

The workforce of tomorrow

How can you ensure that four generations working side by side bring out the best in one another? This is one of the key themes explored in our Trend Report. In this report, BDO looks ahead to 2030 together with trendwatcher Tom Palmaerts. We show how Belgian companies can shape the future with agility and confidence. The workforce of tomorrow draws its strength from diversity.



The workforce of tomorrow

The workplace is changing rapidly. New terms such as Bare Minimum Monday¹, quiet quitting² or mouse jiggling³ are emerging in the media and paint a picture of a generation that is supposedly difficult to manage. Still, this is not just about Generation Z. Today four generations are working side by side: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z. And Generation Alpha is about to be added to the mix. It's not age but expectations, ambitions and working styles that simultaneously clash with and complement each other.

"An organisation only fully harnesses its potential when different generations work together but such cooperation is not self-evident. For instance, younger colleagues are very familiar with the use of AI, whereas the older generations are strongly grounded in analytical reflection. Those differences may cause friction but that is precisely where the strength of an organisation lies. Once we learn to deal with different paces, different communication styles and different expectations, we can build teams that make better decisions than any single generation. The generational mix makes us more creative, more innovative and more resilient."

Peter Van Laer, CEO BDO Belgium

BABY BOOMERS (1946–1964)

The children of the post-war baby boom grew up with frugality but managed to build up considerable wealth in the course of their careers, some €800 billion in Belgium alone. Many boomers are nearing retirement but a fair percentage are not quite ready to be put out to pasture. Through the flexi-status an increasing number of over 65s choose to continue working part-time. These are the so-called 'boomerang boomers'. Thanks to their experience and loyalty, they are valuable links in the new flexirent era⁴.

Takeaway: put the experience of boomers to best use through flexible deployment, mentoring and part-time assignments.

GENERATION X (1965–1980)

Generation X grew up in the MTV era. Gen X'ers are known for their discipline and dedication. They often bridge the gap between the idealistic boomers and the pragmatic millennials. Today they hold key positions in company management. They value structure and hierarchy but also exhibit down-to-earth pragmatism: meetings must be short and focused. This generation forms the backbone of many organisations.

Takeaway: give Gen X'ers clear roles and responsibility but acknowledge their need for efficiency and pragmatism.



¹ A trend in which employees deliberately start their week slowly and with minimal effort in order to counter stress and burnout. ² Not resigning literally but keeping strictly to one's job description, without additional tasks or engagement. ³ A digital trick to appear active online while working from home, for example by using software that automatically moves the computer mouse.

⁴ Semi-retired.

MILLENNIALS (1981–1996)

Millennials juggle work, family and social obligations, often complemented with projects such as home renovation. They grew up with the message that anything is possible. This makes them optimistic but also causes stress of choice. Millennials want freedom to organise their work and are constantly searching for the perfect balance between ambition and well-being. Their busy schedules and high expectations make them demanding but also enterprising and creative.

Takeaway: offer flexibility in work organisation and create opportunities for growth and personal development.

GENERATION Z (1997–2012)

The youngest employees combine boldness and innovation with a strong individualistic streak. Their parents, usually Generation X, taught them that hard work pays off but at the same time they grew up in a digital and climate-conscious world. This explains their paradox: on the one hand they make sustainable choices, such as buying second-hand fashion, but on the other hand they are tempted by the glitter and luxury on social media. In the workplace Gen Z'ers favour informal, fast and direct communication. They expect short feedback loops and address colleagues without detours. At first sight this may seem arrogant but more than anything else it is a different way of communicating.

Takeaway: offer Gen Z frequent, informal feedback and recognise their direct communication as a strength, not as a lack of respect.

GENERATIONAL MIX AS AN ASSET

The first representatives of Generation Alpha will soon enter the labour market. Companies that invest in a mix of ages are stronger. Reverse mentoring gives young people the chance to share their digital knowledge, while experienced employees provide context and strategic insight in return. Research shows that someone in their

sixties who launches a start-up is three times more likely to succeed than someone in their twenties, mainly because older entrepreneurs surround themselves with teams of different ages.

Takeaway: promote active and mutual knowledge exchange between generations in your organisation.

WAR FOR TALENT: SHIFT TOWARDS GROWTH AND EXPERTISE

The war for talent is not over, it's changing shape. It increasingly centres around two groups: young high potentials who make a difference through ambition, and mid-level experts who drive companies forward with their experience. Growth is essential to both groups. The main reason why employees leave their job is not salary but the feeling they are no longer learning. Investments in training and development remain the key to retention.

Takeaway: make learning and development central to your HR policy as a lever for retention and growth.

"In a world that changes faster than ever, it is vital to continuously enhance knowledge and keep honing skills. At BDO we believe that learning is an ongoing process and it is a principle we implement everywhere – on the work floor, through feedback from colleagues and clients, through personal development plans and in training sessions and workshops. There is no standard route; everyone shapes their own tailored learning path, geared to their ambitions, strengths and future plans. We work towards these goals on a daily basis under the motto 'Let's grow together'."

Wim Galbusera, HR Director
BDO Belgium



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