WORKING ACROSS GENERATIONS

Digital Literacy, GenAI, and Workplace Dynamics in Malta

The Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning Foundation

Practitioner Brief

NATIONAL Skills COUNCIL

3CL

PRACTITIONER BRIEF

Working Across Generations

Digital literacy, GenAI and workplace dynamics in Malta: what the evidence means for organisations

The headline for practitioners is simple: workplace friction is driven less by age-based ability than by norms and organisational conditions. GenAI adoption is moving fast, but mature, organisation-wide deployment remains rare, leaving a narrow window to shape how tools are used before ad-hoc habits harden. This brief leads with the actions worth taking first, then sets out the evidence behind them.

START HERE: five moves

If you do nothing else, begin with these five moves. Each is drawn from the tiered plan that follows and marked there with a ★.

1. **One-page communication charter:** which channel for what, what counts as urgent, response windows, and a basic after-hours boundary.
2. **A recurring safe-to-learn slot:** a protected monthly 45–60 minute "tool try-out," with someone modelling learning out loud.
3. **One-page GenAI rules of thumb:** what never to upload, the human-verifier principle, and agreed use cases versus no-go zones.
4. **One cross-generational learning routine**: a buddy rotation, monthly show-and-tell or light reverse-mentoring cycle. Reciprocal, not "younger teaches older."
5. **A development check across roles:** see where AI is shifting task loads and what skills people at every level must keep practising and owning.

About this brief. This reports Phase 1 of a wider 3CL Foundation and National Skills Council research project on how workers across generations in Malta experience GenAI adoption and shifting workplace norms. The findings draw on eight focus groups with 64 participants aged 18 to 65, spanning education and lifelong learning, social partners, policy and innovation, civil society and youth organisations. They are best read as indicative patterns, not population-level measurement.

Where these findings apply. These come from a specific setting: an SME-dominated, highly diverse Maltese workforce under significant labour-market pressure. Organisations that are large, unionised, or rich in in-house L&D may need to adjust the recommendations. The underlying mechanisms: implicit norms creating friction, exposure shaping digital confidence, GenAI adoption outpacing governance, are likely to recur widely; the local texture will differ.

What comes next. This covers Phase 1 of a continuing programme. Phase 2 examines human–AI collaboration in concrete organisational settings through case studies with early adopters, focusing on task-level impacts and how career stage shapes adoption. Phase 3 will add a quantitative layer through a workforce survey. Findings are published at www.3cl.org/resources.

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WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

1 **Digital literacy is broader than "tech skills."** A composite capability: choosing the right tool, prompting GenAI well, understanding safety, privacy and ethics, and critically evaluating outputs.

2 **Channel mismatch, not difference in ability, drives the visible friction.** Divergent channel preferences produce fragmented conversations, missed messages and avoidable frustration.

3 **Learning preferences differ, but stereotypes are unreliable.** Some younger workers preferred flexible, just-in-time learning; some older workers preferred guided formats, with consistent exceptions.

4 **Work values are shifting, and retention is affected.** Older cohorts were described as prioritising stability and security, while younger cohorts prioritise autonomy, fulfilment, financial wellbeing and ethical alignment.

5 **GenAI is both a productivity lever and a risk to agency.** Efficiency was welcomed alongside concerns about privacy, bias, passive over-reliance, displacement, and an "entry-level squeeze."

6 **Transversal skills are the resilience anchor.** Communication, teamwork, creativity, adaptability, problem-solving, critical thinking, empathy and "learning how to learn" were mentioned as the primary safeguard of relevance.

Underneath the six findings

Identity over category
When real differences between people emerge, they reflect individual mindset, professional role, and life context - not age or generational label.

Conditions over cohort
Most of the visible friction traces back to unspoken norms and organisational conditions, not a generational divide, and it eases once expectations are made explicit.

The human edge holds
As AI continues to reshape the workplace, the skills most likely to endure are the human ones - adaptability, critical thinking, and the ability to communicate across difference.

FROM FINDINGS TO ACTION

Nine actions, grouped from low-lift starting points to longer-term strategic choices, express the report's five pillars. Treat them as a menu, not a checklist: start with one or two foundation actions, test what works, and expand. **★ marks the five "start here" moves.**

TIER 1 Foundation: Low-lift steps that reduce friction quickly

1 Establish communication protocols ★ START HERE

Recommendation. Make communication expectations explicit so teams don't run on "assumptions by age." Channel mismatch, not ability, was the most visible source of friction.

START SMALL

- ★ **Create a one-page communication charter**: name which channel is used for what, define urgency levels, set response windows, agree a basic after-hours boundary.
- Define simple urgency labels, such as urgent, standard and low priority, with clear
- response expectations.
- Build on existing norms with bottom-up buy-in, and have leaders model the boundary rules consistently, so staff own the policy.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Provide light guidance on tone and formality by channel, such as when to use informal internal chat versus more formal external email.

  Encourage simple practices that reduce noise, such as status indicators, quiet hours, delayed-send, and agreed response-time expectations.

2 Create psychologically safe experimentation ★ START HERE

Recommendation. Make it normal and safe for all staff to try new tools without fear of embarrassment or penalty. Curiosity and willingness to learn mattered more than age.

START SMALL

- ★ **Put a recurring monthly 45–60 minute "tool try-out" slot**, protected in the calendar.
- Provide a low-stakes space, such as a sandbox or practice task, where mistakes don't matter.
- Ask one leader to model learning out loud once a month by sharing what they tried,
- what worked and what did not.
- Recognise and reward curiosity, experimentation, questioning and skill development.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Treat things that didn't go to plan as learning; focus on what to improve next time.
- Use paired exploration: pair confident users with colleagues still building confidence.

3 Set light, clear GenAI guardrails ★ START HERE

Recommendation. Set light but clear expectations for how GenAI should and should not be used, before informal habits harden into defaults. Adoption is already happening, largely ungoverned.

START SMALL

- ★ **Create a one-page "GenAI rules of thumb"** covering three basics: what should not be uploaded into unapproved tools (such as client data); the human-verifier principle, meaning that a person remains accountable for any AI-assisted output; and agreed use cases and no-go zones for your organisational context. Introduce this in a meeting.
- Ask staff to flag, even informally, when GenAI was used on a piece of work, so review and accountability stay visible.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Distinguish approved organisational tools from personal tools used without IT oversight, especially for data handling.
- Review the guidance every six months as the tool landscape shifts.

TIER 2 Capability-building: Routines that build skills and sharing

4 Invest systematically in transversal skills

Recommendation. Treat communication, critical thinking, judgement and collaboration as core infrastructure, not optional extras - the primary safeguard of relevance as tasks shift.

START SMALL

- Build transversal skills into everyday work by designing tasks that require employees to synthesise information, collaborate with others and explain their reasoning.
- Make feedback more developmental by focusing not only on the final output, but also on clarity, judgement, reasoning and teamwork.
- Run short scenario discussions of 15–20 minutes using practical questions such as: "How would we handle this case?" and "What would we need to check if AI had drafted it?"

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Train managers in coaching-style feedback to support reflection and learning.
- Use realistic simulations and role plays to practise judgement, communication and decision-making.

5 Design cross-generational knowledge transfer ★ START HERE

Recommendation. Create simple, reciprocal learning mechanisms that avoid one-directional "younger teaches older" assumptions.

START SMALL

- ★ **Implement one cross-generational learning routine** such as a buddy rotation system, a monthly 20-minute show-and-tell, or a light six-week reverse-mentoring cycle where juniors share tools and seniors share judgement, context and quality standards.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Use mixed-age implementation teams when adopting new tools.
- Rotate pairings periodically to expand networks and spread learning.

6 Build workplace-integrated learning infrastructure

Recommendation. Make learning fit the workflow, not the other way around, especially in SMEs.

START SMALL

- Create a simple internal "how we do this" page: FAQs, short guides and examples for recurring tasks.
- Provide short microlearning resources usable at the point of need, ideally in 5–10 minutes.
- Use one real business problem as a learning project.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Create small learning cohorts around shared challenges; blend self-paced basics with short live practice.
- Recognise prior learning, including informal and experiential.

TIER 3 Strategic: Longer-term choices that protect talent and learning

7 Differentiate retention strategies

Recommendation. Retention improves when the organisation is clear about what it offers and reads it as two distinct logics (see box).

START SMALL

- Hold regular career check-ins to learn what matters now: stability, growth, flexibility, pay, purpose or progression.
- Make the employee value proposition explicit.
- Address one recurring baseline expectation such as workload, flexibility or recognition.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Audit whether stated values such as social impact, are experienced day to day.
- Use short pulse surveys or stay interviews, then adjust retention actions accordingly.

> **Why retention is two problems, not one. For workers whose identity is built on institutional belonging,** retention means sustaining continuity, acknowledging tenure and contribution, and valuing the organisation's own history. **For workers who treat the organisation as a platform for leverage and visibility,** retention means making stated values visible in real decisions — especially when they become commercially inconvenient.

8 Redesign entry-level career pathways ★ START HERE

Recommendation. As GenAI automates routine tasks, protect early-career development so juniors still build judgement and capability.

START SMALL

- ★ **Carry out a development check across roles**: review where AI is shifting task loads and what skills people at every level must keep practising and owning; use it to redesign junior roles before stripping tasks from them.
- Ensure juniors keep supervised opportunities to practise judgement, make decisions and receive feedback.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Strengthen apprenticeship-style development through mentored problem-solving and gradually rising responsibility.

9 Align organisational learning culture authentically

Recommendation. Treat learning capacity as organisational infrastructure, not optional personal initiative.

START SMALL

- Reserve a small, regular block for learning during work hours, even one hour a month.
- Use "test and learn" pilots for new tools: a small trial, a quick review, then scale what works.
- Ask leaders to model curiosity by normalising questions and learning from what doesn't work.

IF YOU HAVE CAPACITY

- Offer multiple learning pathways such as peer, project-based and external courses.
- Remove structural barriers: time poverty, cost and scheduling constraints.

The Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning Foundation (3CL) is a Malta-based public foundation working at the intersection of technology, learning, and society.

This publication forms part of our LearnTech & The Future of Work project cluster, which investigates how emerging technologies are reshaping education, employment, and lifelong learning. A major focus of the cluster is the AI-mediated workplace, where up to five generations now work alongside one another while often holding fundamentally different assumptions about technology, communication, authority, and learning. Rather than relying on simplistic generational stereotypes, these projects involve evidence-based research into how these differing digital habits and workplace expectations shape collaboration, productivity, and organisational culture.

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