



# Understanding What Generation Z Seeks in Organizations: A Study of College Students

Tanushree

*Assistant Professor (Sr.), Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Professional Studies, New Delhi, India.*

**Abstract**— Generation Z is rapidly emerging as a dominant segment of the global workforce, bringing with it distinct expectations, values, and workplace preferences. This study investigates the expectations of Gen Z college students from prospective employers, focusing on factors such as salary, work-life balance, career growth, organizational culture, flexibility, and leadership support. The research is based on primary data collected from 155 undergraduate and postgraduate students through a structured questionnaire using convenience sampling. The findings reveal that Gen Z students prioritize both financial stability and personal well-being, with salary and work-life balance emerging as equally critical determinants in job selection. The study also highlights a strong preference for hybrid work models, mentorship-oriented leadership, career development opportunities, and value-driven organizations. The research provides important managerial implications for organizations seeking to attract and retain Gen Z talent in an increasingly competitive employment landscape.

**Keywords**— Generation Z, Work-Life Balance, Organizational Culture, Career Growth, Hybrid Work, Employee Expectations, HR Practices

## I. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the newest cohort entering the professional workforce. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has grown up in an environment dominated by digital technology, social media, instant communication, and rapid globalization. These experiences have significantly influenced their attitudes toward careers, workplaces, leadership, and organizational values.

As digital natives, they are accustomed to real-time feedback, seamless connectivity, and personalized experiences, which in turn shape their expectations from professional environments as well. They tend to seek workplaces that are not only efficient and structured but also adaptive, transparent, and aligned with their personal values. This generation is also more aware of global issues such as sustainability, mental health, diversity, and social responsibility, which further influences their perception of suitable employers.

Modern organizations are increasingly facing challenges in attracting and retaining Gen Z employees because their expectations differ substantially from earlier generations. While salary and job security remain important, Gen Z employees also prioritize work-life balance, flexibility, meaningful work, learning opportunities, mental well-being, inclusivity, and ethical organizational practices. They are more likely to engage with organizations that offer clear career pathways, continuous skill development, and a supportive organizational culture rather than purely hierarchical or rigid structures.

Organizations today are no longer merely selecting employees; employees are also evaluating organizations based on workplace culture, transparency, flexibility, and growth opportunities. This changing employer-employee dynamic has transformed recruitment and talent management strategies across industries. As a result, employers are increasingly focusing on employer branding, employee experience, and value-driven leadership to remain competitive in attracting young talent. College students, who form a major segment of Generation Z, represent the future workforce and therefore provide valuable insights into emerging workplace expectations.

In this context, understanding the perceptions of Gen Z students becomes crucial for anticipating future HR trends and designing responsive organizational policies. Their academic environment, exposure to internships, digital learning platforms, and peer influences collectively shape early career aspirations and workplace decision-making patterns.

The study was conducted to understand the expectations, priorities, and workplace preferences of Gen Z college students with regard to their future employers. The findings may help organizations redesign their HR policies and workplace practices in alignment with the aspirations of the emerging workforce, thereby fostering better engagement, retention, and long-term organizational effectiveness.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have examined the changing workplace expectations of Generation Z employees and students.



Ozkan and Solmaz (2023) highlighted that Gen Z employees expect technological integration, flexibility, and supportive work environments, while traditional organizational structures appear less attractive to them. Chillakuri (2023) emphasized the importance of structured onboarding, continuous feedback, and career development opportunities for engaging Gen Z employees effectively.

Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2023) observed that motivation among Gen Z employees is influenced more by meaningful work, recognition, and career advancement opportunities than by financial rewards alone. Similarly, Maloni, Hiatt, and Campbell (2023) concluded that organizational culture, leadership support, and opportunities for personal growth are major determinants of Gen Z workplace preferences.

Research by Gupta and Singh (2024) identified work-life balance as a significant contributor to job satisfaction among Generation Z employees. Jain and Bhatt (2024) further established that organizational culture and inclusivity strongly influence employee engagement among young professionals.

Wood (2024) and Schroth (2024) argued that Gen Z employees increasingly prefer organizations aligned with their personal values, ethical practices, and social responsibility initiatives. Francis and Hoefel (2024) also noted that authenticity, flexibility, and meaningful work are central to Gen Z's workplace expectations.

The reviewed literature suggests that Generation Z values a holistic employment experience combining financial rewards, flexibility, learning opportunities, organizational ethics, and supportive leadership.

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The study is guided by a central objective of understanding Generation Z's expectations from prospective organizations. In line with this, the sub-objectives focus on examining the key factors that shape their job preferences, including the importance of salary, work-life balance, and job security, as well as the role of career growth, training, and development opportunities in influencing their perceptions of future workplaces.

To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a descriptive research design aimed at systematically analyzing the expectations and perceptions of Generation Z students. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via online platforms such as WhatsApp and email.

The sample was selected using a convenience sampling technique and consisted of 155 undergraduate and postgraduate students belonging to Generation Z, drawn from diverse academic disciplines such as commerce, management, engineering, humanities, and law.

For analyzing the data, percentage analysis was used to identify patterns and trends in the responses received from the participants. The questionnaire was thoughtfully designed to gain a well-rounded understanding of Generation Z's expectations from organizations. It included demographic questions to provide background information about the respondents, Likert-scale statements to assess their opinions and attitudes, ranking questions to determine their priorities, and open-ended questions that allowed them to freely express their views and experiences. This combination of question types helped capture both measurable data and personal insights, offering a richer understanding of what Gen Z values in the workplace.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Demographic Profile*

The majority of respondents belonged to the 21–23 age group (45%), followed by the 24–26 age category (29%). Female respondents constituted 59% of the sample. Commerce and Management students together formed over 78% of the total respondents.

A substantial proportion of respondents were final-year students or recently placed candidates, indicating that most participants were close to entering the workforce. Additionally, 77% had already appeared for placements or internships, suggesting familiarity with recruitment processes and employer expectations.

#### *Expectations Regarding Organizational Culture and Leadership*

The findings reveal a strong preference among Gen Z respondents for positive, inclusive, and people-centric work environments. A significant majority, nearly 79% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed that organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping their job preferences. This suggests that for today's young workforce, culture is not a "soft" add-on but a central deciding factor in whether they see themselves belonging to an organization in the long term. Many respondents appear to associate a healthy workplace culture with respect, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging, rather than just formal policies or workplace branding.



Similarly, transparency and open communication from management emerged as another highly valued organizational trait, with almost 79% of respondents emphasizing its importance. This reflects a clear expectation among Gen Z students for honesty, clarity in decision-making, and accessibility of leadership. They seem less comfortable with rigid information hierarchies and prefer environments where communication flows both ways—where employees are informed, heard, and involved. In many ways, this indicates a shift from traditional command-based communication styles to more collaborative and dialogue-driven workplaces.

The study also highlights a strong inclination towards supportive and approachable leadership styles. Around 71% of respondents expressed a preference for managers who act as mentors, providing guidance, constructive feedback, and opportunities for learning, rather than relying solely on traditional hierarchical supervision. This indicates that Gen Z students value leaders who invest in their growth and act as facilitators of development rather than just task monitors. Regular feedback, encouragement, and mentorship appear to be key elements that shape their perception of an ideal workplace.

Overall, these findings collectively point toward a generation that values human connection, openness, and developmental support within organizational settings, alongside traditional employment factors.

#### *Salary, Rewards, and Career Growth*

Financial compensation continues to remain an important factor for Generation Z employees when evaluating potential employers. Approximately 79% of respondents agreed that salary and financial benefits significantly influence their job decisions. This reinforces the idea that while Gen Z is often described as value-driven and purpose-oriented, financial stability is still a fundamental requirement, especially in the early stages of their careers. For many respondents, remuneration is not just about immediate income but also about a sense of security and recognition of their skills and effort.

At the same time, respondents demonstrated a strong inclination toward performance-based incentives and structured recognition systems. This indicates that meritocracy is highly valued within this cohort, where achievements are acknowledged fairly and transparently. Many respondents appear to associate recognition with motivation and self-worth, suggesting that appreciation, whether monetary or non-monetary, plays a key role in sustaining their engagement at the workplace.

Career growth opportunities emerged as another critical expectation shaping job preferences. About 73% of respondents expected clear and well-defined career advancement pathways within organizations. This reflects a desire for direction, clarity, and progression rather than static job roles. Gen Z respondents seem particularly attentive to whether organizations provide structured frameworks for advancement, skill enhancement, and long-term professional development.

In addition, mentorship, training, and continuous learning opportunities were strongly preferred across the sample. Respondents expressed a clear expectation that organizations should actively invest in developing their employees rather than limiting growth to on-the-job experience alone. This highlights a strong awareness among Gen Z students that skills need constant upgrading in an evolving and competitive job market.

Interestingly, more than half of the respondents indicated a willingness to accept slightly lower salaries in exchange for strong learning and development opportunities. This finding is particularly significant as it reflects a more future-oriented mindset, where employability, skill-building, and career trajectory are prioritized over immediate financial gains. It suggests that for many Gen Z individuals, the value of an organization lies not only in what it offers today, but in how it shapes their professional growth for tomorrow.

#### *Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Preferences*

One of the most significant and consistent findings of the study is the strong emphasis placed by Generation Z on maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Over 72% of respondents indicated that work-life balance is more important to them than a high salary. This highlights a clear shift in workplace priorities, where long-term well-being, personal time, and mental health are increasingly being placed on par with, or even above, purely financial considerations. For many respondents, an ideal job is not just about professional success but also about being able to sustain a balanced and fulfilling personal life alongside their careers.

In line with this, flexible working hours emerged as another highly valued aspect of modern employment. More than 71% of respondents expressed a preference for flexibility in their work schedules. This suggests that Gen Z students are less inclined toward rigid 9-to-5 structures and instead favor systems that allow them to manage their time more effectively. Flexibility is perceived not only as a convenience but also as a sign of trust from the employer, enabling individuals to work in ways that best suit their productivity patterns and personal commitments.



Furthermore, hybrid and remote work options significantly influenced job preferences among respondents. The majority showed a clear preference for hybrid work arrangements, combining both in-office and remote work experiences. This reflects Gen Z's comfort with digital tools and their ability to remain productive in virtual environments, while still valuing occasional in-person interaction for collaboration and networking. Overall, this finding underscores a broader inclination toward autonomy, flexibility, and work models that adapt to individual lifestyles rather than enforcing a uniform structure on all employees.

#### *Values, Ethics, and Organizational Alignment*

The study indicates a clear and meaningful shift in how Generation Z evaluates potential employers, with a strong emphasis on value alignment between the individual and the organization. Around 67% of respondents considered alignment with personal values as an important criterion when selecting employers. This suggests that for many Gen Z individuals, a job is not viewed merely as a transactional relationship, but as an extension of their identity and belief system. They appear more inclined to connect with organizations whose purpose, ethics, and culture resonate with their own worldview, rather than simply choosing based on conventional job benefits alone.

This finding reflects a deeper expectation for authenticity in the workplace. Gen Z respondents seem to be increasingly conscious of whether organizations “practice what they preach,” and whether their stated mission is reflected in everyday actions and decision-making. In this sense, employer reputation is shaped not only by market performance, but also by consistency, transparency, and ethical behavior.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability practices also emerged as important influencing factors in employment decisions. Respondents showed greater interest in organizations that actively contribute to social welfare, environmental sustainability, and community development. This indicates that ethical responsibility is no longer seen as an external branding exercise, but as a core expectation from employers.

Overall, the findings suggest that socially responsible and value-driven organizations are more likely to attract and engage Gen Z candidates. For this generation, choosing an employer increasingly involves asking deeper questions about impact, purpose, and contribution to society, alongside traditional considerations such as salary and career growth.

#### V. MAJOR FINDINGS

The study highlights several important trends regarding Gen Z workplace expectations:

1. Salary and work-life balance are equally important priorities for Gen Z students.
2. Flexible and hybrid work models are strongly preferred over traditional office-based work structures.
3. Career growth, mentorship, and learning opportunities significantly influence employer attractiveness.
4. Gen Z values transparency, inclusivity, and supportive leadership styles.
5. Organizational ethics, sustainability, and value alignment play a major role in employer selection decisions.
6. Performance-based recognition and appreciation are major motivational drivers among Gen Z employees.

#### VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study carry important and practical implications for HR managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers who are responsible for shaping the future of work. Taken together, the results clearly indicate that attracting and retaining Generation Z talent requires a shift in mindset, from traditional, structure-heavy systems to more flexible, human-centered, and value-driven workplace practices.

One of the key implications is the need for organizations to adopt mentorship-oriented leadership styles. Rather than relying heavily on rigid hierarchies and top-down control, managers are encouraged to act as guides, facilitators, and coaches who actively support employee growth. Creating space for open dialogue, trust-based relationships, and collaborative decision-making can significantly enhance engagement and commitment among Gen Z employees, who value approachability and support from their leaders. In addition, transparent communication and continuous feedback mechanisms emerge as essential organizational practices rather than optional enhancements. Gen Z employees expect clarity in expectations, timely feedback on performance, and openness in organizational communication. Establishing such systems can help reduce uncertainty, build trust, and create a more inclusive work environment where employees feel heard and valued.

Flexible work policies and hybrid working models should also be viewed as strategic workplace practices rather than discretionary employee benefits.



The findings suggest that flexibility is now closely linked to employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Organizations that integrate flexibility into their core work design are more likely to remain attractive to younger talent who prioritize autonomy and work-life integration.

Furthermore, it is essential for companies to establish clear and structured career progression frameworks. Gen Z employees seek visibility in their growth journey and prefer organizations that invest actively in skill development, training programs, and continuous learning opportunities. This highlights the importance of building long-term career pathways rather than limiting development to short-term role performance.

Finally, the study emphasizes the growing importance of organizational values in employment decisions. Companies are encouraged to visibly demonstrate ethical practices, sustainability initiatives, and social responsibility commitments. For Generation Z, alignment with organizational values is not peripheral but central to their decision-making process. As such, organizations that genuinely integrate purpose, responsibility, and ethical conduct into their operations are more likely to build stronger engagement and long-term loyalty among this emerging workforce.

#### VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is subject to certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting its findings. First, the sample size is limited to 155 respondents, which may not fully represent the diverse and expansive population of Generation Z. As a result, the generalizability of the findings may be somewhat constrained. Second, the sample is largely composed of students from commerce and management backgrounds, which reduces disciplinary diversity and may influence the nature of responses, as students from other academic streams might have different workplace expectations. Third, the study is cross-sectional in nature and captures perceptions at a single point in time; therefore, it does not account for how expectations may evolve with changing economic conditions, exposure, or career progression. Lastly, the findings are based on self-reported perceptions and anticipated expectations rather than actual workplace experiences, which may introduce a degree of subjectivity and response bias.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Generation Z approaches employment with a far more holistic and value-driven perspective compared to earlier generations.

Rather than viewing a job solely as a means of financial security, Gen Z evaluates potential employers through a broader lens that includes salary, flexibility, career growth opportunities, workplace culture, leadership quality, and alignment with personal and ethical values. For them, the idea of a “good job” is not limited to compensation alone but extends to how meaningful, supportive, and adaptable the overall work experience is.

This generation appears to be consciously seeking environments where they can grow not just professionally, but also personally. Factors such as psychological safety, inclusive culture, mentorship, and transparent communication significantly shape their perception of an ideal workplace. In many ways, their expectations reflect the evolving nature of work itself, where employees are no longer passive participants but active stakeholders in shaping organizational culture and direction.

The findings strongly suggest that organizations must rethink and continuously evolve their HR strategies to align with the expectations of this emerging workforce. Traditional, rigid systems may no longer be sufficient in attracting or retaining Gen Z talent. Instead, companies need to focus on building flexible work structures, investing in continuous learning and development, fostering inclusive environments, and strengthening leadership communication practices.

Ultimately, organizations that are unable or unwilling to adapt to these changing expectations may face increasing challenges in attracting and retaining young talent in the future. On the other hand, those that embrace flexibility, growth-oriented systems, and value-driven practices are more likely to build engaged, committed, and future-ready workforces.

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