



Gen Z's Perception of Ideal Work Culture in School Environment

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Abstract

Work culture is a crucial issue in the world of education, considering the still rampant cases of teachers resigning (turnover) due to a less than ideal work environment. This condition can have serious impacts, such as a shortage of teaching staff, an increase in the ratio of students to teachers, and a decrease in the quality of learning. This study aims to map Gen Z's perceptions of the ideal work culture in the school environment. The subjects of the study were students of the Islamic Education Management Study Program (MPI) of STAI Terpadu Yogyakarta who had participated in educational internships at Islamic educational institutions. The approach used was phenomenology, data collection techniques through open surveys based on Google Form. Data analysis was carried out using NVivo 12 software, data validity testing through peer debriefing techniques. The results of the study showed that Gen Z's main priorities in an ideal work culture are comfort including clear communication, a collaborative environment, flexibility, life balance (mental) and rejecting the hierarchy of superiors and subordinates (embracing each other). Gen Z also wants career development through various self-development and technology adaptations. In addition, the aspect of appreciation is also important, both in the form of verbal appreciation and real incentives. Modern facilities are an attraction for Gen Z, while salary is also important for Gen Z but is not the main priority in showing loyalty and performance to the institution. This finding is important as a reference for curriculum development in universities and educational institutions' strategies in creating a work culture that suits the characteristics of Gen Z.

INTRODUCTION

Work culture is one of the key factors in creating an effective, conducive, and quality-improving school environment. Selvi explained that work culture is highly dependent on the leadership of the principal who is fair, collective, and appreciative (Selvia et al., 2024). An ideal work culture is a structured system that is oriented towards mutual achievement, which is able to create a conducive environment and encourage continuous improvement in the performance of educators (Hasibuan & Hadijaya, 2024), conducive and productive. On the other hand, an unhealthy work culture can cause prolonged conflict, low work motivation, and difficulty in achieving institutional goals optimally (Karimah, 2025). In the context of Islamic educational institutions, the work culture that is developed should not only be oriented towards work effectiveness and efficiency, but also reflect noble Islamic values.

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These values include integrity, honesty, responsibility cooperation, and mutual respect among school residents (Warlim, Rozak, & Revalina, 2025). By implementing these values, work culture is expected to be able to create a harmonious, professional, and Islamic ethics-based environment.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of work culture in supporting the success of educational institutions. Hoy and Miskel stated that schools with a strong work culture in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, trust, and optimism will improve student achievement higher than schools with an authoritative culture which tend to hinder students' socio-emotional development (K. Hoy & Cecil, 2013). Fatonah in his research stated that work culture has a significant effect on employee performance. This influence is strengthened by a number of factors, such as the work environment, transformational leadership style, motivation, job satisfaction, employee involvement, communication, organizational commitment, and training and development. In addition, aspects of spiritual intelligence, self-efficacy, and career development patterns are also important parts of forming a productive work culture (Fatonah & Kuntadi, 2023).

Although the urgency of work culture has been widely discussed in various studies, the reality in the field shows that there are still many cases of teachers resigning due to a non-ideal work culture. Lubis said that this phenomenon can lead to a shortage of teachers, an increase in the student-to-teacher ratio, and an excessive workload for the remaining teachers. These conditions ultimately risk reducing the quality of the learning process in schools (Lubis et al., 2024). This phenomenon is often triggered by discomfort in the work environment, especially felt by young teachers from Gen Z who have just entered the workforce. The mismatch between expectations and conservative school conditions can affect retention rates and performance. Therefore, it is important to know Gen Z's perception of an ideal work culture in the school environment.

This study specifically selected Gen Z, namely individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Varghese & Deepa, 2023). Gen Z was chosen as the subject of the study because it has unique characteristics in understanding, evaluating, and adapting to the modern work environment. They tend to be idealistic in planning their careers and pay close attention to the balance between personal life and work (work-life balance). This generation also values a supportive work environment, supportive leadership, and opportunities for career development. In addition, flexibility in working hours, humane leave policies, and work-from-home options are important aspects for them in achieving job satisfaction (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Therefore, their understanding of the ideal work culture in the school environment is crucial in forming an educational management pattern that is in accordance with the needs of the times.

This study aims to map the perceptual concepts of Gen Z students towards the ideal work culture in the school environment. Students of the MPI study program were selected because the profile of their graduates is to become managers and consultants in Islamic educational institutions. The subjects of the study were students who had participated in the educational internship program, because they had early stage perceptual experiences in the school environment. Through understanding their perspectives on work culture, this study is expected to contribute to the development of curriculum and learning strategies in higher

education, as well as being a reference for schools in building a work culture that is in accordance with the characteristics and expectations of Gen Z when they later play a role in the school environment.

METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological approach to explore in depth subjective experiences and understand Gen Z's perceptions related to the concept of ideal work culture that they expect and experience in the school environment (Alhazmi & Kaufman, 2022). The subjects of the study were undergraduate students of the MPI Study Program at STAI Terpadu Yogyakarta who had participated in an educational internship at an Islamic educational institution. Data were collected through an open-ended survey via Google Form. With an open survey technique, respondents can express their experiences, views, and reflections freely and deeply regarding the Ideal Work Culture in the School environment (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019).

Data analysis using NVivo 12 Software to analyze open-ended responses to survey questions given to respondents. NVivo has data cleaning, word frequency, text search and matrix coding features. With NVivo researchers can explore respondents' views (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). Data Validity Testing uses peer debriefing techniques, which involve peer researchers to get input, criticism, and validation of research findings. Peer debriefing allows qualified peer researchers to review transcript documents, research locations, observation notes, and possibly other researchers' papers. This helps avoid subjective bias in research results (Janesick, 2015). In this study, peer debriefing was carried out through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Lecturers in the Psychology and Islamic Education fields at STAI Terpadu Yogyakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study involved a survey of all 6th semester undergraduate students of the Islamic Education Management Study Program who had carried out educational internships, with a total of 17 respondents. The survey was conducted using open-ended questions based on Google Form, then the collected data was rewritten, read repeatedly, and classified based on certain themes with the help of the Nvivo 12 application. There were two main questions asked to respondents in this study, namely first, the respondents' experiences during educational internships about work culture in the school environment and second, the respondents' perceptions of the ideal work culture in the school environment.

One of the features used by researchers is the Word Frequency Query, which functions to display the prevalence of the most dominant words that appear in the survey results (Kraiwanit et al., 2023). The results of the analysis show that the words "work," "internship," "school," and "culture" are the most frequently appearing. The dominance of these words reflects that students pay a lot of attention to aspects of the world of work in schools, the dynamics of the educational internships they undergo, and the work culture applied in the school environment where students carry out professional work practices.



Image No.1 Word Frequency Query

These findings indicate that Gen Z has a significant concern for the ideal work culture in the school environment. They not only see how the work system is implemented, but also how the organizational culture and work environment affect their experience. Adapting to the existing work culture is an important part of their learning during educational internships. Thus, educational internships are not only a place to hone academic skills, but also shape students' understanding of how work culture in the school environment can support effectiveness and comfort in the world of education..

Furthermore, researchers use the Hierarchy Chart feature in Nvivo which has an important role in visualizing thematic data that has been coded in a research project. This feature allows researchers to see patterns, structures and classifications of themes or categories that appear in the data, thus providing a clearer picture of the relationship between the concepts found. By using the Hierarchy Chart, researchers can easily identify the main categories or themes that appear most frequently in the data, as well as related sub-themes, which ultimately helps in a more systematic analysis process (Dhakal, 2022).

In this study, the Hierarchy Chart feature was used to determine the extent to which respondents responded to the school work culture where they underwent their educational internship. Through this feature, it can be seen how students respond to various aspects of the work culture they experience, both in terms of the positive and the challenges they face. The resulting visualization helps in understanding aspects of the school work culture that are considered important by Gen Z students and how they interpret the educational internship experience in the School environment. Further shown in the following image:

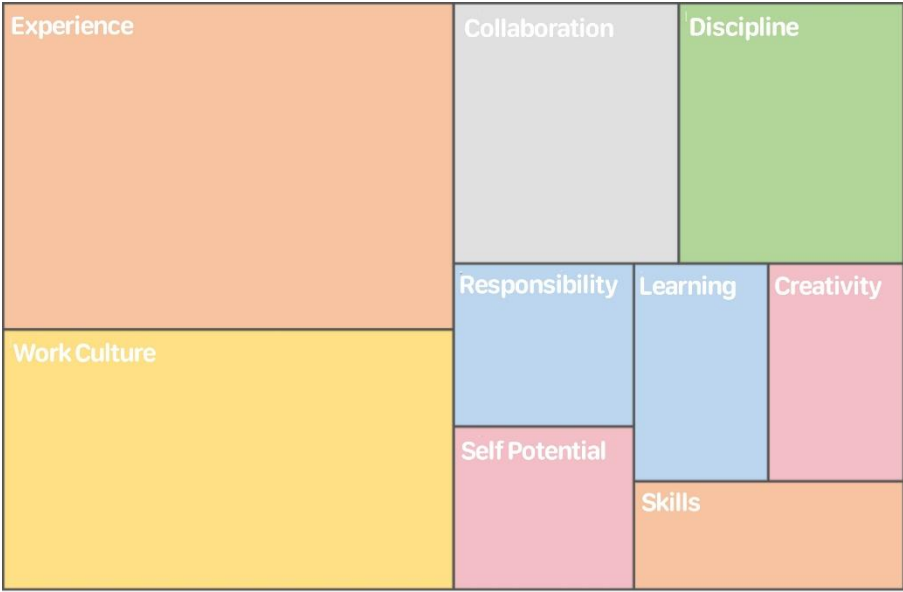


Image No.2 Hierarchy Chart of Perception of Educational Internship Experience

Based on the analysis results using the Hierarchy Chart, 10 main words were found that appeared most often in respondents' responses. The three words that ranked the top were "experience," "work culture," and "collaboration," which showed that students considered their experience during their educational internship as the main factor in understanding the work culture at school. Collaboration was also a prominent aspect, indicating that interaction and cooperation with various parties at school were an important part of their educational internship experience.

Respondents: “..there are many lessons that can be learned and experiences that can develop self-potential..”, “..So my experience is quite broad, seeing and feeling the atmosphere or new things that are going on in the 6 weeks at the institution...”, “..The experience during the educational internship trains me to be more creative”. “..The experience during the educational internship trains me to be more creative..”, “..During the educational internship at the school, I felt that the work culture there was very good..”, “..in the place where I did the educational internship, there was still a lack of collaboration between teaching staff, because I wanted to support each other, especially for friends who had just joined..”.

Next, the words “discipline,” “responsibility,” and “self-potential” emerged as other important themes. This shows that students see discipline and responsibility as key elements in the school’s work culture, as well as how they develop their self-potential through their educational internship experience. This aspect illustrates how the school environment provides opportunities for students to learn about good work ethics and shape their professional character in the future.

Respondent: “During my 2 educational internships, I observed that the work culture at is very disciplined and professional. Each female teacher has a clear responsibility in educating her students”, “Each female teacher has a clear responsibility in educating her students”.

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Finally, the words “learning,” “creativity,” and “skills” were also part of the findings of this study. This shows that students associate the school’s work culture with opportunities to learn and develop their creativity and skills. In the context of educational internships, students not only gain practical experience but also have the space to improve their academic understanding through the application of theory to real practice. The learning process they experience in educational internships helps them understand how the theories they have learned in lectures can be applied in real work situations, especially in educational settings.

Respondents: “The second educational internship was as expected because it was in the place we wanted and there were many lessons that could be taken and experiences that could develop self-potential”, “The experience during the educational internship trained me to be more creative in using praga but what I experienced only applied to junior teachers, it was not as expected because senior teachers did not apply the same thing”. “... had the opportunity to develop my skills..”.

Furthermore, the researcher used the Nvivo Coding Document Chart image feature to provide an overview of the perception of ideal work culture based on the results of qualitative data analysis (Suripto, 2023). This analysis is important, especially in understanding how Gen Z as prospective education personnel view the ideal work culture in the school environment. The results of the data processing are presented in the following image:

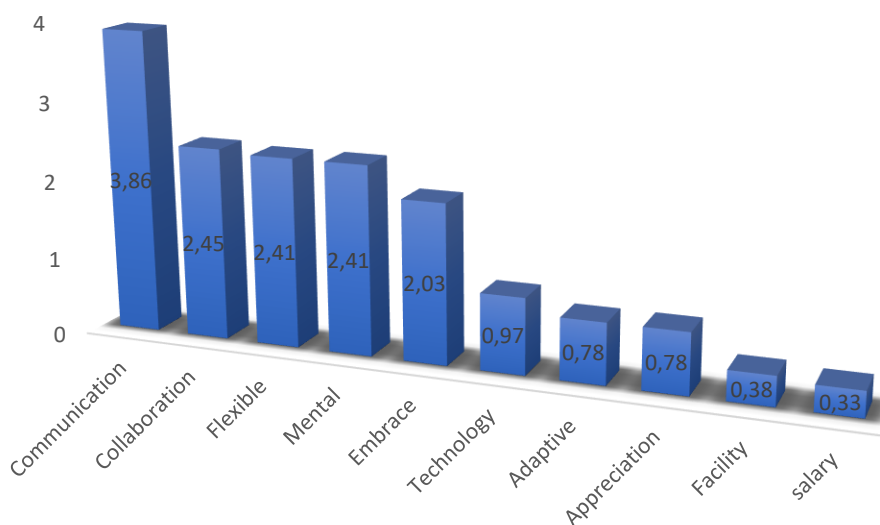


Image No.3 Coding Document Chart of Ideal Work Culture Perception

Based on the image, it was found that communication is the most dominant aspect. This shows that according to Gen Z, good communication is very important in creating a harmonious and productive work environment. After that, the aspects of collaboration, flexibility, mentality, and embracing attitude have a very high scope, meaning that Gen Z wants a work environment that emphasizes cooperation, flexibility in carrying out tasks, mental readiness in facing challenges, and an inclusive and supportive work culture. As

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prospective managers in educational institutions, they consider that schools that have open and collaborative communication will be more effective in supporting the professionalism of other educators.

Respondents: “teamwork commitment to the school’s vision and mission, transparent and open communication..”, “..lack of communication and resulting in lack of confirmation between other female teachers and this often happens..”, “..in my place of internship, there is still a lack of collaboration between teaching staff, because I want mutual support, especially for new friends who have just joined..”, “..dynamic learning methods. Schools that are too rigid will hinder creativity and interest in learning.”, “There is no over Jobs because time for family is reduced”, “..aware of each other’s duties, not upholding seniority too much..”.

Furthermore, researchers also found the words “technology” and “adaptive” as the next words that appeared. Gen Z as digital natives are very close to social media (Rastati, 2018) and the use of technology, including in education. They consider that the ideal school environment is a school that is open to technological innovation in learning and supports educators to continue to adapt to the times. The ability to adapt is also considered important, considering that the world of education continues to experience changes in teaching methods, curriculum, and school policies. Therefore, Gen Z tends to choose a dynamic workplace and provides opportunities for them to continue learning and developing.

Respondents: “The ideal work culture in the School environment for Gen Z must prioritize collaboration and technology. Supporting diversity, every student feels accepted regardless of background. Flexibility in learning methods, such as project-based learning or a hybrid approach, another is the existence of benefits that are in accordance with the job”, “Gen Z is accustomed to the digital world and dynamic learning methods”, “As Gen Z, the ideal work culture in the School environment to create a productive and conducive school environment may be able to adapt to the times and also try to be adjusted to the needs of students and educators”.

Finally, it was found that the words “appreciation”, “facilities” and “salary” had a lower percentage than other clusters. Although the aspects of appreciation, work facilities and salary are the lowest clusters that appear, for Gen Z they are still a consideration even though they are not the main ones. This shows that Gen Z prioritizes non-material factors, such as comfort in working, good communication, and opportunities for self-development. This indicates that schools as workplaces for Gen Z in the future also need to focus on aspects of psychological and professional well-being, not just providing financial compensation.

Respondents: “creativity and innovation are appreciated, not limited or even silenced, the point is to support each other emotionally and mentally”, “..adequate facilities, good boss, supportive friends..”, “in my place of internship, the educational staff are really squeezed with working hours exceeding the rules, and the job description is piling up but the salary is small”.

This is in line with the results of Suhaji's research in his research on the factors that influence employee job satisfaction at the "Yayasan Pharmasi Semarang" pharmacy college, namely financial factors, physical factors, social factors and psychological factors (Melani &

Suhaji, 2012). In line with the results of this study, Wahyuni in her research on the influence of the work environment and salary on teacher performance at SMP Plus Sunan Kalijogo Tulang Bawang Lampung Province concluded that the work environment and salary both have an influence in improving teacher performance (Wahyuni et al., 2024) the results of this study were reinforced by the results of Athfalia's research entitled analysis of gen z turnover intention in terms of job insecurity and work overload on generation z employees in the city of Semarang. The results of the study showed that job insecurity (discomfort at work) had a positive and significant effect on turnover intention while work overload (excessive workload) did not have a positive effect on employee turnover intention (Athfalia & Attiq, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Based on the data presented in the research results, it was found that the perception of Gen Z students regarding the ideal work culture in the School environment can be grouped into three main aspects. The first aspect, comfort in working, includes factors of communication, collaboration, flexibility, mental health, and embracing leaders. The second aspect, career development includes the use of technology and adaptive. The third aspect, awards include appreciation, facilities, and salaries. The details are presented in the following image:

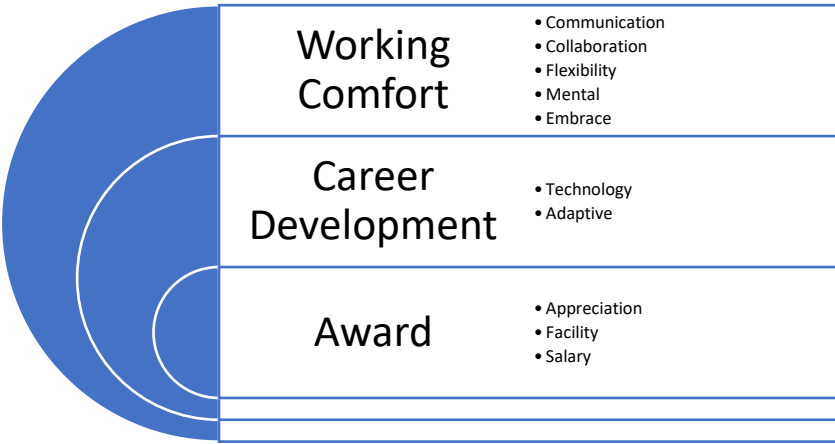


Image No.4 Gen Z Perception Analysis of Ideal School Work Culture

Based on the image, it can be seen that Gen Z students' perception of work culture is greatly influenced by the comfort factor in working. One of the most important main aspects is communication, which was found at 3.86%. This shows that for Gen Z, clear and transparent communication is a key element in an ideal work environment. They expect leaders to provide clear, unchanging task instructions and open up space for discussion between superiors and subordinates. In addition, effective communication is also considered a reflection of leadership that is open to employee input and aspirations.

In addition to communication, collaboration is also an important factor in creating work comfort, with a frequency of occurrence of 2.45%. Gen Z feels more comfortable

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working in a collaborative environment, where the principles of equality and cooperation are the main foundations. They want a work environment that encourages mutual cooperation, mutual assistance, and is oriented towards achieving common goals. Thus, a work culture that emphasizes individualism or rigid hierarchy is considered less in line with their preferences.

Flexibility is also one aspect that is highly considered by Gen Z, with an occurrence rate of 2.41%. They consider that the ideal work culture is one that is dynamic and not too rigid so as not to hinder creativity. Gen Z values a work system that is based on results (output) rather than simply relying on physical presence. If a task can be completed quickly and effectively, they want the freedom to set their own work rhythm without being bound by overly restrictive rules.

Furthermore, the mental aspect is also a major concern for Gen Z, with the same occurrence rate of 2.41%. They consider that work-life balance is a very important factor in choosing a workplace. Gen Z wants a work environment that does not burden them with overwork and provides opportunities to channel hobbies. In addition, they also consider that counseling services and mental health support in the workplace are very important. Facilities such as mindfulness programs and extracurricular activities are considered positive efforts in creating emotional well-being in the workplace.

In terms of work comfort, the word “embrace” is also one of the factors that appears with a frequency of 2.03%. Gen Z wants an inclusive work culture, where there is no gap between individuals in an institution. They reject a work system that emphasizes excessive seniority and prefer an environment where superiors act as mentors who provide guidance, not just control. They are also more comfortable in a work environment that encourages an active exchange of ideas rather than just receiving one-way instructions.

In the career development cluster, technology is the most dominant aspect, with an emergence rate of 0.97%. Gen Z is closely related to technological developments and automation, so they consider that a good work culture must be supported by an effective digital system. They prefer a work environment that uses a technology-based management system and utilizes software to automate work processes to increase efficiency, this is important for Gen Z because technology can be their preference in developing a professional career.

In addition to technology, adaptability is also an important factor in career development, with an emergence rate of 0.78%. Gen Z believes that educational institutions must be responsive to global issues and able to adapt to changing times. The ideal school and workplace for them are those that have the flexibility to adjust policies to the needs of students and educators, so that they can adapt to industrial developments and the demands of the times.

In the award cluster, the word “appreciation” appears with a percentage of 0.78%. Gen Z really wants appreciation for the creativity and innovation they create. They feel that there is a fairly high Gen gap, where their innovative ideas often do not get recognition from previous Gens (Gen X and Gen Y) because they are considered not in accordance with long-standing habits. Therefore, a School work environment that provides space for the exploration of ideas and innovation is very important to them.

Next is the word "facilities", although with a lower occurrence rate of 0.38%, this topic is still considered important by respondents. Gen Z considers that modern, complete, and adequate work facilities play a very important role in creating a comfortable work environment. They believe that a work environment supported by good facilities not only supports daily activities but also contributes directly to increasing productivity and work efficiency. With adequate facilities, they feel more comfortable, focused, have a sense of pride and are motivated to give their best performance.

What is interesting about this analysis is that the salary factor has the lowest occurrence rate, which is 0.33%. This finding is quite important because it shows a shift in values among Gen Z, where a large salary is not always the main guarantee of loyalty to an institution. Instead, they value other aspects such as comfort in working and the opportunity to continue to develop and build a career. These factors determine their commitment and attachment to the institution where they work.

Implications of the Research

The findings of this study present several significant implications for educational institutions, particularly in preparing a work culture that is compatible with Generation Z (Gen Z) as emerging professionals in the education sector. First, the dominance of terms such as *communication*, *collaboration*, *flexibility*, and *mental health* in students' reflections emphasizes the shifting expectations of the modern educational workforce. Institutions must recognize that Gen Z highly values interpersonal transparency, emotional support, and non-hierarchical collaboration. Thus, a rigid, top-down culture may hinder both engagement and performance, potentially increasing turnover intention (Athfalia & Attiq, 2024).

Second, the growing emphasis on *technology* and *adaptability* in the perception of an ideal school work environment indicates that digital fluency is not only expected but required for future-readiness. Educational institutions must therefore embrace digital transformation not merely in teaching tools but also in internal administrative and communication systems to meet the expectations and working styles of Gen Z (Dhakal, 2022). This also supports the findings of Wahyuni et al. (2024), who found that a technologically adaptive work environment significantly contributes to job satisfaction and teacher performance.

Furthermore, the relatively lower importance placed on *salary* and *physical facilities* underscores a major generational shift: from valuing extrinsic financial compensation to prioritizing intrinsic values such as purpose, creativity, and mental well-being. Schools and education policymakers should be attentive to this paradigm shift by investing more in leadership development, innovation hubs, and structured feedback mechanisms that support personal and professional growth. These results echo the findings of Melani & Suhaji (2012) and Suhaji (2023), who emphasized psychological and social factors as essential components of job satisfaction beyond mere compensation.

Lastly, the implications are also relevant for higher education institutions preparing students for the workplace. There is a need to integrate workplace culture literacy, soft skills training, and emotional intelligence development into educational internship programs. This would better equip students to not only adapt but thrive in complex educational institutions that are rapidly evolving in the face of technological advancement and societal change.

In sum, this research contributes to the broader discourse on generational alignment in workplace expectations and highlights a strategic need for educational institutions to revisit and recalibrate their cultural frameworks, leadership styles, and employee engagement strategies in light of Gen Z's emerging dominance in the workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the limitations of this study is that it has not been able to explore in depth the various factors that influence Gen Z's preferences for an ideal work culture in the school environment. Several important aspects that have not been explored include: the strategy for implementing an ideal work culture in the school environment, the relationship between an ideal work culture and factual work productivity and the extent to which work-life balance influences the satisfaction of users of educational services (Parents/Students). Therefore, this limitation can be an opportunity for further research to expand the scope of the study.

For educational institutions, it is recommended to take a number of strategic steps to create a more ideal working environment for Gen Z. These steps include: increasing open and two-way communication between generations, adapting digital and automation-based work systems, providing appreciation and recognition for employee contributions both verbally and in the form of real incentives, and providing mental well-being programs for employees such as counseling services, tourism activities and hobby support facilities.

CONCLUSION

The aspect of comfort at work is the main factor that Gen Z considers. Comfort at work includes clear communication, a collaborative work environment, and flexibility in working. In addition, they also value a balance between work and personal life (work-life balance) as an effort to maintain mental health and a work culture that embraces each other between superiors and subordinates. Gen Z values a work system based on results (output) more than just physical presence, and they tend to reject rigid hierarchies and excessive seniority practices. In terms of career development, Gen Z highly prioritizes the use of technology and is adaptive to global changes. Gen Z is interested in institutions that offer digital-based work systems that can help them achieve their future careers. In addition, they are very concerned about the institution's ability to be responsive to developments in the era, and expect opportunities to continue learning, either through training, certification, or technology-based skills development. Thus, an innovative and dynamic work environment is one of the main factors that attracts them. The appreciation aspect is one of the important things for Gen Z. They expect appreciation for the contributions and innovations they produce, both in the form of verbal recognition and real incentives. In addition, modern and qualified work facilities are also their concern in choosing an ideal work environment. Interestingly, the salary factor is not the main priority in determining loyalty to an institution. Gen Z prioritizes work comfort and opportunities for personal and career development.

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