



## The Role of Career Adaptability in the Relationship Between Generation Z Career Management Practices and Alignment with Corporate Competency Demands

Grace Angele<sup>1\*</sup>, Aida Kirana<sup>2</sup>, Nurhidayah<sup>3</sup>, Anggia Sari Lubis<sup>4</sup>  
North Sumatera University

**Corresponding Author:** Grace Angele [graceangele@students.usu.ac.id](mailto:graceangele@students.usu.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to develop a conceptual framework regarding the role of career adaptability in the relationship between Generation Z career management practices and alignment with corporate competency demands. The article is structured as a conceptual paper based on a directed literature review of key studies on career adaptability, organizational career management, person-job fit, person-organization fit, and skills mismatch. The synthesis indicates that career adaptability can be positioned as a psychosocial mechanism that helps Generation Z workers transform career management support into learning readiness, competency adjustment, and better job fit. The implication is that organizations need to integrate adaptability development into career management practices so that competency mismatch can be reduced more proactively.

## INTRODUCTION

Changes in the business environment, marked by digitalization, automation, and the accelerating need for competency renewal, have reshaped how organizations view workforce career management. In this context, career success can no longer be sufficiently explained by the possession of initial technical competencies alone, but also by individuals' ability to adapt to transitions, uncertainty, and continuously evolving work demands. Career construction literature positions career adaptability as a psychosocial resource that helps individuals address career tasks, transitions, and problems through the dimensions of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

This issue becomes increasingly relevant when linked to Generation Z, which is entering and expanding its dominance in the labor market. Bibliometric studies show that academic attention to Generation Z in the workplace has increased because this generation is perceived as having work orientations, expectations, and interaction patterns that differ from those of previous generations, while organizations are required to manage young workers in more adaptive ways (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022). In practice, companies need not only young workers who learn quickly, but also those who are able to maintain the alignment of their competencies with changing organizational needs.

A major issue in this context is the continuing gap between the competencies possessed by young workers and those required by companies. Skills mismatch affects not only the quality of individuals' transition into the labor market but also organizational productivity and the effectiveness of human resource development investments. In rapidly changing work environments, competency mismatch becomes even more problematic because corporate needs are no longer stable, and relevant skills must be continuously updated.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to explain the mechanisms that can help Generation Z proactively manage their careers in order to remain aligned with corporate competency demands. The meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2017) shows that career adaptability is associated with various adapting responses and adaptation results, including career planning, employability, engagement, and work performance. These findings confirm that career adaptability is not merely an abstract psychological concept, but a resource with the potential to bridge individual career management and work outcomes that are more relevant to organizations.

A number of studies also show that career adaptability is associated with various forms of person-environment fit. Yen et al. (2023) found that career adaptability can improve person-job fit, which in turn contributes to career satisfaction. Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that career adaptability is positively related to person-organization fit and work engagement. In the context of Generation Z, Zhou et al. (2025) showed that career adaptability plays a role in shaping person-job fit among young employees in the hospitality industry. These findings strengthen the argument that career adaptability

deserves to be positioned as an important mechanism in career management practices.

Nevertheless, several research gaps remain. First, many previous studies have focused on outcomes such as employability, career satisfaction, or engagement, but have not explicitly positioned career adaptability within the framework of Generation Z career management practices to explain alignment with corporate competency demands. Second, studies on competency mismatch often stop at identifying the gap, without sufficiently explaining the psychological mechanisms and career-related behaviors that help individuals respond to that gap proactively. Third, studies linking career management practices, career adaptability, and competency alignment within a single conceptual framework remain relatively limited.

Based on this background, this article aims to build a conceptual argument regarding the contribution of career management practices to Generation Z competency alignment, explain the role of career adaptability as an intervening mechanism in this relationship, and offer conceptual implications for organizations in designing more adaptive career development systems for young workers

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Career Adaptability*

Career adaptability is one of the central concepts in career construction theory, explaining individuals' psychosocial resources in dealing with developmental tasks, transitions, and career-related challenges. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) explain that concern, control, curiosity, and confidence shape individuals' readiness to think about their career future, make decisions, explore opportunities, and act effectively in facing career problems. Thus, career adaptability is related not only to mental readiness but also to the capacity to actively navigate workplace change.

Savickas (2013) identified four main dimensions of career adaptability:

- Concern – awareness of and planning for one's future career
- Control – the ability to regulate career decisions
- Curiosity – exploration of career opportunities
- Confidence – belief in one's ability to face career challenges

Research shows that career adaptability plays an important role in improving work readiness, competency development, and individual career success (Rudolph et al., 2017). Individuals with higher levels of career adaptability tend to be more proactive in developing relevant skills and better able to adjust to changing organizational demands.

In the context of Generation Z, Fitri et al. (2023) found that the level of career adaptability is relatively good, although weaknesses remain in certain dimensions, particularly confidence and control. This suggests that strengthening career adaptability is key to bridging competency gaps.

### *Career Management Practices*

In organizational contexts, career management practices refer to policies and programs designed to support employee career development, such as career planning, training and development, mentoring, developmental assignments, and internal promotion systems. Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) emphasize that organizational career management practices are associated with objective career success through various developmental mechanisms. In this article, career management practices are understood as organizational support that can provide resources, learning opportunities, and developmental direction for Generation Z employees.

Career management is a systematic process involving the planning, development, and management of individuals' careers within organizations (Greenhaus et al., 2019). In the modern paradigm, career management is no longer solely the responsibility of the organization, but also of the individual through a self-directed career approach.

The concept of the protean career, introduced by Hall (2004), emphasizes that individuals play the primary role in managing their careers based on personal values and goals. Meanwhile, the concept of the boundaryless career, proposed by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), describes careers that are no longer confined to a single organization, but instead move across organizational and professional boundaries.

For Generation Z, career management practices tend to emphasize flexibility, high mobility, and an orientation toward continuous self-development (Schroth, 2019). However, without adequate organizational support systems, these practices may not necessarily produce competency alignment with corporate needs.

### *Generation Z and Workplace Dynamics*

Generation Z is often understood as a generation that grew up with digital technology and entered the labor market with orientations that differ from those of previous generations. Benitez-Marquez et al. (2022) show that the issue of Generation Z in the workplace has grown rapidly in the literature because organizations must adjust human resource management practices to the characteristics of young workers. In this context, the need for flexibility, continuous learning, rapid feedback, and clear career direction makes career management a particularly important issue for this group.

Generation Z refers to those born approximately between 1997 and 2012 and now beginning to dominate the global labor market. This generation is known as digital natives with strengths in technology use and information access (Schroth, 2019). In addition, Generation Z has distinctive characteristics, such as a preference for work flexibility, a need for rapid feedback, and an orientation toward meaning and purpose in work (Twenge, 2017).

However, despite their strengths in digital literacy, Generation Z often faces challenges in mastering soft skills such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, and resilience under work pressure (World Economic Forum, 2023). This condition creates a mismatch between the competencies they possess and

organizational demands, thereby requiring a more adaptive approach to career management.

### *Competency Alignment with Corporate Demands*

In this article, alignment with corporate competency demands is understood as an individual's ability to meet the knowledge, skill, and work behavior requirements expected by the organization. This concept is closely related to person-job fit and person-organization fit because both describe the degree of congruence between individuals and their work context. Yen et al. (2023) and Chen et al. (2024) show that career adaptability is related to both forms of fit, thereby providing a theoretical basis for the argument that adaptability can help individuals maintain the relevance of their competencies in response to changing organizational demands.

Person-job fit is an important concept in human resource management. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) define person-job fit as the degree of alignment between an individual's abilities and job demands, as well as between the individual's needs and what the job provides.

Research shows that a high level of person-job fit is positively associated with performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, and negatively associated with turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the context of Generation Z, this alignment becomes challenging because of the differences between the competencies they possess and the ever-evolving needs of organizations.

The World Economic Forum (2023) emphasizes that competency gaps occur not only in technical aspects but also in cognitive and social skills. Therefore, mechanisms are needed to bridge these gaps, one of which is the strengthening of career adaptability.

Based on the above literature synthesis, this article positions career adaptability as a psychosocial mechanism that bridges career management practices and competency alignment. Career management practices provide support and developmental opportunities; career adaptability helps individuals make proactive use of that support; and the final outcome is reflected in an improved ability to align competencies with corporate needs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article is a conceptual paper developed through a directed literature review rather than a systematic literature review. This approach was chosen because the primary objective of the article is not to calculate empirical effects or present a quantitative synthesis, but to build a more integrated theoretical argument regarding the relationship between career management practices, career adaptability, and alignment with corporate competency demands.

The literature search focused on core academic sources relevant to five themes: career adaptability, career construction, organizational career management, person-job fit/person-organization fit, and skills mismatch. Priority was given to reputable journal articles, meta-analyses, and empirical studies that directly support the development of the article's conceptual

propositions. Sources were selected purposively based on thematic relevance, theoretical contribution, and recency.

The analysis was conducted through critical reading, thematic grouping, and argumentative synthesis. Through this process, the article identifies patterns in the relationships among concepts, compares the main findings across studies, and formulates conceptual propositions regarding how career adaptability may bridge the influence of career management practices on the alignment of Generation Z competencies with corporate demands.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature review reveals three main conceptual patterns. First, career management practices function as contextual resources that provide learning opportunities, developmental structures, and organizational support for employees. In the context of young workers, this support is important because Generation Z tends to require clear direction, opportunities for exploration, and rapid feedback in the career development process.

Second, career adaptability emerges as a core capacity that determines whether organizational support is truly transformed into career readiness and competency adjustment. Individuals with higher adaptability tend to be better prepared to plan their careers, explore opportunities, make decisions, and actively respond to changing work demands. Thus, the presence of career management practices alone is not sufficient; their effectiveness also depends on the extent to which individuals possess adaptive resources to utilize that support.

Third, the literature synthesis shows that career adaptability has conceptual proximity to person-job fit and person-organization fit. This indicates that adaptability can be understood as a mechanism that helps individuals align their knowledge, skills, and work orientations with job and organizational needs. Within this framework, competency alignment is viewed not only as the result of formal training, but also as the outcome of individuals' capacity to learn, assess changing demands, and reconfigure their career strategies.

We propose an adaptive career development model for Generation Z that emphasizes the integration of organizational career management practices and individual psychosocial capacities to achieve sustainable competency alignment. This model is based on the assumption that organizational support alone is insufficient; rather, it must be optimized through individuals' adaptive capabilities to produce continuous learning readiness and competency adjustment.

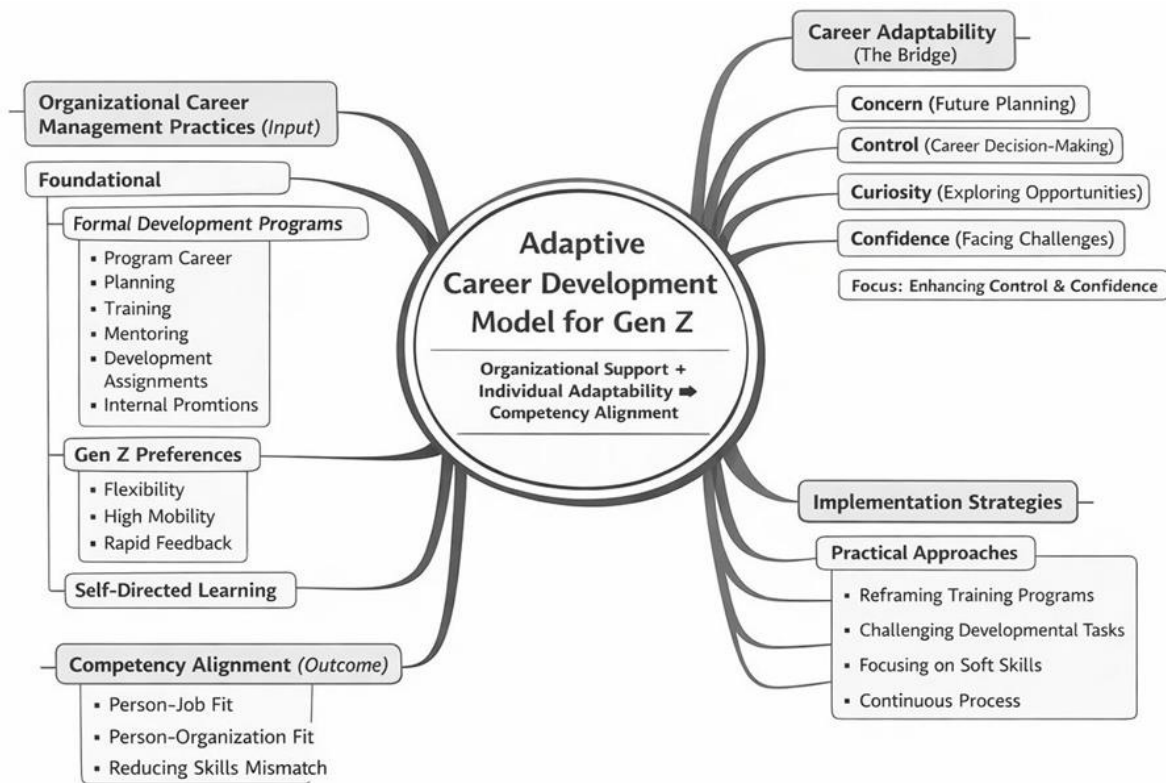


Figure 1. Adaptive Career Development Model for Generation Z  
 Source: Developed by the authors based on literature synthesis.

The proposed model consists of three main components.

1. Foundation: Organizational Career Management Practices

At this stage, organizations act as providers of contextual resources through structured career management practices. The main components include: (1) formal development programs, such as training, mentoring, career planning, developmental assignments, and internal promotion systems; (2) alignment with Generation Z characteristics, which emphasize flexibility, high mobility, rapid feedback, and clear career direction; and (3) learning autonomy, allowing individuals to manage their careers in a self-directed manner in line with the concept of a protean career.

2. Core Mechanism: Career Adaptability

Career adaptability functions as a psychosocial mechanism that bridges organizational support and career outcomes. This construct consists of four key dimensions: (1) concern, referring to awareness and future career orientation; (2) control, referring to individuals' ability to regulate and make independent career decisions; (3) curiosity, referring to the tendency to

explore new opportunities and experiences; and (4) confidence, referring to self-efficacy in dealing with career-related challenges and obstacles. Strengthening the control and confidence dimensions is particularly crucial, as Generation Z tends to exhibit relative weaknesses in these areas despite having generally adequate levels of adaptability.

### 3. Outcome: Competency Alignment

The ultimate goal of this model is to achieve a dynamic person-environment fit, which includes: (1) person-job fit, referring to the alignment between individual competencies and job demands; (2) person-organization fit, referring to the alignment between individual values and organizational values and needs; and (3) reduction of skills mismatch, particularly in non-technical competencies such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, and resilience under pressure.

Based on these patterns, this article proposes the conceptual proposition that career management practices contribute more effectively to alignment with corporate competency demands when Generation Z has an adequate level of career adaptability. In other words, career adaptability acts as a bridge connecting organizational career support with the competency readiness required by companies.

The conceptual findings of this article confirm that the relationship between career management practices and competency alignment is neither linear nor automatic. Career management practices do provide developmental structures, but their outcomes are strongly influenced by individuals' readiness to interpret, utilize, and follow up on such support. This is where career adaptability becomes relevant as a psychosocial resource that enables Generation Z employees to act proactively in highly dynamic work environments.

From the perspective of career construction theory, adaptability helps individuals translate environmental changes into meaningful developmental responses. The dimension of concern encourages a long-term career orientation, control strengthens decision-making capacity, curiosity opens space for opportunity exploration, and confidence supports the courage to face challenges. Therefore, when organizations provide training, mentoring, job rotation, or career planning, the impact of these interventions will be greater if employees have the adaptive readiness to transform them into learning and competency adjustment.

For organizations, the main implication of this article is that Generation Z career management should not be limited to the provision of formal programs alone. Organizations need to design career management practices that also cultivate adaptability, for example through learning autonomy, challenging yet structured assignments, reflective feedback, coaching, and opportunities for cross-functional exploration. This approach is more aligned with the contemporary work context, which demands continuous learning and rapid responses to changing competency requirements.

Conceptually, this article also extends the discussion of competency mismatch. To date, mismatch has often been understood as a static gap between

the skills individuals possess and the needs of organizations. This article emphasizes that mismatch should instead be understood as a condition that can be managed through the interaction between organizational support and individuals' adaptive capacity. Thus, the focus shifts from merely identifying competency deficiencies toward understanding the process through which competencies are continuously aligned.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article concludes that career adaptability deserves to be positioned as a conceptual mechanism that bridges the relationship between Generation Z career management practices and alignment with corporate competency demands. Career management practices provide developmental support, but career adaptability determines the extent to which that support can be transformed into learning readiness, competency adjustment, and better job fit.

Based on these conceptual findings, organizations are advised not only to strengthen career management programs, but also to deliberately foster adaptability through developmental interventions that encourage career reflection, exploration, and self-confidence. For future researchers, this conceptual framework may be empirically tested by positioning career adaptability as a mediator or bridging mechanism across various industrial and national contexts.

## FUTURE STUDY

This article has limitations because it is conceptual in nature and has not empirically tested the relationships among variables. In addition, the discussion remains general and is not limited to a specific industrial sector, country, or occupational group. Future research is recommended to develop more operational indicators of alignment with corporate competency demands, compare cross-industry contexts, and examine whether career adaptability functions as a mediator, moderator, or antecedent in different models.

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