

Design of the Educational Video “Creative Survival Guide” to Help Gen Z Workers Cope with Culture Shock in the Creative Agency Industry in Medan

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The rapid growth of the creative agency industry in Medan has not been matched by structured working systems, creating a significant gap between academic life and the professional world that Generation Z workers are forced to navigate upon entry. This study addresses the phenomenon of culture shock experienced by Gen Z workers entering creative agencies in Medan, encompassing the clash between expectations of flexible and appreciative workplaces and the reality of unpredictable workloads, unrealistic deadlines, inadequate compensation, and insufficient institutional mental health support, which consequences that extend beyond psychological distress to tangible physical health disruptions. A qualitative descriptive analytical approach was employed, with data collected through semi structured in depth interviews with three creative workers possessing 1–3 years of experience, and subsequently analyzed using narrative analysis to understand how each individual constructs meaning from their adaptation process. Based on these findings, an approximately 13 minutes educational video was produced in a cinematic documentary format across three narrative segments, presented not as an instructional guide but as an authentic representation of lived experience designed to help Gen Z audiences feel understood, psychologically prepared, and capable of establishing healthy professional boundaries before entering the creative agency world.

Keywords: Burnout, Culture Shock, Creative Agency, Educational Video, Generation Z.

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1. Introduction

Changes in the world of work are happening at a rapid pace; in fact, it is often difficult to anticipate the many changes that occur overnight. While some individuals who have been working for a long time are able to adapt to new changes, this process can be particularly challenging for those entering the workforce. A World Economic Forum report (2023) notes that changes in the structure of the workforce are now driven not only by technology but also by shifts in the values and expectations of the new generation of workers entering the existing system. As a result, many recent graduates realize that what they learned in college does not adequately prepare them for the real world workplace.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has its own unique perspective on the world of work. They don't just focus on the type of job they have, but also care about how the work environment operates. They want more flexible work arrangements, better communication among colleagues, and a focus on mental health (Deloitte, 2022). Unfortunately, many workplaces do not provide these conditions. Just like in many other industries, the creative industry still has many organizations with very traditional work systems and structures. Many still enforce long working hours and expect a high level of commitment from their employees, much like the work systems in large corporations.

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Recent years have seen rapid growth for creative agencies due to an increase in businesses requiring services ranging from branding and digital content to visual marketing in the city of Medan. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2023), the visual communication and advertising sector in North Sumatra continues to grow, with Medan emerging as one of its hubs. Unfortunately, however, this growth has not been accompanied by well organized work systems. As a result, Gen Z newcomers are forced to adapt quickly, even in chaotic situations. This is what makes Gen Z workers at creative agencies in Medan more prone to experiencing culture shock, both in terms of work challenges and environmental adaptation.

Unfortunately, although this happens frequently, there is still very little media coverage that specifically addresses the local context of Medan. Content about culture shock in the workplace found on digital platforms remains general in nature or adopts the perspective of large corporations, such as those in Jakarta or even abroad. In reality, the conditions are not always the same. Young workers in Medan who experience culture shock at small or local agencies do not have many references that truly “speak” to their own experiences. This aligns with the findings of Maulana & Sihombing (2022), who state that content that feels close to everyday experiences tends to be easier to understand and accept.

Therefore, this study attempts to use a slightly different approach. The concept of the Creative Survival Guide used here is not merely a name, but rather an effort to compile a kind of adaptation guide that feels more realistic. It is not presented as a rigid theory, but rather as a collection of experiences that can serve as a reference, especially for those in the early stages of their careers. This approach aligns with the concepts of peer learning and narrative based education, which are considered more effective in helping individuals understand situations and make decisions, particularly among younger age groups (Schank, 2011).

Therefore, educational videos offer a distinct approach that is worth considering. Unlike other formats that rely on text or infographics, videos can convey messages through multiple senses, combining narrative, visuals, music, and emotion into a single, easily digestible format. Ito Jaeger et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital videos are effective in raising awareness and improving understanding among young audiences regarding mental health and environmental adaptation issues. Beyond simply disseminating information, videos designed with the right approach can trigger selfreflection and foster a sense of connection something Gen Z particularly needs during the adaptation process (Putra & Setiawan, 2024).

To that end, this study introduces the concept of the Creative Survival Guide as the primary framework for the video’s design. Unlike instructional work guides, the Creative Survival Guide is designed as a medium that combines depictions of real life experiences, authentic testimonials from creative industry professionals in Medan who have navigated the adaptation phase, and practical guidance that can be immediately applied. The approach is empathetic and non preachy, serving instead to accompany them. This practice aligns with Arnold and O’Brien (2025), who note that Gen Z responds more to content that feels personal, honest, and drawn from real life experiences, rather than content that is formal and one sided.

Based on the above discussion, this research holds significant urgency. The development of the Creative Survival Guide educational video to address culture shock among Gen Z workers in Medan’s creative agency industry is not merely a creative endeavor, but a response that addresses an unmet need. This research aims to bridge this gap by bringing to light experiences that have long remained hidden behind the scenes of the local creative industry, and transforming them into a useful resource for those who need it.

Based on this background, this study focuses on the following questions: 1. What forms of culture shock do Generation Z workers experience when entering the workplace at creative agencies in Medan, and how does this impact their psychological well being? 2. What is the process for designing a creative survival guide video that effectively addresses the culture shock experienced by Generation Z workers in Medan's agency industry?

This project aims to: 1. Identify and understand the culture shock experienced by Generation Z workers at creative agencies in Medan, including its causes and effects. 2. Design an educational video titled "Creative Survival Guide" that visually explores these experiences, making them easy for Gen Z to understand.

For Gen Z workers who are currently in or about to start a career in the creative industry, this study is expected to serve as a practical reference and a representation of relevant experiences, helping them feel better understood and better equipped to overcome the challenges they face. For the creative industry, the results of this study can serve as a basis for creating a more humane work environment that takes into account the adaptation process of new employees. For designers and content creators, this design process can serve as a methodological reference in developing educational media based on real world experiences.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical focus. This approach was chosen because the primary focus of the study is to understand the culture shock experienced by Generation Z workers, which is highly subjective and tied to the individual's psychological state. Therefore, this phenomenon cannot be explained solely through numerical data but must be explored through the direct experiences of those who have experienced it. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2022), a qualitative approach is used when researchers wish to understand the meanings individuals ascribe to specific social experiences. In the context of this study, this approach allows researchers to explore how Gen Z workers interpret their adaptation process in the creative industry workplace.

Research Location

This study was conducted in the city of Medan, North Sumatra. This city was chosen because of its rapid growth in the creative industries, particularly in advertising, graphic design, and digital content production. In addition, Medan is one of the major cities outside of Java that exhibits creative work dynamics worth studying.

Research Population

The population in this study consists of Generation Z employees working at creative agencies in the city of Medan. The term "Generation Z" refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012, meaning that at the time this study was conducted, they were between the ages of 14 and 29. However, since this study focuses on work experience, the appropriate population consists of those who have already entered the workforce and have direct experience in the creative agency industry.

Sample and Informant Criteria

The research sample was drawn from the population based on criteria that were directly relevant to the research focus. The selected informants must fall into the Gen Z category, have 0–3 years of work experience in the creative agency industry in Medan, have held or currently hold a creative role such as graphic designer, copywriter, social media specialist, or content creator, and be willing to share their

experiences openly and honestly. The 0–3 year work experience criterion was chosen because this period is the phase in which culture shock is most frequently experienced and most easily remembered.

Sampling Technique

The technique used for sampling is purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. According to Saunders et al. (2023), purposive sampling is an appropriate strategy when researchers require data from individuals who possess specific characteristics, knowledge, or experiences relevant to the research questions. The number of informants was not strictly predetermined but was determined based on the principle of data saturation that is, the point at which the information obtained begins to repeat itself and no longer yields new findings (Saunders et al., 2023).

In Depth Interviews

Primary data collection was conducted through in depth interviews using a semi-structured approach. This method was chosen because it strikes a balance between clear question guidance and flexibility in exploring the informants' experiences more broadly. According to Megan DeJonckheere and Leah M. Vaughn (2024), semistructured interviews allow researchers to explore experiences in depth while maintaining the focus of the research. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and lasted approximately 10–20 minutes per participant; the entire process was recorded with the participants' consent. The topics discussed included their experiences with culture shock, the psychological effects they felt, and how they adapted to their work environment.

Indirect Observation

In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted indirect observation. This was done due to limited access to conduct direct observation in the informants' work environments. The observation was conducted through narratives provided by the informants, analysis of relevant social media content, and the researcher's reflections based on their background in the creative industry. This approach was used as a complement to understand the broader context of the experiences shared by the informants.

3. Results And Discussion

Research Findings

This study involved three informants who are creative agency workers in the city of Medan. Each informant has experience:

Informant 1

Informant N is a 22 year old eighth semester college student who began his career as a professional video editor after becoming interested in the social environment at a creative agency. Before entering the workforce, N expected that working at a creative agency would be flexible and enjoyable. However, after working at a creative agency in Medan, he found the working conditions to be more demanding than he had anticipated, such as sudden projects outside of working hours, difficulty maintaining a work life balance, and a lack of time to focus on his studies. Additionally, N felt that his salary was not commensurate with the workload he was handling. While working, N often experienced burnout due to unrealistic deadlines and endless revisions.

To alleviate this exhaustion, she decided to take a short break from work, seek out a change of scenery, and spend more time socializing with her friends. Based on this experience, N hopes that the

company will implement work systems that better support employees' mental health, such as setting more reasonable deadlines, ensuring clear workplace communication, and providing appropriate recognition for employees' work whether in the form of acknowledgment or compensation.

Informant 2

Informant M is a 27 year old creative agency employee who began her career as a social media strategist at a creative agency in Medan in 2024. Before entering the workforce, M had high expectations for career growth in the creative industry. However, after starting work, they experienced an unpredictable work rhythm sometimes relaxed and sometimes extremely busy which required adaptability in various situations. Additionally, various work challenges, both internal and external, also impacted the workflow on the ground. M also believes that the agency's work system prioritizes quantity over quality. In his view, many employees want to produce their best work, but policy and budget constraints prevent them from achieving optimal results.

Regarding work life balance, M believes that it is difficult to maintain consistently due to an irregular work schedule. When work is particularly busy, time after work is spent solely on resting to recharge. In fact, work related stress often carries over into rest periods, with thoughts about work still popping into mind even while sleeping. To cope with this situation, M chooses to socialize and spend time with friends as a way to relieve work related stress. In addition, he hopes the company will better recognize employees' contributions and refrain from comparing individual capabilities, particularly when it comes to creativity.

Informant 3

Informant P is a 26 year old creative agency employee who previously worked as a social media strategist at two creative agencies in Medan. Before entering the agency world, P expected a comfortable job with a satisfying salary. However, after starting work, he encountered various challenges in the workplace, such as a lack of clear workflows, sudden schedule changes, and pay cuts. In the interview, P also revealed that excessive work pressure had once caused physical health issues, specifically a three month absence of menstruation. According to her, several other employees at the agency had experienced the same condition, indicating that work pressure affects not only mental health but also physical health. To cope with this situation, P chooses to get plenty of rest and spend time with friends to relieve stress. In addition, P hopes that creative agencies will better recognize their employees' hard work and create a more supportive and family like work environment without compromising professional boundaries.

4. Discussion

Based on the interview results, a similar pattern of experiences related to culture shock was found among Gen Z employees at a creative agency in Medan. All three informants initially had expectations of a flexible, dynamic work environment that supported career growth and work life balance. However, after entering the workforce, they realized that work life balance was difficult to achieve due to an unpredictable work rhythm, sudden projects, repeated revisions, and deadlines considered unrealistic. These conditions impacted the workers' personal lives, including their rest time and academic activities.

The work related stress experienced also has an impact on the informants' mental and physical well being. Thoughts about work often linger beyond working hours, even affecting physical health due to excessive work pressure. To cope with this situation, the informants employ various coping strategies, such as taking a short break, seeking a change of scenery, and socializing with friends. However, these solutions are deemed insufficient to resolve the underlying issues stemming from the work system within the creative agency environment.

Therefore, the informants hope that the company can establish a clearer work system, realistic time management, transparent communication, and a more supportive work environment that values employees' efforts. The results of this study indicate that the work experience at a creative agency is influenced not only by job demands but also by work systems and an organizational environment that supports employee well being.

Based on these findings, the concept for the educational video was designed to honestly portray the realities of creative professionals' experiences in a way that resonates with the target audience. The video combines authentic interview footage with visuals that support the narrative, making the information feel more natural and relevant to Gen Z members who are currently in or about to enter the world of creative agencies. The video visuals depict a realistic work environment such as editing activities, laptop use, and break moments with a simple, emotional approach to reinforce the message about workplace stress. Additionally, the use of authentic source dialogue aims to make the shared experiences feel more genuine and aligned with the actual conditions faced by creative professionals.

Video Storyboard Design

The video's narrative structure was designed in a structured manner, using the interviews with the interviewees as the primary footage, which was then arranged into a seamless narrative. The video was designed so that viewers not only see and hear the interviewees' stories, but also understand and empathize with the experiences they went through.

The video's structure follows a three part narrative approach centered on each interviewee. The first segment opens with N, who realistically highlights the gap between expectations and the reality of work. The next segment showcases a more personal and emotional experience, while the final segment concludes with P, who shares an experience of burnout that has even affected their physical health. This structure is designed to gradually build the audience's emotional engagement, keeping them connected to the story being told.

In addition, the video's structure is organized using timecode divisions, interviewee segments, visual descriptions, and estimated durations for each section to ensure a more focused and structured delivery of the message.

Table 1. Video Flowchart For Creative Survival G 1

Timecode	Speaker	Theme Segment	Visuals & Narrative	Duration
00:00 – 01:00	N	Expectations vs. Reality	Medium shot of N facing the camera, discussing the gap between initial expectations and the reality of working at a creative agency. B roll: shots of a laptop, office atmosphere, and busy gestures.	~1 minute
01:00 – 01:45	N	Work Life Balance	N talks about the challenges of balancing work and school. B roll: late night chat notifications, the talent suddenly opening a laptop, a desk divided between work and school books.	~45 seconds
01:45 – 02:20	N	Impact on Mental Health	Live interview, serious expression. B roll: talent looks overwhelmed, gestures of dizziness, exhausting work posture.	~35 seconds
02:30 – 03:20	N	Burnout & How to Deal with It	N talks about his recovery strategy. B roll: a casual conversation with a friend, outdoors, away from the laptop.	~50 seconds
03:20 – 04:30	N	We Hope for the Company's Support	Only footage of the interviewee speaking, with no additional documentary footage. N shares his ideal vision for a more humane work system.	~1 minute 10 seconds
04:30 – 05:00	M	Expectations Before Entering the Creative	M talks about his initial impressions of the creative industry before he actually experienced it firsthand. It's	~30 seconds

Timecode	Speaker	Theme Segment	Visuals & Narrative	Duration
05:00 – 06:05	M	Expectations vs. Reality	M illustrates the gap between imagination and reality. Visuals of the interviewee, without additional B roll footage.	~1 minute 5 seconds
06:05 – 07:15	M	Work Life Balance	B roll: laptops and books scattered about; the talent glances at them briefly before getting back to work; working quickly with many tabs open; a quiet room at night. The visual tone is eerie and isolating.	~1 minute 10 seconds
07:15 – 08:15	M	Impact on Mental Health	B roll: talent falls asleep at the table, then slowly wakes up, with a blank expression, sitting still and staring; slow motion footage conveying emotional exhaustion without any obvious physical activity.	~1 seconds
08:15 – 08:50	M	Burnout & How to Deal with It	M describes hanging out as an escape. B roll: walking out of a room, sitting back and relaxing, casual conversation, a brighter atmosphere by contrast.	~35 seconds
08:50 – 10:00	M	We Hope for the Company's Support	B roll: The talent reviews their work, showing a neutral to slightly relieved expression. The scene closes with a shot of M working more calmly after receiving recognition.	~1 minute 10 seconds
10:00 – 10:30	P	Expectations Before Entering the Creative World	B roll: P sits in front of a laptop in a simple workspace. The interviewee discusses expectations regarding salary and the lack of a penalty system.	~30 seconds
10:30 – 11:05	P	Work Life Balance	B roll: The talent is relaxing when suddenly they receive a message; they immediately grab their bag and camera. The footage captures an impromptu shoot that has become an unexpected part of their routine.	~35 seconds
11:05 – 11:30	P	We Hope for the Company's Support	Only the interviewee speaks; there are no documentary inserts. P expresses his hopes directly and personally.	~25 seconds
11:30 – 13:00	P	Burnout & How to Deal with It	B roll: a documentary montage from morning to evening (a drop in energy), talent standing for a long time and holding their legs, a team discussion with small smiles. Concludes with a sense of collective solidarity as a coping mechanism.	~1 minute 30 seconds

Based on the storyboard and production results outlined above, it can be concluded that each scene conveys a clear narrative and message. The three interviewees, though from different backgrounds, share a similar situation: they work in a system that demands a great deal from them without providing adequate support or guarantees of decent living conditions. The gap between expectations and reality is not merely about salary, but more about how they are viewed and valued as human beings.

In terms of video design, the cinematic approach employed proved effective in linking the narrative with the visual experience. The selection of B roll footage focusing on expressions and everyday objects created a very thin line between the audience and the subjects. Viewers did not merely listen to the story; they also felt what the characters in the video were experiencing. This was the primary objective of the cinematic documentary format used in this study.

As a result, the video's narrative successfully fulfills its original purpose as a non preachy creative survival guide. Rather than offering neatly packaged solutions, the video draws on the firsthand experiences of the interviewees, who speak candidly including about the uncomfortable parts making it an authentic resource for anyone who has entered or is about to enter the world of the creative agency industry.

5. Conclusion

This study not only succeeded in gathering factual accounts from people in those situations, but also captured the emotional layer that is often missing from academic research. The three interviewees N, M, and P exhibited nearly identical patterns: their initial expectations before entering the world of creative agencies differed from the conditions and realities they faced. This isn't just about individuals who aren't prepared; it's about an industry that has never been sufficiently transparent in conveying its conditions to prospective employees before they join the company. Not a single one of the three interviewees felt they had a healthy work life balance. Work bleeds into personal time, from late at night into rest periods. Impromptu shoots, unreasonable deadlines, and communication outside of working hours have become habits that everyone is forced to follow without being able to question them. For agencies and creative companies, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for reflection on how to improve workplace well being.

Clearer workplace communication regarding working hours must be established, including concrete protections for workers against work related contact outside of agreed upon hours. Companies are encouraged to implement recognition systems and foster open dialogue to address and support employees' mental or psychological wellbeing. This study is an invitation to view the creative workplace with a more open perspective and a more human centered approach. Not to be pessimistic, but to be honest. And from that honesty, positive change can begin to take shape. Strong social support. Your work capacity does not define who you are, and setting boundaries does not equate to failure.

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