

What Gen Z Really Wants from HR: A Student's Guide to the Future of Work

Angelina Kuldeep, Kalpana Godara, Shiwani, Tanpreet Kaur Rayat

Ishita Sil and Vilas Kulkarni

Dr. D.Y. Patil B School Pune, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

This study paper explores the evolution of the relationship between Generation Z and the latest Human Resource practice. The Generation Z, also known as Generation Z, was born between 1997-2012 entering into organisations with values, expectation and work attitude that are far different from the earlier generations. No longer adaptable to the digital era and modern attitudes to authenticity, traditional HR systems built to work with regimentation and hierarchy are less successful at engaging this digitally connected and authenticity-seeking piece of the workforce. This is a study of the one's expectations of Gen Z workers, and why businesses must restructure their policies to remain relevant and competitive. There are five large expectations: 1) Openness and honesty about compensation, 2) Flexibility about work arrangements, 3) Workplace support for employee health and wellbeing, 4) Assessment and progression based on fairness, and 5) Recognising employee contributions. These traits reflect Gen Z's attitudes towards honesty, autonomy, feeling safe, equality, and meaningful work experiences. This paper discusses these themes and presents two new models that can help support legislation for communication and transparency in staff-employer relations, as well as a human-centered model for holistic staff well-being and integration in the workplace, called "No-Hype Contract and "Life-First Wheel,' respectively. This paper is written in a straightforward, accessible style, with the aim of users who are preparing to enter the workplace and HR professionals looking to come up with some creative means to find, retain, and engage the young emerging workforce in a changing work environment.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Human Resource Management, Workplace Flexibility, Mental Well-Being, Employee Engagement*

1. Introduction: Let's Be Real for a Moment

Let me tell you something that may sound harsh to some extent, but is absolutely true. The majority of firms today are still utilizing HR practices that were developed many years ago

and in the 1980s. Yes, the 1980s. (Lloyd & Aho, 2021). It was the age of workplace systems designed for a pre-digital generation. Gen Z has yet to be born. Most likely, their parents were in high school. What do you do when a 22-yr-old familiar with TikTok, Uber Eats, and ChatGPT arrives in a business where annual performance reviews are still in existence and expects a job at a central desk? Such environments often lead to dissatisfaction, reduced motivation, and resignation (Schroth, 2019). This is no comparison to the extremely lengthy, tedious academic papers you have to read for class. I will not refer to 50 old studies. I will not use terms such as "epistemological framework" or "socio-organizational paradigms. Rather, I will tell you the truth about what Gen Z expects from HR: what I see, know, and hear from real, live Gen Z's. All of these arguments revolve around the main one: Gen Z is not interested in jobs. They desire life, which sometimes entails having jobs (Dhand et al., 2025). This requires a change in HR practices in their entirety. Let me walk you through five simple expectations. Then I will show you two brand-new models (with tables) that explain everything visually. Finally, I will tell HR departments exactly what to do tomorrow.

2. Who Exactly is Gen Z?

Gen Z was born between 1997 and 2012. The oldest ones are around 27 to 28 years old today. The youngest are still in middle school. But the ones entering the workforce right now are between 18 and 26 years old (Richa Vairagi & Varsha Jha, 2024). Generation Z's experiences have differed from those of past generations owing to uncertainty, technology, and change being constants in their worldview. For the older generation, smartphones were a novelty in later life, whereas Gen Z has been technologically immersed since childhood. They do not just use the Internet; it is a part of their daily life and a part of how they communicate, learn, work, and relate. They

have also seen the effects of the 2008 global recession on their formative years, as families have experienced a lack of employment, financial security, and instability. Many developed a cynical attitude towards corporations and, from the labour perspective, towards traditional concepts of loyalty at work (Savić et al., 2025). COVID-19 also caused some disruption in their teen and college years, as it became the norm to learn from home, work from home, and collaborate virtually. This experience had a lasting impact on their beliefs about work and the culture of their work life. Simultaneously, Gen Z has heavy concerns about climate change, must have a strong sense of what it means to pursue sustainability, and trust that organizations are responsible for addressing social and environmental issues (Roy et al., 2025). Preferring authenticity is one of the many things they are sensitive to, as is the culture of influencers and curated online self-presentation. They do not like artificial actions and want to be treated honestly, transparently, and with true human interaction (Balaban & Shambolic, 2022). This is why conflicts and miscommunication between Gen Z and older generations in the traditional work environment appear in a short amount of time.

3. Five Things Gen Z Expects from HR

The mindset of the younger generation (Generation Z) that has entered the workforce is very different from previous generations, and this is affecting the expectations imposed on the Human Resource management function (Burger et al., 2021). A typical person who would have gladly put up with a fairly rigid office structure does not get it at all when it comes to Gen Z, who are looking for openness, flexibility, emotional well-being, fairness, and quick rewards (Leslie et al., 2021). They are aware of the rapid pace and transparency of digitalization, and this has a strong effect on their expectations.

First, **Gen Z** expects financial transparency. Gen Z is more likely to value transparency in salary levels, benefits, and career progression. This generation does not appreciate corporate secrets and trusts those that are not kept (Burger et al., 2021). They want to understand and are looking for the HR function to ensure that their pay scale is transparent, performance

expectations are clear, and career paths are in place.

Second, the expectation is of workplace flexibility. Productivity is more important than by the seat for Gen Z. Their priorities are when and where they will be working and whether it is done effectively (A. F. Akbar & Amalia, 2023). Flexible work, flexibility about working from home, and respecting time off work are seen as inevitable rather than a right.

Mental health is also a significant concern. Gen Z is talking no more about how hard it is to handle stress, burnout, anxiety and emotional exhaustion, and admitting that there is no shame in it (B. M. B. Akbar et al., 2024). They do not want companies to simply implement "wellness" programs and claim to provide psychological support; rather, they want companies to offer real support by providing counselling services, mental health leave, empathetic leadership, healthy work cultures, and more.

They also expect fairness and objective evaluations and possess high values regarding fairness and unbiased evaluations. Gen Z is more into using a system that focuses on the results as opposed to favouring subjective opinions or fail scoring (Johnson & Mccaffrey, 2023). Forms of distributed promotion are greatly appreciated, such as promotion policies that are clearly communicated, frequent feedback systems, and equal opportunities for promotion.

Finally, Gen Z cannot wait to hear back from you and receive some form of compensation for their efforts. They have a high tolerance for information and frequently check and respond to their pay and contributions. They wish to know the importance of their work and the value it adds to the organization, customers, and society. They are more motivated to perform well than if they were recognized formally through annual performance appraisals, which do not necessarily lead to real initiatives (Surugiu et al., 2025). They respond with authenticity, in good time, and with a sense of meaningfulness more readily to an authentic and meaningful action than to an annual performance appraisal.

In general, Gen Z is pushing HR to reimagine their workplaces to be more open, kind, flexible, and meaningful. Not only are they expecting to be cozy, but their demands also stand for better, healthier, and more enriching corporate cultures.

4. Two Brand-New Models

The 'No-Hype Contract ' is an innovative approach to understanding Generation Z in the workplace. Long-existing organizations are traditionally based on unspoken expectations between the employer and employee, called psychological contracts. These unwritten assumptions involve beliefs such as loyalty, commitment, and acceptance of workplace stress. However, Gen Z workers are less inclined to rely on any expressed or implied promises as they have been raised in a time of uncertainty, misinformation, and lost faith in institutions (Egerova et al., 2024). They want clarity and knowledge rather than assumptions, and clear communication instead of corporate jargon.

The “No-Hype Contract” is an updated, open, and flexible contract, especially for this generation. Ambiguous policies and/or objectives are replaced with straightforward roles, objectives, freedoms, and incentives, all agreed and shared by both the employee and the organization. This agreement is checked and revised 3-monthly in line with changing workload, personal goals, and organizational priorities (Golding & Giancaspro, 2022). The intent is not control, because it is not a legal intent, but accountability to one another and mutual honesty.

For instance, the company defines some of the things they expect some of the possibilities for growth, some of their ways of working, some of their ways of communicating, and some of their career interests; the employee does the same. The “No-Hype Contract” fosters an environment of trust, transparency, and flexibility on the job, eliminating hidden meanings and politics (Rousseau, 1989). This allows Gen Z to gain insight into who they are with a more genuine sense and to make professional relationships more balanced.

Table 1: The No-Hype Contract vs. The Old Unspoken Contract

What is the agreement based on?	Old Unspoken Contract (previous generations)	The No-Hype Contract (What Gen Z wants)
Time commitment	9 to 5, plus overtime when needed	You finish your tasks. We don't watch the clock.
Loyalty	You stay for 3+ years. We give you a pension.	You stay while we help you grow. If you leave, we are happy for you.
Feedback	Manager tells you once a year. You say, "thank you."	Everyone gives feedback to everyone every week. Anonymously if needed.
Promotion	"Keep your head down and work hard."	Here are the exact five things you need to do. Do them, get promoted.
Leaving the job	Two weeks' notice. Manager gets angry.	One month notice. We threw you a goodbye party and offered a reference letter.
Side jobs	Forbidden. You belong to us.	Allowed, as long as your main work is done.

What this means for HR: Stop writing 50-page employee handbooks. Write a one-page No-Hype Contract. Update it every quarter. Ask the employee: "Does this still feel fair?" If not, change it.

Novel Idea 2: The "Life-First Wheel"
 Another innovative approach to understanding Generation Z in the workplace is the concept of the “Life-First Wheel.” Traditional organizations frequently promote the idea of “work-life balance,” implying that work and

personal life are in constant competition (Manafe et al., 2025). However, Gen Z employees reject this mindset because they do not want their careers to overpower their personal happiness, relationships, and well-being. Rather they want a system where professional obligations are integrated in the context of life. The Life-First Wheel is a self-evaluation tool to help HR teams better track employee health in a more person-first way. According to the wheel, the five basic dimensions are: career satisfaction, mental wellness, physical health, personal relationships and personal growth (Muppidi & Manoharan, 2025). Each staff member is asked

to score each area from 0 to 10 every three months, with 0 being dis-satisfied and 10 being successfully fulfilled and stable. This model in this regard is not to correct but to prevent. Support, guidance and/or changes in their workplace should intervene if any dimension does not reach a five for two straight quarters, which is expected of HR (Sorensen et al., 2021). This practice allows companies to treat their employees as more than just a resource, a tool to be used and resold to other organizations. This practice leads employees to think of an employee as a person and the quality of the person's life directly affects productivity, creativity, and commitment.

Table 2: The Life-First Wheel (Five Slices of a Good Life)

Slice of Life	What Does This Mean?	What HR Must Do If This Slice is Low
Money Slice	Can I pay my bills? Is there a penny for every penny saved? Do I know what I will earn next month?	Explore and offer same day pay (earned wage access), if it is possible and lawfully and administrative permitted. Clearly explain the bonuses formulas. Automatically make market adjustments.
Time Slice	Do I have my own schedule? Do I have to feel guilty to go to a doctor's appointment? Do I work late frequently?	Ban after-hours emails. If employee desires, establish "no meetings before 10 AM or after 4 PM". Allow flexible hours.
People Slice	Do I like my coworkers? ineffective leadership? Do I feel safe speaking up?	Address toxic behaviour swiftly, including removal if needed. Create anonymous reporting that actually leads to action. Fund team activities that people actually want to attend.
Mental Slice	Do I feel anxious on Sunday nights? Do I dread Monday morning? Do I have the energy for my hobbies?	Provide free therapy sessions. Train managers to spot burnout. Make mental health days a real policy, not a symbolic wellness initiative.
Growth Slice	Am I learning new things? Do I see a path forward? Do I feel stuck?	Pay for courses and certifications. Allow internal job changes every 12 months. Have real career conversations every month, not once a year.

Note: This paper offers conceptual HR models. Real-world implementation may require legal and payroll review.

What this means for HR: Eliminate employee "satisfaction" parameters. End the practice of measuring "employee satisfaction. That is too vague. Take measurements of each piece of your Life-First Wheel. Having extra

free snacks is not enough if the Money Slice is down. Repair the problem.

5. What HR Must Do Tomorrow

Organizations that wish to attract and retain Generation Z employees must move beyond traditional HR practices and adopt immediate practical reforms. The first and most important action is ensuring salary transparency. Job advertisements should clearly mention realistic

pay ranges instead of vague phrases such as “competitive package.” Gen Z values openness, and transparent compensation policies build trust at the beginning of the recruitment process (Mishra et al., 2025).

Allowing flexible working times is encouraged since Gen Z think that productivity doesn't rely on sitting in an office for a fixed period of time. The other key reform is to provide mental health leave within the organisation's policy. Employers should treat emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout as serious issues of their employees (Singh et al., 2025). Taking a day for mental wellness without any unnecessary documentation shows employees that you are caring and you have a psychologically safe environment.

HR must have anonymous means of feedback from employees. Retaliation-free digital tools can enable workers to assess managerial conduct, communication and workplace issues. Feedback can help organizations recognize negative leadership practices before they have a negative impact on employee satisfaction and staff turnover (Jasni et al., 2022). Performance measurement methods can be used to reinforce accountability through managerial assessments and leadership incentives. These practical changes represent a transition from rigid organizational systems to workplaces built on trust, flexibility, transparency, and human-centered leadership, which are essential for effectively engaging the Gen Z workforce.

6. What Happens If HR Ignores This?

Failing to keep HR processes in line with the times can mean attracting a generation Z that actively seeks out workplaces that aren't in line with their expectations. Think of a firm that hasn't updated its management practice, a practice that was laid down more than 10 years ago, besides dealing with the expectations of younger employees (Mishra et al., 2025). The effects are felt in the long-term and include all aspects of the job application process.

The first obstacle that we faced is during the recruitment process. Youth candidates are turning down job offers from candidates who don't have transparency, flexibility and honesty in their offer. From an employer's point of view, it's often characterized by undefined salary

structures, rigid schedules for working in the office and unclear communication (Imdorf et al., 2023). However, even after offers of employment are accepted by many Gen Z employees, they still look for another alternative because the organisation doesn't seem to look like a good fit in their perspectives.

This second issue is also intrinsic to the work culture. Those that feel over-monitored, under-recognized, have inflexible schedules, and/or are managed in a way that does not consider their personal health are more likely to become emotionally disaffiliated. For a generation that has come into the world expecting and used to feedback and chat at all times, the annual review seems dated (Mosca & Curtis, 2022). With time, the motivation decreases, creativity takes a hit and people start working just enough to get the job done, resulting in disengagement in teams without talking to anyone.

There will be a high turnover at some point. A lot of young employees leave an organization shortly after being hired, making the recruitment and training exercises a constant drain on resources, time and money for the company (Masood, 2024). Companies grow a bad reputation as employers through negative word-of-mouth on social networks, the internet, and among peers. This situation is no longer a hypothetical scenario. This reflects the growing reality of many organizations struggling to adapt to the modern workforce.

7. The Good News: Gen Z Is Actually Easy to Please

It is no surprise that one of the biggest myths about Generation Z is that they are hard to work with and have unrealistic expectations. In fact, their demands at work are quite sensible and attainable. Most young employees are not looking for higher salaries or benefits; instead, they want employers to create a respectful, trusting, and transparent work environment. They will not ask for lavish compensation or frills in the company (Burger et al., 2021). Rather, they want employers to be transparent regarding salaries and career progression. Let us establish clear pay structures and transparent policies to provide confidence but without additional monetary investment. As another example, allowing employees to work remotely

or at irregular hours can be a no-cost improvement that can boost employee morale and productivity (Avdul et al., 2023).

There is also an expectation for support with mental health issues—although in this instance, "expense" is not the only part of the story; emphasis is placed on burnout — a possibility that can be avoided with a supportive manager, reasonable workloads, and access to emotional wellness resources to mitigate the possibility of employee turnover (Calitz, 2022). Equity in promotions, feedback, and opportunities is also valued by Gen Z. They tend not to be picky when it comes to who gets the promotion or the most competitive jobs through office politics and personal connections but are more concerned about the one who is the best. Communication is as important as timely recognition. This generation values ongoing feedback as it is beneficial for their growth and improvement, and positive reinforcement to link them to the organization’s goals (Mabaso, 2025). It does not require much money, and the practices must be led and supported.

Those who adopt these human-focused approaches will foster not only dedicated and driven teams of employees but also creative and innovative teams. Businesses that fail to align their expectations for the future to meet these changing needs can expect greater employee attrition and dissatisfaction and a low interest in hiring younger generations.

8. Conclusion:

The conversation started with something very simple: telling our audience about the future of work but not in a way that's surrounded by the confusing and over-the-top-management-

speak. The end is equally simple, and clear, and breezy, as it goes here. The problem that employers of the modern era do face is that Gen Z is not hard to manage—it's that some of the systems HR manages are hard to fit in the current world. Gen Z Workers want a foundation of humanity-based value. They want to see a pay sheet with transparency, flexibility in jobs, mental health support, a level playing field for performance-based evaluation and instant recognition and reward of valuable contributions. These are not out of the norm expectations; it is a generation who appreciate authenticity, balance and respect in the professional arena. The 2 models that are proposed further reduce this transformation process.

The emphasis is put on “No-Hype Contract”, and is directed to clear statements leaving little room for assumptions, letting accountability for the relationship be shared between the employees/carer and the organisation. Likewise, “Life-First Wheel” takes the focus off of the antiquated work/life balance discussion and draws readers' attention to the fact that working fits into life, instead of the other way around. These notions can guide students and young professionals to see what a healthy workplace can be for them. HR professionals recognized the time that is ripe for the need to reform policies and leadership models. Transparency, adaptability, compassion, fairness, and responsiveness are the characteristics of the workplace of the future. Generation Z already expects this change – it's time for various companies to make the decision whether they are ready to change too.

Appendix: Glossary of Simple Terms Used in This Paper

Term	What It Means (In One Sentence)
No-Hype Contract	A short-written agreement that changes every three months and states exactly what both sides expect.
Life-First Wheel	A tool with five slices (money, time, people, mental, and growth) that measures how well work fits into life.
Radical Flexibility	Employees are allowed to work whenever and wherever they want, as long as the work gets done.
Money Honesty	Posting real salary ranges and explaining exactly how bonuses and raises work.
Mental Health Day	A day off specifically for mental rest, separate from sick days, with no questions asked.
Anonymous Feedback	A system where junior employees can rate senior employees without revealing their identity.

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