

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2026 Edition

Perspective

A New Generation of Freelancers

Take a closer look at your teams

An interesting phenomenon that is developing around younger workers is that they seem to prefer working freelance or on projects versus consistent work with one organization. A recent study by the Upwork Research Institute found that over half of Gen Z workers are taking on freelance projects and of that group, 53 percent are freelancing full time. This compares to 44 percent of Millennials, 30 percent of Gen X and 26 percent of Baby Boomers who prefer freelance work.

It isn't that these younger workers are slacking off. On average, they report working at least 40 hours per week on a variety of projects and a third of them said they had been working like this for over two years. What does this say about Gen Z workers? To refresh your memory, Gen Z is the demographic cohort that is most frequently described as those born between 1997 and 2012.

The managing director of the Upwork Research Institute says that Gen Z workers want "freedom, control and autonomy that allows them to take advantage of new, distributed ways of working that ultimately impact their performance and financial stability." Clearly, they are more independent and have more of an entrepreneurial mindset than their older brothers and sisters. Freelance work gives them the opportunity to be their own boss and create a more flexible career path than being in a traditional organization.

The research into Gen Z and freelance work reveals even more reasons why they like working in this format. Key is flexibility, with 70 percent saying that is very important to them, working where they choose is another factor identified by 64 percent. Other factors include the ability to pursue work they are passionate about and to take more control over their personal development and career paths.

There is no doubt that the shape and nature of work and employment is in a state of flux right now. So, what should employers do to adapt to how newer workers might be choosing to work freelance style? If we think about things differently, we may be able to make the shift in a way that acknowledges the needs of Gen Z workers and still accomplish our organizational goals. One suggestion from workplace experts is that we should be flexible and maybe consider putting together teams and work groups of freelance and full-time employees. Each can contribute a piece to the puzzle and that should work for everyone.

Those employers who learn these lessons first will get a leg up on everyone else as we navigate our way through the next generation of workers.

Sharlene Rollins is Manager, Administration for IPM [Institute of Professional Management].



Sharlene Rollins
RPR
Manager,
Administration