

CHAPTER 14

The Role of Organisational Culture and Leadership Styles in Engaging Generation Z Employees: A Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z, born from 1997 to 2012, is now entering the global workforce. Gen Z has different expectations than previous generations. This paper is a review of Literature published between the year 2018 and 2025 to examine how organizational culture and Leadership styles influence employee engagement of Gen Z employees. It focuses on psychological safety, inclusion, openness and work-life flexibility, which are the basic needs and demands of Gen Z's engagement. Also, this paper studies how the Leadership Styles affect employee engagement. Leadership styles such as Transformational, Ethical, Participative, and empathetic leadership clearly show the practical exhibition and explanation of positive relations with motivation, retention and psychological ownership. Gen Z's prefer Digital communication practices and meaningful work with work-life balance in the organisation. If they do not get satisfaction with these points, they immediately quit the job. So, it is affecting the existing organizational culture and questioning on Leadership style. In this paper, I am trying to propose a conceptual framework linking organizational culture and Leadership styles to engage Gen Z employees. Also, it will highlight the focus points for future research and potential impact on Human Resource Management and Leadership style in the organizations.

Keywords: Generation Z; Employee engagement; Organisational culture; Leadership styles; Transformational leadership; Psychological safety.

1.0 Introduction

The issue of employee engagement has become a key organisational issue in a highly dynamic and competitive workplace. The motivation of employees is a positive contribution to organisational sustainability, innovation, and productivity. Interaction is a business imperative to organisations. Although leadership and organisational culture are not new to the list of engagement factors.

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Specifically, the arrival of Generation Z into the organisation has brought new demands, values, and interactions that are disruptive of traditional management practices. Generation Z is the group of individuals who are digitally fluent, favoring flexibility, inclusivity, and valuable work experiences. According to recent findings, Generation Z employees are not similar to the previous generations in their perception of leadership, organisational culture, and work engagement (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2025). With more organisations hiring Generation Z and trying to gain an understanding of the variables that impact their engagement is a necessity to maintain operations in terms of workforce performance and retention.

The leadership style is a major factor in the development of the attitudes of employees and their behaviours. The existing literature shows that the leadership styles that focus on empowerment, inclusiveness, and authenticity are especially helpful to attract the younger workers (Revuru and Bandaru, 2024; Katsaros, 2024).

Simultaneously, the organisational culture can be the context in which the leadership behaviours are realised, and it can contribute to the interpretation of the employees of the leadership actions and the organisational intent (Bui, 2023; Osman et al., 2024). Nevertheless, current research tends to study leadership or organisational culture separately and provides little information about how the two impact the engagement of Generation Z.

Moreover, the high speed of the digitalisation of the workplace has also altered the patterns of engagement. Flexible work, hybrid work models, and technology-based communication platforms have become part of the employee experience, especially for Generation Z (Lee, 2024; Rahman and Putri, 2024). The literature on these developments is yet to be synthesised, although increasing attention is paid to them, and the interaction between the digital work environment and leadership styles and organisational culture are the areas where the results of engagement rely on.

Even though a number of bibliometric and systematic reviews have elucidated the research trends in the context of employee engagement and Generation Z, those studies are so occupied with the need to identify thematic trends and patterns of publication but do not provide an integrated conceptualization of it (Santosa et al., 2025; Paul, 2025). As such, the overall number of reviews investigating interrelationships between organisational culture, leadership styles, and employee engagement in Generation Z is insufficient.

To address the mentioned gaps, the current research seeks to review and synthesise the published literature on the role of organisational culture and leadership styles to capture the attention of Generation Z employees. Introducing both the classical theoretical underpinnings with the recent empirical and review-based research, the paper aims at offering a systematic insight into the engagement drivers unique to the generation Z and to determine the future direction in the research and management practice.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

- To review existing literature on organisational culture and leadership styles in engaging Generation Z employees
- To synthesise key themes influencing Gen Z employee engagement
- To identify gaps and future research directions

3.0 Methodology of Literature Review

3.1 Research design

In this research, the narrative literature review method is used with a systematic search strategy based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model. This design was chosen to be able to synthesize a broad range of empirical and review-based studies being able to ensure methodological transparency.

3.2 Data sources and search strategy

The search in a variety of academic databases has been carried out to find the relevant literature that will be used and the main databases used were:

- Scopus and Web of Science.
- Google Scholar.
- MDPI, Taylor & Francis, and Frontiers in Psychology.
- SA Journal of Industrial Psychology and Cogent Social Sciences.

The search strategy took combinations of keywords that included: Generation Z, employee engagement, organisational culture, leadership styles, transformational leadership, ethical leadership and workplace flexibility.

3.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To guarantee that the data synthesized is relevant and of a high quality, the following criteria were followed:

- *Inclusion* Criteria: (a) Empirical or review articles that are written in English; (b) literature that specifically addresses Generation Z (c) employees engagement based on their leadership and culture.
- *Exclusion* Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion-based reports, practitioner-only papers and studies without a distinct conceptual connection to the core variables.

3.4. Study Selection Process (PRISMA)

The process of selecting was multi-stage to narrow down the end set of literature.

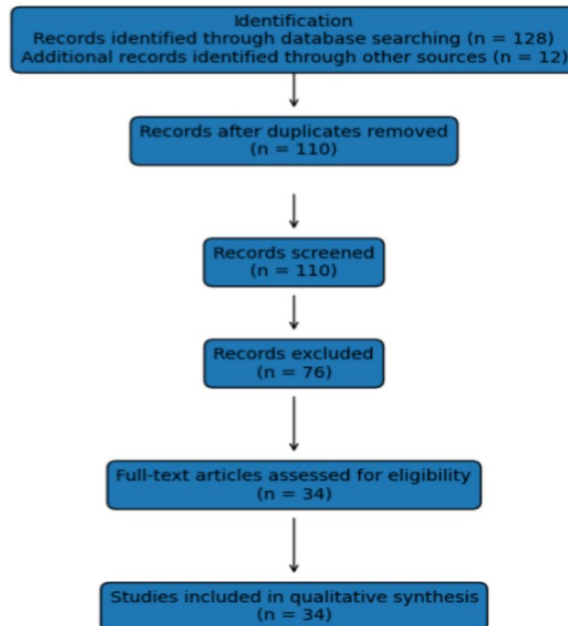
- *Identification*: The first search provided 128 records in databases and 12 in citation tracking (n = 140).
- *Screening*: 110 records were screened in terms of title and abstract after the elimination of duplicates.
- *Selection*: 76 records were filtered out as irrelevant, and 34 articles were assessed in full according to the text.
- *Inclusion*: 34 articles were chosen in the end as qualitative synthesis articles.

3.5. PRISMA review

Table 1: PRISMA Flow Summary

PRISMA Stage	Number of Records
Identification (database search)	128
Additional records	12
After duplicates removed	110
Records screened	110
Records excluded	76
Full-text articles assessed	34
Studies included in review	34

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram



3.6 Data synthesis and analysis

The thematic analysis was applied to the selected studies. This implied the determination of recurring patterns, prevailing leadership styles, and cultural features, as well as mediating mechanisms (psychological safety and digital feedback) that affect Generation Z engagement.

4.0 Review of Literature

4.1 Concept of employee engagement

Engagement among employees has been commonly accepted as a key factor of organisational performance, employee health, and retention. Kahn (1990) theorised engagement as psychological presence of people when performing a role and determined by meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Later researchers duplicated this perspective with an addition of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The model of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) also expounds on the subject of engagement as a resource of job, like leadership support, organisational culture, and autonomy (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The recent bibliometric reviews show that the engagement research has been increasing dramatically during the last two decades with leadership and organisational context as the most common antecedents (Paul, 2025; Santosa et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the concept of engagement is not seen as a fixed entity anymore, as the difference in the generational traits of the workforce, especially the introduction of Generation Z to organisations, becomes a more influential factor (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022).

4.2 The generation Z at work

The generation Z generation of employees, who are normally born between 1997 to 2012, have different expectations of the workplace than the older generation. According to bibliometric and scoping reviews, Generation Z appreciates flexibility, inclusivity, technological focus, meaningful work, and a supportive leadership style (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2025). Research indicates that Generation Z workers require engagement in terms of identification with organisational values, learning opportunities, and digital collaboration tools (Cubukcu Cerasi, 2024).

According to Zahra et al. (2025), organisational climate, authenticity of leadership, and work-life balance are major factors that determine the engagement of Generation Z. On a similar note, Vieira et al. (2024) consider that employer branding and talent management processes are vital in releasing and retaining Gen Z laborers, which justifies the use of culture-based engagement strategies.

4.3 Leadership styles and employee engagement

The style of leadership is always cited as a force behind employee engagement. The classical theories of leadership, like transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) and leader-member exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) form the basis on which leader and employee relations can be understood. The empirical literature proves that transformational leadership improves motivation, trust, and engagement because it promotes vision and empowerment (Ibrahim, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

According to recent studies on generation Z, the inclusive, servant, and authentic leadership styles appear to be prominent and effective when it comes to maintaining the engagement levels among younger employees (Revuru and Bandaru, 2024; Katsaros, 2024). Ogunsola et al. (2024) have discovered that the participative and supportive leadership styles have a significant positive impact on work performance and engagement among Generation Zs. Moreover, adaptive performance in Gen Z employees is found to be promoted by leadership behaviours that promote psychological safety and autonomy (Katsaros, 2024).

The bibliometric reviews support the fact that leadership styles continue to be one of the most actively researched antecedents of work engagement in the different sectors (Santosa et al., 2025). Nonetheless, researchers claim that the efficacy of leadership regarding Generation Z should be framed in the context of the organisational culture and online workplaces (Rahman and Putri, 2024).

4.4 Organisational culture and engagement

Employee attitudes, behaviour and level of engagement are majorly influenced by the organisational culture. Initial efforts by Schein (1985) and Hofstede (1980) made culture a set of shared values and norms that affect workplace behaviour. Research has shown that cultures which encourage trust, teamwork and learning have a positive effect on engagement (Bui, 2023).

It has been empirically shown that the employees of the Generation Z are more responsive to the inclusive, open, and innovation-driven cultures (Lee, 2024; Osman et al., 2024). Ibrahim (2022) discovered that organisational culture mediates leadership and engagement relationship, which means that the effectiveness of leadership is in part dependent on the cultural fit.

According to recent bibliometric research, there is a growing academic interest in the correlation between organisational culture and Generation Z job satisfaction and engagement (Balahmar and Abadi, 2025). The organisational culture and servant leadership as the key to high levels of Gen Z engagement and performance are also supported by sector-specific researchers in the hospitality and tourism field (Sustainability, 2024; Pusaka Journal, 2025).

4.5 Technology, flexibility, and emerging engagement practices

The technological orientation of the generation Z has led to a need by researchers to examine technology-based engagement practices. As Lee (2024) notes, flexibility and the hybrid model of work contribute positively to engagement, especially in the young group of employees. Rahman and Putri (2024) further the discussion by looking at how metaverse and virtual environments can help in redefining the experience and engagement of Gen Z workers. In spite of these new developments, available literature is still fragmented and exploratory. According to Zahra et al. (2025), technological engagement mechanisms are frequently studied separately without taking into consideration leadership and cultural frameworks, which implies that combined models are required.

4.6 Synthesis of literature

In general, the available literature confirms that leadership styles, organisational culture and the changing workforce expectations determine employee engagement. Classical theories give an excellent theoretical background (Kahn, 1990; Bass, 1985; Schein, 1985), and recent researches emphasize the increasing role of a generational background, especially Generation Z (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022; Vieira et al., 2024).

Bibliometric reviews and systematic reviews confirm the growing research interest in the topic of Generation Z engagement, but the reviews also emphasize the lack of empirical concentration and conceptual depth (Santosa et al., 2025; Paul, 2025). The majority of the studies work on the leadership, culture, or technology as separate factors, which highlights the necessity to thoroughly review them to get a better idea of what Generation Z employee engagement is.

5.0 Conceptual Framework

This study conceptual framework is formulated to discuss the correlation between organisational culture, leadership styles and employee engagement among the employees of Generation Z. Based on classical theories of engagement and leadership and empirical evidence of recent times, the framework identifies organisational culture and leadership styles as the key antecedents that affect the degree of engagement as experienced by the Generation Z employees.

The conceptualisation of employee engagement is understood as a multi-dimensional construct involving emotions, cognitive and behavioural engagement in work role, which is in line with the previous engagement research (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002). With regard to Generation engagement, the individual job characteristics are not the sole determinants of engagement but also other factors associated with the organisation and leadership.

5.1 Leadership styles

The styles of leadership are a major independent construct in the model. The focus is on transformational, inclusive, servant, and authentic leadership styles since they were found to be relevant to Generation Z workers. Empirical evidence suggests that empowerment, psychological safety, fairness, and meaningful communication prevention leadership behaviours have a positive impact on engagement and adaptive performance among Generation Z employees (Ibrahim, 2022; Revuru & Bandaru, 2024; Katsaros, 2024). These leadership styles promote independence, appreciation and trust, especially among the younger employees.

Figure 2: Types of Leadership Styles in Organisation



5.2 Organisational culture

The organisational culture is theorised as a situational phenomenon that influences the perceptions and reactions of the employees towards organisational leadership behaviours. According to cultural frameworks suggested by Hofstede (1980) and Schein (1985), culture is an expression of common values, norms, and practices in the organisation. According to the studies, a culture of inclusiveness, flexibility, innovation, and support improves engagement rates, particularly among the employees of Generation Z (Bui, 2023; Lee, 2024; Osman et al., 2024). The organisational culture is thus placed as a direct factor of engagement as well as the context that strengthens leadership performance.

5.3 Generation Z employee engagement

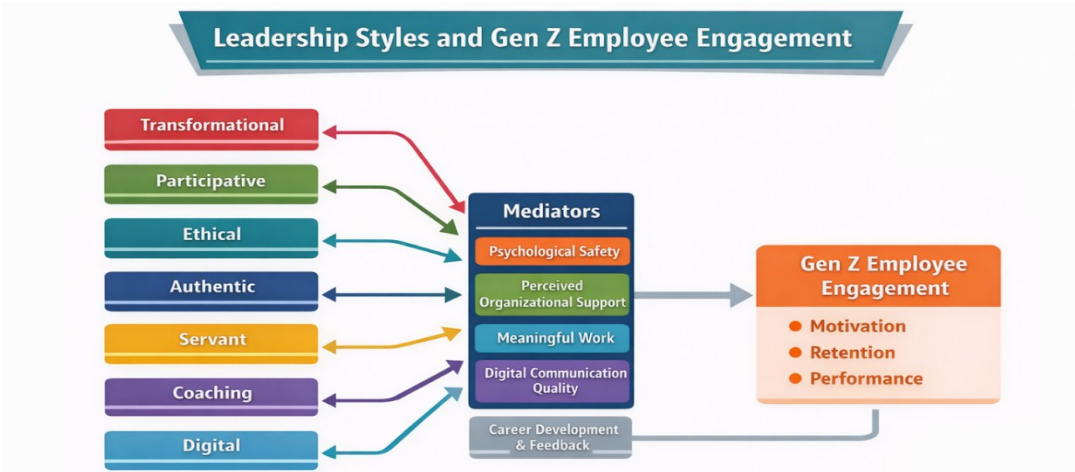
The dependent construct in the framework is the engagement of Generation Z employees. According to the available literature, the extent to which Gen Z are engaged is

determined by the fit between individual values and organisational behaviours, growth prospects, work-life balance, and work environments that are enabled by technology (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2025). The result of the engagement is a higher motivation, commitment, performance, and retention.

5.4 Integrative perspective

The framework takes an integrative approach, which suggests that leadership behaviours and organisational culture interact and impact Gen Z employee engagement. Although the behaviours of leaders directly influence the experiences of the employees, the organisational culture presents the structural and symbolic context in which the leaders are interpreted. This combined methodology overcomes the shortcomings of earlier studies that have investigated these variables separately and is a response to the need to have holistic models in recent review and bibliometric studies (Santosa et al., 2025; Paul, 2025).

Figure 3: Leadership Styles and Gen Z Engagement



6.0 Research Findings

The methodical summary of the identified 34 peer-reviewed articles indicates that there is a number of important conclusions related to the involvement of Generation Z employees. The following are the main themes in which these findings can be classified:

6.1 The dominance of “Human-Centric” leadership styles

The review ascertains that traditional and top-down leadership cannot be effective when it comes to the youngest group of workforce.

- *Transformational and Participative Leadership:* These two styles always demonstrate a positive relationship with motivation and trust. The generation Z employees would also react to leaders who have a clear vision but with free hand.
- *Authenticity and Empathy:* Authentic and Empathic leadership are highly preferred. Generation Z appreciates leaders who are authentic, open, and show concern about the overall well-being of the employee as opposed to their performance.
- *Inclusive Leadership:* Inclusion is not an option; the leadership that is proactive in terms of promoting diversity and equal contribution is the major retention catalyst.

6.2 Cultural foundations: Safety and flexibility

The findings imply that organisational culture is the “contextual basis through which success of leadership endeavours can or cannot be achieved.

- *Psychological Safety:* Generation Z requires a culture that encourages taking risks and communicating their opinions and ideas without fear of punishment.
- *Flexibility as Core Value:* Flexibility is no more considered a perk, but a necessity. Cultures that facilitate the hybrid work model and the balance between work and life have recorded an increased level of engagement.
- *Association with Meaningful Work:* Generation Z workers are the most engaged when they feel that their work is making a social impact or espousing their own values.

6.3 The mediating role of digital systems and feedback

The most notable observation made during this review is that the digital infrastructure is highly utilized to support the process of engagement.

- *Constant Feedback Loops:* Generation Z insists on a constant feedback system as opposed to the annual reviews of past generations. It is important to have digital platforms that enable real-time recognition and useful critique.
- *Quality of Digital communications:* The quality of digital tools of collaboration directly influences the experience of the employees. It is mentioned that inefficient or outdated technology is a cause of instant job discontent and resignation.

6.4 Integrated impact on retention and performance

The literature indicates that a positive leadership style and supportive culture can have a synergistic effect on an organization’s outcome when combined.

- *Mediation Factors:* Perceived organizational support and career development opportunities are factors that bridge the gap between leadership behavior and employee commitment.
- *Retention Outcomes:* When these areas are very high in satisfaction, then there is a

greater psychological ownership that reduces the rates of attrition very much in the otherwise highly mobile generation.

7.0 Research Gaps

Although there is an increased literature about the younger workforce, some critical gaps still exist: **Absence of Combined Structures:** The majority of current research studies the styles of leadership, organizational culture, and employee engagement separately. The knowledge of the joint influence of leadership and culture on the generation Z engagement is limited to one conceptual model.

- *Theoretical Lag:* Numerous works are based on classical models of engagement of the 1980s and 90s. These paradigms might not be able to explain the digital orientation and purpose-oriented values peculiar to the generation z.
- *Digital Research Stressors:* The field of study of digital leadership and virtual workplace is still in its early stages and has not been integrated into the cultural framework of classic research methodology.

8.0 Limitations of the Research

Although this paper has offered a systematic review of the engagement drivers, it has a number of shortcomings:

- *Secondary data dependence:* The findings are constrained by the methods and bias of the original authors since it is a narrative review.
- *Cross-sectional focus:* The vast majority of references are associated with providing a snap-on picture of engagement, and therefore, it is difficult to understand the way the expectations of Generation Z could alter as they grow older or as organizations undergo changes in their life cycles.
- *Language and scope:* The search was limited to the English-language, peer-reviewed articles that may have missed the cultural perspectives that were relevant and were published in other languages or practitioner reports.

9.0 Future Scope

The future research ought to address the following areas to fill the identified gaps and the dynamics of the workforce:

- *Cross-culture and global analysis:* Further expansion of the research to emerging economies and different cultural backgrounds will aid in finding out whether the Gen Z drivers of engagement are universal or culture-specific.

- *Topic of the AI and Digital Leadership:* The researchers would examine the specific ways in which the combination of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the “metaverse” can transform the leader-employee relationship and cultural expectations that this digital-native generation possesses.
- *Sector-Specific Studies:* The specific study of non-technological sectors, including manufacturing or health care, is required to observe how leadership approaches change in situations when remote or work flexibility is not possible.
- *Experimental Design:* Future research can use field experiments to confirm the direct effects of certain leadership development interventions on Generation Z retention and performance results.

10.0 Conclusion

The current study confirms that not only is it a management issue but a strategic requirement to engage Generation Z that leads to a basic change in organizational paradigms. The literature supports that the involvement of this cohort is also associated with a human-based intersection of the leadership and organisational culture. In particular, the organisational cultures with the emphasis on psychological safety, inclusiveness, and work-life flexibility are the keys to the commitment of Generation Z.

Through the combination of these cultural values with transformational, participative and authentic leadership styles, employee motivation and psychological ownership towards organisations increase significantly. Additionally, transparent digital feedback mechanisms should be integrated to meet the needs of Generation Z to have an ever-growing and purposeful work. After all, the transition to a more modernized approach to management, where the old paradigm is being replaced by the new, more adaptable system, is the most effective way to minimize attrition and perform at a higher level. Although this review offers the roadmap on the modernization of engagement strategies, a continuous study on digital leadership and career trends over time will become the central part when Generation Z becomes the dominant force in the worldwide workforce.

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