Journal of Arts & Social Sciences
Vol 8, Issue 1, 58-64 (2026)

Structuring the Workplace to Attract, Suit, and Retain Gen Z Employees: Evidence from an Exploratory Asian Survey

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Abstract
This research explores the preferences and priorities of Generation Z employees in Asia, with a particular focus on Singaporean and Malaysian respondents, to provide evidence-based recommendations for corporations and organisations seeking to attract, suit, and retain Gen Z talents. Drawing upon the results of an exploratory survey of 177 Gen Z individuals and supported by recent scholarly literature, the study reveals the critical importance of work-life balance, value alignment, professional growth, intellectual challenge, financial stability, recognition, personal fulfilment, and definitions of success for this cohort. The findings indicate that organisations must adopt flexible, value-driven, and growth-oriented workplace structures to meet Gen Z expectations, thereby enhancing talent attraction and retention. Recent research papers and relevant articles are cited to contextualise and substantiate the analysis.

Key words: Generation Z, Workplace structure, Work-life balance, Talent attraction, Talent retention, Asian workforce, Corporate policies.

Introduction

The emergence of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) in the workforce has prompted a paradigm shift in organisational strategies across Asia. By 2030, Gen Z is projected to comprise more than a quarter of the global workforce (De Smet et al., 2023). As digital natives with distinct values and aspirations, Gen Z employees differ markedly from their predecessors. In Singapore and Malaysia, rapid technological advancement and evolving societal norms have accentuated the need for organisations to reassess workplace structures. Despite increasing scholarly attention, a literature gap persists regarding region-specific preferences of Asian Gen Z talents and their implications for human resource management. This study addresses this gap by interpreting empirical survey data and integrating recent academic findings to inform organisational practices.

Background

Foremost, more employees are seeking not just a job that pays, but also one that caters to personal needs. A recent international survey states:

> "Work-life balance still ranks as the second most important job driver globally. For Gen Z, it holds equal importance to salary, highlighting a shift toward valuing personal well-being alongside financial reward . . . in APAC . . . salary and work-life balance are valued almost equally."
> (Randstad, 2025)

A preceding study of Work-Life Balance (WBL) of millennials in Singapore and South Korea shielded light on theoretical and empirical issues of WLB, for example highlighting the importance of coping strategies for WBL for millennials in the construction industry in Singapore (Low and Chua, 2019). In a more recent study, the effectiveness of work-life balance (WLB) programmes on employee performance at the *Monetary Authority of Singapore* (MAS) and the *Financial Services Authority of Indonesia* (OJK) explores the difficulties in sustaining WLB programmes in the financial regulatory industry (Arquisola and Irsan, 2024). Such industry specific WLB investigations in the region certainly provides valuable insights. This exploratory study seeks to get a better understanding of Gen Z aspirations for WLB, thereby providing further understanding for organisations at large in their strategy formulation and programme implementation to better cater to the needs of this increasing pool of workers.

Methodology

A quantitative survey was administered to 177 Gen Z respondents, predominantly Singaporeans and Malaysians with a handful from Indonesia and Myanmar, to assess their workplace preferences. The survey measured the perceived importance of various factors: WLB, job alignment with personal values, professional growth and development, intellectual challenge, financial stability, recognition, personal fulfilment, and the role of WLB in defining success. Respondents rated each factor on a five-point Likert scale – "Totally important", "Highly important", "Fairly important", "Slightly important" to "Not important." This methodological approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of Gen Z priorities, enabling evidence-based analysis and recommendations.

To explore the potential number of factors in the original set of 15 questions, a Scree Plot was undertaken. Further, to validate internal consistency of the final set of questions, Cronbach's alpha (α) was employed.

Findings

The Scree Plot points to a single uniform scale by the 15 questions. To attain a parsimonious scale, a series of Cronbach's alpha computation was undertaken to reduce the number of questions essential to understand the preferences and priorities of Generation Z employees in their aspiration of WLB.
A final optimised set of 8 questions was obtained while still maintaining a reliability value of $\alpha = 0.76753$ (>0.7) that is acknowledged by scholars for internal consistency (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). This set of questions can be used as a surrogate measure of WLB for this study.
The summary statistics of the 8 questions from the survey reveals several salient themes in Gen Z workplace preferences:

(1) *Financial stability*: The highest single-factor importance, with 94.4% rating it as "Totally" or "Highly important". Financial security remains a fundamental motivator for Gen Z, perhaps intensified by economic uncertainties in the region.

(2) *Success and WLB*: A substantial majority (89.8%) indicated that WLB is central to their definition of success, reinforcing its pivotal role in organisational attraction and retention strategies.

(3) *WLB*: An overwhelming majority (86.4%) deemed WLB as either "Totally important" or "Highly important", with no respondents dismissing its significance. This underscores Gen Z's prioritisation of personal well-being and boundaries between professional and private life.

(4) *Value alignment*: Nearly four-fifths (79.7%) considered job alignment with personal values as "Totally" or "Highly important". Only 0.6% regarded it as "Not important", reflecting a strong desire for authenticity and purpose at work.

(5) *Personal fulfilment*: Over four-fifths (81.9%) rated fulfilment as "Totally" or "Highly important", highlighting the generational shift towards holistic career satisfaction.

(6) *Professional growth and development*: Over four-fifths (81.4%) rated growth as "Totally" or "Highly important". This indicates a pronounced preference for continuous learning and upward mobility.

(7) *Recognition and acknowledgement*: Approximately 72.3% viewed recognition as "Totally" or "Highly important", reflecting Gen Z's need for feedback and appreciation.

(8) *Intellectual challenge*: While only 18.6% rated intellectual challenge as "Totally important", a combined 63.8% selected "Highly" or "Fairly important", suggesting a moderate but meaningful emphasis on stimulating work.

Collectively, these findings reveal a multi-dimensional set of expectations that organisations must address to remain competitive in attracting Gen Z talents.

Discussion

Analysing these 8 questions in terms of preferences, from the most to the least preferred, themes of (1) *Financial stability* (94.4%) and (2) *Success and WLB* (89.8%) feature utmost while themes of (7) *Recognition and acknowledgement* (72.3%) and (8) *Intellectual challenge* (63.8%) rank lowest in comparison. Preferences of themes (1) and (2) reveal the extrinsic real-world pragmatism of Gen Z employees – financial stability undergirding personal success and WLB. For the former in Singapore, financial independence remains a top priority and primary concern (FinTech News Singapore, 2025). Economic volatility in Southeast Asia and even the world has heightened Gen Z's risk aversion and preference for stable compensation packages. While salary remains a baseline requirement, supplementary benefits, such as wellness stipends and retirement planning, are increasingly attractive and sought after by Gen Z employees.

The themes of (7) *Recognition and acknowledgement* are closer ranked with (6) *Professional growth and development* (81.4%) and (5) *Personal fulfilment* (81.9%). These preferences reveal the intrinsic professional ideal of Gen Z employees – being recognised for who they are and their penchant for career development as part of personal fulfilment. *Recognition and acknowledgement* in conjunction with *Personal fulfilment*, are essential for Gen Z's sense of belonging and motivation. Mabaso (2025) demonstrates that Gen Z's approach to work prioritises not just extrinsic monetary rewards in remuneration, benefits, etc. but also in intrinsic rewards such as purpose, personal growth, well-being, etc. Public acknowledgement of them and their work, frequent feedback and opportunities for meaningful contribution are linked to higher retention rates among Gen Z employees. Organisations must therefore cultivate cultures of purpose and appreciation to sustain engagement. *Professional growth and development* serves as the crucial link between recognition and acknowledgement, and personal fulfilment. Rebel et al. (2023) report that Gen Z employees view a strong connection between continuous learning of work-related skills to career advancement and progression. They also seek clear pathways for advancement and skills acquisition, often viewing stagnation as grounds for resignation. Organisations must therefore invest in structured learning programmes, mentorship, and transparent career progression frameworks.

Theme of (8) *Intellectual challenge* (63.8%) ranked lowest, seemingly running counter to their preference for *Professional growth and development*. Perhaps with an increase of burnout rates of Millennials (Gen Y) and Gen Z – 41% and 46% respectively (Deloitte, 2021), the latter places a higher value on WLB to mitigate against such occurrence. Intellectual challenge is valued, but not if it comes at the expense of their WLB. In addition, Gen Z despite being a better educated and networked

generation, could yet lack higher-order thinking skills like complex problem-solving and critical thinking. Literature points to potential "soft skills" or "cognitive skills gap" in the Gen Z workforce, particularly in areas that require deep, reflective, or in-person cognitive processing (Dingot, 2023).

Themes of (4) *Value alignment* (79.7%) and (3) *WLB* (86.4%) bridge Gen Z notion of intrinsic professional ideal of themes (5), (6) and (7) with extrinsic real-world pragmatism of themes (1) and (2). *Value alignment* is increasingly recognised as a driver of employee engagement and retention. Hafid and Baltes (2023) highlight Gen Z's preference in accepting work and job offers from organisations that value and carry out sustainability. This set of company's values, including ethical practices, diversity and social impact, align with what they are looking at. The survey's high scores for value alignment reinforce the need for organisations to articulate and embody their values authentically, integrating them into daily operations and performance evaluations. For Gen Z, the equilibrium of *WLB* between professional responsibilities and personal life is an alignment of personal value to achieve fulfilment on one hand with success and financial stability on the other (Deloitte, 2025).

In summary, the survey data reflects recent scholarly literature on Gen Z workplace preferences. According to Kasundari (2025), Gen Z in Asia values flexible work arrangements and prioritises well-being. They challenge traditional notions of presenteeism and rigid schedules. The overwhelming emphasis on WLB in the survey corroborates these findings and suggests that organisations must move beyond tokenistic wellness initiatives to implement substantive flexibility, such as remote work options and adaptive scheduling. Pradipta *et al*. (2025) demonstrate that companies offering hybrid models see higher satisfaction and thus better work performance among Gen Z employees. The shift is not merely about convenience—it reflects deeper commitments to mental health and holistic well-being.

The survey findings are also echoed in Western contexts, but the intensity and specificity of preferences among Asian Gen Z employees necessitate tailored strategies. The intersection of rapid economic change, technological adoption, and evolving social norms in Singapore and Malaysia amplifies the urgency for organisational adaptation.

Recommendations

Based on the survey and literature review, the following strategies are recommended for corporations and organisations aiming to attract, suit, and retain Gen Z employees:

- Enhance financial security: Offer competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and financial wellness resources to address Gen Z's heightened need for stability.

- Balance work success and WLB: Organisations should set realistic performance KPIs jointly with employees, lessening pressure for the latter to pursue otherwise unilateral KPIs set by employers to attain work success at the expense of their health.

- Accommodate Gen Z's desire for WLB: Implement flexible work policies such as remote work options, flexible hours, and results-oriented performance metrics.

- Foster a value-driven culture: Clearly communicate organisational values, ensure leadership models these values, and integrate them into recruitment, onboarding, and performance management.

- Promote personal fulfilment: Design roles that allow for meaningful contribution, align tasks with employees' strengths, and encourage autonomy and innovation.

- Invest in professional growth: Develop robust learning and development programmes, provide mentorship opportunities, and establish transparent career progression pathways.

- Establish recognition systems: Create formal and informal mechanisms for acknowledging achievements, providing feedback, and celebrating individual and team successes.

By operationalising these strategies, organisations can position themselves as employers of choice for Gen Z, reducing turnover and cultivating a resilient, motivated workforce.

Suggestions for Further Research

The traditional WLB seeks to achieve a balance between entities of work and personal life to reduce stress. The preference of Gen Z however is however inclined towards a holistic alignment of these two entities as part of fulfilment instead. Such work-life harmony notion has been suggested to promote positive organisational outcomes (Ong and Jeyaraj, 2014). Adopting such a notion of harmony between work and personal life, a fulfilling work environment where employees can thrive both professionally and personally - encompassing flexibility, personal autonomy, and well-being -, should be investigated. In this respect, themes of *Success and WLB* and *Professional growth and development* could be delved further, for example in terms of acquiring the necessary professional skills to complete their assigned work within deadline and yet having sufficient time left with family, as part of extrinsic real-world pragmatism in WLB. Quantitative assessment of Gen Z satisfaction in these areas could shed light on the extent such needs are met currently as they strived to achieve professional success and personal fulfilment at work.

On the other hand, themes of *Value alignment* and *Personal fulfilment* should also be investigated in tandem, for example Gen Z value of success in terms of purposeful contribution of their work to society, as part of intrinsic professional ideal in WLB. Qualitative appraisal of Gen Z ideal of what they value as success would help to uncover the challenges faced by these employees as they try to align their aspired values of success with work as part of finding fulfilment.

Findings from such extrinsic real-world pragmatism and intrinsic professional ideal of WLB would help organisations to better understand specific needs of employees to better design, implement and support effective WLB programmes (Lee and Sirgy, 2024).

Conclusion

The transition of Gen Z into the Asian workforce necessitates a reconfiguration of traditional workplace structures. Survey data and recent academic literature converge on the importance of WLB, value alignment, professional growth, financial stability, recognition, and fulfilment for Gen Z employees. With their affinity and deft with technology usage and fresh youthful perspectives, this generation has the potential to drive innovation. As more of them enter the workforce, their impact and challenges become significant. Their unique values, preferences and approach to work could bring about potential change.

The challenges of managing Gen Z employees are becoming more urgent as numbers grow. Organisations that proactively adapt and address these preferences through flexible policies, authentic cultures, and growth-oriented practices will be best positioned to attract, suit, and retain Gen Z talents. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes of these strategies and examine intra-regional differences across Asia.

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