



Organizational Onboarding and Generation Z: The Hidden Impact of Social Media

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Abstract: The entry of Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010) into the labor market presents significant challenges for organizations, particularly in relation to integration and onboarding. While onboarding has always involved structural, cultural, and psychological difficulties, the arrival of Generation Z introduces a new set of complexities linked to their unique digital upbringing. This study first examines the general pitfalls of integration, such as role ambiguity, cultural fit, group dynamics, and communication barriers, and then, in the following section, analyzes how the specific characteristics of Generation Z exacerbate these issues. A separate section addresses the psychological impact of social media, with particular attention to identity formation, the heightened demand for continuous feedback, fragmented attention, and growing mental health concerns. The findings suggest that one of the central reasons for Generation Z's integration difficulties lies in the logic of social media itself and in the behavioral patterns cultivated through constant digital exposure. This generation not only relies on various technological tools but also perceives, learns, and connects in fundamentally different ways from previous cohorts. Simply digitizing traditional onboarding materials does not resolve these challenges; in fact, when outdated content is delivered online, frustration often increases. Instead, onboarding strategies must be restructured to include interactive, personalized, and psychologically supportive approaches tailored to Generation Z. The aim of this study is to provide a conceptual framework that informs future research and offers practical guidance for developing modern, generation-sensitive onboarding practices.

Keywords: Generation Z, Mental Health, Microlearning, Onboarding, Social Media

1 Introduction

The present paper introduces the conceptual framework of our research on onboarding for Generation Z. At this stage, the relevant information has been obtained through a thorough literature review of academic sources. Future stages of the research will include analyses of social media records and personal interviews. At the same time, we are mindful of recent critiques of “generationalism,” which warn against oversimplified labels and stereotypes (Rauvola et al., 2019). We therefore treat Generation Z not as a homogeneous psychological type, but as a cohort whose members share certain formative digital experiences that have implications for onboarding.

The arrival of a new member is a significant change in the life of any community. Those with large families know well that the birth of a fourth, fifth, or sixth child, although in different ways, transforms family dynamics no less than the first. And it would be futile to deny that the arrival of a new family member is a source of not only joy but also stress for the community. It is no different in a workplace, a parallel that holds true not least because many workplace communities like to refer to themselves as a big family. Of course, we are aware that family and workplace communities differ in many respects—not least in their initial cause and ultimate goal—but many similarities can also be found. For example, both consist of people, are structured, hierarchical, have norms, and have a culture. There are unwritten rules in the family (who sits where at the family table, what the “pecking order” is for the TV remote, etc.), just as there are in the workplace (who speaks first at a meeting, how to use the shared coffee machine, etc.). And these are all things that the newcomer must learn and get used to. Of course, this learning is never one-way; the newcomer not only changes themselves but also shapes the system, which changes with them. And the process of mutual adjustment involves clashes and conflicts.

Despite a substantial body of research on organizational socialization and a rapidly growing literature on Generation Z, there is still limited work that systematically connects general onboarding challenges with the specific psychological patterns shaped by intensive social media use. Much of the existing scholarship either examines onboarding practices in general (e.g., Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Schein, 2010) or analyzes the broader effects of digital technologies on young people (e.g., Haidt, 2024; Twenge et al., 2019), but does not integrate these strands into a single framework focused on workplace entry.

The novelty of this conceptual paper lies in three contributions. First, we bring together classic theories of group development and organizational socialization with recent findings on Generation Z’s digital upbringing, mental health, and work expectations, thereby showing how these jointly shape the onboarding process. Second, we highlight the role of social media not only as a communication channel but also as a psychological and cultural

environment that conditions attention, identity work, feedback needs, and fear of missing out (FOMO). Third, we link these social-media-shaped traits to concrete onboarding outcomes—such as early turnover, conflict with senior employees, and difficulties with remote integration—thus offering an integrated explanation of why Gen Z onboarding succeeds or fails.

The significance of our framework is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it synthesizes dispersed strands of research on onboarding, generational differences, and digital media into a coherent model that can guide future empirical studies on digital-native generations at work. Practically, it offers organizations a lens for redesigning onboarding in a way that is sensitive to Generation Z's needs while avoiding simplistic remedies such as merely “digitizing” traditional training materials. Instead, we argue for onboarding strategies that deliberately harness the affordances of social and enterprise social media while mitigating their psychological risks.

The structure of the paper follows this logic. We first outline general, generation-independent challenges of workplace integration. We then examine core characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives and, subsequently, analyze how social media shapes their attention, identity, and feedback needs. Finally, we connect these threads to specific onboarding difficulties and discuss how organizations can respond by rethinking onboarding design for a social-media-shaped generation.

2 Research questions and objectives

2.1 Research questions

Q1. How does social media influence Gen Z's expectations and behaviours in the workplace?

Q2. What are the main sources of conflict between Gen Z and senior employees, and how are these influenced by social media?

2.2 Research objectives

To conceptualize how social media shapes Gen Z's workplace behaviours and expectations.

To identify sources of conflict during onboarding and strategies for resolution.

To suggest organizational responses to social media-driven changes in workplace onboarding.

3 Methodology

This conceptual paper develops a framework for understanding the unique onboarding challenges faced by Generation Z. We conducted an extensive review of the literature spanning Gen Z characteristics, organizational socialization theory, onboarding challenges specific to Gen Z, and digital media effects. Sources were identified through targeted keyword searches in academic databases and prioritized for relevance, scholarly impact, and recency. Furthermore, during the synthesis stage, we paid particular attention to integrating research that highlights both the challenges and the affordances of social and digital media for workplace socialization (e.g., Leidner et al., 2018; Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Chen et al., 2020).

4 General difficulties of workplace integration (onboarding)

That the integration of a new colleague can be a source of tension and stress for the team was explored in more detail back in the 1960s by Bruce Tuckman (1965), whose group development model divides group dynamics into four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming is the initial stage when group members first meet. It is characterized by uncertainty, politeness, and members trying to get to know each other and the task. The group is heavily dependent on the leader, who provides direction and defines goals. Roles and responsibilities are not yet clear. Members try to find acceptable patterns of behavior and avoid conflicts. In the Storming stage, differences of opinion and conflicts come to the surface. Members begin to push boundaries, question the leader's role, goals, or work methods. This period can be characterized by tension, competition, and confrontation as individual personalities and work styles clash. Although it can be difficult, this phase is essential for the group's development because it provides an opportunity to clarify problems. In the Norming phase, after conflicts have arisen, the group begins to resolve them, and common norms, rules, and values are formed. Cohesion, trust, and willingness to cooperate among members increase. Roles become clear, and group members accept each other and the established operating order. The sense of belonging and open communication increase. The group begins to function as a unit. Performing is the most productive stage, when the group works effectively and efficiently to achieve common goals. The group's structure and processes are already working well, and members know and accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. There is a high level of cooperation, problem-solving ability, and autonomy. The focus is on completing tasks, and the group is able to adapt flexibly to challenges. According to the model, the joining of a new member can change the team's current state and can cause conflicts, especially if the team was

already in the "norming" or "performing" stage. The arrival of a new employee can push even well-established groups back into the "storming" stage, generating new conflicts. This is also supported by the social identity theory, according to which new members are often treated as "outsiders" by the group, which increases tension between "us" and "them" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In parallel, the uncertainty reduction theory states that newcomers' initial, tentative information-gathering can disrupt established communication patterns (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). During the integration process, one of the most common sources of stress is role ambiguity. Bauer and Erdogan's (2011) research concluded that if a new employee does not receive a clear job description and expectations, they are 32% more likely to get into conflict with others in the first 90 days. A lack of cultural fit is also a serious problem. If the newcomer's values or work style clash with the organization's norms, it can lead to "cultural resistance" (Schein, 2010). New colleagues can also rearrange power relations, which can trigger status anxiety in existing employees. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer's (1981) classic power theory, the appearance of newcomers intensifies competition for resources (e.g., promotion, better projects). This can even lead to defensive, exclusionary behavior (Chattopadhyay et al., 2008). Finally, communication is a critical point. Unclear expectations—for example, when and how to give feedback—lead to misunderstandings and frustration. De Souza Santos & Ralph's (2022) Grounded Theory reveals that poor coordination in remote/hybrid teams often yields misunderstandings, lost requests, and ambiguity over responsibilities — especially when members come from different communication norms. This chapter outlined the general, generation-independent challenges of onboarding.

So far, we have outlined the general, generation-independent challenges of onboarding. It is worth noting that modern digital platforms have begun to address some of these issues. Enterprise social media tools, for instance, afford new behaviors—such as greater visibility of information and persistent knowledge sharing—that were previously difficult to achieve. Treem and Leonardi (2013) argue that activating these affordances can facilitate processes like employee socialization. In practice, internal social networks can even help newcomers circumvent hierarchy and boost their early engagement. A case study by Leidner, Gonzalez, and Koch (2018) showed that using an enterprise social media platform for a new-hire program enabled “bureaucracy circumvention” and served as a “morale booster” for IT recruits. However, these same technologies also create new expectations for immediacy and transparency that can clash with conventional onboarding methods. Given this evolving dynamic, the arrival of Generation Z—deeply immersed in social media—adds an entirely new layer of complexity to the integration process.

The next section focuses on how the situation is complicated by the arrival of Generation Z.

5 Digital natives: Generation Z as a separate 'tribe'

While the integration process has always involved cultural, structural, and psychological difficulties, the entry of Generation Z (born roughly between 1995 and 2010) into the labor market adds a whole new layer of complexity. The members of this first "native" generation of social media bring with them behavioral patterns, expectations, and attitudes that often contrast sharply with traditional onboarding practices. Moreover, the digital socialization of Generation Z differs fundamentally from that of previous generations. While Generation Y (1980–1995) grew up with the internet but spent their teenage years without social media, for Generation Z, social media has always been an integral part of their environment. This constant exposure to digital interaction has significantly shaped their workplace expectations, particularly during the early stages of employment.

In terms of technological expectations, more than 70% of traditional onboarding programs fail to meet the needs of Generation Z, who prefer gamified training, mobile-accessible content, and AI-supported task allocation. Furthermore, companies that adopt modern digital tools achieve up to 40% higher retention rates among this generation (Chillakuri, 2020). Patience and feedback also play a critical role: while Twenge and Campbell (2008) already observed that Generation Y employees had developed a preference for immediacy and a low tolerance for delay, more recent qualitative studies with Gen Z employees (Robertson, 2023) highlight that traditional hierarchical systems and opaque decision-making processes are perceived as outdated. Similarly, Fuchs et al. (2024) emphasize that Generation Z expects rapid communication, transparency, and agility in organizational operations. They are less patient with slow, bureaucratic structures and highly value real-time feedback, disliking situations where their roles and tasks are slowly or ambiguously defined.

Additionally, immediacy and clarity are essential for Generation Z. They want to be told directly and promptly what is expected of them. Where such clarity is lacking, turnover tends to rise within the first few months (Calk & Patrick, 2017; Agovino, 2022). Another challenge is virtual integration. Although remote work has become widespread, the online onboarding of Generation Z employees is particularly problematic. According to Rauvola et al. (2021), 63% of Gen Z employees find online onboarding less effective than in-person programs—a much higher rate compared to previous generations. This is not due to a lack of digital literacy but rather to the difficulty of forming authentic human connections and a sense of community in virtual settings. Furthermore, concentration problems have become

a pressing issue. A series of studies confirms that the attention span of Generation Z is shorter because of constant digital stimuli (Gibson et al., 2009). Consequently, traditional onboarding methods involving lengthy manuals and extended training sessions are largely ineffective. Microlearning—short, easily digestible, and interactive content—proves far more successful in maintaining their engagement. In addition, personalization is a major expectation. Generation Z seeks onboarding processes tailored to their individual goals and values. According to LinkedIn's 2023 "Workplace Learning Report" (Cai, 2023), 58% of Gen Z employees will leave within a year if they do not receive personalized attention, mentoring, and career-focused support. Thus, successful programs increasingly include individual coaching, goal-oriented career planning, and value-based modules such as sustainability. Moreover, emotional and psychological factors are especially important to this generation. According to Deloitte's 2022 "Gen Z and Millennial Survey," 60% of Gen Z respondents feel that companies neglect their mental health during integration, compared to 45% of Gen Y (Deloitte, 2022). They also exhibit strong commitments to social justice and sustainability, and when an organization fails to align with these values, their engagement tends to decline.

Finally, the desire for personal and professional growth is a defining feature of this cohort. Beyond salary considerations, "professional development and learning" rank as the second most important factor influencing their job choices (Civil Impact, 2024). They deliberately seek positions where they can expand their knowledge, acquire new skills, and visualize a clear career path. Several major international surveys—including Deloitte's 2024 report and LinkedIn's "Workplace Learning Report"—confirm that Generation Z is the most motivated to learn in the workplace (Deloitte, 2024; Cai, 2023). According to Deloitte, 59% of them would leave their job if denied sufficient opportunities for development. For Generation Z, learning is not a supplementary benefit but a fundamental expectation, viewed as the key to career advancement and long-term success. If they do not perceive this opportunity, they are quick to seek alternatives.

The next section examines how social media contributes to the formation of these psychological and behavioral characteristics.

6 Characteristics of Generation Z in the mirror of social media

The generation-shaping effect of social media has been examined in an increasing number of studies in recent years. The members of Generation Z are the first to have spent their entire formative teenage years in the presence of social media. According to American psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2024), the development of the adolescent brain is significantly

influenced by digital technology, especially smartphones and social media. During adolescence, the brain undergoes a complete “rewiring,” which means that the adolescent brain is particularly sensitive to repetitive activities—neurons that fire together, wire together. Consequently, social media has not only become a constant companion of Generation Z but also a powerful force shaping their attention, identity, and emotional life. Numerous studies confirm that the attention spans of Generation Z are shorter. The constant stream of digital stimuli teaches their brains to prefer immediate rewards over sustained, deep focus (Radesky et al., 2015). Moreover, this generation's self-concept is partly formed on social media, in the crossfire of public feedback through likes and comments. This often leads to the development of a dual identity: a “real” offline self and a carefully curated, “performative” online self (Boyd, 2014; Turkle, 2011). Furthermore, elements of this curated self-image inevitably seep into offline behavior, demonstrating the deep interconnection between digital and real-life identities.

Additionally, intensive use of social media is linked to increases in anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Twenge et al., 2019). As a result, members of Generation Z often react more sensitively to workplace stress, especially during the uncertain period of integration. The instant feedback mechanisms of social media—such as likes and comments—can also create a psychological dependency. This generation has become extremely sensitive to both positive and negative feedback and often interprets experiences in black-and-white terms: they either like something or they don't (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020). Moreover, algorithm-filtered and personalized content consumption has resulted in Generation Z being less tolerant of ambiguity and complexity. Algorithmic filtering can reduce openness to new information that contradicts one's existing worldview, reinforcing cognitive rigidity and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Carr, 2010).

Furthermore, there is broad consensus that social media platforms provide an ideal breeding ground for FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). In a highly influential study, Przybylski et al. (2013) defined FOMO as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.” Research has consistently shown that the more time someone spends on these platforms, the more likely they are to experience this anxiety. The constantly glimpsed, carefully curated “perfect” lives, vacations, parties, and successes of others can make a user feel that their own life is boring or incomplete, heightening the fear of missing out. FOMO correlates significantly with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower self-esteem, and general life dissatisfaction (Tandon et al., 2021). Moreover, the constant social comparison inherent in social media use undermines self-confidence and can induce a negative mood. The anxiety provoked by FOMO drives individuals to check social media even more frequently, lest they miss something. This compulsive behavior, in turn, reinforces both the addiction and the anxiety, as users

encounter more and more content that feeds the feeling of being left out (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Thus, FOMO becomes both a cause and a consequence of problematic social media use, encapsulating the self-perpetuating cycle of emotional dependency that defines Generation Z's digital experience.

Having become acquainted with these psychological traits shaped by social media, the next chapter will examine how they all manifest during workplace integration.

7 Findings: Social media and the challenges of integration

In this section, we connect the dots and outline how the effects of social media lead to the integration difficulties of Generation Z in several ways.

Generation Z was socialized in a digital culture where information and reinforcement are only a click away, and this experience fundamentally shapes their expectations in the workplace. When they encounter a slow, hierarchical onboarding process based on delayed feedback cycles, they experience cognitive dissonance. As Fuchs et al. (2024) have pointed out, this generation has difficulty tolerating slow institutional functioning. Moreover, they perceive slowness not as the natural order of things, but as a lack of interest and indifference on the part of the company—something alienating that often leads to early attrition. Furthermore, social media is the domain of the carefully constructed, “postable” identity, not of spontaneous honesty. This creates serious tension during the integration process, where openness, mutual adaptation, and trust are key (Schein, 2010). Gen Z employees often present an overly “polished” image of themselves, making it difficult for managers and colleagues to recognize their real skills and areas for development. Additionally, algorithm-driven “opinion bubbles” reduce openness to differing viewpoints. In the context of workplace integration, this can manifest as resistance to elements of the organizational culture that require adaptation. What starts as subtle reluctance to accept managerial feedback can escalate into outright rejection and, ultimately, resignation. Moreover, owing to their fragmented attention, Generation Z finds short, interactive learning materials (microlearning) much more effective (Gibson et al., 2009). In contrast, many companies still attempt to impart knowledge through long lectures, static PDFs, and dense policy documents. Online onboarding is often merely a digital transfer of outdated methods rather than a true rethinking of training for the digital age (Rauvola et al., 2021). In the absence of gamification and interactive formats, Gen Z quickly loses interest, causing the integration process to stagnate.

Social media also acts as the primary arena for social comparison. Gen Z employees are far more influenced by the need for external validation than previous generations, and this

extends to their self-esteem at work (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020). If there are no clear, immediate performance indicators during onboarding, they are prone to seek validation in their own digital circles (e.g., informal Slack or WhatsApp groups), which can lead to rumors, competition, and internal tensions. Furthermore, this anxiety is exacerbated by the polished “day in my life at work” videos popular on LinkedIn or TikTok, which set unrealistic expectations. When the reality of work proves far more mundane, it can easily trigger self-esteem issues. Additionally, social media has made Gen Z extremely sensitive to issues of mental health, inclusion, and social justice. According to the aforementioned Deloitte survey, 60% of Gen Z feel that companies do not adequately address their mental well-being during onboarding (Deloitte, 2022). For them, integration is not just about information transfer but also a kind of “test”: they are examining whether the company genuinely lives up to the values it advertises. If they detect hypocrisy, they are quick to call it out—and even quicker to leave.

Another emerging phenomenon is workplace FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Several recent studies distinguish between everyday FOMO and its professional variant (Kóvári et al., 2023). Workplace FOMO is defined as “a pervasive apprehension that, relative to other employees, one might miss valuable career opportunities when away or disconnected from work.” This fear can center on informational exclusion (e.g., a new hire worrying they’re missing out on important project updates or decisions) or relational exclusion (missing out on key professional connections and networking events). A higher level of workplace FOMO positively predicts the need for personal development—employees more afraid of falling behind professionally are also more motivated to acquire new skills and educate themselves (Reinders, 2022). The roots of FOMO lie in social comparison theory. In professional life, this manifests in phenomena like the “LinkedIn effect,” where employees constantly see what courses colleagues are taking, what certifications they are earning, or what trendy new skills (e.g., AI tools) they are listing on their profiles. Career anxiety works similarly: seeing others’ positive career posts can cause frustration and anxiety about one’s own progress. This anxiety, in turn, encourages action—in this case, continuous learning (Fukubayashi & Fuji, 2021).

However, it is not all doom and gloom. Social media can also actively facilitate onboarding and socialization when used constructively. For example, Chen et al. (2020) found that key enterprise social media affordances—such as visibility and association—strengthen newcomers’ work-related ties (both instrumental and affective), leading to improved in-role and innovative job performance. Similarly, Bodhi and van Zoonen (2025) observed that when organizations support and encourage work-related social media use, young employees experience gains in both routine and innovative performance. These findings imply that companies can harness Gen Z’s digital habits to improve integration outcomes—for

instance, by using internal social platforms to connect new hires with mentors, openly share knowledge, and provide real-time feedback. In essence, the positive affordances of social media can be leveraged to complement structured onboarding processes, even as the negative effects are mitigated through guidance and support.

8 Conclusions

This study has demonstrated why the integration of Generation Z into the workplace presents a special challenge. We reviewed the general pitfalls of onboarding, followed by the new digital and values-based problems that this generation brings with it. We examined how social media is reshaping Gen Z's attention, identity, and feedback needs, and finally connected these threads to specific workplace difficulties. The main lesson is that the integration problems of Generation Z stem from deep cultural and psychological differences that arise from the encounter between the adolescent brain and social media. This generation not only uses different tools, but also perceives, learns, and connects differently. Simply digitizing traditional onboarding materials does not resolve these challenges; in fact, when outdated content is delivered online, frustration often increases. Instead, onboarding strategies must be restructured to include interactive, personalized, and psychologically supportive approaches designed specifically for Generation Z. Too often, companies' onboarding processes still ignore this reality.

Some key takeaways for practice:

- Unstructured, discovery-based learning can be frustrating for Gen Z. They need clear, goal-oriented guidance.
- Traditional training materials (long videos, static documentation) do not hold their attention. Microlearning and interactive modules are more effective.
- Because of their focus on building a "personal brand," Gen Z employees are extremely sensitive to feedback. They can easily perceive negative criticism as a personal attack, and a lack of feedback as a failure. They need more frequent positive reinforcement and emotional support than previous cohorts.
- During onboarding, special attention should be paid to psychological safety and empathetic communication. As we have seen, Gen Z exhibits both a high level of anxiety (of which FOMO is a part) and an extremely strong need for continuous development. We suspect these two phenomena are closely linked: the fear of being left behind is one of the main driving forces pushing them toward constant upskilling.

Future research should examine how these findings can be put into practice, especially in the areas of microlearning, values-based integration, and technological solutions that support mental well-being.

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