

Talent Retention in the Generation Z Era: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z's entry into the global labor market has created new challenges for human resource management. As a generationdigital nativewith unique characteristics that prioritize work-life balance (work-life balance) and meaningfulness of work, traditional talent retention strategies are no longer adequate to reduce turnover rates.turnover This study aims to synthesize the current literature on the determinants of Generation Z talent retention and map the relationship model between talent management, mediating variables, and their impact on employee loyalty across various industries. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review(SLR) by reviewing 15 selected studies from the period 2020 to 2025. The analysis was conducted by identifying key themes, key variables, and research gaps from various international and national reference sources covering the retail industry, hospitality, digital media, and the public sector. The review results show that Gen Z talent retention is influenced by three main pillars: (1) Psychological Factors, (2) Organizational Factors, and (3) Innovation Factors. Work-life balance (work-life balance) is identified as a fundamental predictor, while employee engagement acts as a crucial mediator linking talent management practices to retention decisions. Theoretically, this study expands the talent management framework by integrating an intergenerational perspective into retention theory. Practically, organizations are advised to adopt more adaptive, transparent, and technology-based strategies to create an inclusive work environment for Gen Z by 2030.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, HR Strategy, Turnover Intention, Work-Life Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

In the knowledge-based economy, human capital has shifted from being a mere resource to becoming an organization's primary competitive advantage. However, the biggest challenge facing companies today is not simply attracting talent, but retaining them long-term. Mazlan & Jambulingan (2023), emphasizes that failure to retain talent results in the loss of institutional knowledge, decreased productivity, and high recruitment costs. This phenomenon is further complicated by the dynamics of a highly competitive business environment (Haris et al., 2025).

If a leader is able to provide clear direction and show empathy towards life's challenges, it is possible that the apparatus (especially young talents/Gen Z) will feel like they have a "protector" (Sutiyem et al., 2023). Leadership has four main components (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration) that directly address Gen Z's need for a mentor, not just a boss. According to (Nadya et al., 2025), quality talent (especially Gen Z) remains in an organization because they admire the integrity of their leader (Idealized Influence). According to (Nadya et al., 2025), if a leader can meet Gen Z talent's expectations for self-development and empathetic leadership, it will optimize team performance while securing the commitment of top talent to continue contributing to the organization's progress.

The entry of Gen Z into the workforce is disrupting traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) practices (Badiah & Rojuaniah, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has different expectations for the workplace. They highly value work-life balance, flexibility, and meaningful work (Hassan et al., 2022).

Conventional retention strategies that rely solely on financial compensation are no longer effective. Collins (2020) highlights that HRM strategies must evolve qualitatively in line with the dominance of Gen Z, which brings digital-native values and high career mobility. Talent management has emerged as a key factor in retaining high-performing employees. However, its effectiveness depends largely on how organizations integrate innovation into their HR practices (Usman, 2025). In specific industries such as retail (Heqi, 2023) and hospitality (Hajal & Losekoot, 2025; Self et al., 2019), talent management strategies must be adapted to the Gen Z mindset which prioritizes clear career paths and trust.

Although there are many studies on talent retention, there is fragmentation in the literature regarding how variables such as leadership, organizational culture (Pratama & Febriansyah, 2024), and organizational support (Hassan et al., 2022), interacting specifically within the Gen Z ecosystem. This fragmentation is an important research gap: there is no unified framework that brings together the complex relationships between leadership, organizational factors, and Generation Z's unique values to create a complete retention model that can be used across various industries. There is still an urgent need to synthesize various research findings from various industries ranging from the public sector (Saurombe, 2025) to the creative industry to find a coherent retention model for Generation Z. To address this gap, this study has two main objectives: (1) to systematically organize and combine the existing factors of Generation Z talent retention across multiple industries; and (2) to develop a complete conceptual model that shows the relationships between key variables, such as talent management practices, mediating factors like employee engagement, and their final impact on Gen Z retention outcomes. This study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to map the current landscape of talent retention strategies. By referring to the SLR methodology (Sindurnata et al., 2024), this research will provide theoretical contributions in the form of a synthesis of new retention models and practical contributions for HR managers in facing workforce volatility in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Talent Retention

Talent Retention is defined as an organization's ability to retain high-potential and high-performing employees to remain with the organization for a long period of time. According to Mazlan & Jambulingan (2023), retention is not simply an effort to prevent employee turnover, but rather a strategy to ensure that institutional knowledge and core competencies are maintained to maintain competitive advantage. Retention strategies are contextual. In the hospitality industry, the focus is on developing future leaders. Self et al. (2019), while in the retail industry such as KKV, the strategy places more emphasis on flexibility and work experience (Heqi, 2023). So it can be concluded that talent retention is an integrative strategy that aims to bind the commitment of high-performing employees through fulfilling psychological expectations, sustainable career development, and providing a supportive work environment, in order to minimize employee turnover costs and maintain the organization's competitive advantage in a fluctuating era.

2.2. Generation Z

Generation Z (born around the mid-1990s to early 2010s) is a generation that grew up in a fully digital era, which shaped their mindset, work ethic, and expectations of organizations. According to Yahya et al. (2024), Defining Gen Z as the "talent of the future" who in 2030 will dominate the job market with a high need for management adaptation to new technologies and values. Gen Z has natural tech savvy. This makes them very adaptive to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital tools in their work (Khan, 2024) For Gen Z, this balance isn't just a bonus, it's a basic necessity. They prioritize mental health and time flexibility over a high salary (Hassan et al., 2022). They tend to seek work that aligns with their personal values and provides social impact (Vieira & Gomes, 2024). Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that Gen Z is a group of digital-native talents who have high expectations for transparency, personalized career development, and emotional well-being, where their loyalty is no longer driven by financial security alone, but by the fulfillment of psychological contracts and inclusive organizational values.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The use of the SLR technique is considered highly relevant to this research. It was chosen because it allows for the systematic and comprehensive identification, evaluation, and in-depth analysis of relevant theories, concepts, and previous research findings (Fakhrudin & Ratnawati, 2025; Haris et al., 2025; Sindurnata et al., 2024). The purpose of this research is to obtain patterns, trends, and challenges in Gen Z talent retention strategies.

The selected literature comes from Scopus, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the ASEAN Citation Index (ACI), Emerald Publishing, Administrative Science, and Google Scholar used as databases. There are several stages to be carried out, 1) selecting articles, 2) inclusion criteria, and 3) conducting objective analysis. The article selection process for this study was carried out through a search using the keywords "Talent Retention and Talent Management" and then filtering articles specifically published between 2020 and 2025 in sciencedirect, resulting in 8626 articles. The final step is to select articles that are accessible and relevant to the research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

In this phase, 15 relevant articles from various sources were identified and studied as primary references in this analysis. The articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic and their contribution to the understanding of Talent Retention and Talent Management, as well as the most recent data from the past six years. Next, the researcher will conduct an in-depth review and study of these articles, focusing on the research findings and the number of citations. The final stage will involve comparing the findings from several articles and creating a summary of the findings of this study. This discussion is based on the number of citations obtained by the research.

Vieira & Gomes (2024), established a foundational perspective in their systematic literature review, "Talent Management and Generation Z: A Systematic Literature Review through the Lens of Employer Branding," which has garnered 79 citations. This article analyzes and synthesizes the relationship between Talent Management (TM) and Gen Z characteristics, using the concept of Employer Branding as the main theoretical lens. The aim is to provide guidance to HR managers on how to attract, motivate, and retain Gen Z talent. TM is a series of HR processes aimed at attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining high-performing employees. Vieira & Gomes (2024), the literature review identified several key characteristics of Gen Z that TM should consider, 1) Digital Native & Quick to Adapt, 2) Seeking Purpose & Social Values, 3) Independent & Realistic/Pragmatic, 4) Valuing Balance (Work-Life Balance), and 5) Wanting Instant Feedback.

Expanding on this foundation, Mazlan & Jambulingan (2023) provided a comprehensive overview in their literature review, "Challenges of Talent Retention," which has been cited 60 times. Mazlan & Jambulingan (2023) present a comprehensive literature review aimed at identifying and categorizing the key challenges organizations face in their efforts to retain talent or high-performing employees. This review underscores the complexity of talent retention amidst the dynamics of the modern labor market. Talent, especially Gen Z, is motivated by work that has a social impact or a greater purpose, beyond just a salary. The challenge of talent retention is multidimensional and cannot be solved simply by increasing salaries. Organizations must adopt a holistic Talent Management strategy that simultaneously addresses individual motivations and values, creates a positive organizational culture of support, and strategically responds to external market dynamics.

Building a more nuanced model, the research by Ekhsan & Taopik (2020), "The Role of Employee Engagement Mediation on the Effect of Talent Management on Employee Retention," cited 33 times, aims to analyze and empirically test the role of Employee Engagement as a mediating variable in the relationship between Talent Management (TM) and Employee Retention. This study argues that a good TM program does not directly guarantee retention, but must first succeed in fostering a high sense of engagement in employees. A well-designed TM program (e.g., the existence of a clear career path and relevant training) directly increases employee intentions to stay. Employee Engagement has a very strong and significant positive influence on Employee Retention. Highly engaged employees (passionate, focused, and enthusiastic) are much less likely to look for job opportunities elsewhere. The key to successful retention is not only the implementation of the

TM program itself, but on how the program is executed in such a way as to maximize employee experience and emotional involvement.

A crucial technological dimension is explored by Khan (2024) in the article “Application of Artificial Intelligence for Talent Management: Challenges and Opportunities,” with 29 citations. It discusses the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Talent Management/TM functions, reviewing the various innovative opportunities AI offers, while highlighting the ethical, operational, and structural challenges that organizations must overcome. The researchers conclude that AI is the future of Talent Management, potentially transforming TM from an administrative function to a strategic, data-driven function. However, these benefits can only be achieved if organizations proactively address the ethical and operational challenges.

Focusing on key mediating variables, the study by Hassan et al. (2022), “The Influence of Talent Management and Work-Life Balance on Employee Retention with Mediating Organizational Support,” cited 22 times, offers a contribution by examining the mediating role of Organizational Support (Perceived Organizational Support/POS) between Talent Management (TM) and Work-Life Balance (WLB) on Employee Retention. TM and WLB have different definitions for Gen Z (valuing flexibility/purpose) versus Gen X (valuing stability/rewards). Without considering the specific demographic or industry context, practical recommendations for managers will be less accurate and sharp. Overall, the research Hassan et al. (2022) provides a useful framework, but its validity and practical value could be enhanced through more detailed analysis of specific dimensions of TM, the use of longitudinal designs to test causality, and a deeper exploration of how POS is internalized by employees from different generations.

A critical industry-specific analysis was conducted by Hajal & Losekoot (2025) in their study “Gen Z talent management: Hospitality industry,” cited 13 times. Specifically investigating the challenges and strategies of effective Talent Management (TM) in the unique context of the Hospitality Industry, which relies heavily on a Gen Z workforce. The study focuses on how the nature of the hospitality industry demanding irregular working hours, intensive customer interaction, and often low starting salaries intersect with the unique expectations of Gen Z. Gen Z values Work-Life Balance (WLB) and flexibility. The hospitality industry, with its 24/7 operational needs (nights, weekends, holidays), often cannot offer the flexibility that Gen Z desires. The study concludes that TM in the hospitality industry must adapt to meet two key demands of Gen Z, namely the need for flexibility and the need for growth (skills).

Further investigating motivational pathways, Sofianti & Susanto (2024), explored “The Influence of Work Motivation and Career Development on Gen Z Employee Retention through Employee Commitment,” with 5 citations. Investigating the key factors influencing Gen Z Employee Retention, with a particular focus on the role of employee commitment as a mediating variable. This study empirically examines the extent to which work motivation and career development influence Gen Z’s desire to remain with the organization. Gen Z employees are known for their digital native, independent nature, and low loyalty to the organization compared to previous generations. For Gen Z, company investment in their skills development (such as digital-based training and mentoring) is seen as evidence of the organization’s commitment to them, which in turn fosters loyalty (commitment). Although extrinsic factors (salary) are important, Gen Z also seeks meaningful work that aligns with their personal goals, and this is a strong source of motivation. Sofianti & Susanto concluded that to optimally improve Gen Z Employee Retention, organizations must focus on building Employee Commitment as a bridge.

Sofianti & Susanto (2024), in the same study, “the Influence of Work Motivation and Career Development on Gen Z Employee Retention through Employee Commitment” (cited 5 times), further conclude that HR managers cannot simply “feed” Gen Z with job promotions. Managers must focus on building commitment. There are two things recommended for practitioners, 1) Focus on the Meaning of Work: Use motivation to make employees feel their work has an impact (building commitment). 2) Personalized Career. Career development must be perceived as a company investment in the individual, not just a formal procedure, to create a sense of reciprocity that triggers the desire to stay.

Adopting a forward-looking perspective, Yahya et al. (2024) presented “The Future Of Gen Z Talent In 2030 Adapting Talent Management Strategies For a New Workforce Era,” with 4 citations. This is an essential strategic blueprint. Its greatest contribution lies in the paradigm shift from “transactional” to “aspirational” talent management. Three important points for organizations, namely 1) Digital Recruitment, by Utilizing AI without eliminating the human touch. 2) Radical Flexibility Not just working from home (WFH), but flexibility

in what is learned and how they grow. and 3) Authenticity, where Gen Z can detect the “image” of the company; transparency is the key to retention.

Similarly strategic in focus, Rahdarpour et al. (2025) discussed “Talent Management: Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Generation” (cited 3 times). Presents an in-depth exploration of Talent Management (TM) strategies that organizations must adopt to successfully attract and retain Gen Z employees. The author emphasizes that traditional TM approaches based on the motivations of previous generations are no longer effective and must be replaced with strategies centered on the unique values and expectations of Gen Z. The key to success in Gen Z Talent Management lies in the organization’s ability to integrate technology, purpose, and flexibility into every aspect of the employee lifecycle. Failure to adapt TM will result in increased turnover and loss of top talent in the future. The main challenge is for older organizations to overhaul their traditional hierarchical structures to embrace the autonomy and digital culture of Gen Z.

Focusing on the Indonesian context, Pratama & Febriansyah (2024) examined “Talent Management Strategies in Indonesia’s Digital Media and Entertainment Industry for Gen Z: The Role of Leadership Style and Organizational Culture” (cited twice). They examined how companies in the Indonesian Digital Media and Entertainment (MDE) Industry can develop effective Talent Management strategies to attract, motivate, and retain Gen Z employees. This study highlights that the effectiveness of TM is highly dependent on the interaction between the leadership style and organizational culture implemented by the company. In the Indonesian digital media and entertainment industry, the effectiveness of TM for Gen Z is the result of a combination of an inspiring transformational leadership style, and a strong, creative, and flexible organizational culture. Companies that fail to align these elements risk losing this highly sought-after young talent.

Yahya et al. (2024) in another study, “The Future of Gen Z Talent In 2030 Adapting Talent Management Strategies For A New Workforce Era” (cited twice), focuses on a futuristic analysis of Gen Z’s dominant role in the global labor market in 2030, and how organizations must radically reform their TM strategies to face the challenges and harness the potential of this generation. The author argues that failure to adapt will threaten business survival. Gen Z is not interested in traditional vertical career paths. TM must offer horizontal career paths and flexible skill development (up-skilling and re-skilling) that allow them to move across different functions (internal mobility). TM strategies in the future must be dominated by flexibility, AI-powered personalization, and an authentic commitment to social and environmental values. The key to success is the organization’s ability to see Gen Z not just as employees, but as collaborative partners shaping the future of business.

Through a qualitative lens, Collins (2020) conducted “A Qualitative Investigation into the Implications on Human Resource Management Retention Strategies as Generation Z Enter the Workplace” (cited twice). presents an in-depth qualitative investigation, focusing on how HR Retention Strategies must change and adapt as Gen Z enters the labor market. The study identifies several key expectations of Gen Z that directly challenge traditional HR retention strategies, 1) The Need for Meaningful Work and Purpose, 2) Autonomy and Flexibility, 3) Rapid and Personal Skill Development, 4) Instant Feedback and Recognition. Collins (2020) concluded that effective HR retention strategies for Gen Z must be responsive, flexible, and value-oriented. Companies must create an environment that supports autonomy, rapid personal growth, and meaningful work. Organizations’ failure to invest in skills development, work/life balance, and strong manager-employee relationships will result in high Gen Z turnover rates.

Pratama & Febriansyah (2024) in their same study “Talent Management Strategies in Indonesia’s Digital Media and Entertainment Industry for Gen Z: The Role of Leadership Style and Organizational Culture” (with 2 citations), further emphasize that this research is important literature for academics and HR practitioners in Indonesia. Leaders are the main magnet for Gen Z. Companies must invest in developing leaders who are able to inspire and provide autonomy (transformational) rather than just building a visually “cool” office culture.

Finally, offering a perspective on adaptation strategies, Manurung et al. (2025) analyzed “Gen Z’s Strategy in Facing Changes in the World of Work and Its Impact on Performance,” cited twice. It is crucial for office management practitioners to understand the mindset of young employees. The findings of this study confirm that Gen Z’s performance is highly dependent on autonomy and digital infrastructure. This article provides 3 Implications for Organizations, 1) Investing in Tools. Companies can no longer delay digital transformation if they want to maintain Gen Z’s performance. 2) Redefining Performance. Managers need to

shift from time-based to result-based supervision. and 3) Soft Skills Training. Despite being tech-savvy, Gen Z still needs support in navigating office diplomacy and interpersonal communication, which are often “weak points” in their adaptation strategies.

4.2. Discussion

Literature studies show that retention does not stand alone, but is influenced by various variables. 1) Employee Engagement (Ekhsan & Taopik, 2020). 2) Psychological Contract and Trust (Charoenrat, 2025). 3) Employer Branding (Fakhruddin & Ratnawati, 2025). 4) Vieira & Gomes (2024), identified that the company’s image as an attractive workplace is crucial in attracting and engaging Gen Z. and 5) Non-Financial Compensation (Sofianti & Susanto, 2024).

There are several main factors that determine an employee’s decision to stay a) Work-Life Balance (Hassan et al., 2022), b) Employer Branding (Fakhruddin & Ratnawati, 2025; Vieira & Gomes, 2024), and c) Psychological Contract and Trust (Charoenrat, 2025). Based on talent management literature, Gen Z demands a more personalized and transparent approach, such as Rapid Career Development (Sofianti & Susanto, 2024), Psychological Contract & Trust (Charoenrat, 2025), and Employer Branding (Fakhruddin & Ratnawati, 2025).

The presence of Gen Z creates new challenges for traditional retention strategies, such as 1) Low Loyalty to the Organization (Collins, 2020). 2) Changes in the World of Work (Manurung et al., 2025). and 3) The Need for Inclusive Leadership (Pratama & Febriansyah, 2024) By 2030, Gen Z will be the backbone of the global workforce. Organizations must immediately adapt their management practices with a focus on Personalization (Rahdarpour et al., 2025), Digital Engagement (Yahya et al., 2024), and Total Well-Being by making mental health part of the company culture.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), it can be concluded that future talent retention trends will depend heavily on organizational agility, empathetic leadership, and a fundamental commitment to well-being. Retention in the Generation Z era has evolved beyond transactional financial compensation into a complex ecosystem driven by values and psychological contracts. Central to this shift is the understanding that Generation Z’s loyalty is conditional and fundamentally transactional, contingent upon the organization delivering on its promises. For this cohort, achieving an authentic work-life balance is a non-negotiable top priority that directly influences their commitment.

Furthermore, an organization’s employer branding and public reputation serve as a crucial filter for attraction and an ongoing anchor for retention. Simultaneously, continuous technological adaptation is not merely an operational tool but a core expectation that signals an organization’s future readiness. Ultimately, successful retention of Generation Z talent emerges from the synergy between innovative, personalized HR practices, the consistent fulfillment of psychological contracts, and an organizational culture that genuinely prioritizes holistic well-being. Within this framework, employee engagement acts as the essential mediator, translating positive experiences and perceived value into sustained, long-term loyalty.

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