ENGAGING GENERATION Z
IN THE CLASSROOM

HOW TO ENSURE SUCCESS
FOR THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

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MARKETING STRATEGY | DIGITAL | INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

With the creation of the internet in the mid-90's came the birth of a new generation, one that has grown up never knowing a world without computer screens or high-speed connections. This cohort of digital natives is currently occupying college and university campuses from across the globe. Not entirely like their predecessors, the Millennials, this generation, known as generation Z, has their own unique beliefs, behaviors and ways of learning.

Today's instructors in higher education and executive courses should evaluate and adapt their teaching methods to make sure that this emerging generation obtains the key skills in the classroom that they'll need to thrive in tomorrow's workforce.

THE FACES BEHIND GENERATION Z

Generation Z encompasses those who were born between 1995 to 2010. These individuals have been predominantly molded by technological advancements, most markedly the rise of the internet, and a tumultuous socio-economical context, making them highly adaptable and at ease with change, but more wary and less optimistic than their older counterparts, the Millennials.

Perhaps as a reaction to this rocky and uncertain upbringing, Generation Z believe in social justice, equality and the power to make the world a better place (1).

With access to fast internet and smartphones starting at a very young age, no other generation has had such a plethora of information so easily accessible at their fingertips. As a result, they are well-informed (though not necessarily profoundly or accurately) on a vast array of topics and are tech-savvy.

Some additional insights that set Generation Z apart:

- Never knew a world without internet
- Little to no tolerance for being without digital resources
- Tend to have a shorter attention span (8 seconds on average)

- Easily seek answers via Google or Youtube, but don't necessarily evaluate their sources
- Prefer watching videos to reading articles
- Tend to text or instant message instead of emailing

It's no surprise that this generation's upbringing has had an impact on how they learn in a variety of ways (2).

LEARNING PREFERENCES

As aforementioned, Generation Z's shortened attention span has impacted the way that they prefer to learn. What researchers have noticed is that these learners tend to have trouble concentrating and focusing on longer, more complex or involved problems (3). Traditional long readings & case studies in written format, or lectures may be ineffective.

Additionally, the use of multimedia devices with a focus on video has resulted in an increased development of the visual ability portion of these learners' cognitive functions (4).

Some research has even shown that this generation's brains have developed differently and are structurally unique from previous generations. The part of the brain responsible for visual ability is far more developed, making visual forms of learning more effective.

Interactive games, collaborative projects and challenges tend to be the best form of learning for this cohort (5).

More specifically, educators must employ teaching tactics outside of traditional methods such as lectures. The learning needs (6) of Gen Zers include:

Fast delivery of content, data and graphics

A trial and error approach

Integration of interactive media

Problem-solving assignments and exercises

Multi-tasking

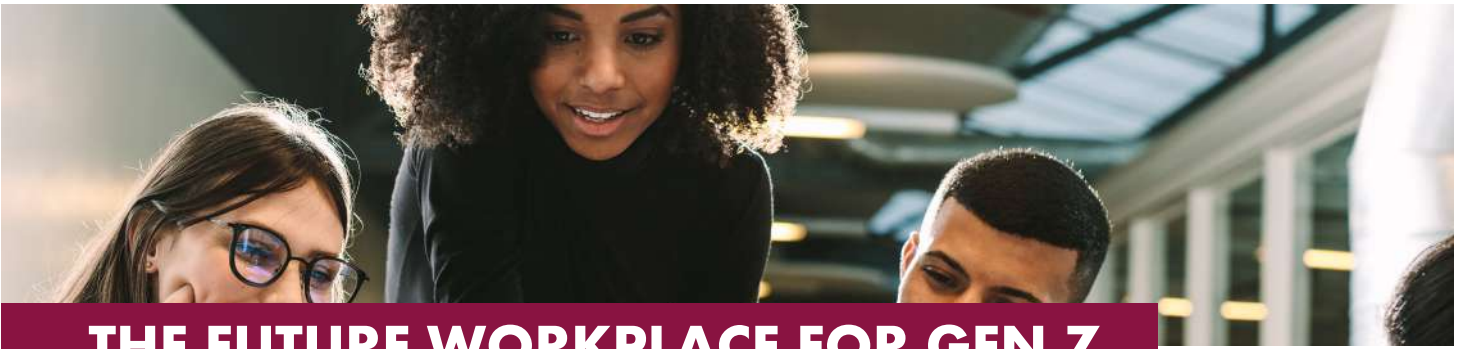**Working in small teams or groups**

Instant feedback, clear goals & challenges as found in video games

Engagement in creativity and collaboration

Delivery of learning in bite-sized chunks

THE FUTURE WORKPLACE FOR GEN Z

As artificial intelligence and automation become the norm, the skills once needed in the workplace are becoming redundant. For any Generation Z graduate, the prospect of facing the competitive job market is daunting enough let alone in such a transitioning environment. So how can professors better prepare their students to face this uncertainty?

> A mixture of both soft and hard skills will be essential to thrive in the digital workplace, with a focus on 'human skills' that can't be automated.

Creativity

The ability to think creatively is a soft skill that's highly valuable and irreplaceable by robots. Regardless of their profession, students will benefit greatly if they can demonstrate an ability to be unique, imaginative and proactive in coming up with new ideas. Essentially, creativity and innovation are exactly what helps organizations and marketers move ahead of the competition and achieve organizational success.

Critical thinking

Analytical capabilities will be essential for any future profession. From analyzing information to providing logical reasoning and evaluation, critical thinking will help students solve problems and seek sources of information to better inform themselves.

Collaboration

Working effectively with others will be a core skill that future employees will need to master, as they will be working on diverse, cross-functional teams. Knowing how to effectively communicate and collaborate with others will be key to boosting productivity.

Emotional intelligence

This core soft skill is the self-awareness of recognizing and understanding one's own emotions, and those of the people around them. While there are undoubtably personal benefits to being more emotionally intelligent, within the workplace, emotional intelligence will be vital for managing effective relationships and leading and inspiring teams in the future. It will also help students identify conflict and best find resolutions.

Digital citizenship

In today's workplace, it's impossible not to be affected by the rise of social media, and this will only become more apparent in the years to come. Digital citizenship is the respectability and responsibility in all online communications. Whether your students will work in a specific digital role or not, future employees will have to have a solid understanding of how to develop their online personal and business personas to build their influence within the workplace.

ENSURING ENGAGEMENT

One of the biggest challenges that instructors face is adopting new, innovative methods effective for Gen Z to teach the mix of hard and soft skills such as creativity and critical thinking that will be essential in the future workplace.

The truth is, students will not be able to learn these skills through traditional means such as textbooks or lectures alone. Instead they will need to be given the opportunity to practice these skills in a concrete, interactive and engaging way.

Certain methods that use new technologies to provide a mobile-friendly, visual and highly engaging experience can prove to work wonders. Below are a few suggestions to help increase engagement while ensuring that the right skills are acquired:

Implement a Learning Management System (LMS): Perhaps considered the core of a learning journey, this comprehensive online teaching tool allows both teachers and learners to collaborate, assess, test and learn online. Already employed in most higher education institutions, it is considered an essential tool and will only become universal overtime for Generation Z.

Use video-based learning: Capture Gen Z's attention span by using videos and other visuals to help explain concepts. Finding engaging videos from speakers through TED talks can bring concepts to life. Allow students to create their own videos as well: asking them to explain a theory or a problem that they solved in this creative format will engage them on another level.

Employ gamification: Gamification in education uses video game design and elements to motivate students to learn. This innovative approach started to gain traction and attention over 5 years ago and is seen a viable alternative for teaching. Students taking "gamified" courses are increasingly motivated and stay engaged and remember more of what they have learned.

Immerse them with experiential learning: In the same vein as gamification, experiential learning in the form of a business simulation, incorporates a challenging, competitive element to teaching complex skills. Simulations can model real world environments and immerse participants in a sort of augmented reality, testing their critical thinking skills as they need to make complex decisions in a compressed timeframe. This type of learning model suits Generation Z's tendency to want to learn and react quickly.

Simulations also develop emotional intelligence and collaboration skills, as participants must work on diverse teams and must learn how to effectively communicate with one another to run their simulated business.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Instructors in higher education will need to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of Generation Z. One of the most effective ways to engage with this generation is through action-based, interactive business simulations. We invite you to discover how simulations can make an impact in your classroom and help you successfully prepare this new generation of learners for the future workforce.

REQUEST A DEMO

References:

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(3,4): Teaching Generation Z at the University of Hawaii (2015-2016)
(5,6): A Tsunami of learners called Generation Z, Rothman, D. (2016)

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