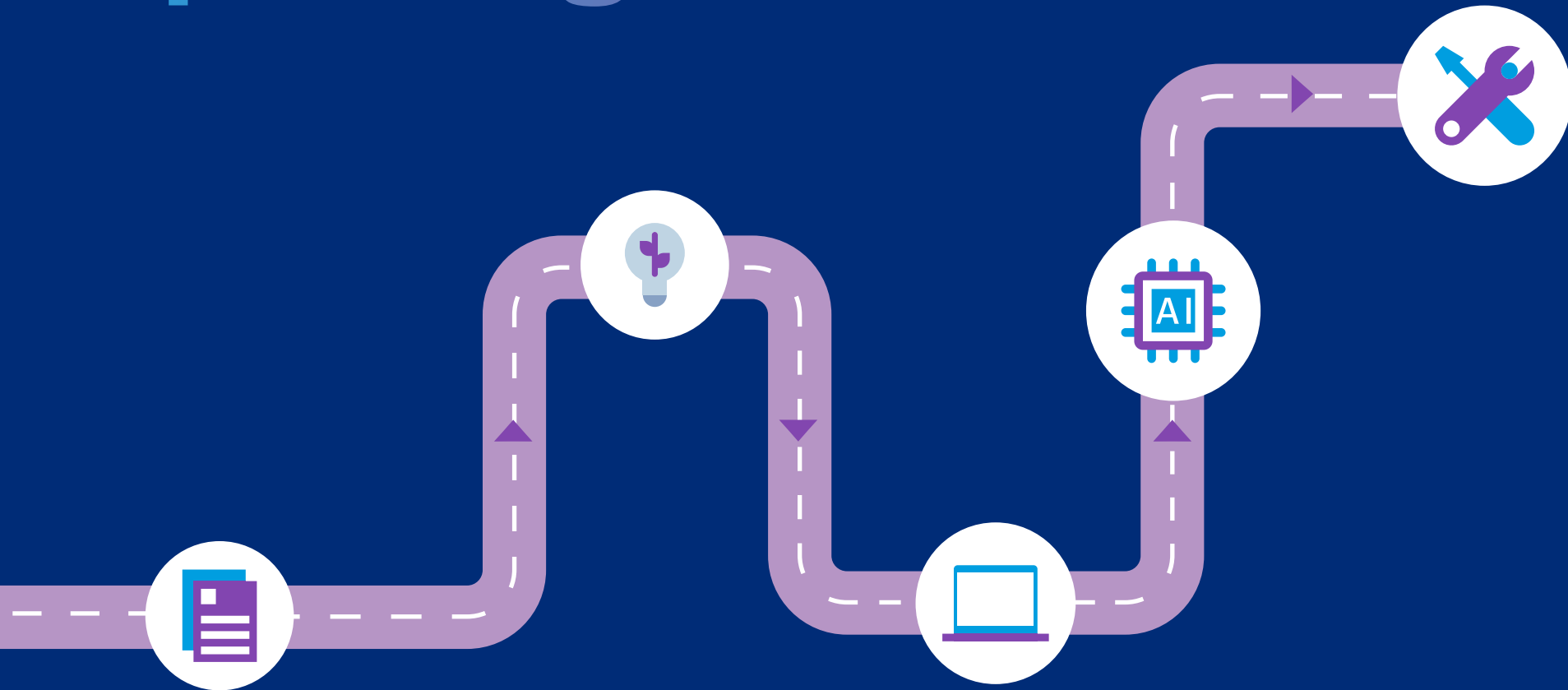# Your guide to upskilling Gen X

Embrace employee longevity

As the workforce ages, organizations must recognize the unique needs and contributions of each generation of employees. By 2030, the youngest of the baby boomer generation will be 65 and possibly entering retirement, while Gen X employees will be 50 or older with several working years ahead. While these groups offer a wealth of knowledge and experience, they are less likely to learn new skills. Organizations that invest in inclusive learning environments can support baby boomers in the latter years of their careers and provide Gen X employees with the opportunity to develop and become more productive and innovative for as long as they remain working. This guide aims to provide you with actionable strategies to develop effective upskilling programs tailored to Gen X employees.

Understand the unique needs of Gen X employees

Gen X may have unique needs for their learning and upskilling. Employees over 55 are less likely to feel that learning paths are personalized and more likely to struggle when navigating learning opportunities at their organization. Additionally, they may require tailored approaches that accommodate varying levels of technological experience and cognitive processing speeds, ensuring that learning environments are both accessible and engaging for them. While Gen X has more computer experience than baby boomers, they may still need guidance on emerging technology like generative AI. Employees over 55 are the least likely to have used AI, and in a recent study, 37% of workers over 65 cited not being tech forward as the reason for not using new technology compared to 13% of 18–24 year olds.

Learning preferences

Gen X employees may have different learning preferences compared to other workers. Consider the following:

- **Hands-on learning:** Many of these workers benefit from practical, hands-on experiences rather than purely theoretical instruction.

- **Peer learning:** Collaborative learning environments can be more effective, allowing Gen X employees to share their knowledge and learn from one another.

- **Flexible pacing:** Gen X employees may prefer a slower pace of learning, allowing them to absorb information thoroughly.

- **Pragmatic thinking:** Gen X employees tend to be practical and realistic, focusing on results and efficiency rather than idealism. Tailoring learning content to practical solutions may be more appealing to this group.

Career aspirations

Understanding the career goals of these employees is fundamental for designing relevant upskilling programs.

- **Desire for meaningful work:** Many Gen X workers seek roles that align with their values and allow them to make a positive impact.

- **Interest in mentorship:** Gen X employees often want to share their expertise and mentor younger colleagues, which can be integrated into upskilling initiatives.

Develop appropriate upskilling programs

Developing the right type of learning programs for Gen X employees is essential, as they often possess valuable institutional knowledge and skills that can be enhanced through targeted training. These programs should be designed to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences, ensuring that Gen X employees feel supported and motivated to engage with new technologies and methodologies, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and productive workplace.

Assess skills and needs

Before implementing upskilling programs, it's helpful to assess the current skills and needs of Gen X employees.

- **Conduct surveys and interviews:** Gather feedback from Gen X employees about their interests, career goals and perceived skill gaps.

- **Utilize performance reviews:** Incorporate skill assessments into regular performance reviews to identify areas for development.

Create tailored learning opportunities

Design upskilling programs that cater specifically to the needs of Gen X employees.

- **Offer diverse learning formats:** Provide a mix of in-person workshops, online courses and self-paced learning modules to accommodate different preferences. While some Gen X employees may prefer collaborative learning, others value independent learning.

- **Focus on relevant skills:** Prioritize skills that are in demand within the organization and align with the career aspirations of Gen X employees.

- **Encourage cross-generational learning:** Facilitate opportunities for Gen X employees to mentor younger colleagues, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing.

Implement flexible scheduling

Gen X employees value flexibility and work-life balance. Incorporating flexibility into your upskilling efforts will allow you to appeal to more Gen X employees.

- **Offer part-time or flexible hours:** Allow Gen X employees to participate in upskilling programs without disrupting their work-life balance.

- **Provide remote learning options:** Ensure that online courses and resources are accessible from home, making it easier for Gen X employees to engage in learning.

Overcome potential barriers

Overcoming potential barriers to upskilling Gen X employees, including resistance to change, may take time. But by implementing supportive strategies and open communication channels, you can help alleviate fears and encourage Gen X employees to embrace new skills and emerging technologies, ultimately enhancing their confidence and adaptability in the workplace.

Address age-related biases

Organizations may face biases that hinder the development of upskilling programs for Gen X employees:

- **Review recruitment practices:** Revise recruitment strategies to ensure they are inclusive of all age groups. This can include using age-neutral language in job descriptions, actively seeking candidates from various age demographics and avoiding age-related stereotypes in the hiring process.

- **Promote age diversity in leadership:** Ensure that leadership teams reflect a range of ages. Diverse leadership can challenge stereotypes and demonstrate the organization's commitment to valuing contributions from all age groups.

- **Offer equal upskilling opportunities to all employees:** Managers should never assume that Gen X employees are not interested in the latest technology trainings or new ways of working. Opportunities to gain new skills should be accessible to everyone.

- **Highlight success stories:** Showcase success stories among all generations, including Gen X. Acknowledge employees that have taken advantage of upskilling opportunities and made a positive impact on the organization.
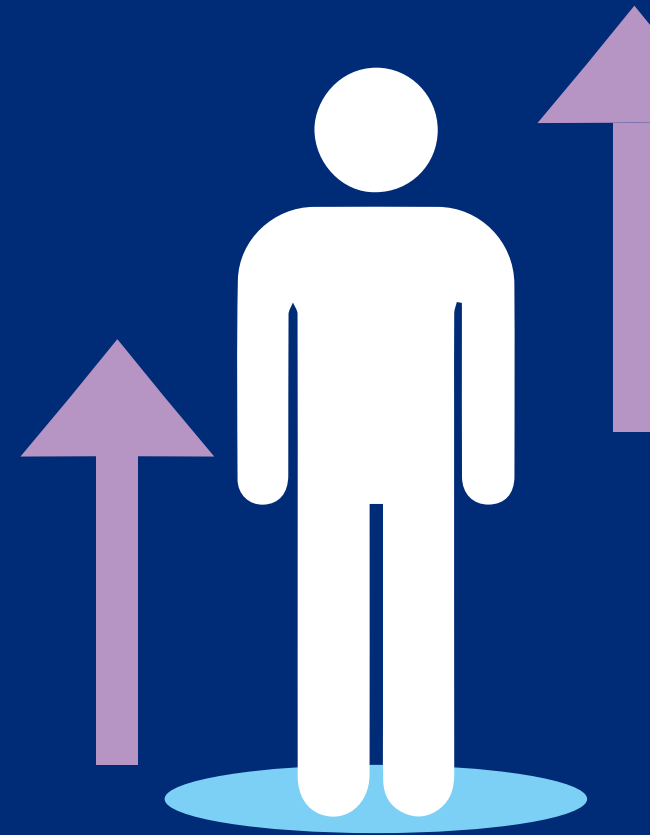
Manage resistance to change

Some Gen X employees may be hesitant to participate in upskilling initiatives:

- **Communicate the benefits:** Clearly articulate the advantages of upskilling, such as increased job satisfaction, career advancement and engagement.

- **Provide support and encouragement:** Offer resources and mentorship to help Gen X employees navigate new learning opportunities. Instill confidence in employees that while skill development may take time, you are willing to help them through the journey.

Ensure accessibility

Accessibility is crucial for Gen X employees to fully engage in upskilling programs:

- **Consider physical and technological barriers:** Ensure that training facilities are accessible and that online platforms are user-friendly for those who may not be as tech-savvy.

- **Offer additional support:** Provide one-on-one assistance or coaching for Gen X employees who may need extra help.

Conclusion

Upskilling Gen X employees is a strategic investment that enhances employee satisfaction, retention and overall organizational performance. By creating an inclusive upskilling program, your organization can empower employees of all ages to reach their development and career goals. Prioritizing these initiatives also cultivates a diverse, skilled and engaged workforce committed to the success of your organization.

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