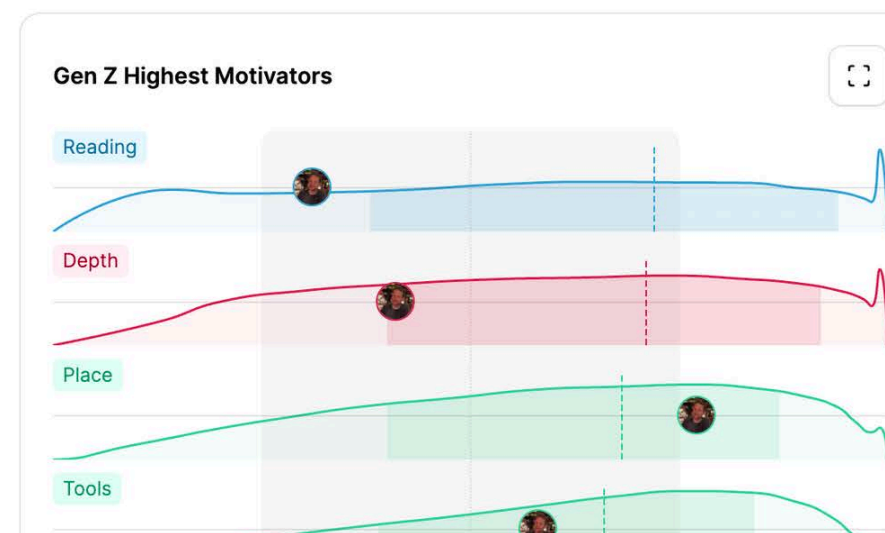
Develop your dream team



Invite your team so Marlee can help you understand your similarities, differences and how you can bring out the best in each other.

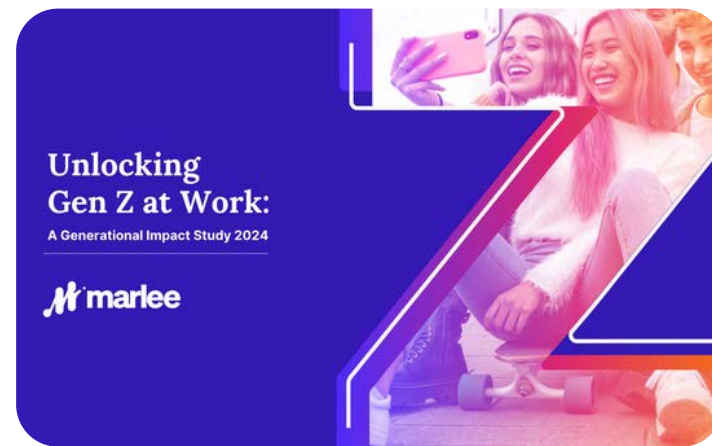
Try your first Marlee Board for free

Boards show the highest and lowest motivators for each generation in the workplace. See how you and your team compare to Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, or Baby Boomers.



Using these insights

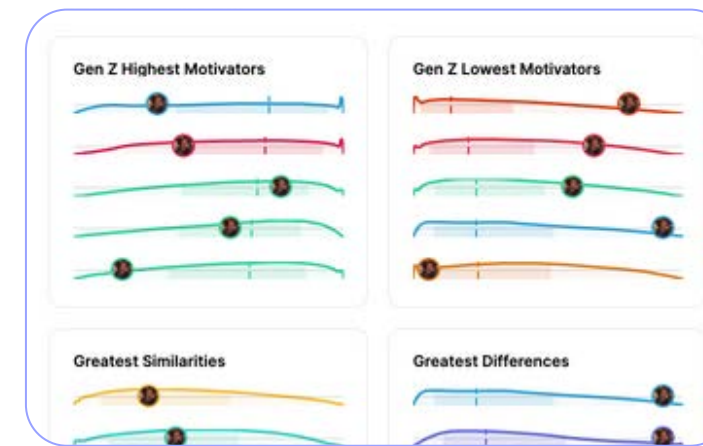
Explore the findings



Uncover two decades of research on generational workplace attitudes and motivations.

&

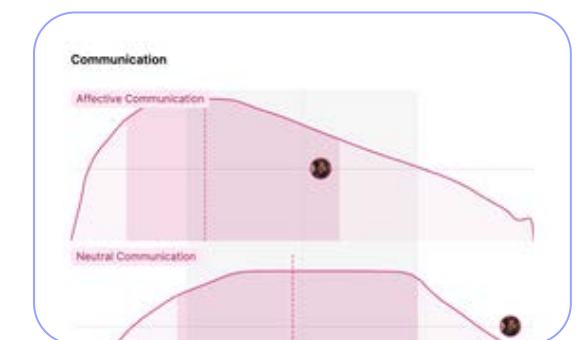
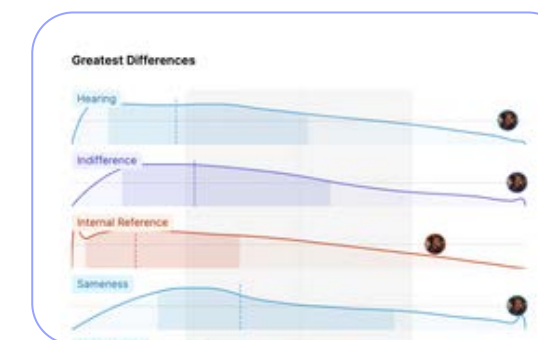
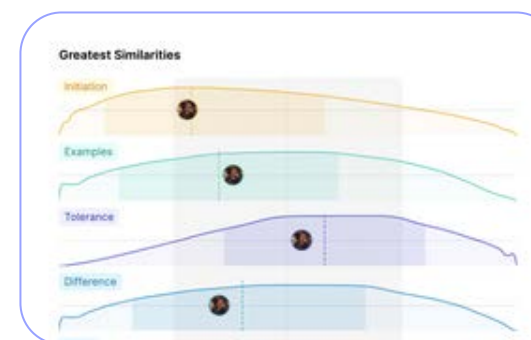
Compare yourself to Gen Z



Gauge your alignment with Gen Z and other generations through Marlee's live and free benchmarking technology.

Activate insights for you and your team

Experience these insights live in the Marlee app. Answer questions about your work motivations and instantly compare your results with generational trends. Access personalized, real-time data for yourself and your team, bringing this research to life in your own context.





Enterprise and strategic partnerships



Annie Luu



Belinda Field

Our team would love to connect with you

Discover how Marlee's innovative collaboration and performance technology can improve your team's motivation, connection, and development.

Let's explore how Marlee's benchmarking success models can be customized to address your unique organizational needs and goals.



Email us at hello@getmarlee.com