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Strategies for Generation Z in the Contemporary Workplace: A

Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Generation Z is becoming an increasingly powerful source of the world workforce, but organisations are still grappling with how to motivate, engage and retain these workers in the face of digitalisation, hybrid work and changing values. Despite the boom in research about Generation Z, it has been disjointed, with much of the research focusing on engagement, leadership, work-life balance or employer branding as a standalone concept, instead of linking motivation, work-related issues and retention to a cohesive theoretical approach. This dissertation fills this gap by summarising the evidence on the experiences of Generation Z in the modern workplace and what organisational practices lead to long-term engagement and retention.

Methods: A qualitative systematic literature review was performed (based on PRISMA-informed protocol) to find the peer-reviewed articles on Generation Z employees published in 2020-2025. Searches were performed in Scopus and Google Scholar, where 2,212 records were located, and 50 studies in 22 countries and 15 sectors were included and fulfilled the predefined inclusion and quality criteria. A structured template was used to extract the data, which was appraised based on modified CASP critical appraisal guidelines and synthesised thematically based on the Job Demands Resources model, Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory and talent management and employer branding perspectives.

Findings: There were three themes found: dual intrinsic-extrinsic motivation drivers, contextual and organisational issues, and multi-level retention strategies comprising rewards, development, flexibility and culture. Generation Z appreciates meaningful jobs, independence, learning, value congruence, competitive compensation, work-life balance and digital assimilation, which react favourably to considerate and participative leadership. But the job demands, work-life balance, mental health burdens, intergenerational strains and branding-employer misalignment augment disengagement and turnover intentions.

Contribution: The review narrows down existing motivation and retention theories to a digitally native generation and provides evidence-based advice to human resource practitioners to design work environments and people-management practices that are effective in motivating, engaging and retaining Generation Z employees.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Context

Today's work environment is in the midst of massive change as a result of digitalisation, flexible working arrangements and changing expectations of employees. Generation Z, or the millennial generation, refers to the children of the mid-1990s to early 2010s who are becoming an increasingly large part of the work force around the world. The generation that has been born into the digital world is deeply connected to technology and digital spaces, with a set of values and expectations towards work which are unique from previous generations (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). But, for HR professionals and leaders, it has become necessary to know how they feel about their workplace, what drives their engagement and what holds them back from staying.

The generations defined

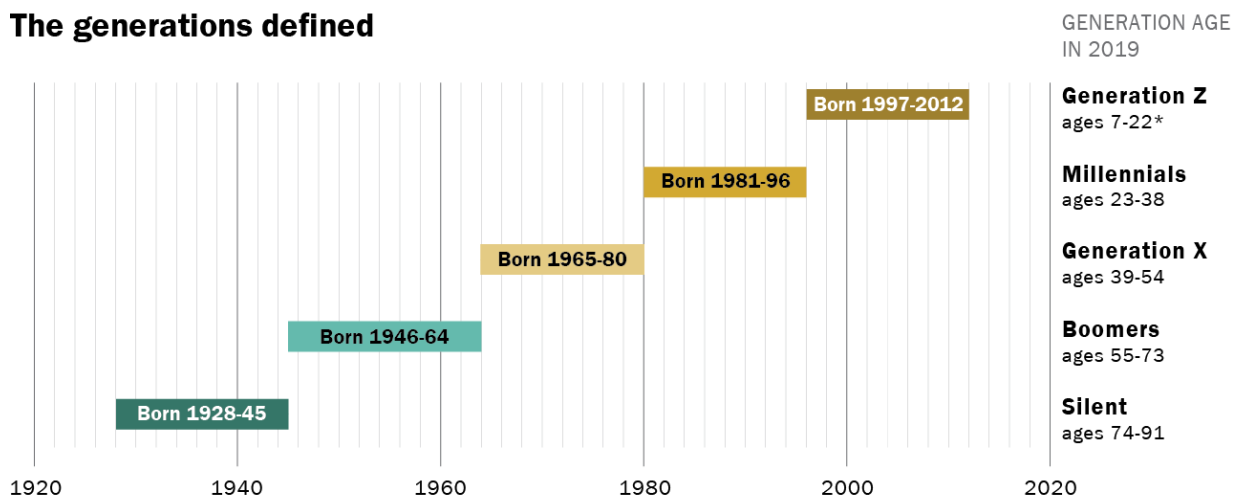


Figure 1: Generations timeline (Dimock, 2019)

Empirical research in the last few years shows that the concerns of Generation Z employees are the importance of work that has meaning, continuous learning, supportive leadership, and work-life balance are all prominent, as well as heightened sensitivity to workplace stress (Septiani et al., 2024). While the number of employees in this category is expected to grow and reach up to 27% of the global labour force by 2025, and up to 2.5 billion people across the world, organisations report ongoing difficulties in attracting, managing and retaining these employees (Toboso-Gómez et al., 2025). Studies have shown that Gen Z workers have a turnover rate of more than 30% a year, compared to the 15-20% of Millennials, and 65% are willing to jump jobs in the next two years if they are not living up to their expectations. Many organisations struggle with high turnover rates, lack of alignment between their practices and employees' expectations, and struggle to create long-term commitment.



Global Labor Force Participation, Aged 20-65

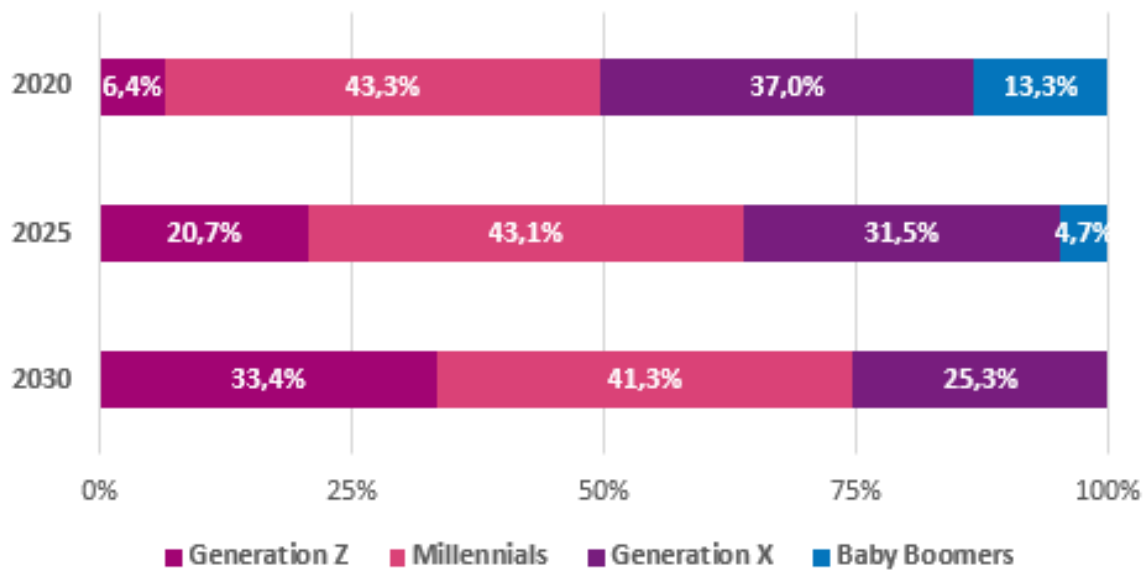


Figure 2: Global Labour Force Share (Lettink, 2019)

The amount of scholarly literature on Generation Z in organisational contexts has surged exponentially from fewer than 50 publications in 2020 to more than 800 peer-reviewed articles, as shown in this bibliometric analysis, by 2025, when they will be entering and working in the workforce. At an organisational level, the amount of scholarly literature on Generation Z has increased rapidly; by 2025, there will be more than 800 peer-reviewed articles documenting the context of the workplace, engagement, motivation, leadership styles, and retention strategies (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). This evidence, however, is still fractured in disciplines, sectors and countries. Research frequently focuses on individual factors, like job satisfaction, employer branding, or flexible working, without incorporating them into a unified model alongside other factors such as motivation, challenges, and retention measures (Pózner and Kozák, 2025). Previous systematic reviews examined a specific aspect of the relationship between JDR and retention outcomes, such as work engagement (Surugiu et al., 2025), leadership effects (Doan and Wu, 2025), or talent management practices (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024), but less than 12% of published reviews combined the JDR model, the Social Exchange Theory, and empirical evidence on retention.

However, in methodological aspects, more than 75% of the literature in the present study is still using the cross-sectional survey design, the one country sample and self-reported measures, which provide limited causal inferences and limited generalisability (Zain, Ardiansyah and

Fachrunnisa, 2025). Since the advent of hybrid and remote work models (which were adopted by more than 60% of organisations since 2020), empirical research has not advanced as quickly as the models have evolved, making it difficult to capture how the two models relate to the motivation and retention of Generation Z (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2024). The gaps highlight the need for a systematically, integrative review that can combine various research strands.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to systematically review and synthesise existing literature on the motivation, challenges, and retention strategies of Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace.

1.3 Research Question

- What factors motivate Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace, as identified in the existing literature?
- What key challenges do organisations face in attracting, managing, and engaging Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace?
- What organisational strategies have been identified in the literature as effective in retaining Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace?

1.4 Research Objectives

- To identify and synthesise the key factors that motivate Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace as reported in existing literature.
- To examine the principal challenges faced by organisations in attracting, managing, and engaging Generation Z employees.
- To analyse organisational strategies identified in the literature as effective in retaining Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace.

1.5 Rationale and Significance of the Study

With the rise of a new generation, Gen Z, on the international labour market, organisations are still struggling to motivate, engage and retain young people. While there have been recent reviews on Generation Z using the perspective of engagement, leadership and talent management, research continues to be fragmented across disciplines and focused on a single facet of Generation Z (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). Organisations are therefore missing the clarity of a strong evidence base of how motivation, workplace challenges and retention strategies influence the employment journey of Generation Z.

This study systematically and comprehensively synthesizes the empirical research on peer-reviewed published literature from 2020 to 2025, during which the first generation of members of the Generation Z was entering the workforce and significant changes in work practices were occurring. The review, which was conducted using a systematic and transparent protocol based on available literature (2,212 initial records were screened and 186 full-text articles assessed), brings together the often-fuzzy and sparse evidence and provides greater theoretical understanding of Generation Z workplace behaviour in the context of the Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. The studies included are from more than 85,000 Generation Z participants in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies.

In practice, the results can inform human resource and talent management practices, such as defining interventions in line with the needs and expectations of Generation Z, which will impact on sustainable workforce plans, retention, etc. (Pózner and Kozák, 2025). The review also highlights key research gaps, such as the need for longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparative studies, and evaluation of interventions, that should be further explored in the future. This systematic review tackles an emerging organisational puzzle, as Generation Z is expected to make up 27% of the workforce in 2025 and 58% by 2030, with their unique attitudes toward autonomy, digital integration and value alignment.

1.6 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1, the background, objectives, and importance of investigating Generation Z motivation, challenges, and retention strategies are discussed. Chapter 2 critically reviews what has already been written in the area of workplace behaviour, and draws on the evidence to develop theoretical frameworks with the Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory. The methodological aspects of the systematic review based on PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) are explained in Chapter 3, which includes the procedure for screening 2,212 records, evaluating 186 full-text articles and choosing 50 studies for inclusion, as well as data extraction and quality assessment methods. Chapter 4 summarizes the thematic analysis of results of the 50 studies across 22 countries and 15 sectors for each of the research questions relating to motivational drivers, work challenges and retention strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of the main findings, theoretical and practical implications, methodological limitations (75% of studies were of cross-sectional design) and research directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The chapter summarizes academic research pertaining to motivation, challenges, and retention strategies of Generation Z workers in today's workplace. It establishes the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, including explanations of concepts, an overview of major theoretical approaches, and a consolidation of empirical research on motivation, engagement, workplace barriers and retention practices of Generation Z. It begins by articulating the key concepts of Generation Z and related constructs to work. It then offers the primary theoretical models which play a role in explaining current workplace behaviour of Generation Z, including the Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Durman et al., 2026). It then explores the empirical evidence of motivation and engagement, organisational issues in managing and engaging this cohort, reported strategies for retaining this group and organisational responses. Finally, it brings together these strands and pinpoints areas for future research that warrant the present systematic review.

2.2 Definition of key concepts

2.2.1 Generation Z

The cohort between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s has been called Generation Z (Z-Gen) and is the next generation after Generation Y, or Millennials (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). Such a well-connected, technology-dominated upbringing is commonly associated with specific workplace attitudes and actions such as a desire for speedy information transmission, digital equipment, flexible work and work practices, and ongoing feedback (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Țuclea and Poenaru, 2026). For the purposes of this study, Generation Z are those who are working or looking to work, and whose attitudes and experiences in the workplace are being empirically studied.

2.2.2 Motivation, engagement and work values

Motivation at work is the internal and external factors influencing the direction, intensity and persistence of work-related behaviour (Barhate and Dirani, 2021). For Generation Z, studies often differentiate between intrinsic motivation, like the need for interesting work, personal development and self-determination, and extrinsic motivation, such as salary, benefits and protection (Elducal et al., 2025). Engagement is typically described as a positive and satisfying work-state that involves vigour, dedication and absorption (Khusanova, Kang and Choi, 2021; Surugiu et al., 2025). Work values are the underlying beliefs about what is important in work

that will affect motivation and career decisions and include values such as development, flexibility, security, status or social impact (Busque-Carrier, Ratelle and Le Corff, 2021).

2.2.3 Workplace challenges

In this context, workplace challenges are defined as difficulties faced in the recruitment, integration and management of Generation Z workers in the workplace. Some of these challenges are the lack of alignment with what is expected from leadership and communication, the lack of providing adequate work–life balance and mental health support, lack of intergenerational alignment and need to adjust HR practices to accommodate new preferences (Sousa, Oliveira and Rodrigues, 2025). They include structural aspects like job design, workload, and implementation of flexible/hybrid work, potentially impacting stress, job satisfaction and intention to leave (Elducal et al., 2025).

2.2.4 Retention, turnover and organisational commitment

Retention is the ability of the organisation to maintain employees for a longer time, turnover is the employees' voluntary or involuntary departure from the organisation (Póznér & Kozák, 2025). A frequently used measure of intention to leave is the employee's conscious desire to leave (Kellerer and Süß, 2025), which is known as turnover intention. Organisational commitment can be defined as the psychological attachment and identification that employees have with their organizations, which can be categorized into three aspects: affective, continuance and normative (Zain et al., 2025). Empirical evidence demonstrates a link between Generation Z's commitment and turnover intention as well as the influence of motivations and work experiences and perceived organisational support (Mabaso, 2025; Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024).

2.3 Theoretical frameworks

The Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory are increasingly widely integrated to explain the behaviour of Gen Z in recent literature and are often complemented by the perspectives of talent management and employer branding (Durman et al., 2026; Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025).

2.3.1 Job Demands–Resources model

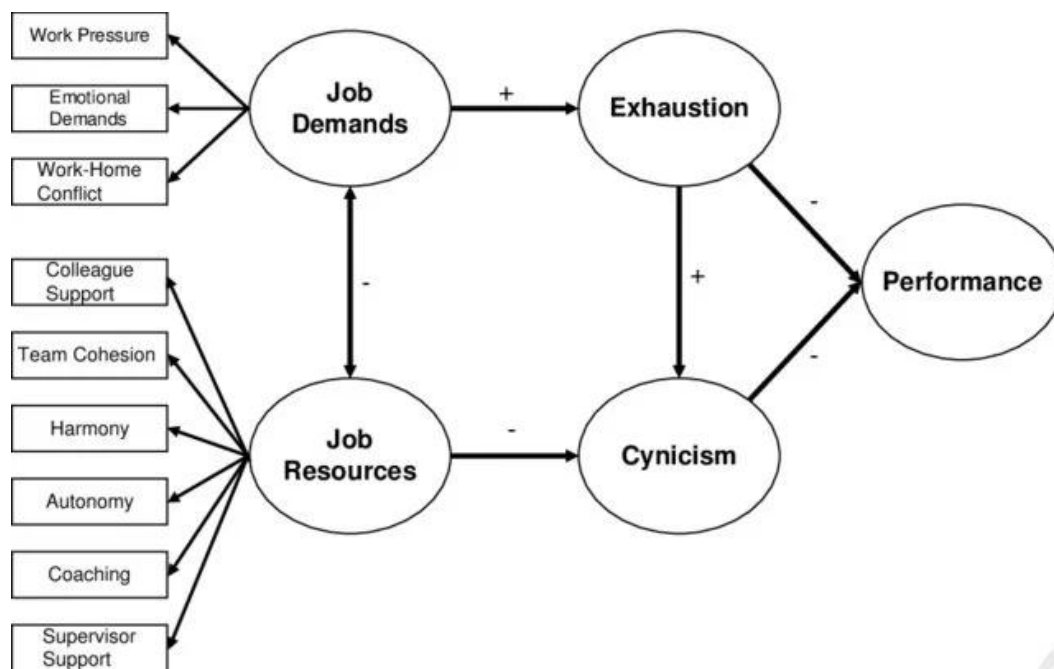


Figure 3: The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Job Demands-Resources (JD–R) model suggests that employee well-being and engagement depends on the balance between job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands – including time pressure, emotional strain and role ambiguity – require continuous effort and may result in job strain if not balanced by adequate resources. Job resources (autonomy, feedback, development, supportive leadership, etc.) promote growth, learning and engagement, and buffer the demands.

A systematic review of engagement of Generation Z reveals that this generation is more susceptible to high job demands as well as unclear job expectations and unclear division between job and non-jobs (Agustinus, Aditya and Meilani, 2025). Concurrently, Gen Z seems to be highly receptive to a rich job resource, particularly learning and skill development opportunities, and opportunities for frequent feedback and supportive supervision (Surugiu et al., 2025; Septiani et al., 2024).

2.3.2 Social Exchange Theory

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), employment relationships are dynamic and involve a two-way exchange of effort and commitment from the employee and in return for some form of reward, support and fair treatment from the employer (Blau, 1964). If the employee feels that the organization values their contributions and cares about his wellbeing, then he or she is obliged to reciprocate with higher commitment and discretionary effort, while if the employee

feels that he is not being valued and put at ease by the organization, then he will withdraw and will have an intention to leave the organization (Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025).

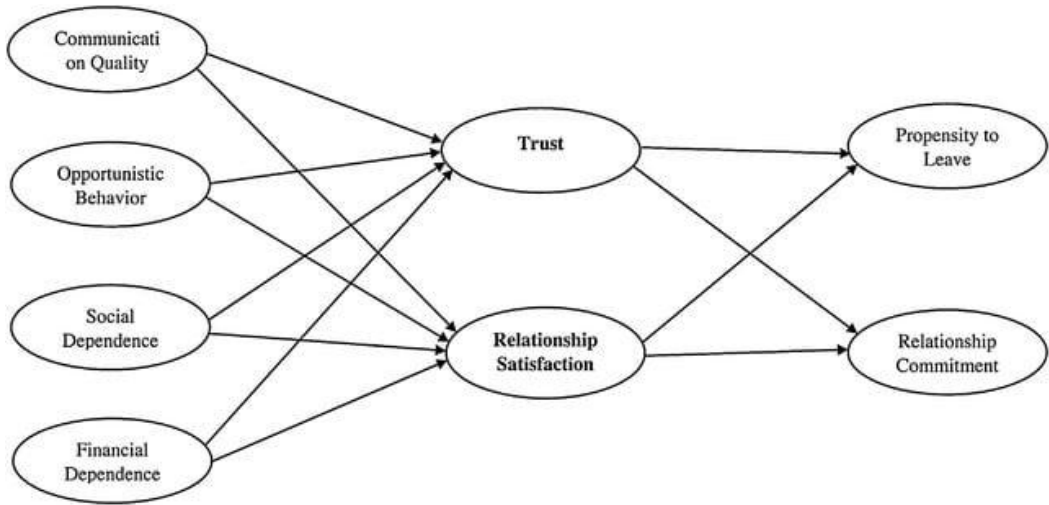


Figure 4: A Proposed Model of Social Exchange Theory and an Extension (Jeong and Oh, 2017)

In the context of Generation Z, SET is seen as a tool to explain the link between fairness, recognition, supervisor support and consistency between employer branding and actual practices and their connection to motivation and retention (Pandit, 2024; Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024). The research has shown that Gen Z employees value and are interested in being treated with respect, timely feedback and seeing the values of the organisation when decisions are made in the day to day operations (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025; Mabaso, 2025). Organisations that make promises in the areas of development, flexibility and culture are more likely to gain members' engagement and commitment to their organization, while those that do not will see their turnover intentions increase rapidly (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024; Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025).

2.3.3 Self-Determination Theory

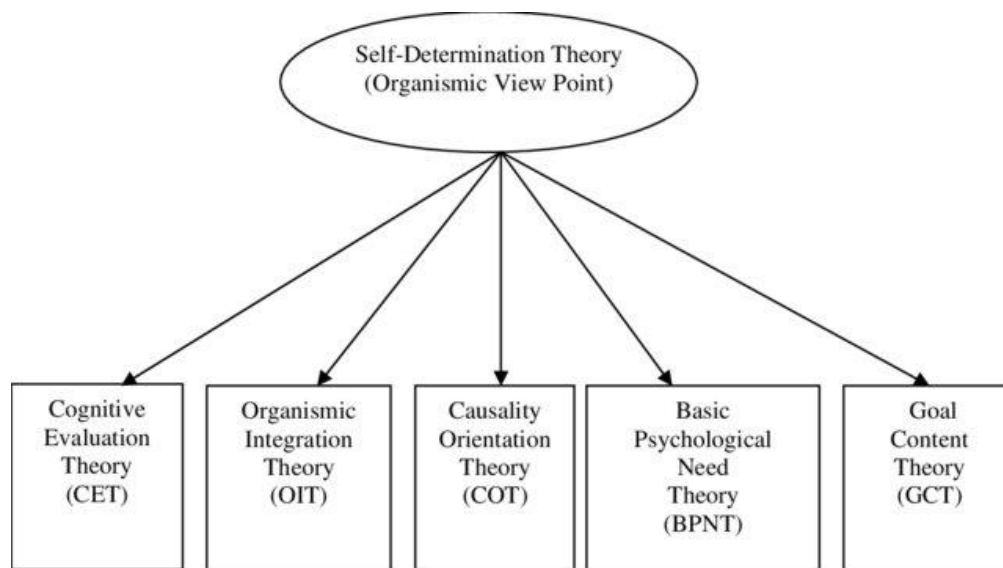


Figure 5: Self-Determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000)

Taking its main ideas from SDT, the satisfaction of three psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000), is believed to be essential for intrinsic motivation and optimal functioning. Autonomy – when you feel that you have the freedom to choose and make decisions in your behaviour, competence – when you feel effective and capable, and relatedness – when you have valuable social connections. These needs can be internalised and sustained engagement is more likely to occur when they are supported in the workplace.

SDT is important for Generation Z, as attested to by reviews of work engagement in this generation (Durman et al., 2026; Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine, 2025). Empowering leadership practices and HR practices that allow learning opportunities and constructive feedback are among the practices that foster intrinsic motivation and engagement among Gen Z (Surugiu et al., 2025; Rahman, Supriadi and Marwana, 2025).

2.3.4 Talent management and employer branding

In addition to the basic motivation theories, there are also two other models that are widely used to explain the attraction and retention of Generation Z (GZ), namely talent management and employer branding (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024; Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025). The Talent management views focus on linking recruitment, development, performance management and succession management with the expectations of important talent groups. Employer branding is about how a company talks and acts as an employer and the unique value that they offer (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024). Organisations with a flexible

and diverse culture, a culture of learning, and a culture that focuses on social impact tend to have higher reporting of commitment and intention to stay for Gen Z employees when they communicate this brand and execute a consistent employee experience (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024; Pózner and Kozák, 2025). But out of alignment between the external brand image and the internal reality is detrimental to trust and retention, especially for younger employees who are prone to sharing negative experiences via digital platforms (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025).

2.4 Motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees

Empirical research paints a picture of Generation Z as being driven by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, with a significant emphasis on personal development, as well as meaningful work and work–life balance. Systematic reviews suggest that employability, skill-building and the options for future mobility are priorities for Gen Z compared to long-term employment with one employer (Elducal et al., 2025). They appreciate jobs in which they can learn, have variety and clear learning pathways, even if those learning opportunities are in a different career or in project or lateral moves, not just traditional jobs where they can get promoted up the ladder (Career aspirations research).

Meanwhile, there are still the external incentives that are important, particularly when starting out in the business. A qualitative research on total reward preferences also reveals that competitive compensation, benefits and recognition are important factors for Gen Z workers, but so are also personal growth, purpose and impact and retention is highest when both extrinsic and intrinsic needs are met (Mabaso, 2025). According to a systematic review of the current literature comparing the effects of reward systems for people of Generation Z (1997–2009) with those of Millennials (1981–2021), non-financial rewards like flexible working arrangements, development opportunities and recognition can have a greater impact on maintaining motivation than financial incentives (Alimin and Tukiran, 2024). Generational comparison research also shows that the Gen Z generation is more interested in better pay to progress in their careers than in the job's content and quality of training. (Maříková et al., 2025)

Leadership and job design are key to the engagement of Gen Z. Transformational, supportive and coaching leadership styles, focusing on vision, feedback and individual attention are found to be positively linked to engagement and learning outcomes with Gen Z employees, as consistently highlighted in review and empirical studies (Doan and Wu, 2025; Surugiu et al., 2025). Conversely, authoritarian and/or high hierarchical leadership styles are associated with decreased motivation and increased turnover intentions (Yildizhan et al., 2023). Based on the

Job design research, autonomy, task variety and receiving chances to contribute ideas to the job create a sense of ownership and involvement in the job for Gen Z workers (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025).

There is an ongoing theme of meaning and value congruence. Recent scoping review of Gen Z in the workplace reveal that this generation wants jobs that reflect their personal ethics, social and environmental values (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). Research indicates that CSR and ethical behaviour can positively affect intrinsic motivation and organisational identification of Gen Z, particularly when they perceive CSR as authentic (Hu, Ma and Mu, 2026). In situations where employees do not feel that the values expressed are aligned with their implemented actions, there will be a decrease in motivation and trust, which will result in a decrease in their levels of engagement or turnover (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024; Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025).

Motivation is also influenced by technology. Gen Z workers are digital natives, so they look for technologies to be integrated into work processes seamlessly, for quick digital communication, and for access to current technologies that support their collaboration and productivity (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). For instance, static systems and communication methods, or limited digital flexibility, can hinder engagement, while technology-driven collaboration and flexible working arrangements can improve satisfaction and performance, with clear expectations and leadership. (Yildizhan et al., 2023).

2.5 Challenges in managing and engaging Generation Z

Even though organisations say they can make use of the skills and competencies of Generation Z, they find it difficult to manage and engage these young people. The mismatching of the traditional leadership and managerial model with Gen Z expectations on leadership, communication and work design is one of the most common problems cited (Vieira, Carla and Santos, 2024). The use of traditional command and control approaches, which are not aligned with Gen Z's preferences for open dialogue, feedback, and engagement in decision-making, can lead to a disconnect (Surugiu et al., 2025). Younger workers who feel left out or unheard are more likely to report feeling disengaged and to intend to leave the company (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025).

Another significant challenge is the work–life balance and mental health. Research about flexible working arrangements indicate that flexibility can be a positive support to autonomy and wellbeing, but can also lead to stress and to the loss of boundaries, particularly for young workers, if poorly designed or managed, and hence to higher levels of stress (Petitta and Ghezzi,

2025). Perception reviews of Gen Z revealed that workloads, stress, and managerial support are significant factors affecting Gen Z, with inadequate support structures increasing the risk of burnout (Septiani et al., 2024). Further, the continuous digital culture, along with the constant connectivity expectations, can create blurred boundaries between work and life and can increase stress, unless accompanied by norms and supportive management (Petitta and Ghezzi 2025).

In addition, there are intergenerational dynamics which complicate management. They might work in companies where older generations are in leadership roles, and where they might have differing understandings of authority, communication and technology. Scoping reviews reveal that intergenerational misunderstandings and stereotyping are common findings, and conflicts were observed in relation to the issues of perceived entitlement, attitudes to remote work and expectations of having to move up quickly in the career ladder (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). These tensions can diminish psychological safety and collaboration if they are not intentional by working to create mutual understanding and inclusive cultures.

Retention is a special challenge. Through bibliometric analysis, it can be seen that the theme of reduced organizational commitment and high turnover has been present throughout the studies on Gen Z in the workplace (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Research in fields like engineering and mining shows that the usual retention initiatives might not be effective in meeting Gen Z's expectations for recognition, flexibility and supportive relationships, which can result in challenges to retaining young talent (Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024). Vieira, Carla and Santos (2024) report that when organisations are not meeting their employer branding expectations when it comes to culture, development or flexibility, Gen Z employees are more likely to have increased intentions to leave and switch jobs.

Synthesis difficulties with the literature. Studies are often conducted on a single sector/one country level, which might restrict the generalisability (Pózner and Kozák, 2025). Research designs are frequently cross-sectional surveys and self-report measures that limit the ability of causal inference, and common-method bias (Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025) is a concern. The comparison of the studies is complicated also because the definition of Generation Z and key concepts like engagement, commitment and retention are not clearly defined in all the studies (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025).

2.6 Retention strategies and organisational responses

To address these challenges, there's more and more research that focuses on recruiting and keeping members of Generation Z (Gen Z). In general, the evidence noted that employee retention is not only based on employee initiatives, but also the continuity of the employee

journey from recruitment to onboarding, development, and regular engagement with the company (Peterson, 2025; Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025).

Career development and learning opportunities are always identified as important retention levers. Research shows that Gen Z workers value even more structured training to build future possibilities and employability, and mentoring than the traditional long-term security of a job (Barhate and Dirani, 2021; Surugiu et al., 2025). Studies conducted on management training programmes reveal that Gen Z employees are driven by competitive salary, career advancement opportunities provided by the programme and clear career progression plans after the programme to improve their retention rates (Triviño et al., 2025). Studies show a correlation between personalised development plans, coaching, and increased organisational attachment and reduced turnover intention among Gen Z (Rahman, Supriadi and Marwana, 2025; Mabaso, 2025).

Reward and recognition strategies are also at the heart of the strategies. The findings from the study carried out by Mabaso (2025) reveals that Gen Z workers are generally appreciative of total reward packages that encompass competitive compensation, benefits and recognition, along with growth prospects and opportunities to make a difference. In the South African mining industry, employee recognition and flexible employment options are shown to have positive correlations with Gen Z retention, while general career development programs do not have a significant correlation with retention (Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024). The results indicate that interventions to stay students should be targeted at generational preferences and that symbolic or under-targeted interventions may have little impact.

Flexible working and hybrid working is equally key. While some reviews and empirical studies suggest that good flexibility can boost the engagement and commitment of Gen Z, it also needs to be well designed, accompanied with clear expectations, and effective communication (Kavya et al, 2025). The findings of this study reveal that the use of transformational leadership style is found to be able to increase the level of engagement and affective commitment of Gen Z employees in the creative industry in Jakarta in the hybrid work model and that the level of work–life balance is found to have a direct effect on the level of affective commitment. These findings indicate that it is not enough to be flexible, it has to be part of a supportive leadership and good work systems.

There is a strong relationship between employer branding and organisational culture and to the retention results. It is important to highlight that fostering a values-driven approach to employer branding, supported by routine HR actions and leadership behaviours, can enhance the trust and belonging of Gen Z employees (Vieira, Gomes da Costa & Santos, 2024; Zain, Ardiansyah &

Fachrunnisa, 2025). Youth are more likely to stay and commit to long-term careers when organisations keep their promises on issues of inclusion, sustainability, innovation and flexibility (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024). On the other hand, if there's a mismatch between the reported and the real culture or work environment, it will become obvious promptly, and could make Gen Z workers want to quit (Mabaso, 2025).

Lastly, organisational responses which offer voice and participation opportunities are a sign of promise for retention. Engaging with Gen Z workers in decision-making, seeking their input on process enhancements, and providing avenues for positive feedback can foster a sense of influence and belonging, thereby deepening their engagement with the company (Surugiu et al., 2025). This participative approach is in line with the theory of Social Exchange, which has a positive impact on the signalling of respect and reciprocity, and Self-Determination Theory, which has a positive effect on autonomy and relatedness, and motivates and increases commitment (Hadziahmetovic and Bilgin, 2026; Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025).

2.7 Research gap

While there has been an increase in the scholarship on the "Generation Z in the workplace" the evidence is scattered and incomplete. There are numerous studies that focus on certain areas, such as engagement, leadership styles, work–life balance, employer branding, and/or the preferences of rewards, in more specific sectors or national contexts (Toboso-Gómez et al., 2025). Although these studies provide valuable insights, they have rarely tried to incorporate motivation in one of the frameworks in combination with workplace challenges and retention strategies for Generation Z employees (Pózner and Kozák, 2025). This means that practitioners are left with a fragmented set of results, which are hard to interpret in terms of HR and leadership strategies.

Some existing reviews and scoping studies have started to synthesize components of the literature related to Gen Z work engagement and its theoretical underpinnings (Surugiu et al., 2025); leadership impacts (Doan and Wu, 2025); talent management and employer brands (Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos, 2024); and general workplace factors (Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi, 2025). These reviews, however, are typically limited to a single domain, and do not examine the role of motivation, challenges, and outcomes of retention in a shared analytic lens. To date, there are limited studies that explicitly link JD–R, SEDT and empirical evidence on retention strategies to deepen the understanding of the link between job characteristics, social exchanges and psychological needs on engagement and retention among the Generation Z.

In terms of method, the majority of literature used are cross-sectional survey, single country samples, and self-reported measures, which is not appropriate for making casual inferences and generalising findings across different cultures (Zain, Ardiansyah and Fachrunnisa, 2025). Mixed-methods, longitudinal and comparative studies that follow the experiences of Gen Z over time or across various labour markets are also lacking, as are national level studies (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). As work arrangements have changed since the pandemic, especially the hybrid and remote jobs, empirical studies have fallen behind the pace and are still largely unclear about the interactions between these new types of work and Gen Z motivation and retention (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2024).

The current dissertation, therefore, will contribute to a more coherent and theory-based understanding of how organizations can effectively motivate, engage and retain generation Z employees by focusing on peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 and employing a theoretical lens, such as JD-R, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, while also considering the talent management and employer branding perspective.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The systematic literature review methodology is described in this chapter, which details the process for implementing the systematic literature review. The methodological approach used to conduct a systematic literature review on the motivation, challenges and retention strategies of Generation Z employees in the contemporary workplace, is explained in this chapter. The methodology explains the process by which the relevant studies were identified, selected, appraised and synthesised in a transparent and rigorous process, enabling the answers to the research questions to be credible. A systematic review is appropriate as existing research on Generation Z at work is growing at a fast pace but fragmented across disciplines, sectors and countries, making it difficult to get an overview without a structured synthesis (Alessandro et al., 2025). The chapter, thus, explains all the design of the research, the protocol for reviewing a research, the data and search strategy, selection process of the research, the process of extraction of data, the approach used for quality assessment, data analysis, data synthesis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research methodology.

3.2 Research design

This study takes a qualitative systematic literature review design to explore the motivation, challenges and the strategies that help keep the "Generation Z" employees in the organisations. The systematic review is a method that can be repeated and structured to identify, evaluate and synthesize published literature to answer specific well-defined questions on a clearly defined topic with explicit pre-specified methods (Afifi, Stryhn and Sánchez, 2023). It is especially useful when the evidence is abundant but scattered and synthesizes the evidence of various yet different studies instead of selectively citing only those that support a particular point of view.

The design is informed by a practical, general positivist perspective that focuses on clear processes, defined eligibility and exclusion criteria and thorough reporting on the review process. Concurrently, it acknowledges that the majority of the primary studies lie in the context of their own study, and instead of statistical meta-analysis, a narrative synthesis approach is more appropriate (Williams et al., 2022). The review is thematic and uses the approach of PRISMA-type review protocols used for documenting identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion of studies, but does not pool the effect sizes, due to the highly varied designs, measures and contexts (Page et al., 2021).

3.3 Systematic review protocol

The general objective of the dissertation is to give a systematic overview of existing literature on the motivation, challenges and retention of Generation Z in today's working world and to combine this knowledge in order to derive a conclusion. A review protocol was established prior to conducting a search to reduce ad hoc decision-making. It outlines population, context, phenomena of interest, types of evidence and temporal and linguistic boundaries (Boland, Cherry and Dickson, 2017).

The population is Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, post-millennials or centennials, which are people born since the mid-1990s and are already in the workforce. The context is organisational/ workplace rather than consumer, educational or purely societal contexts (Cooper, 1984). The phenomena studied include work-related motivation and engagement, the problems organisations are encountering in attracting, managing and engaging Generation Z employees, and the strategies and practices employed for retention and outcomes related to retention (e.g., organisational commitment, turnover intention, and actual retention).

This review covers empirical and review articles published in English between 2020 and 2025, and written by peers. The period was selected as this is when Generation Z (Post-Baby Boomers) first became a visible part of the workforce and when there have been significant changes in the nature of work, including an increase in hybrid and remote working, as well as a focus on mental well-being (Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2017). Previous research is referenced and included in the introduction and literature review but not systematically in the data. Conceptual papers are only taken into consideration if they contribute to the understanding of Generation Z work motivation, challenges or retention strategies directly.

3.4 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Only studies relevant to the topic and with sufficient quality were included to ensure clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies are counted as long as the focus is on the generation(s) of Generation Z and/or equivalent labels and the study examines one or more of three areas: work motivation and engagement; workplace-related challenges, including leadership, communication, work design, work-life balance, and mental health; and retention outcomes, including organisational commitment, intention to leave, turnover rates, and the assessment of specific retention efforts (Gusenbauer and Gauster, 2024). Peer-reviewed English-language journal articles, in full text, published from 2020-2025, are eligible for submission as publications.

Studies are excluded if they focus on the Generation Z as consumers, students, tourists or patients, but not including an employer or workplace. Even though the study talks about motivation or satisfaction (Hong and Pluye, 2018). For consistency and quality assurance, non-peer reviewed sources (dissertations, conference papers, internal reports or opinion pieces) are excluded. Publications before and after this period, not in English or where full-text is not available are excluded. For studies that compare multiple generations, inclusion is dependent on having unique analysis or findings about Generation Z that can be gleaned.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Generation Z (Gen Z, post-millennial*, centennial*) as employees or with separate Gen Z analysis.	Gen Z only as consumers, students or tourists, with no workplace or employment focus.
Context	Organisational or workplace settings in any sector and country.	Non-work settings such as general youth culture or customer behaviour only.
Topic	Motivation/engagement, workplace challenges, or retention/turnover and related HR strategies.	Mentions Gen Z but does not examine motivation, challenges or retention in the workplace.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles (empirical or review).	Theses, reports, book chapters, conference papers and other non-peer-reviewed sources.
Timeframe	2020–2025.	Before 2020 or after 2025.
Language	English.	Non-English.
Accessibility	Full-text available.	Full-text not accessible, abstract only.

3.5 Data sources and search strategy

The review is based on a comprehensive bibliographic database with a large number of disciplines, indexing peer-reviewed journals in management, human resource management, psychology, and sociology/education, as well as an extensive academic search engine to ensure coverage and check articles (Gusenbauer and Gauster, 2024). The sources have been chosen due

to the fact that they allow for very good access to relevant literature on organisational topics and extend advanced searching with the help of Boolean operators, truncation and field restrictions.

The search strategy has been constructed in a few steps. The first step was to identify the concept of the research questions: the population (Generation Z); the context (organisational and workplace); the conceptual domain of the first research question (motivation and engagement); the second (challenges); and the third (retention, turnover and organisational commitment). Second, synonyms and related terms were identified from various reviews and key articles. The following combination was used:

“generation z”, “gen z”, “post-millennial*” and “centennial*” were used. Motivation and engagement were captured through terms such as “motivation”, “engagement”, “job satisfaction”, “work values” and “career aspirations”. Challenges were represented by terms such as “challenges”, “barriers”, “work–life balance”, “stress”, “mental well-being”, “leadership” and “human resource management”. Retention was represented by terms such as “employee retention”, “staff retention”, “talent retention”, “turnover intention”, “employee turnover” and “organisational commitment”.

The terms have been merged into structured search strings with the help of Boolean operators. The population block was connected to AND with the motivation block and with the workplace and retention block, and OR was connected with synonyms in the blocks. To guarantee topical relevance, search was restricted to title, abstract and keyword fields and filters were used for publication year, document type and language to match the inclusion criteria (Shaheen et al., 2023). The academic search engine was treated in a similar fashion, as it has fewer field-specific limitations, meaning that more extensive manual screening was necessary.

3.6 Study selection

The selection of the studies was carried out following the PRISMA guidelines, as it is a transparent and rigorous screening of the literature (Page et al., 2021). A total of 2138 records were initially retrieved from the main database and 74 more records were retrieved from a supplementary academic search, resulting in 2212 records at the identification stage. Out of 1205 records, 31 were duplicates prior to screening and 1097 were excluded automatically based on a limited document type, language, and/or date, resulting in 1084 records for manual screening.

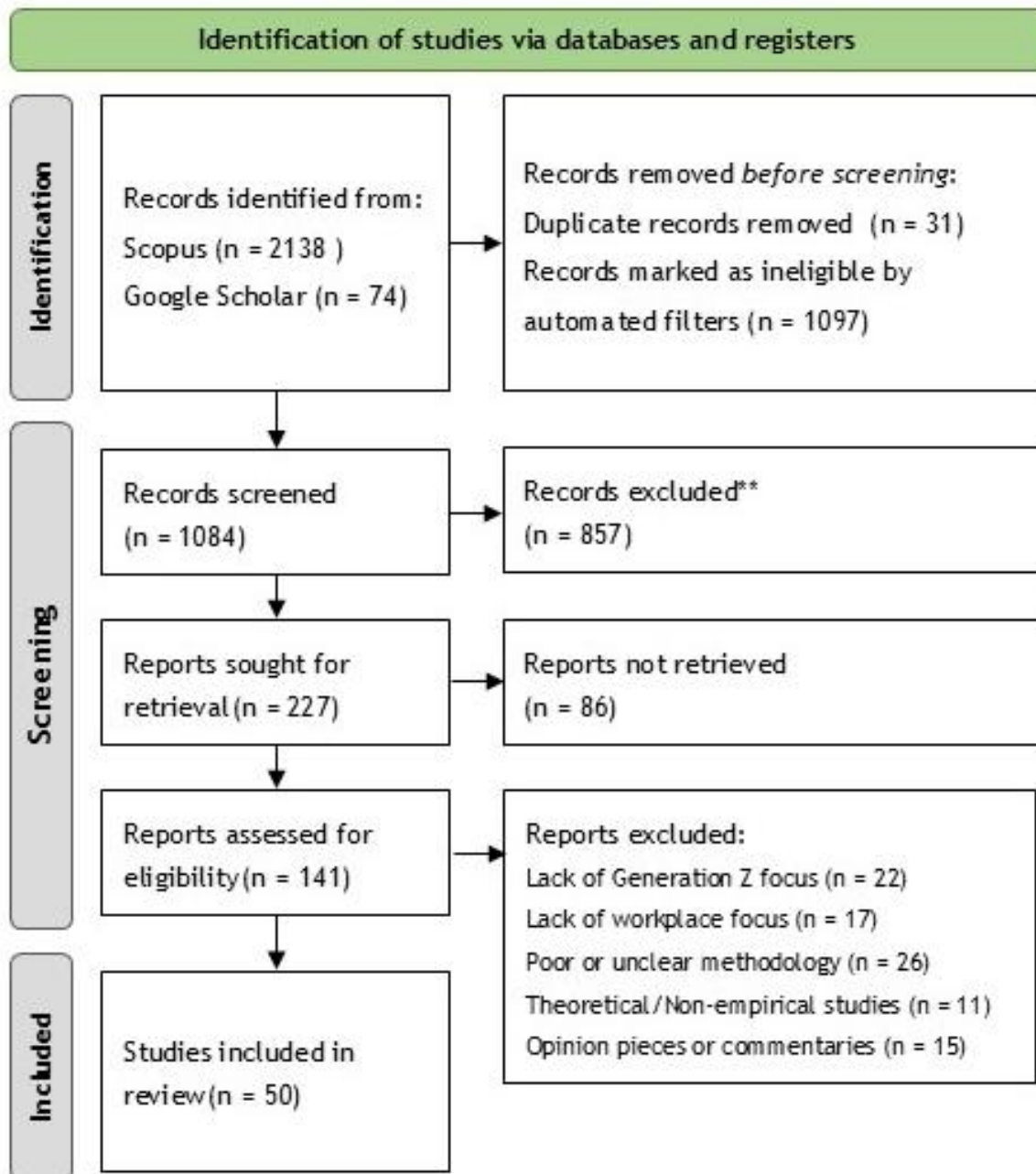


Figure 6: Study Selection Process by PRISMA framework (Author)

The titles and abstracts of these 1,084 records were then again screened according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving 857 records that clearly did not match the criteria. The remaining 227 records were located by full text search; 86 were not retrieved and were thus discarded. Accessible, full text articles (n=141) were evaluated in detail to determine eligibility. At this stage 22 were removed because they didn't have a clear focus on Generation Z, 17 because they were without a workplace or organisational context, 26 because they lacked good or clear methodology, 11 because they were opinion pieces or commentaries, and 15 because they lacked original data.

Finally, 50 studies were found to satisfy all criteria and included in the review. They represent the main evidence that will undergird the further analysis of the motivation, challenges and retention strategies of generation Z employees. This process can be summarised in the PRISMA diagram that is included in the dissertation, and the number of records at each stage is displayed (Page et al., 2021).

3.7 Data extraction

After the final set of studies were identified, a structured data extraction template was applied to ensure consistency in the data extraction process; In each study, the following template elements were identified and documented: author(s), year of publication, country/region, and the sector/industry context. It documented the design of the study (quantitative survey, qualitative interview study, mixed methods or systematic review), and included characteristics of the sample (size, generational makeup, and other sample characteristics relevant to the study). Theoretical models were also highlighted such as the Job Demands–Resources model, the Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, talent management models or the employer branding frameworks.

The first one was motivational drivers and engagement factors of Generation Z including learning opportunities, meaningful work, leadership style, reward systems and technology. The second was on workplace issues with relation to attract, manage and engage Generation Z, such as leadership misfit, work–life balance issues, mental health issues, intergenerational conflict or mismatch between employer branding and organisational reality. The third domain included retention outcomes and organisational responses such as total reward packages, flexible working practices, career development program, employer branding, participative decision-making, and their relationships with commitment, intention to leave or retention (Shaheen et al., 2023).

3.8 Quality assessment

Clarity of research aims, appropriateness of research design, transparency of sampling procedures, adequacy of data collection methods, rigour of data analysis and recognition of limitations were all taken into account in the appraisal (Gusenbauer and Gauster, 2024).

In the quantitative studies, the sample size, sampling method, reliability of the measurement instruments, and validity of the measurement instruments and the appropriateness of the analytical techniques were studied. The qualitative studies were evaluated on the richness and credibility of data, clarity of analytical processes and reflexivity of the researcher role (Shaheen et al., 2023). For review-type studies, the criteria used to assess them were the transparency and comprehensiveness of their search and selection process, and the coherence of their syntheses.

The quality assessment was not intended to rule out all but the very highest quality studies, but rather to guide the synthesis. The results of studies deemed to be methodologically sound were accorded more weight in interpretation than those of less methodologically sound studies, particularly where these results contradict more credible evidence (Bradway et al., 2025). This is as systematic reviews tend to be pragmatic in new areas of research where there may be a very small, or unrepresentative, evidence base if all imperfect studies were excluded.

3.9 Data analysis and synthesis

With the variety of designs, measures and contexts, data analysis was qualitative in nature, through thematic synthesis, instead of numerical through meta-analysis. The data was then extracted and each study was coded based on its content and relevance to the research questions. The codes were inductively developed from the data but based on the pre-defined domains of motivation (Duden, 2021), challenges and retention strategies and constructs drawn from the literature review (Duden, 2021).

They were then categorized into the wider thematic descriptions: theoretical approaches to Generation Z at work, internal and external motivators, leadership and communication problems, work–life balance and mental health concerns, and organizational interventions such as rewards, flexible working and development opportunities (Dwivedula, 2024). A further step of interpretation was made by looking at the themes of description in relation to the Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory as well as perspectives on talent management and employer branding. This enabled the synthesis to go beyond description and delve deeper into the mechanisms that connect workplace conditions, motivation and outcomes of retention for Gen Z (van Rossenberg, Cross and Swart, 2022).

The results of this process are discussed in the following chapter, organised around the major thematic areas and the research questions. It outlines how research on Generation Z experiences overlaps and contrasts, contextualises the experiences of the Generation Z and pinpoints areas of the evidence that need to be further explored.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The research is based on secondary analysis of previously published, peer-reviewed research and not include any contact with human subjects. Hence it doesn't pose any problems like informed consent, confidentiality and others of the like in the regular way (Suri, 2020). However, the issues of academic honesty, transparency and responsible research and creative practice are still very relevant. References are cited correctly, ideas and findings of others are fairly represented and paraphrasing is done carefully to avoid plagiarism (UWTSD, 2022). It is clearly documented

that the review process is followed; it is clearly explained to the readers how the studies were found, selected and synthesised. Research ethics in secondary research is adhered in the whole process (Wager and Wiffen, 2011).

3.11 Limitations of the methodology

While the review is to be systematic and transparent, there are certain limitations which have to be recognised. Focusing only on peer-reviewed, English-language journal articles can also lead to publication and language bias and potentially result in the exclusion of relevant published material (in English or other languages) or unpublished material (Dobrescu et al., 2021). Even with careful design of the search strategies, studies indexed elsewhere may not have been identified since the search was based on the two major search platforms. The time span (2020-2025) guarantees that the research is recent, and sometimes it does not include the empirical literature that may enrich the historical perspective (Pelosi, Cacciagrano and Piangerelli, 2025).

The conclusions are also limited by the quality and type of the underlying studies. Many are cross-sectional studies and based on self-reported perceptions which limit causal inference and lead to common method bias. Others use relatively small or convenience samples, limited to within individual sectors or countries and are therefore not generalisable (Deaton and Cartwright, 2018). Lastly, even if coding is systematic, it is necessary to make interpretive judgements when themes are synthesized, as different reviewers may highlight different themes (Naeem et al., 2023). These limitations suggest more conservative interpretation of the results and suggest the areas where further primary studies and/or more sophisticated reviews of the literature could contribute to the evidence base of Generation Z motivation, workplace challenges and retention.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The chapter offers the results of the systematic review of 50 peer-reviewed studies on the Generation Z employees with their motivation, workplace issues, and retention strategies. It starts by providing a review of the chosen studies, proceeds to highlight some of the essential themes in line with the three research questions and examined using thematic synthesis across various sectors and national settings.

The discussion explores the intrinsic and extrinsic variables impacting Gen Z motivation, the difficulties organisations are experiencing in attracting and engaging this cohort, and the strategies that are identified to be effective in retention. Based on the main theoretical perspectives, such as the Job Demands Resources model, Self-Determination Theory, Social Exchange Theory and such frameworks as employer branding and talent management, the chapter provides a brief, theory-oriented explanation of how Generation Z experiences the work environment and how committed they are to the organisation.

4.2 Summary of the Key Literatures

Table 2: Key Characteristics of the Articles Chosen for the Systematic Review

ID	Author(s) & Year	Industry	Country	Methods	Findings
1	Aggarwal et al. (2022)	Multi-industry	India	Survey; SEM; regression analysis	RQ1: HR practices aligned with Gen Z expectations (flexibility, digital tools, meaningful roles, career pathways) improve task performance and organisational commitment. RQ3: Restructuring HR policies to accommodate Gen Z values fosters both performance and long-term retention.
2	Ali, Li and Qiu (2024)	Multi-industry	China	Survey; SEM	RQ3: HRM practices — compensation, training, performance appraisal, and WLB — significantly influence Gen Z retention. Organisational commitment mediates the HRM–retention relationship, emphasising building psychological attachment alongside HR investments.
3	Al-Moteri et al. (2025)	Healthcare / Nursing	Saudi Arabia	Survey; exploratory factor analysis (EFA)	RQ1: Gen Z nurses prioritise work-life balance, recognition, collaborative environments, professional development, and competitive salaries. RQ2: Unmet

					expectations around schedules, autonomy, and feedback create dissatisfaction and hinder Gen Z nurse engagement.
4	Anggiani & Fatonah (2025)	Digital / Freelance / Creative industry	Indonesia	Survey (n=389); SEM using AMOS	RQ1: Digital leadership and digital transformation improve Gen Z job satisfaction, which enhances performance. RQ2: Digital transformation alone does not improve Gen Z performance without digital leadership and job satisfaction as mediators.
5	Anh Do et al. (2023)	Multi-industry	Vietnam	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ3: Affective commitment mediates the relationship between organisational support, culture, and leadership and Gen Z turnover intention. Building affective commitment through support, fair treatment, and strong culture reduces Gen Z attrition.
6	Arslan et al. (2022)	Entrepreneurial organisations	Finland / International	Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA); qualitative interviews	RQ1: Gen Z leaders find work meaningful through social impact, autonomy, digital innovation, and purpose alignment. RQ2: Generational differences in meaningfulness perceptions create leadership alignment challenges in multi-generational entrepreneurial settings.

7	Astuty et al. (2025)	MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises)	Indonesia (developing countries)	Survey (n=186); path analysis	RQ1: Motivation positively affects workplace happiness, which mediates the motivation–performance relationship. RQ2: Gen Z in MSMEs perceive workplace happiness differently; environments lacking teamwork and respect reduce motivation and output.
8	Bazargan et al. (2025)	Multi-industry	United Kingdom	Conceptual analysis; systematic literature review; qualitative case analysis	RQ2: 'Quiet Quitting' as a Gen Z dissatisfaction response stems from unmet expectations around recognition, workload fairness, and meaningful work — a novel challenge beyond the EVLN model. RQ3: Addressing psychological safety, meaningful roles, and equitable treatment proactively prevents Gen Z quiet quitting and disengagement.
9	Bou Hatoum & Nassereddine (2025)	Construction	United States	Mixed methods; surveys and interviews; thematic analysis	RQ2: Construction struggles to attract Gen Z due to safety concerns, poor WLB, and absence of digital tools and flexible work. RQ3: Digital transformation, flexibility, mentoring, and strong safety culture are needed to become an employer of choice for Gen Z.
10	Chen et al. (2023)	Multi-industry	China	Survey (n=676); PLS-SEM	RQ1: Career development opportunities and pay-for-performance indirectly improve Gen Z wellbeing via job

					satisfaction. RQ2: 996 work culture and work overload increase psychological distress and burnout. RQ3: Reducing exploitative work cultures and investing in career growth and fair pay safeguards Gen Z mental health and performance.
11	Dwidienawati et al. (2024)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM	RQ1: Organisational culture and positive employee experience significantly improve Gen Z job satisfaction. RQ2: High turnover is closely linked to poor organisational culture. RQ3: Improving culture and employee experience reduces Gen Z turnover intention.
12	Elgeka, Hidayat and Pratono (2025)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Scale development; survey; CFA	RQ1: Job net value — combining intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, and perceived fairness — is a valid construct capturing what Gen Z derives from work. Higher job net value associates with greater satisfaction and lower turnover intention.
13	Gaan & Shin (2023)	IT / Software	India	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ2: Job demands, lack of psychological safety, and poor supervisor support increase Gen Z software employee turnover intention. RQ3: Psychological safety

					and supervisor support mediate the demands–turnover relationship, representing key retention levers.
14	Guslina et al. (2025)	Private sector (multi-industry)	Indonesia	Survey; SEM; Regression analysis	RQ1: Management support, career development, organisational culture, and technology integration drive Gen Z job satisfaction. RQ3: Job satisfaction mediates the management–retention relationship; improving satisfaction reduces turnover.
15	Heilman (2025)	Education / Teaching	United States	Conceptual review; literature synthesis	RQ2: Gen Z teachers face workplace bullying, social isolation, chronic stress, and lack of recognition as major wellbeing and engagement challenges. RQ3: Mentoring, peer networks, recognition programmes, and emotional well-being support are essential to retain Gen Z teachers.
16	Jamalulel & Chang (2025)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ1: Work-life balance and career development positively influence Gen Z job satisfaction. RQ2: Poor WLB and limited career development increase turnover intention. RQ3: Job satisfaction mediates the impact of WLB and career development on turnover intention.

17	Jang & Lee (2025)	Multi-industry	South Korea	Survey (YP2021 panel data); random effects regression	RQ1: Health status, educational fit, job relevance, skill level, wages, commute time, and physical/social working conditions are key Gen Z job satisfaction determinants. Differentiated management strategies tailored to generational characteristics are necessary.
18	Katsaros (2024)	Multi-industry	Greece	Survey; SEM; moderation analysis	RQ1: Workplace happiness significantly enhances Gen Z adaptive performance. RQ2: Inclusive leadership facilitates adaptive performance by increasing psychological safety. RQ3: Inclusive leadership practices improve Gen Z engagement, performance, and intention to remain.
19	Kgarimetsa & Naidoo (2024)	Mining	South Africa	Survey; multiple regression analysis	RQ3: Employee recognition and flexible working arrangements significantly predict Gen Z retention in the mining sector. Generic professional development initiatives were not significantly related to retention, indicating the need for targeted strategies.
20	Kim et al. (2025)	Healthcare / Nursing	South Korea	Survey; hierarchical regression; mediation analysis	RQ2: Gen Z nurse characteristics (digital nativity, high independence, elevated expectations) reduce job embeddedness and increase turnover when unmet. RQ3:

					Strengthening job embeddedness through community fit, organisational links, and sacrifice perceptions reduces Gen Z nurse turnover.
21	Koura et al. (2025)	Banking	Morocco	Survey; SEM; regression analysis	RQ2: Workplace stress driven by workload, role ambiguity, and poor supervisor support increases Gen Z turnover intention in banking. RQ3: Stress reduction through role clarity, managerial support, and workload management reduces turnover.
22	Labrague et al. (2025)	Healthcare / Nursing	Oman	Survey (n=552); SEM; mediation analysis	RQ1: Positive work environment mitigates burnout and enhances satisfaction. RQ2: High job burnout directly reduces work satisfaction; poor environment amplifies burnout risk. RQ3: Improving work environments is a critical retention strategy for Gen Z nurses.
23	Lee & Shin (2025)	Healthcare / Nursing	South Korea	Survey; multilevel analysis (MLM)	RQ2: Individual factors (stress, burnout, low satisfaction) and unit-level factors (poor team cohesion, inadequate supervisor support) jointly predict Gen Z nurse turnover intention. RQ3: Multi-level interventions targeting both individual wellbeing and unit leadership are needed to retain Gen Z nurses.

24	Mabaso (2025)	Multi-industry	South Africa	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis	RQ1: Gen Z prefers total reward packages combining competitive pay, recognition, growth, and meaningful contribution. RQ3: Non-financial rewards (flexibility, recognition, development) are stronger retention levers than compensation alone.
25	Mahesh, Bhat and Suresh (2021)	Higher Education	India	Qualitative interviews; inductive framework analysis	RQ1: Gen Z values instrumental goals (career, passions) and terminal goals (success, happiness). Work motivation shaped by desire for purpose, autonomy, and continuous learning.
26	Mahmoud et al. (2021)	Multi-industry	United Kingdom	Survey; multi-group SEM; generational comparison	RQ1: Intrinsic motivation partially buffers the negative effect of job insecurity on Gen Z OCB. RQ2: Job insecurity has a stronger negative impact on Gen Z OCB compared to older generations, reflecting heightened sensitivity to perceived threat.
27	Marjerison et al. (2025)	Multi-industry (urban workforce)	China	Survey; regression analysis	RQ1: Intrinsic motivation, career advancement, and WLB are primary motivators for Gen Z urban workers. RQ2: Urban cost-of-living pressures and unmet expectations reduce satisfaction. RQ3: Holistic retention

					strategies addressing urban pressures and career fulfilment are needed.
28	Monika & Israel (2025)	Healthcare	India	Survey; regression analysis; mediation analysis	RQ1: Intrinsic motivation and workplace adaptability significantly reduce stress and enhance Gen Z job satisfaction in healthcare. RQ3: Supporting autonomy, skill-building, and adaptive environments reduces stress and improves Gen Z healthcare worker retention.
29	Nadia, Salendu and Nabila (2025)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ3: Servant leadership enhances Gen Z retention by fostering a caring ethical climate, which mediates the servant leadership–intention to stay relationship. Self-interest ethical climate negatively moderates this effect.
30	Ngoc Thang et al. (2023)	Multi-industry (recruitment / employer branding)	Vietnam	Survey (n=290 Gen Z students); regression analysis; mediation analysis	RQ2: Gen Z job seekers are highly sensitive to organisational CSR reputation; weak CSR positioning reduces employer attractiveness and job pursuit intention. RQ3: Positive CSR assessment and CSR engagement enhance Gen Z employer attractiveness, which mediates job pursuit intention; integrating social and environmental issues into corporate strategy is an effective Gen Z attraction and retention tool.

31	Nguyen & Petchsawang (2024)	Multi-industry	Thailand	Survey; SEM; moderation analysis	RQ1: Transformational leadership positively boosts Gen Z work engagement, which mediates the path to innovative behaviour. RQ3: Generational cohort moderates the leadership–innovation relationship; transformational leadership tailored to Gen Z maximises engagement and retention.
32	Norina & Sary (2025)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ1: Ethical leadership enhances Gen Z work engagement through trust as a mediator. RQ3: Building trust through ethical leadership is an effective strategy to foster sustained Gen Z engagement and reduce turnover.
33	O'Connor & Rinella (2024)	Technology / Corporate	United States	Case study; qualitative analysis (Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory)	RQ1: Motivators (recognition, achievement, growth, responsibility) drive genuine Gen Z engagement; hygiene factors (pay, conditions) only prevent dissatisfaction. RQ2: Organisations relying solely on hygiene improvements fail to address Gen Z's deeper motivational needs.
34	Oraibi, Bawazir & Emam (2025)	Multi-industry	Malaysia	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ2: Job insecurity is a key challenge facing Gen Z workers, reducing affective commitment and psychological empowerment. RQ3: Job security

					increases Gen Z retention through affective organisational commitment and psychological empowerment as mediators; HRM professionals must prioritise job security and empowerment strategies to retain Gen Z.
35	Osorio & Madero (2025)	Multi-industry (corporate, family, entrepreneurial)	Mexico	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis	RQ1: Gen Z prefers hybrid work due to autonomy, WLB, and personal productivity benefits. RQ2: Organisations slow to adopt hybrid models face engagement and attraction difficulties. RQ3: Flexible hybrid work arrangements are a key retention tool across organisational types.
36	Pandita & Khatwani (2022)	Multi-industry / CSR-active organisations	India	Conceptual review; literature synthesis	RQ1: CSR activities enhance Gen Z engagement by aligning organisational values with their social conscience and desire for meaningful work. RQ3: Embedding genuine CSR into employer branding and daily practices strengthens Gen Z identification and retention.
37	Pandita & Kumar (2022)	Multi-industry	India	Empirical study; survey; regression analysis	RQ1: Task variety, autonomy, recognition, and developmental opportunities enhance Gen Z motivation and performance. RQ3: Re-structuring HR practices

					around Gen Z engagement preferences (flexibility, feedback, learning) improves retention outcomes.
38	Rohayati et al. (2023)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM	RQ1: Job satisfaction, positive organisational culture, and meaningful work significantly reduce Gen Z turnover intention. RQ3: Cultivating positive cultures and providing meaningful work are effective Gen Z retention strategies.
39	Sailaxmi & Ranjithsingh (2025)	BPO (Business Process Outsourcing)	India	Survey (n=137); CFA; PLS-SEM; mediation analysis	RQ3: Training, co-worker support, and career prospects influence Gen Z retention via psychological contract in BPO firms. Psychological contract fully mediates the socialisation–retention relationship, underscoring the importance of meeting implicit expectations.
40	Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet (2021)	Hospitality	Thailand	Written life narratives (n=125); qualitative analysis	RQ1: Gen Z's collective consciousness, shaped by national, global, and technological experiences, forms core work values: universalism, benevolence, self-direction, achievement, and security. RQ2: Organisations must understand these deep-seated values to effectively engage and manage Gen Z.

41	Sigaeva et al. (2022)	Hospitality	Cyprus	Survey; SEM	RQ1: Servant and authentic leadership positively influence Gen Z work engagement in hospitality. RQ2: Transactional or directive management reduces Gen Z engagement and increases attrition. RQ3: Servant and authentic leadership approaches effectively engage and retain Gen Z hospitality workers.
42	Surugiu et al. (2025)	Multi-industry	Romania	Systematic review; narrative synthesis	RQ1: Gen Z is motivated by meaningful work, autonomy, feedback, development, WLB, and technology access. RQ2: Organisations struggle adapting to Gen Z preferences for flexible, inclusive cultures. RQ3: Continuous learning, supportive leadership, and value-aligned management are effective retention strategies.
43	Talamayan, Teng-Calleja and Caringal-Go (2025)	Multi-industry	Philippines	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis	RQ1: Filipino Gen Z employees are motivated by meaningful work, clear feedback, career progression, peer relationships, and financial security. Intrinsic (purpose, autonomy) and extrinsic (pay, recognition) enablers jointly drive engagement.

44	Triviño et al., (2025)	Multi-industry (management trainee programmes)	Philippines	Qualitative; in-depth interviews (n=6); comparative thematic analysis	RQ1: Gen Z in management trainee programmes is primarily motivated by competitive pay and career exploration value. RQ3: Tailored employer branding, post-programme support, and clear advancement timelines are key retention strategies for Gen Z trainees.
45	Tran et al. (2024)	SMEs	Vietnam	Survey; EFA; CFA; SEM	RQ1: Pay, work environment, supervisory support, and advancement opportunities are key Gen Z job satisfaction determinants in SMEs. RQ2: Limited career growth and poor management practices increase Gen Z dissatisfaction and attrition risk.
46	Tran et al. (2025)	Marketing	Vietnam	Survey; SEM; regression analysis	RQ2: Poor person-job fit, limited career advancement, and inadequate management drive Gen Z job-hopping in marketing. RQ3: Clear career pathways, competitive pay, and supportive management reduce job-hopping and turnover intention.
47	Utomo, Muafi and Isna (2025)	Multi-industry	Indonesia	Survey; SEM; mediation analysis	RQ1: Trust, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction sequentially mediate between leadership behaviour and Gen Z performance. RQ3: Building trust and self-

					efficacy through effective leadership improves satisfaction and lowers Gen Z turnover intention.
48	Verma & Garg (2023)	Multi-industry (IT-intensive)	India	Survey; cross-generational comparative analysis	RQ2: Gen Z differs from older generations in technology-oriented ethical behaviour, creating intergenerational tensions. Organisations must adapt ethical guidelines and tech training to manage generational diversity.
49	Yu et al. (2022)	Hospitality / Hotels	United States	Survey; SEM	RQ2: Gen Z hotel employees' service robot risk awareness, driven by technology anxiety, negatively affects job engagement and increases turnover intention. RQ3: AI literacy training and tech anxiety management mitigate automation's negative impact on Gen Z hospitality retention.
50	Yunyi, Singh and Kularajasingam (2024)	Multi-industry	Malaysia	Survey; SEM	RQ1: Workforce diversity and job meaningfulness positively predict Gen Z engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). RQ2: Lack of meaningful work reduces engagement and OCB; organisations must design enriched roles to leverage Gen Z potential.

4.3 What Factors Motivate Generation Z Employees in the Contemporary Workplace? (RQ1)

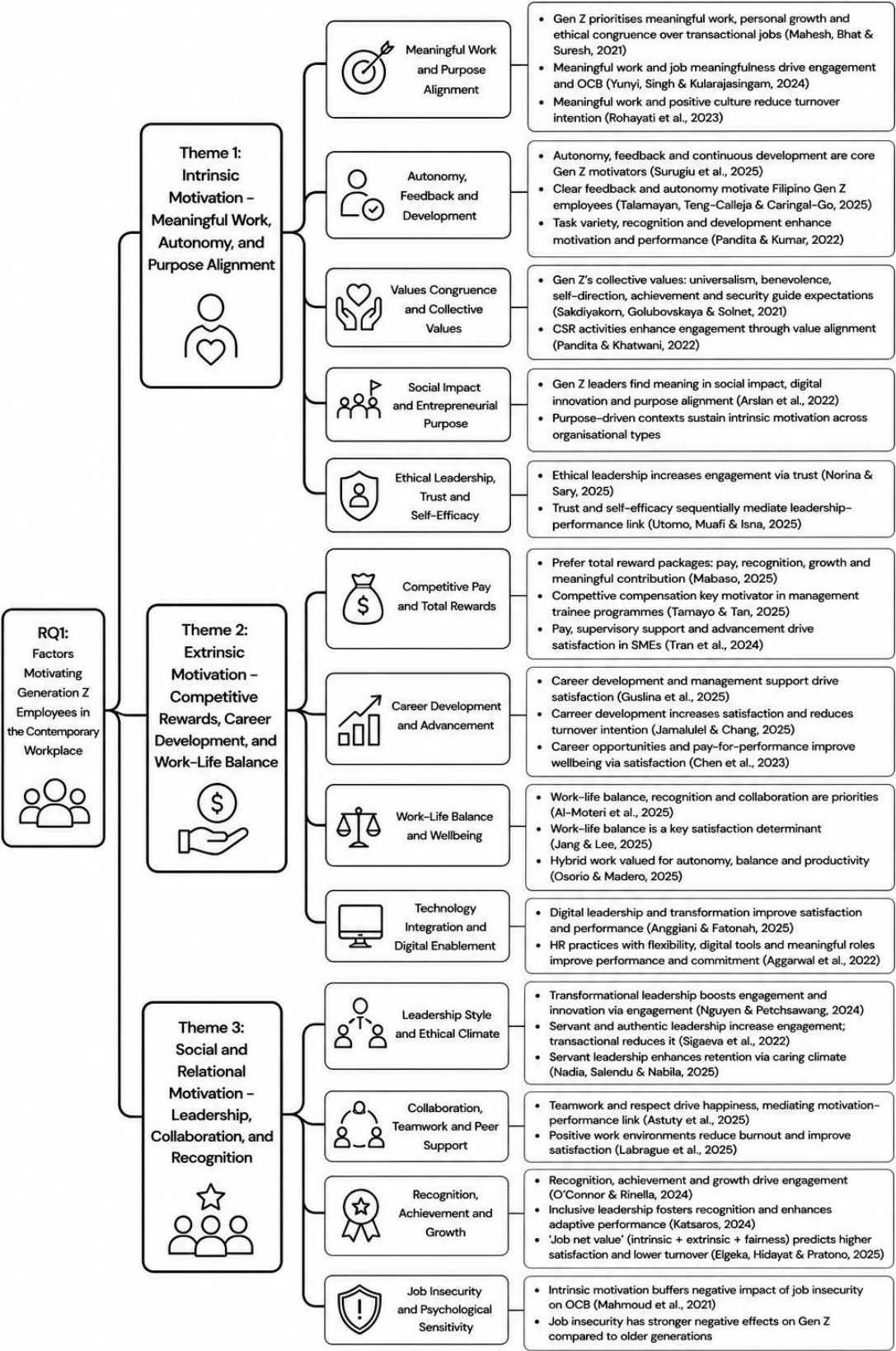


Figure 7: Factors Motivating Generation Z Employees in the Contemporary Workplace (Author)

Theme 1: Intrinsic Motivation – Meaningful Work, Autonomy, and Purpose Alignment

There is a strong intrinsic motivation drive among the generation Z employees especially meaningful work which is closely linked to autonomy and alignment between the personal values and organisational purpose. According to Mahesh, Bhat and Suresh (2021), four superordinate values that are seen to drive Gen Z motivation are the career, passions, success and happiness. Talamayan, Teng-Calleja and Caringal-Go (2025) affirm that meaning work, direct feedback, and autonomy are contributors to motivating Filipino Gen Z employees. Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet (2021) disclose that the collective consciousness of Gen Z establishes the essential mono-work ethics such as universalism, benevolence, self-direction, achievement, and security.

Major focus is on autonomy and developmental opportunities. Surugiu et al. (2025) list autonomy, feedback, and continuous development as the key Gen Z motivation factors, whereas Pandita and Kumar (2022) also include task variety, recognition, and chances of development as the key factors of motivation and performance. Arslan et al. (2022) show that Gen Z leaders find their meaning in social impact and digital innovation and purpose alignment in entrepreneurial situations.

The work that is driven by purpose is especially relevant. Pandita and Khatwani (2022) state that CSR activities contribute to better Gen Z engagement since an organisation's values are aligned with the social conscience of Gen Z. Yunyi, Singh and Kularajasingam (2024) verify that job meaningfulness is a positive predictor of engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour. Rohayati et al. (2023) show that meaningful work has a significant impact in terms of reducing turnover intention among Gen Z workers in Indonesia. Norina and Sary (2025) conclude that ethical leadership, through trust as a mediator, facilitates work engagement, whereas Monika and Israel (2025) reveal that stress and job satisfaction are alleviated and increased by intrinsic motivation and workplace adaptability in healthcare.

Theme 2: Extrinsic Motivation – Competitive Rewards, Career Development, and Work-Life Balance

Extrinsic motivators are also important to Gen Z. Mabaso (2025) finds that South African Gen Z workers would like to receive total reward packages combining competitive pay, recognition, growth, and meaningful contribution. Triviño et al., (2025) discover that competitive pay and value of career exploration motivates Gen Z in management trainee programmes. Tran et al. (2024) find pay, supervisory support and advancement opportunities to be significant

determinants of satisfaction in Vietnamese SMEs, whereas Jang and Lee (2025) confirm that wages, working conditions and educational fit are significant determinants of satisfaction in South Korea.

One of the motivators which recurs is career development. As shown by Guslina et al. (2025), the aspects of management support, career development, and organisational culture are the drivers of Gen Z job satisfaction in Indonesia. Jamalulel and Chang (2025) affirm that the opportunities of career development positively affect the satisfaction and mediate between the opportunities of career development and turnover intention. Chen et al. (2023) contribute that Gen Z wellbeing is enhanced through job satisfaction and career development opportunities and pay-for-performance. Marjerison et al. (2025) show that career promotion and work-life balance are key driving factors among gen Z urban employees in China.

Balancing work and life is also imperative. Al-Moteri et al. (2025) discover that the Saudi Gen Z nurses are more concerned with the work-life balance, recognition, working in a collaborative environment, and professional development. Osorio and Madero (2025) show that Gen Z values hybrid arrangements due to autonomy, work-life balance, and personal productivity. Anggirani and Fatonah (2025) show that digital leadership and digital transformation enhance job satisfaction and job performance, and Aggarwal et al. (2022) provide evidence that HR practices that are in line with the expectations of Gen Z enhance job performance and commitment.

Theme 3: Social and Relational Motivation – Leadership, Collaboration, and Recognition

Gen X motivation is influenced by social and relational factors. Nguyen and Petchsawang (2024) discover that transformational leadership has a positive impact on the work engagement of Gen Z, and the mediation process between transformational leadership and innovative behaviour. Sigaeva et al. (2022) show that servant and authentic leadership has a positive impact on work engagement in hospitality, whereas transactional management negatively affects work engagement. Nadia, Salendu and Nabila (2025) reveal that servant leadership increases retention by promoting a nurturing ethical environment.

Teamwork and support by co-workers are encouraging. As is found by Astuty et al. in (2025), the workplace happiness, which is a result of working as a team and with respect, mediates the relationship between motivation and performance in MSMEs. Labrague et al. (2025) conclude that positive work environments reduce burnout and increase the levels of satisfaction among Gen Z nurses. Utomo, Muafi and Isna (2025) demonstrate that the sequence of mediation between leadership behaviour and Gen Z performance is in the form of trust and self-efficacy.

Acknowledgment comes out as a potent driving force. In their arguments, O'Connor and Rinella (2024) claim that the actual Gen Z engagement is motivated by factors like recognition, achievement, and growth, whereas hygiene factors, such as pay, only prevent dissatisfaction. Katsaros (2024) further explains that adaptive performance is boosted by inclusive leadership and workplace happiness, which leads to psychological safety. Elgeka, Hidayat and Pratono (2025) propose that incorporating intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, and perceived fairness into a single key construct can capture the concept Gen Z derives through work. Dwidienawati et al. (2024) verify that organisational culture and positive employee experience are the key factors that enhance job satisfaction. Mahmoud et al. (2021) also unveil that job insecurity has a negative impact on Gen Z organisational citizenship behaviour in the UK which is partially buffered by intrinsic motivation.

4.4 What Key Challenges Do Organisations Face in Attracting, Managing, and Engaging Generation Z Employees? (RQ2)

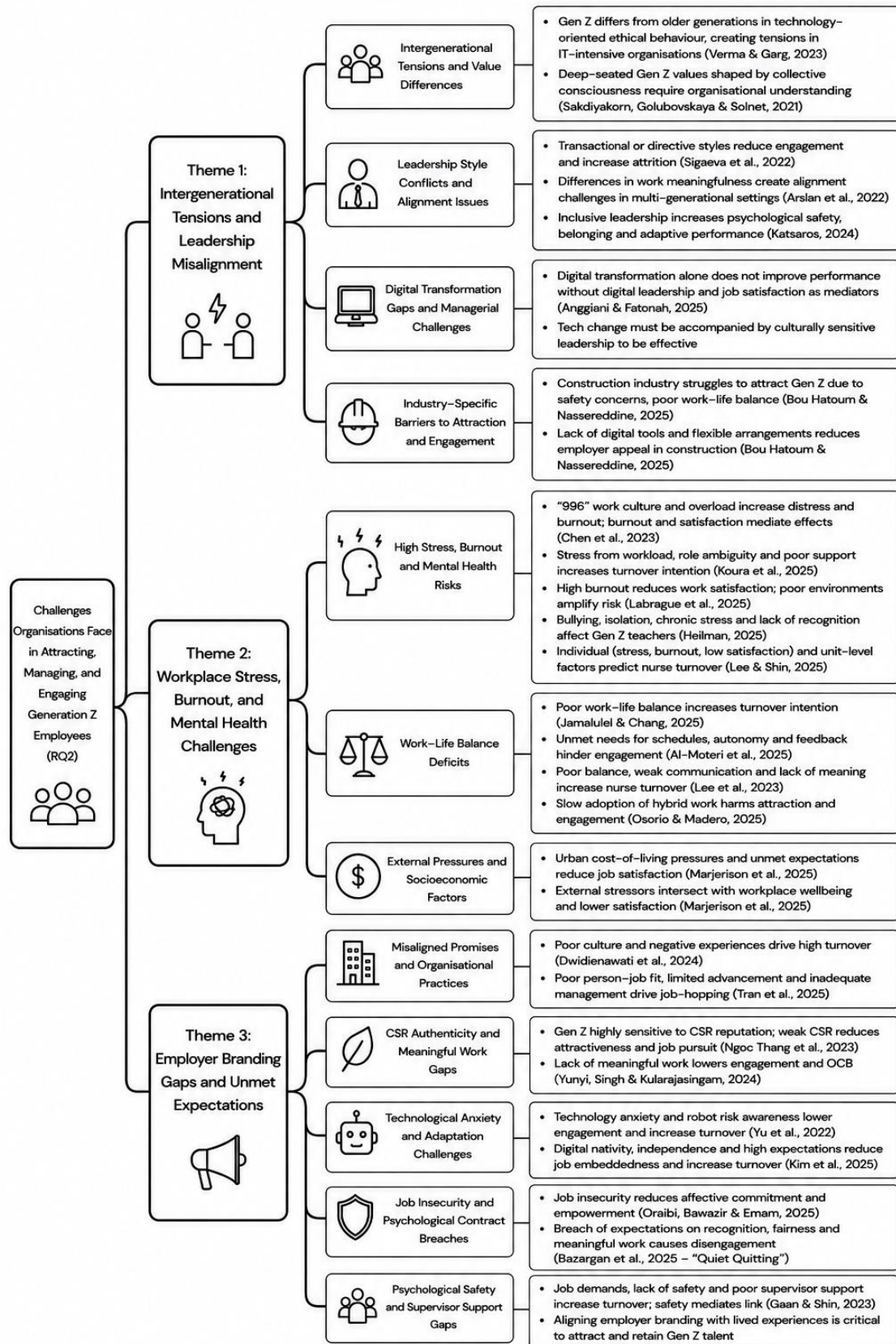


Figure 8: Organisational Challenges in Attracting, Managing, and Engaging Generation Z Employees (Author)

Theme 1: Intergenerational Tensions and Leadership Misalignment

The conflicts between traditional management approaches and the expectations of Gen Z are expressed in the form of intergenerational tension and conflicts between generations in terms of leadership. Verma and Garg (2023) discover that Gen Z is opposed to older generations in terms of technology-related ethical behaviour, which creates conflicts in organisations that are highly dependent on technologies. Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet (2021) stress that to be able to engage this generation in the hospitality industry, organisations need to be aware of the deep-seated values of Gen Z.

Misalignment in leadership is re-occurring. Sigaeva et al. (2022) indicate that transactional or dictatorial management diminishes Gen Z engagement and increases turnover in hospitality, and Arslan et al. (2022) report that the differences in the perceptions of meaningfulness among generations creates leadership challenges in hospitality. Katsaros (2024) claims that to facilitate Gen Z adaptive performance through enhancing psychological safety, it is essential to have inclusive leadership.

The gaps in the digital transformation add to the difficulties. Anggiani and Fatonah (2025) discover that the digital transformation is not a solution to better the performance of Gen Z without the mediating role of digital leadership and job satisfaction. In Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine (2025) disclose that construction is not appealing to Gen Z because of safety concerns, lack of work-life balance, and the necessity to use digital tools. Surugiu et al. (2025) affirm that organisations are finding it hard to adapt to the Gen Z demands to have flexible, inclusive cultures. O'Connor and Rinella (2024) caution that organisations that merely focus on hygiene improvements do not take into consideration the deeper motivational needs of Gen Z.

Theme 2: Workplace Stress, Burnout, and Mental Health Challenges

Gen Z is more sensitive to stress, burnout, and mental health issues at the workplace. Chen et al. (2023) show that psychological distress/burnout, mediated by job burnout, are more negative effects of the work culture in China and work overload. Koura et al. (2025) discover that workload, role ambiguity, and poor supervisor support as causes of stress at work, increase turnover intention among Gen Z in the banking field. Labrague et al. (2025) affirm that the high job burnout reduces directly work satisfaction among Gen Z nurses in Oman.

There are specific areas that have mental health issues that are especially acute. According to Heilman (2025), the bullying in the workplace, social isolation, chronic stress, and lack of recognition are significant challenges impacting Gen Z teachers in the United States. According to Lee and Shin (2025), individual variables like the stress, burnout, low satisfaction, and unit variables such as poor team cohesion, inadequate supervisor support, etc are seen to jointly predict the Gen Z nurse turnover intention in South Korea. Lee & Shin (2025) support that poor work-life balance, inadequate communication competence and a lack of work meaning increase the Gen Z nurse turnover intention.

The lack of work-life balance is another contributor to stress. Jamalulel and Chang (2025) demonstrate that a low work-life balance and career development are the factors that increase turnover intention among the Indonesian Gen Z workers. Al-Moteri et al. (2025) discover that incompleteness of expectations with respect to schedules, autonomy, and feedback lead to dissatisfaction among Saudi Gen Z nurses. Osorio and Madero (2025) further indicate that organisations that are slow to embrace hybrid models have problems accessing engagements. According to Marjerison et al. (2025), Gen Z job satisfaction in China is decreased by the pressures and expectations of the cost-of-living in the metropolis. Astuty et al. (2025) observe that Gen Z in MSMEs have a different perception of happiness in the workplace; an environment that lacks teamwork, will decrease the motivation of Gen Z.

Theme 3: Employer Branding Gaps and Unmet Expectations

The disconnect between promises and reality of employer branding undermine Gen Z trust and hasten turnover. Dwidienawati et al. (2024) discover that high Gen Z turnover in Indonesia is associated with a poor organisational culture, as well as negative employee experiences. According to Tran et al. (2025), poor person-job fit, the lack of career growth, and ineffective management are the trigger of Gen Z job-hopping in Vietnamese marketing industry. Tran et al. (2024) further contribute that a lack of career development and ineffective management heighten dissatisfaction in SMEs.

The authenticity of CSR is important. Ngoc Thang et al. (2023) show that Gen Z job seekers in Vietnam are highly sensitive to the organisational CSR reputation; poor CSR positioning decreases the attractiveness of the employers and the intention to seek a job. Yunyi, Singh and Kularajasingam (2024) posit that work engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour are lessened due to the absence of meaningful work.

The problem of technological anxiety and adaptation have an influence on the employer attractiveness. Yu et al. (2022) discover that service robot risk awareness of Gen Z hotel employees, fuelled by technology anxiety, has a negative impact on job engagement. As disclosed by Kim et al. (2025), the differences between Gen Z nurse-specific characteristics (digital nativity, high independence, high expectations) and job embeddedness lessen job embeddedness when unmet in South Korea.

Engagement is compromised by job insecurity and breach of psychological contract. According to Oraibi, Bawazir and Emam (2025), job insecurity is one of the issues that Gen Z employees in Malaysia have to deal with, which downplay affective commitment and psychological empowerment. Mahmoud et al. (2021) affirm that job insecurity has a more negative influence on the Gen Z organisational citizenship behaviour than the older generations. Bazargan et al. (2025) present a new type of dissatisfaction, which is known as Quiet Quitting and is the response to unmet expectations regarding recognition, fairness in workloads, and meaningful work in the UK. As demonstrated by Gaan and Shin (2023), job demands and the absence of psychological safety and poor supervisor support are all factors that increase Gen Z software employees turnover intention in India.

4.5 What Organisational Strategies Have Been Identified in the Literature as Effective in Retaining Generation Z Employees? (RQ3)

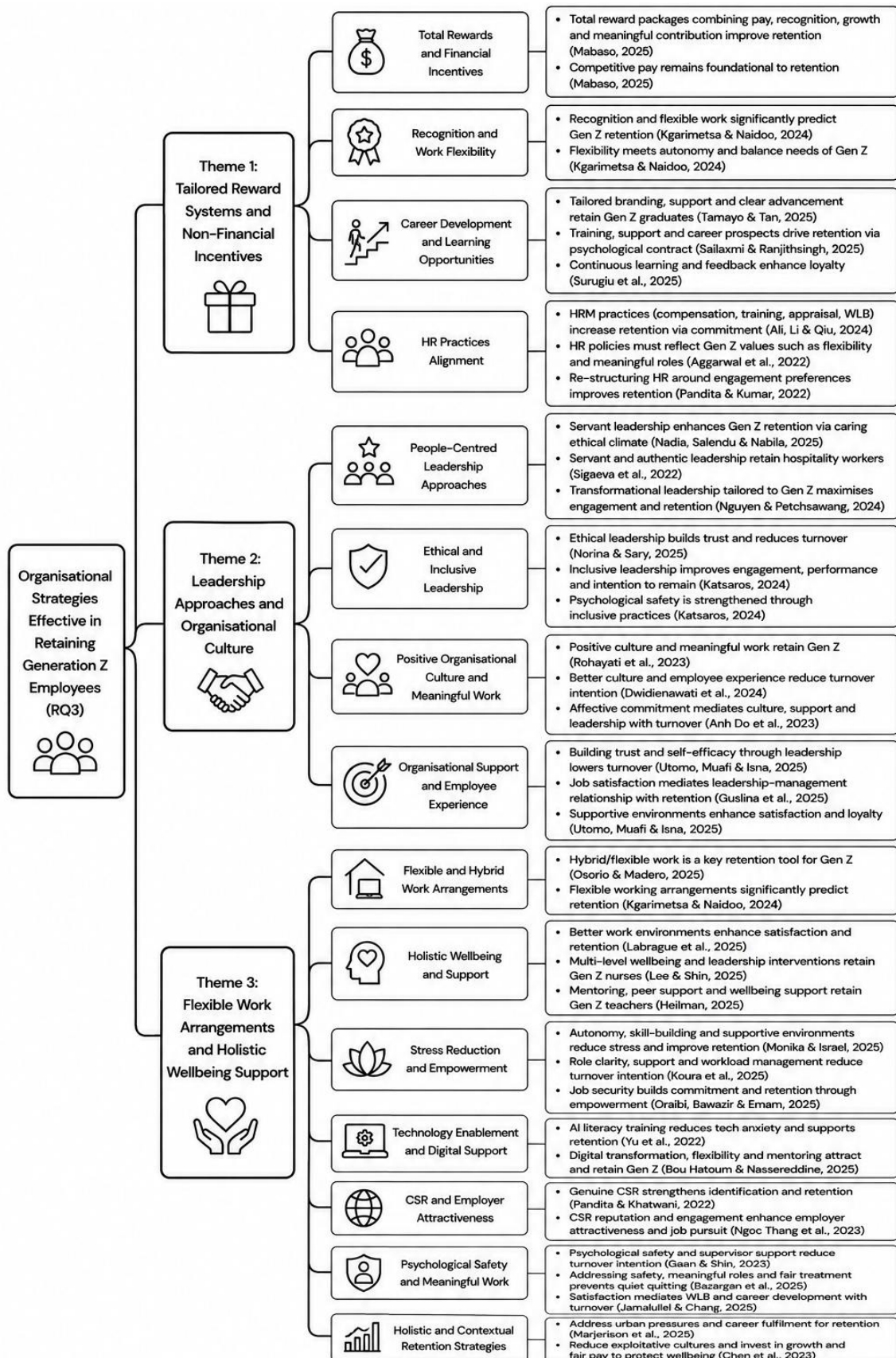


Figure 9: Organisational Strategies for Retaining Generation Z Employees (Author)

Theme 1: Tailored Reward Systems and Non-Financial Incentives

To be effective in retaining Gen Zs, it would be necessary to shift the current compensation models towards more personalized reward schemes that can incorporate both financial and non-financial incentives based on the values and preferences of Gen Zs.

Mabaso (2025) shows that total reward packages based on competitive pay, recognition, growth opportunities, and meaningful contribution yield more positive responses on the part of the Gen Z employees. Kgarimetsa and Naidoo (2024) discover that the recognitions of employees and flexible working setups significantly predict Gen Z employee retention in the mining industry of South Africa, whereas generic professional development initiatives do not have significant predictive value.

Flexibility, recognition and development are non-financial rewards that are especially effective. Ali, Li and Qiu (2024) disclose that HRM practices, such as compensation, training, performance appraisal, and work-life balance, play a significant role in Gen Z retention in China in addition to organisational commitment mediating the HRM-retention relationship. The authors note that HR policies can be restructured to support the Gen Z values of flexibility and meaningful work, leading to performance and long-term retention (Aggarwal et al., 2022). Guslina et al. (2025) affirm that the management-retention relationship is mediated by job satisfaction, which implies that enhancing job satisfaction should improve the management-retention relationship.

The core of retention is centred around career development and learning opportunities. According to Triviño et al., (2025), the personalized employer branding, post program support, and definite advancement schedules are some of the most important retention strategies among graduates of the Gen Z management trainee programme in the Philippines. Sailaxmi and Ranjithsingh (2025) show that training, co-worker support and career prospects are influencing Gen Z retention through psychological contract fulfilment in the BPO industry in India with psychological contract fully mediating the socialisation-retention relationship.

Pandita and Kumar (2022) supplement with the idea that re-structuring HR practices, according to Gen Z engagement preferences, including flexibility, feedback, and learning, enhances retention outcomes. Surugiu et al. (2025) affirm that effective retention strategies in various industries are continuous learning, supportive leadership and value aligned management. Trans et al. (2025) demonstrate that job-hopping and turnover intention are decreased in Gen Z marketers in Vietnam with proper career paths, attractive wages, and management support.

Theme 2: Leadership Approaches and Organisational Culture

The most important levers to Gen Z retention are leadership style and organisational culture. Servant, transformational, ethical, and inclusive leadership model always improves the engagement and intention to stay of Gen Z, and the negative, caring, and genuine culture of organisations lowers turnover.

Nadia, Salendu and Nabila (2025) discover that servant leadership increases Gen Z retention by positively influencing a caring ethical climate that mediates the servant leadership-intention to stay relationship in Indonesia. Sigaeva et al. (2022) assert that servant and authentic leadership styles can successfully engage and keep Gen Z hospitality employees in Cyprus. Nguyen and Petchsawang (2024) show that transformational leadership that is adapted to Gen Z maximises engagement and retention in the multi-industry workforce in Thailand.

Inclusive and ethical leadership are also crucial. Norina and Sary (2025) demonstrate that a proven solution to engage Gen Z in the long term and reduce turnover in Indonesia is to create the trustful relationship by ethical leadership. Katsaros (2024) suggests that Gen Z engagement, performance, and intention to stay can be enhanced by boosting psychological safety in Greece through inclusive leadership practices.

The organisational culture should be in line with Gen Z values. As shown by Rohayati et al. (2023), positive cultures, meaningful work, and positive cultures are good Gen Z retention tactics in Indonesia. Dwidienawati et al. (2024) also validate that the lower the turnover intention among Gen Z employees, the better the organisational culture and employee experience are. Anh Do et al. (2023) unveil that the relationship between organisational support, organisational culture, and organisational leadership and Gen Z turnover intention in Vietnam is mediated by affective commitment.

Utomo, Muafi and Isna (2025) further posit that trust and self-efficacy should be established by means of effective leadership that will raise the level of satisfaction and reduce the intention to turnover among Gen Z in Indonesia. Jamalulel and Chang (2025) confirm that work-life balance and career development have a mediating effect on turnover intention, and the integrated nature of retention strategies.

Theme 3: Flexible Work Arrangements and Holistic Wellbeing Support

Supporting the holistic wellbeing of employees through flexible work arrangements, hybrid models, and enhanced autonomy and work-life balance have become essential retention policies, especially in the post-pandemic environment where Gen Z demands on autonomy and work-life balance have increased.

According to Osorio and Madero (2025), a major retention tool in organisational types in Mexico is flexible hybrid work arrangements which Gen Z prefers to give them more autonomy, work-life balance, and personal productivity. Kgarimetsa and Naidoo (2024) affirm that the predictive power of flexible working arrangements is significant in predicting Gen Z retention in the South African mining industry.

Whole person wellbeing support is also significant. As positive work environments reduce burnout and improve satisfaction, Labrague et al. (2025) demonstrate that improving work environments is a key retention strategy to Gen Z nurses in Oman. Lee and Shin (2025) believe that both individual wellbeing and unit leadership should be targeted by the multi-level interventions to retain Gen Z nurses in South Korea. Heilman (2025) points out that the key to retaining Gen Z teachers in the United States is mentoring, peer networks, recognition programmes, and emotional wellbeing support.

Notable mechanisms are stress reduction and psychological empowerment. Monika and Israel (2025) discover supporting autonomy, skill-building, and adaptive environments reduces the stress and improves retention of healthcare workers in Gen Z in India. Koura et al. (2025) demonstrate that role clarity, managerial support, and workload management are stress reduction factors that lower the turnover intention of Gen Zers in the banking sector of Morocco. Oraibi, Bawazir and Emam (2025) show that affective organisational commitment and psychological empowerment are the mediators that increase job security and promote job retention in Gen Z in Malaysia, meaning that HRM professionals should consider job security and job retention strategies as priority.

Retention is also supported by technology and digital transformation. Yu et al. (2022) discover that automation has a detrimental effect on Gen Z hospitality retention in the United States, which can be mitigated through AI literacy training and technology anxiety management. To make the construction industry an employer of choice among Gen Z, Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine (2025) argue that it needs to be digitally transformed, flexible, mentored, and a strong safety culture. Kim et al. (2025) further contribute that enhancing job embeddedness by maximising community fit, organisational links, and sacrifice perceptions reduce Gen Z nurse turnover in South Korea.

The other strategic levers are CSR and employer attractiveness. In their argument, Pandita and Khatwani (2022) state that incorporating authentic CSR into employer branding and everyday operations enhances Gen Z identification and retention. Ngoc Thang et al. (2023) reveal that positive CSR appraisal and CSR enrolment increase Gen Z employer attractiveness, which

mediates job pursuit intention, meaning that incorporating social and environmental factors into corporate strategy is an effective Gen Z employer attraction/retention tool.

Lastly, the disengagement is avoided by attending to the issues of psychological safety and meaningful work. Gaan and Shin (2023) demonstrate that the demands-turnover relationship between Gen Z software employees in India is mediated by psychological safety and supervisor support. Bazargan et al. (2025) posit that addressing the psychological safety, meaningful roles, and equitable treatment proactively prevent the Gen Z quiet quitting and disengagement in the UK. Marjerison et al. (2025) find that holistic retention strategies that address the urban pressures and career fulfilment are required to retain Gen Z urban workers in China, whereas Chen et al. (2023) note that the exploitative work cultures and the investment in career growth and fair pay security is necessary to protect Gen Z mental health and performance. All these findings suggest that Gen Z retention needs multi-dimensional, values-aligned, and wellbeing-centred organisational strategies.

4.6 Discussion

The thematic findings synthesised in this chapter offers a holistic answer to research questions on Gen Z motivation, organisational challenges, and retention strategies in the contemporary workplaces. The results, interpreted in the context of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the perspective of talent management, not only reinforce current theoretical assumptions, but also show significant extensions that deserve further scholarly consideration.

The fact that intrinsic motivation is eminent throughout the literature gives a strong support to SDT. Work environments that fulfil the three fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness prove more appealing to gen Z workers who will be more engaged and less turnover (Mahesh, Bhat and Suresh, 2021; Talamayan, Teng-Calleja and Caringal-Go, 2025; Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet, 2021). The JD-R model pathway of resource activation is also confirmed: servant and transformational leadership (Sigaeva et al., 2022; Nguyen and Petchsawang, 2024; Nadia, Salendu and Nabila, 2025), positive organisational culture (Rohayati et al., 2023; Dwidienawati et al., 2024), and digital tools (Anggiani and Fatonah, 2025) become critical job resources that enable Gen Z engagement. Notably, the results bring out SDT in a new formulation. As established by Arslan et al. (2022), Gen Z leaders find meaning in social impact and digital innovation and thus, digital competence seems to be a context-specific motivational need that cannot be fully conceptualised within the traditional SDT constructs. Likewise, Pandita and Khatwani (2022) and Yunyi, Singh and Kularajasingam

(2024) show that meaningful work and CSR alignment are motivational with a value beyond the instrumental one, making competence construct in digitally native workforces a challenging concept.

The challenge findings are a strong stimulus of the demand pathway of the JD-R model. Systematically, intentions of quiet quitting, psychological distress, and burnout arise when work demands that exceed available resources (Chen et al., 2023; Koura et al., 2025; Labrague et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the speed and strength of Gen Z reactions are better parsimoniously described using SET in comparison to JD-R alone. When organisations are viewed as having violated the psychological contract by not providing the promised flexibility, career development, or respectful management, the Gen Z employees will quickly withdraw commitment and increase turnover intentions (Jamalulel and Chang, 2025; Tran et al., 2025; Bazargan et al., 2025), which is fully consistent with the reciprocity mechanism of SET. Misalignment of leadership that is reported in the literature that spans various national settings, as reported by Verma and Garg (2023), Surugiu et al. (2025) and Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine (2025) are most consistent in understanding them as a perceived sustained violation of the SET exchange relationship. The intergenerational conflicts compounded by the gaps in digital transformation that Anggiani and Fatonah (2025) identify and technology anxiety recorded by Yu et al. (2022) add further complexity that JD-R and SET do not fully anticipate in the context of intergenerational tensions.

Interestingly convergence and divergence pattern develop within the geographical and sectoral settings. Indonesian studies (Guslina et al., 2025; Jamalulel and Chang, 2025; Dwidienawati et al., 2024; Rohayati et al., 2023) continuously highlight the importance of organisational culture and job satisfaction as the main retention mediators, and the research in China (Chen et al., 2023; Marjerison et al., 2025; Ali, Li and Qiu, 2024) foreshadows the harmful impact of exploitive work cultures and the need of organisational commitment as an intervening mechanism. The workplace stress, burnout, and job insecurity are mentioned in the context of middle Eastern studies (Koura et al., 2025; Labrague et al., 2025; Al-Moteri et al., 2025; Oraibi, Bawazir and Emam, 2025) as one of the issues, which are particularly relevant to Gen Z exposure to the workforce demands. Conversely, employer branding gaps, unmet expectations, and quiet quitting are more often noted as symptoms of Gen Z disengagement (in O'Connor and Rinella, 2024; Heilman, 2025; Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine, 2025; Bazargan et al., 2025).

The findings of retention can best be described to indicate that no single theoretical framework can be completely adequate. Both the competence need of SDT and the resource logic of JD-R

are activated by career development and structured learning interventions (Guslina et al., 2025; Triviño et al., 2025; Sailaxmi and Ranjithsingh, 2025; Pandita and Kumar, 2022). Reciprocity principle of SET is operationalised by recognition and reward strategies (Mabaso, 2025; Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024; Aggarwal et al., 2022). Psychological contract based on SET and the autonomy and relatedness levels of SDT are simultaneously addressed by authentic employer branding and culture alignment (Ngoc Thang et al., 2023; Anh Do et al., 2023; Norina and Sary, 2025). The retention evidence of sector-specific retention interventions, i.e., nursing (Lee and Shin, 2025; Kim et al., 2025; Labrague et al., 2025), mining (Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024), hospitality (Sigaeva et al., 2022), education (Heilman, 2025), construction (Bou Hatoum and Nassereddine, 2025), and IT (Gaan and Shin, 2023) converge on one single integrative principle: retention is optimised when intrinsic need satisfaction, equitable extrinsic rewards, and consistent enabling leadership are aligned rather than treated as competing priorities.

Another significant theoretical gap is the contribution of flexible work arrangements and hybrid framework. Osorio and Madero (2025) and Kgarimetsa and Naidoo (2024) show that flexibility is a significant predictor of retention, but neither JD-R nor SDT sufficiently theorises flexibility as a particular psychological resource or need. The functionality of flexibility as an autonomy-enhancing resource (SDT) or a demand-buffering resource (JD-R) or a signal of reciprocity (SET) is still theoretically unclear. Moreover, the psychosocial mechanisms of empowerment reported by Oraibi, Bawazir and Emam (2025) and Monika and Israel (2025) imply that the mechanisms of empowerment can be considered as an intrinsic need (SDT), a job resource (JD-R), and an exchange signal (SET), which poses a challenge to disciplinary boundaries between these two frameworks.

The other important gap is in terms of the temporal dynamics of Gen Z engagement. The observed patterns of accelerated turnover intention and rapid disengagement pattern observed across various studies (Tran et al., 2024; Tran et al., 2025; Bazargan et al., 2025) indicate that Gen Z has shorter psychological contract assessment cycles compared to the previous generations. Existing theories do not sufficiently deal with this temporal compression, but generally assume fairly stable exchange relationships. The quiet quitting phenomenon described by Bazargan et al. (2025) and unmet expectation pattern reported by Dwidienawati et al. (2024) and Kim et al. (2025) further indicate that Gen Z might have more passive withdrawal strategies and use them earlier and more frequently than the traditional exit-voice-loyalty-neglect (EVLN) framework predicts.

Lastly, the interactions between digital nativity and motivational frameworks need to be theorized. The studies by Anggiani and Fatonah (2025), Yu et al. (2022), and Aggarwal et al. (2022) collectively point to the fact that digital leadership, integration of technologies, and AI literacy are both extrinsic motivators and intrinsic need satisfiers to Gen Z, and the traditional distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic needs should be viewed as outdated in the context of SDT. Such convergence models as the integration of psychological needs, social exchange dynamics, and generational-technological contextual factors to better explain where and how Generation Z works in the modern landscape should thus be pursued in future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1 Overview

The aim of this study was to critically review and synthesise the existing literature on motivation, challenges, and retention strategies of the employees of the Generation Z at the modern workplace. The results of the research provide a complex and integrated understanding of the concept of Generation Z as a unique cohort in organisational contexts, whose motivation drivers are unique, highly sensitive to workplace demands, and have distinct expectations towards employer-employee relationships.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The initial significant conclusion is that Generation Z motivation is inherently dual in nature and is therefore a complex of both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions that need to be addressed at the same time to be engaged effectively. Gen Z employees are intrinsically motivated to have meaningful work, autonomy, purpose alignment, and ethical organisational behaviour. They desire roles that combine personal values with professional input and show an increased sensitivity to servant, transformational and ethical leadership styles that help to create a sense of psychological safety, trust and relatedness. Competitively, competitive pay, formal career growth opportunities, work life balance, and integration of technology is also a key motivator. Notably, the above dimensions are not opposed to each other, but rather complementary: Gen Z engagement can be optimised when organisations provide total reward packages, which combines financial rewards and non-financial recognition, growth opportunities, and meaningful contribution.

The second significant revelation is with regard to the character and the severity of workplace issues that organisations are confronted with as they seek to attract, manage and retain employees of the Generation Z. Three challenge areas that are interrelated were identified. To begin with, intergenerational conflicts and lack of alignment between traditional management practices and Gen Z expectations of participative, transparent, and digitally literate leaders. Second, Gen Z is more sensitive to work-related stress, burnout, and mental health issues, especially when occupational demands (e.g., workload, role ambiguity, and boundary erosion) surpass the amount of job resources available. Third, lack of branding and unmet expectations by the employer are significant contributors to Gen Z disengagement and turnover. In cases where organisations do not deliver on promises in terms of flexibility, development, corporate social responsibility, or cultural inclusivity, Generation Z workers quickly withdraw

psychological commitment and seek other work environments. This is compounded by the digital connectivity and tendency to share negative experience of Gen Z, which make authenticity and consistency between espoused values and actual performance key organisational requirements.

The third significant discovery is connected with retention strategies. The evidence supports the principle that the retention of Gen Z talent does not occur through localized efforts but through the cohesion and alignment of values of employee experiences across recruitment and daily work. Reward systems designed uniquely to include both financial and non-financial rewards, especially recognition and flexible working arrangements, are of great importance in predicting retention. Leadership styles in terms of servant, transformational, ethical and inclusive leadership styles contribute to affective commitment through satisfying the needs of Gen Zers to autonomy, competence and relatedness. Organisational cultures that are characterised by a psychological safety, trust, fairness, and alignment with Gen Z values in terms of sustainability and social impact decrease turnover intention. Flexible work arrangements, especially the hybrid models, which balance autonomy with structure, have become a key retention tool in post-pandemic settings. The Gen z susceptibility to burnout is dealt with by holistic wellbeing support, which includes stress reduction, psychological empowerment, mentoring, and emotional support. More importantly, the effectiveness of retention strategies depends on the authenticity and internal consistency: the initiatives that are not based on the commitment to the organisation do not work and may have a contrary effect, i.e. increase the turnover rate.

The fourth valuable piece of evidence is related to the sectoral and geographical variation. Indonesian studies always highlight organisational culture and job satisfaction as the major retention moderators, but Chinese studies predict exploitative work cultures and organisational commitment. The Middle East settings provide accent to job insecurity, stress at work, and burnout as the especially relevant issues. Employer branding gaps, unmet expectations and quiet quitting are also found to be forms of disengagement more frequently identified in the Western contexts. These tendencies imply that although some motivational and retention principles could be considered cross-cultural, effective strategies need to be tailored to the local labour market conditions and cultural norms.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

The study helps to fill the literature gap by bringing together the Job Demands-Resources model, Self-Determination Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and talent management frameworks into a harmonious analytical framework, which can be used to explain the Gen Z workplace behaviour.

The Self-Determination Theory has a high level of empirical support: the engagement and retention of Gen Z individuals are greatly increased when the work conditions can fulfil the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Nevertheless, the results further expand SDT since they show that digital competence is a contextually specific motivational need of Gen Z that is not fully captured by traditional constructs. The Job Demands-Resources model is supported by a range of consistent evidence that the engagement of Gen Z depends on balancing job demands and resources, and Gen Z seems to be more sensitive to the imbalances than previous generations. The Social Exchange Theory describes how Gen Z will respond to perceived breaches of a psychological contract at a rapid and intense pace, though currently Gen Z also has shorter evaluation cycles than current formulations of the Social Exchange Theory predict.

Theoretical gaps were identified which were critical. The four theories, Job Demands-Resources, Self-Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory do not sufficiently theorise flexible work arrangements as an independent construct. The phenomenon of quiet quitting, as well as passive withdrawal tactics, do not coincide with the conventional exit-voice-loyalty-neglect theories. The interaction between the digital nativity and the motivational structures obscures the traditional distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic needs and motives because digital leadership and integration of technologies.

5.4 Practical Implications

To practitioners, the results show that organisations need to take multifaceted, theoretically-informed, and contextually-sensitive approaches to Gen Z talent management. Incentives ought to be incorporated in the intrinsic and extrinsic platforms using total rewards package consisting of competitive pay with recognition, growth opportunities and meaningful contribution. The development of leadership needs to place a great emphasis on servant, transformational, ethical and inclusive styles of leadership that promote participative decision-making and psychological safety. The employer branding should be genuine and internally coherent, with the external value propositions implemented in the everyday HR activities and

management practices. The flexible working arrangements must be integrated in the supportive leadership and the work systems designed. The importance of holistic wellbeing support in the area of stress reduction, psychological empowerment, and emotional support needs to be prioritised due to the susceptibility of Gen Z to burnout. Organisations are recommended to adopt some systematic measures of monitoring and response to Gen Z expectations, in the understanding that this cohort reviews psychological contracts more often and gets out more easily in case of failure to meet its expectations.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations, although it has contributed to its growth. Limitation to peer-reviewed journal articles in the English language published between 2021 and 2025 introduces publication bias and language bias. The underlying studies are often cross-sectional in nature, and in many instances, the underlying studies rely on self-reported perceptions and are based on convenience samples within individual sectors or within individual countries, which restricts the ability to make causal inferences and generalisability. Thematic synthesis involves inevitably interpretive judgement.

Future studies ought to pursue longitudinal research studies tracking the experiences of Gen Z across time, cross-cultural comparative research studies in which the experiences of national contexts on Gen Z motivation and retention are compared, intervention research studies that evaluate the effectiveness of particular retention strategies, and theoretical development that integrates psychological needs, social exchange dynamics, and digital nativity into convergence models.

5.6 Conclusion

In sum, the present study illustrates that Generation Z is a unique and powerful group in the modern workplaces, with the dual characteristics of intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, a high level of sensitivity to workplace needs and psychological contract violations, and certain expectations in terms of leadership, culture, flexibility, and authenticity. To manage Gen Z, it is necessary to go beyond the disjointed initiatives to the coherent, values-aligned employee experience based on theoretical knowledge of psychological needs, social exchange relationship, and job demands-resources relationship. With the proportion of the world workforce comprised of Generation Z steadily growing, the ability of organisations to comprehend and react to the unique attributes of this workforce will increasingly determine competitive edge and organisational survivability.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Database Search String

```
TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( motivation OR engagement OR "job  
satisfaction" OR challenges OR barriers OR obstacles  
OR difficulties OR "employee retention" OR "staff  
retention" OR "talent retention" OR "turnover  
intention" OR "employee turnover" ) AND ( "generation  
z" OR "gen z" OR "post-millennial*" OR centennial* )  
AND ( organisation* OR organization* OR workplace OR  
"work environment" OR employment OR job OR corporate  
OR firm* OR business* OR company* OR industry ) ) AND  
PUBYEAR > 2020 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO  
( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE ,  
"English" ) )
```

Appendix B: CASP Appraisal Table

Sl No.	Author(s) and Year	1. Clear research aim?	2. Appropriate research design?	3. Appropriate recruitment strategy/sample?	4. Data collection clearly described?	5. Research design appropriate to answer aim?	6. Rigorous data analysis?	7. Ethical considerations addressed?	8. Findings clearly stated and supported?
1	Aggarwal et al. (2022)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	CT
2	Ali, Li and Qiu (2024)	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
3	Al-Moteri et al. (2025)	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
4	Anggiani & Fatonah (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y
5	Anh Do et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	Y
6	Arslan et al. (2022)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	N
7	Astuty et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y
8	Bazargan et al. (2025)	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
9	Bou Hatoum & Nassereddine (2025)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	CT	Y
10	Chen et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y
11	Dwidienawati et al. (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	CT	Y

12	Elgeka, Hidayat and Pratono (2025)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	Y
13	Gaan & Shin (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
14	Guslina et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y
15	Heilman (2025)	N	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y
16	Jamalulel & Chang (2025)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
17	Jang & Lee (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y
18	Katsaros (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
19	Kgarimetsa & Naidoo (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
20	Kim et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y
21	Koura et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y
22	Labrague et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT
23	Lee & Shin (2025)	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y
24	Mabaso (2025)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	CT	Y	Y
25	Mahesh, Bhat and Suresh (2021)	N	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
26	Mahmoud et al. (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
27	Marjerison et al. (2025)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
28	Monika & Israel (2025)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y
29	Nadia, Salendu and Nabila (2025)	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
30	Ngoc Thang et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
31	Nguyen & Petchsawang (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
32	Norina & Sary (2025)	Y	CT	Y	CT	CT	Y	N	Y

33	O'Connor & Rinella (2024)	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	CT
34	Oraibi, Bawazir & Emam (2025)	Y	CT	Y	Y	N	CT	Y	Y
35	Osorio & Madero (2025)	Y	CT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
36	Pandita & Khatwani (2022)	Y	N	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
37	Pandita & Kumar (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
38	Rohayati et al. (2023)	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	CT
39	Sailaxmi & Ranjithsingh (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
40	Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
41	Sigaeva et al. (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	CT	CT
42	Surugiu et al. (2025)	Y	N	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
43	Talamayan, Teng-Calleja and Caringal-Go (2025)	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y
44	Triviño et al., (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
45	Tran et al. (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
46	Tran et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y
47	Utomo, Muafi and Isna (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
48	Verma & Garg (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
49	Yu et al. (2022)	Y	Y	CT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
50	Yunyi, Singh and Kularajasingam (2024)	CT	Y	CT	Y	CT	Y	CT	Y