

Engaging a multi-generational workforce in medical communications

Hannah Brocklehurst,^a Leen Jouman-Agha,^b Sophia Meneely,^c Matilda Toivakka,^d Hannah FitzGibbon^e

^aIPG Health Medical Communications, Macclesfield, UK; ^bCMC Connect, Macclesfield, UK; ^cCaudex, New York, NY, USA; ^dComplete HealthVizion, Glasgow, UK; ^eCMC Affinity, Macclesfield, UK

Overview

- An anonymous 37-question survey explored perspectives across the four generations currently working in medical communications: Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964), Gen X (1965-1979), Gen Y (1980-1994) and Gen Z (1995-2010).
- The survey was open for three weeks (Aug 16-Sep 6, 2023) to staff in seven agencies from the IPG Health Medical Communications network: Area 23 on Hudson, Caudex, CMC Affinity, CMC Connect, Complete HealthVizion, Complete Regulatory and Trio.
- Respondents included 91 Gen X, 134 Gen Y and 47 Gen Z; these groups were reasonably balanced in terms of department (Medical or Scientific Services, 37.4-57.5%; Client Services, 27.6-40.7%), location (Europe, 50.7-63.8%; USA, 27.7-39.6%) and experience of working on medical publications (70.2-79.9%).
- Results presented here reflect the strongest trends and themes of interest.

Conclusions

To engage a multi-generational workforce, and evolve in line with the expectations of later generations, we recommend:

- supporting career growth and development, particularly for entry-level staff (e.g. through training programs and clear career pathways)
- recognizing the importance of work-life balance
- offering flexibility in working location
- offering a range of approaches to learning, including on-the-job opportunities.

Potential limitations include: limited data for Baby Boomers, only the oldest portion of Gen Z will be represented, data were limited to seven agencies from one network, and responses to some questions may have been influenced by the career / life stage of each generation.

We recognize that everyone is an individual and trends highlighted here may not be universal.

Listen to our podcasts for author perspectives on:

Expectations around promotion

Career growth and work-life balance

Remote and hybrid working preferences

Impact of department and geographical location

Scan this QR code to access the podcasts, Baby Boomer data and downloadable poster tiny.one/duT654qe7

Getting started in medical communications	Motivations	Long-term career plans	Remote / hybrid working	Learning preferences																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
More likely to have entered medical communications by chance, with 'serendipity' being a more common factor than for later generations, perhaps reflecting increased awareness of the industry over time.	Most commonly motivated by interesting / stimulating / challenging work, being part of a supportive team and personal drive (more so than later generations).	More likely to want to make a meaningful and valued contribution to the business than later generations, perhaps reflecting a later career stage associated with a level of status and influence.	Like later generations, most primarily work from home and consider this their ideal preference. More likely to work mostly / always in an office than later generations, but this only applied to 14%.	On-the-job learning and 1:1 mentoring or coaching conversations are preferred approaches to learning; these preferences may reflect a later career stage.																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
Commonly attracted by job security (more so than any other generation).	The same top three motivations as Gen X: being part of a supportive team, interesting / stimulating / challenging work and personal drive.	Commonly want to earn enough money to have a comfortable life (more so than any other generation); work-life balance is similarly important.	Like other generations, most primarily work from home and consider this their ideal preference. Many value home working as a way to fit work around other commitments and avoid commuting time, perhaps reflecting a stage in life when many people have young children.	Practice tasks and on-the-job learning are preferred approaches to learning.																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
Typically attracted by career growth and learning opportunities, perhaps reflecting the availability of formal training programs in recent years; this is coupled with a more frequent ambition for an early first promotion than previous generations.	Relative to previous generations, more commonly motivated by career growth and development, perhaps reflecting an early career stage.	Achieving a good work-life balance is the most common career goal, and more common than in any other generation. Like previous generations, most are keen to find the 'right' company for their long-term career, but they may be more open to switching companies.	Post-pandemic working is the 'norm' – 60% started paid employment after COVID-19 restrictions came into effect in their country, and 73% have never regularly worked in an office during their medical communications career. However, few want to work solely from home – more commonly desire an element of office life than previous generations.	Practice tasks and on-the-job learning are preferred approaches to learning; less interest in solo 'screen-based' learning (e.g. reading a webpage, watching a video), perhaps reflecting some level of 'digital/screen fatigue'.																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
Thinking back, what appealed to you about starting a career in med comms? Select all options that apply Gen X n=91 Gen Y n=130 Gen Z n=46 <table><tr><td>Aligned with passions and interests</td><td>52.7%</td><td>61.5%</td><td>67.4%</td></tr><tr><td>Opportunities for learning and progression</td><td>44.0%</td><td>61.5%</td><td>71.7%</td></tr><tr><td>Opportunities to fulfil long-term career goals</td><td>25.3%</td><td>35.4%</td><td>47.8%</td></tr><tr><td>The greater good/ positive impact in the world</td><td>20.9%</td><td>31.5%</td><td>41.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Varied / stimulating / challenging work</td><td>40.7%</td><td>55.4%</td><td>65.5%</td></tr><tr><td>Job security in a stable / growing industry</td><td>40.7%</td><td>61.5%</td><td>54.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Salary</td><td>25.3%</td><td>42.3%</td><td>45.7%</td></tr><tr><td>Work-life balance</td><td>13.2%</td><td>37.7%</td><td>54.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Working environment / style (e.g. working in teams, working at a desk)</td><td>16.5%</td><td>26.9%</td><td>34.8%</td></tr><tr><td>Serendipity – the opportunity to start my career / happened to present itself at the right time</td><td>41.8%</td><td>37.7%</td><td>30.4%</td></tr></table> Data are not shown for options where no generation exceeded 20% (aligned with personal values and beliefs [range: 12.1-20.0%], something else [0.0-15.4%]). Thinking back to when you started in an entry-level role in med comms, did you target a specific timeframe for your first promotion? Yes - I targeted an ambitious timeframe that I was eager to achieve Yes - I had a rough timeframe in mind, but I felt fairly relaxed about it No - The timeframe had little importance for me <table><tr><td>Gen X n=66</td><td>10.6%</td><td>33.3%</td><td>56.1%</td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=124</td><td>28.2%</td><td>45.2%</td><td>26.6%</td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=46</td><td>39.1%</td><td>45.7%</td><td>15.2%</td></tr></table> Responses shown for those who remembered starting in an entry-level medical	Aligned with passions and interests	52.7%	61.5%	67.4%	Opportunities for learning and progression	44.0%	61.5%	71.7%	Opportunities to fulfil long-term career goals	25.3%	35.4%	47.8%	The greater good/ positive impact in the world	20.9%	31.5%	41.3%	Varied / stimulating / challenging work	40.7%	55.4%	65.5%	Job security in a stable / growing industry	40.7%	61.5%	54.3%	Salary	25.3%	42.3%	45.7%	Work-life balance	13.2%	37.7%	54.3%	Working environment / style (e.g. working in teams, working at a desk)	16.5%	26.9%	34.8%	Serendipity – the opportunity to start my career / happened to present itself at the right time	41.8%	37.7%	30.4%	Gen X n=66	10.6%	33.3%	56.1%	Gen Y n=124	28.2%	45.2%	26.6%	Gen Z n=46	39.1%	45.7%	15.2%	What motivates you in the workplace? Select the top three things that motivate you the most Gen X n=88 Gen Y n=127 Gen Z n=46 <table><tr><td>Interesting / stimulating / challenging work</td><td>69.3%</td><td>51.2%</td><td>43.5%</td></tr><tr><td>Personal drive (e.g. innate conscientiousness, high standards, ambition or competitiveness)</td><td>54.5%</td><td>48.0%</td><td>28.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Recognition and appreciation</td><td>28.4%</td><td>21.3%</td><td>28.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Career growth and development</td><td>14.8%</td><td>28.3%</td><td>60.9%</td></tr><tr><td>Being part of a supportive team with good team morale</td><td>59.1%</td><td>53.5%</td><td>39.1%</td></tr><tr><td>Work-life balance</td><td>33.0%</td><td>39.4%</td><td>43.5%</td></tr><tr><td>Compensation / financial rewards</td><td>29.5%</td><td>34.6%</td><td>30.4%</td></tr></table> Data are not shown for options where no generation exceeded 20% (achieving goals or formal objectives [range: 9.1-19.6%], deadlines [5.7-15.2%], strong leadership and role models that I aspire to be like [14.2-17.4%], making my own impact within the company [6.5-7.9%], making a positive impact in the world [8.0-19.6%] or 'something else' [0.0-3.4%]).	Interesting / stimulating / challenging work	69.3%	51.2%	43.5%	Personal drive (e.g. innate conscientiousness, high standards, ambition or competitiveness)	54.5%	48.0%	28.3%	Recognition and appreciation	28.4%	21.3%	28.3%	Career growth and development	14.8%	28.3%	60.9%	Being part of a supportive team with good team morale	59.1%	53.5%	39.1%	Work-life balance	33.0%	39.4%	43.5%	Compensation / financial rewards	29.5%	34.6%	30.4%	What are / have been your career goals? Select up to three goals that are / have been most important to you Gen X n=88 Gen Y n=125 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>To make a meaningful contribution to the business that is valued by my employer</td><td>46.6%</td><td>27.2%</td><td>6.8%</td></tr><tr><td>To earn enough money to have a comfortable life</td><td>48.9%</td><td>64.8%</td><td>61.4%</td></tr><tr><td>To have a good work-life balance</td><td>50.0%</td><td>66.4%</td><td>72.7%</td></tr><tr><td>To enjoy work – be stimulated and fulfilled</td><td>71.6%</td><td>68.0%</td><td>53.9%</td></tr><tr><td>To challenge myself, learn and grow into the best I can be</td><td>42.0%</td><td>40.8%</td><td>40.9%</td></tr></table> Data are not shown for options where no generation exceeded 20% (to achieve an accelerated development trajectory, repeatedly getting promoted more quickly than typical expectations [range: 6.8-12.0%], to reach a high-level leadership position [6.0-15.9%], to become an expert in my field [7.2-9.1%], to make a positive impact in the world [5.7-11.4%], to earn a specific target salary [4.8-9.1%], to work for myself / start my own business [0.0-6.6%] or 'something else' [0.0-1.1%]). How much do you disagree / agree with the following statements? I'd like to find the 'right' company and work there for most of my career Gen X n=88 Gen Y n=125 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly disagree</td><td>Disagree</td><td>Neither agree nor disagree</td><td>Agree</td><td>Strongly agree</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=88</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=125</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Prospective employers are justified in having concerns if candidates have switched companies multiple times (e.g. three or more times over 5 years) Gen X n=88 Gen Y n=125 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly disagree</td><td>Disagree</td><td>Neither agree nor disagree</td><td>Agree</td><td>Strongly agree</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=88</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=125</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> These figures show weighted averages for each generation, where 'strongly disagree' = 1, 'disagree' = 2, 'neither agree nor disagree' = 3, 'agree' = 4 and 'strongly agree' = 5. There was little difference in weighted averages between the generations for three additional statements (range: <0.3): 1% valuable to try roles in different companies, to broaden your perspectives and explore what you want to do (range: 3.61-3.91), switching companies can help to progress your career more quickly (3.24-3.32) and switching companies can allow you to achieve higher salaries more quickly (4.14-4.20).	To make a meaningful contribution to the business that is valued by my employer	46.6%	27.2%	6.8%	To earn enough money to have a comfortable life	48.9%	64.8%	61.4%	To have a good work-life balance	50.0%	66.4%	72.7%	To enjoy work – be stimulated and fulfilled	71.6%	68.0%	53.9%	To challenge myself, learn and grow into the best I can be	42.0%	40.8%	40.9%	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Gen X n=88					Gen Y n=125					Gen Z n=44					Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Gen X n=88					Gen Y n=125					Gen Z n=44					Where do you currently work? Gen X n=88 Gen Y n=125 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Always from home</td><td>Mostly from home</td><td>An even mix</td><td>Mostly in an office</td><td>Always in an office</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=88</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=125</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Setting aside any limitations (e.g. you do not have an office within commuting distance), what would be your ideal working location? Gen X n=87 Gen Y n=124 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Always from home</td><td>Mostly from home</td><td>An even mix</td><td>Mostly in an office</td><td>Always in an office</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=87</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=124</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Always from home	Mostly from home	An even mix	Mostly in an office	Always in an office	Gen X n=88					Gen Y n=125					Gen Z n=44					Always from home	Mostly from home	An even mix	Mostly in an office	Always in an office	Gen X n=87					Gen Y n=124					Gen Z n=44					How do you like to learn? Having a go at practice tasks on your own, with written and verbal feedback Gen X n=86 Gen Y n=120 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly dislike</td><td>Dislike</td><td>Don't mind</td><td>Prefer</td><td>Strongly prefer</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=86</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=120</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> On-the-job learning, with written and verbal feedback Gen X n=86 Gen Y n=120 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly dislike</td><td>Dislike</td><td>Don't mind</td><td>Prefer</td><td>Strongly prefer</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=86</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=120</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Reading a document / slide deck / webpage on your own Gen X n=86 Gen Y n=120 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly dislike</td><td>Dislike</td><td>Don't mind</td><td>Prefer</td><td>Strongly prefer</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=86</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=120</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Computer-based learning on your own, e.g. watching videos or completing elearnms Gen X n=86 Gen Y n=120 Gen Z n=44 <table><tr><td>Strongly dislike</td><td>Dislike</td><td>Don't mind</td><td>Prefer</td><td>Strongly prefer</td></tr><tr><td>Gen X n=86</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Y n=120</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Gen Z n=44</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> These figures show weighted averages for each generation, where 'strongly dislike' = 1, 'dislike' = 2, 'don't mind' = 3, 'prefer' = 4 and 'strongly prefer' = 5. There was little difference in weighted averages between the generations for four additional learning approaches (range: <0.3): 1:1 mentoring or coaching conversations (virtual) (range: 3.66-3.86), small-group activities (e.g. role plays, group tasks (virtual) (2.61-2.74), virtual group workshops, with a mix of presentations, discussions and activities (3.13-3.27), and virtual presentations / webinars, with no interactivity (2.80-2.86).	Strongly dislike	Dislike	Don't mind	Prefer	Strongly prefer	Gen X n=86					Gen Y n=120					Gen Z n=44					Strongly dislike	Dislike	Don't mind	Prefer	Strongly prefer	Gen X n=86					Gen Y n=120					Gen Z n=44					Strongly dislike	Dislike	Don't mind	Prefer	Strongly prefer	Gen X n=86					Gen Y n=120					Gen Z n=44					Strongly dislike	Dislike	Don't mind	Prefer	Strongly prefer	Gen X n=86					Gen Y n=120					Gen Z n=44				
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Baby Boomers

Aged 58–78 years

Due to limited Baby Boomer respondents (n=15), no interpretation has been attempted; data are available in versions of the figures accessible via the QR code.

Gen X

Aged 43–58 years

Gen Y

Aged 28–43 years

Gen Z

Aged 12–28 years

For more information

#GenZ with Dr Meghan M Grace, episodes 46 and 49:
• freely available from podcast providers.

Simon Sinek videos on different generations:
• freely available online.

Disclosures

All authors are employees of IPG Health Medical Communications.