



The Importance of Generation Z Career Management in Bridging the Skills Gap and Organizational Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Generation Z career management bridges the competency gap with organizational needs in Indonesia and proposes an integrative framework as its novelty. It explores career adaptability, psychological empowerment, organizational systems, and competency alignment. The research applies a qualitative descriptive design with purposive sampling of Generation Z workers and HR practitioners. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation during a cross-sectional period and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. Findings reveal flexible career patterns but persistent gaps in soft skills, confidence, and alignment. The study identifies five key strategies including career adaptability, flexible career systems, competency-based training, psychological empowerment, and adaptive organizational culture, to improve alignment and organizational performance.

INTRODUCTION

The entry of Generation Z into the workforce marks a paradigm shift in the global labor market. This generation, born between 1997 and 2012, is projected to dominate around 27% of the global workforce by 2025. Generation Z brings different characteristics compared to previous generations, such as Millennials and Baby Boomers, particularly in terms of flexibility, digital innovation, and a focus on work-life balance (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Concurrently, the evolving business environment marked by digitalization, globalization, and technological disruption is driving significant shifts in workforce competency requirements. Organizations no longer demand merely technical skills but also the ability to adapt, collaborate, and engage in continuous learning. In this era of disruption, the workforce's adaptability is key for organizations to survive and remain competitive.

In that context, the emergence of Generation Z as a group that is beginning to dominate the workforce is a strategic factor for an organization's future success. This generation is known as digital natives who are relatively adaptable to technology, yet at the same time have high expectations regarding work flexibility, the meaning of work, and career advancement (Schroth, 2019; Sunaryanto & Idrus, 2025). Meanwhile, organizations continue to require a workforce that is not only technically proficient but also has soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and the ability to collaborate effectively within a team (World Economic Forum, 2023).

This situation leads to a major challenge which is the gap between the expectations of Generation Z and the needs of organizations. This mismatch widens the skills gap, which has a direct impact on organizational performance and sustainability. According to a World Economic Forum report (2023), 85% of jobs by 2030 will require skills in artificial intelligence, data analysis, and collaboration. Although Generation Z generally possesses strong digital skills, many lack practical experience and don't have the resilience for long-term employment. This situation not only reduces productivity but also increases employee turnover rates.

This skills gap is also reflected in the increasing difficulties Generation Z faces in entering the workforce. Various studies indicate that these challenges are not solely due to limited job opportunities, but also to a mismatch between the skills they possess and industry needs (Fotaleno & Batubara, 2024). Furthermore, a significant gap has been identified in Generation Z's work readiness, particularly regarding adaptability, interpersonal skills, and readiness to navigate organizational dynamics (Hermawan et al., 2024).

This situation becomes even more relevant when viewed in the context of Indonesia. Data from Badan Pusat Statistik 2023 (Central Statistics Indonesia), shows that approximately 40% of Generation Z college graduates face a skills mismatch with industry demands, contributing to a high rate of educated unemployment at 9.25%. Organizations in Indonesia, particularly in the manufacturing and service sectors, still face difficulties in integrating young workers, mainly due to the limited availability of suitable career development programs. Consequently, this situation could weaken national competitiveness amid the competition of the Industry 4.0 era.

This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of career adaptability, which emphasizes the importance of an individual's readiness to cope with career changes and job demands (Savickas, 2013). Individuals with high levels of career adaptability tend to be better equipped to handle career transitions and minimize competency gaps. However, research indicates that Generation Z's adaptability levels remain varied, particularly during the transition from education to the workforce (Fitri et al., 2023). Additionally, differing values and generational gaps contribute to misalignment between individuals and organizations (Twenge, 2017), ultimately impacting employee engagement and retention.

This mismatch highlights the need for career management strategies that focus not only on enhancing competencies but also on aligning individual values with organizational goals. In this context, the concepts of the protean career, where individuals independently manage their careers, and the boundaryless career, which enables cross organizational mobility, are becoming increasingly relevant (Rudolph et al., 2022). Empirical studies show that these approaches are effective in enhancing Generation Z's competency readiness to align with organizational needs (Barhate & Dirudha, 2020).

Based on the issues outlined above, this study seeks to examine how the dynamics of Generation Z career management can bridge the gap between competencies and organizational needs in Indonesia. It also aims to identify the key obstacles and supporting factors that affect the career management process of Generation Z regarding organizational competencies, as well as to explore the most effective career management strategies for organizations to optimize Generation Z contributions to competency alignment and performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generation Z in the Workplace

Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who are now beginning to dominate the global workforce. This generation is known as "digital native", meaning individuals who have grown up in an environment heavily influenced by digital technology and rapid, widespread access to information (Schroth, 2019). These conditions shape the unique characteristics that distinguish Generation Z from previous generations.

In general, Generation Z prefers work flexibility, requires prompt feedback, and is oriented toward meaning and purpose in their work (Twenge, 2017). They tend to value work experiences that offer opportunities for learning and self-development more than long-term stability alone. However, despite their strengths in digital literacy, Generation Z also faces various challenges, particularly in interpersonal skills, communication, and workplace resilience (World Economic Forum, 2023). Research by Sunaryanto and Idrus (2025) indicates a gap between the characteristics of Generation Z and organizational expectations, which impacts their productivity and ability to adapt in the workplace. Therefore, a more adaptive human resource management approach is needed to manage this generation.

Skills Gap

Skills gap refers to the mismatch between the skills individuals own and the skills required by organizations or the labor market (Becker, 1993). In the context of the modern workplace, this gap is not limited to technical skills but also encompasses soft skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The phenomenon of the skills gap is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of Generation Z, who, despite their technological advantages, are often not yet fully prepared to face the complex demands of the workforce. Research by Fotaleno and Batubara (2024) indicates that the skills gap is one of the primary factors hindering Generation Z's transition into the workforce.

Additionally, Hermawan et al. (2024) found that Generation Z's work readiness in Indonesia remains suboptimal, particularly regarding adaptability and resilience to workplace pressures. This indicates that the skills gap is not merely technical but also relates to mental preparedness and work behavior. Therefore, strategic interventions through industry driven training and development are necessary.

Career Management

Career management is the process of planning, developing, and managing an individual's career path within an organization (Greenhaus et al., 2019). In modern organizations, the concept of career management has shifted from a linear model to one that is more flexible, dynamic, and competency-based.

For Generation Z, career management has more complex characteristics. This generation tends to have unconventional career orientations, such as a tendency toward job hopping, a desire for rapid self-development, and a preference for continuous learning (Schroth, 2019).

These conditions require organizations to move away from traditional career approaches and adopt more adaptive, personalized, and technology-based approaches. Organizations need to provide clear career paths, competency development programs, and continuous learning systems to improve retention and engagement among Generation Z employees.

The Theory of Career Adaptability

The theory of career adaptability proposed by Savickas (2013) explains that individuals need to be psychosocially prepared to face change and uncertainty in the workplace. This concept consists of four main dimensions: concern (concern for the future), control (the ability to manage career decisions), curiosity (the desire to explore opportunities), and confidence (confidence in facing challenges).

In the context of Generation Z, career adaptability is particularly crucial given the increasingly complex and rapidly changing dynamics of the workplace. Research by Fitri et al. (2023) indicates that Generation Z's level of career adaptability is relatively strong, though weaknesses remain in the areas of confidence and control.

Low levels in these two dimensions can lead individuals to lack confidence in making career decisions and face difficulties in tackling workplace challenges. This has the potential to widen the gap between individual competencies and organizational needs. Therefore, organizations need to develop career development programs capable of enhancing all four dimensions in a balanced manner.

Generation Gap Theory

The generation gap theory explains that differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors across generations can influence workplace dynamics within an organization (Twenge, 2017). Generation Z has different characteristics compared to previous generations, particularly in terms of work orientation, flexibility, and work-life balance.

These differences often lead to a mismatch between employee expectations and organizational policies. For example, Generation Z tends to desire work flexibility and quick feedback, while organizations still adhere to rigid work systems. This can result in decreased performance and increased employee turnover (Schroth, 2019).

Therefore, organizations need to understand the characteristics of each generation and create an inclusive and adaptive work environment. This approach is crucial for minimizing intergenerational conflict and enhancing team effectiveness.

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is a state in which individuals feel they have control, meaning, competence, and impact over their work (Spreitzer, 1995). This concept comprises four main dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

In terms of Generation Z, psychological empowerment is a key factor in boosting motivation, engagement, and work performance. This generation tends to be more motivated when they feel their work is meaningful and makes a tangible contribution to the organization.

Soerjoatmodjo's (2025) research indicates that the dimensions of competence and work meaning have a significant influence on Generation Z's work motivation. However, the dimensions of autonomy (self-determination) and impact remain relatively low. This suggests that organizations need to provide employees with greater autonomy to make decisions and contribute meaningfully to their work. Thus, psychological empowerment can serve as a key strategy to bridge competency gaps while enhancing Generation Z's performance in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Generation Z's career management, particularly in bridging the gap between their competencies and the organization's evolving needs.

The research subjects consist of Generation Z individuals who have work experience as well as Human Resources (HR) practitioners involved in employee career management and development. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria tailored to the research objectives to ensure the data collected is more relevant.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore the informant's experiences and perspectives, while observation and documentation served as supporting data to ensure the information obtained was comprehensive and reliable.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, which consists of the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis process was carried out in stages and continuously throughout the research. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation and member checking techniques were used, involving the informants again in the data verification process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

How Generation Z career management bridge the competency gap with organizational needs in Indonesia

The analysis results indicate that Generation Z's career management dynamics tend to be flexible and self directed, as reflected in the concepts of the protean career and the boundaryless career. This generation no longer relies entirely on organizations but takes the initiative to develop their own competencies through various means, such as participating in online training, gaining work experience across different fields, and leveraging digital technology. This indicates that Generation Z prioritizes self development over pursuing long term job stability (Schroth, 2019).

The concepts of the protean career and the boundaryless career explain that individuals today are more self reliant in managing their careers and do not depend on a single organization (Rudolph et al., 2022). This phenomenon is particularly evident among Generation Z, who tend to engage in job hopping, freelance work, or work across multiple fields.

This situation indicates that traditional career patterns are beginning to be abandoned. However, on the other hand, organizations are often not yet prepared to accommodate these changes. Consequently, there is a mismatch between organizational career management systems and the preferences of Generation Z. This underscores the importance of adapting career management strategies to better align with the evolving times.

However, these developments have not yet fully bridged the gap between employees' competencies and organizational needs. This is evident in the imbalance between relatively strong technical skills and still lacking non-technical skills, such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. This situation indicates that the competency gap is not limited to technical skills but also involves interpersonal skills and work readiness, which are increasingly critical in today's workplace (World Economic Forum, 2023).

When viewed through the lens of career adaptability theory, Generation Z exhibits a high level of curiosity and concern for the future, as evidenced by their enthusiasm for learning and exploring career opportunities. However, weaknesses are still evident in the aspects of self-control and self-confidence. This causes some individuals to hesitate in making career decisions and leaves them unprepared to handle workplace pressures. Savickas (2013) states that these four aspects must develop in a balanced manner for individuals to adapt to changes in the workplace.

This situation is further exacerbated by a phenomenon occurring in Indonesia, where many Generation Z graduates still struggle to find employment because their skills do not yet align with industry needs. The high rate of educated unemployment serves as an indicator of a gap between graduates competencies and the demands of the job market (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This suggests that while Generation Z is active in exploring opportunities, they still need to build their confidence and decision-making skills regarding career choices.

Additionally, the dynamic of differing values between Generation Z and organizations impacts the effectiveness of career management. Generation Z tends to prioritize flexibility, the meaning of work, and a balance between personal life and work. On the other hand, many organizations still implement rigid and hierarchical work systems. This mismatch can hinder the development of individual potential and widen the competency gap (Twenge, 2017).

Thus, it can be concluded that the dynamics of Generation Z's career management actually have the potential to reduce the competency gap, but this potential has not yet been fully realized. Its success depends heavily on individuals' adaptability as well as the alignment between Generation Z's values and the systems and culture implemented within the organization.

Barriers and Enabling factors in Influencing Career Management Processes Among Generation Z

The analysis results indicate that the effectiveness of Generation Z's career management is influenced by a combination of inhibiting and supporting factors, both internal and external. Internally, one of the main obstacles lies in the low levels of confidence and control within career adaptability. Although Generation Z has a strong desire to learn, they often lack the confidence to make career decisions and cope with workplace pressures. This indicates that the issue lies not in a lack of potential, but in their psychological readiness not yet being fully developed. This finding aligns with research stating that Generation Z's work readiness remains weak in terms of adaptability and resilience (Hermawan et al., 2024).

However, behind these obstacles lie strong supporting factors, namely high curiosity and a focus on the meaning of work. Generation Z tends to have high intrinsic motivation, especially when the work they do is perceived as having clear value and purpose. This condition serves as a crucial asset in career development, as individuals are driven to continuously learn and

enhance their competencies independently (Schroth, 2019). In other words, although mental readiness is not yet fully established, the potential for growth is actually quite significant.

From an external perspective, the main obstacle lies in the suboptimal career management systems within organizations. Many organizations still employ rigid approaches that lack flexibility, making them incompatible with the dynamics of Generation Z. Additionally, the limited availability of training programs tailored to industry needs further exacerbates the skills gap. This situation indicates that the skills gap is not solely caused by individuals but also by a lack of organizational support for human resource development (Becker, 1993).

On the other hand, supportive factors within the organizational environment are beginning to emerge through increased awareness of the importance of career development and competency based training. Some organizations are now offering digital training programs, mentoring, and continuous learning systems that can help Generation Z enhance their skills. Additionally, the application of the concept of psychological empowerment serves as a supportive factor, particularly regarding the aspects of meaning and competence, which can enhance work motivation (Spreitzer, 1995). Nevertheless, the aspects of self-determination and impact still need to be improved so that Generation Z can contribute more effectively.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the barriers and enablers in Generation Z's career management operate simultaneously. Generation Z possesses significant potential in terms of motivation and learning ability, yet still faces limitations in mental readiness and organizational support. Consequently, the success of career management depends not only on the individual but also on the extent to which organizations can provide adaptive systems that support the development of this generation.

Effective career management strategies for organizations to optimize Generation Z contributions to competency alignment and performance

Effective career management strategies for Generation Z must be adaptive, flexible, and focused on holistic individual development. We propose a career management strategy model that is most effective for organizations to optimize Generation Z's contributions toward aligning competencies and performance, consisting of five main domains, as shown in the figure below:

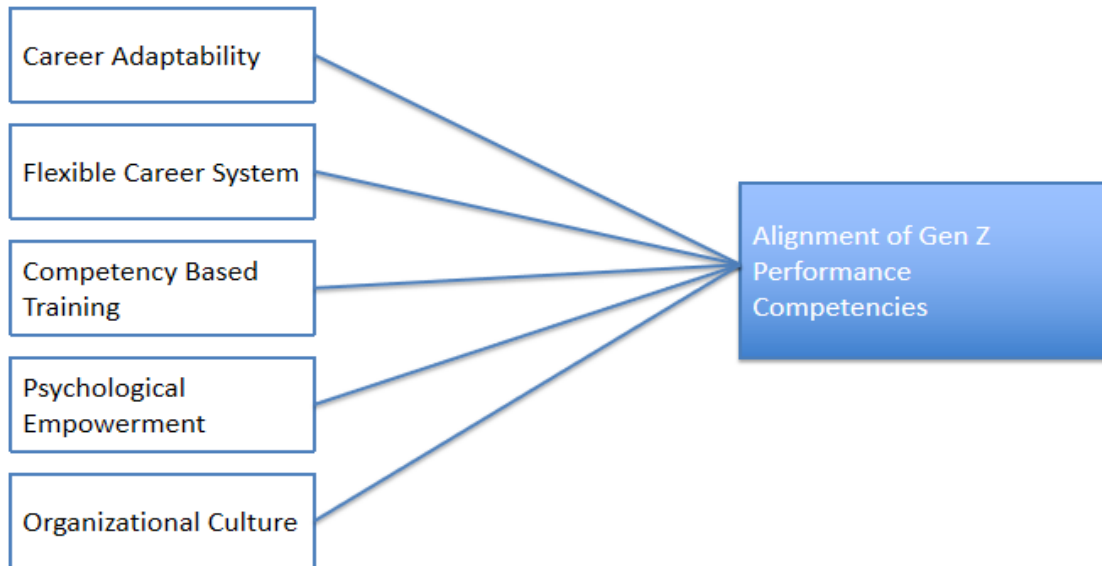


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Career Management Strategies for Generation Z
(Source: Developed by the authors based on literature synthesis)

The first strategy is to strengthen career adaptability, particularly in the areas of confidence and control, which remain areas of weakness. Organizations need to design programs such as mentoring, coaching, and work simulations that can help boost self-confidence and career decision-making skills. This is important because career adaptability is key to navigating the dynamic changes in the world of work (Savickas, 2013). In practice, several companies and digital platforms currently offer online training and mentoring programs, such as certification-based training and virtual internship programs, which help Generation Z improve their work readiness. This demonstrates that the right interventions can tangibly strengthen career adaptability.

Second, implementing a flexible career system is also a relevant strategy, accommodating the concepts of protean careers and boundaryless careers through non-linear career paths, job rotations, and cross-functional opportunities. This approach allows Generation Z to develop competencies more broadly and in alignment with organizational needs (Rudolph et al., 2022). This phenomenon is evident in the rising trends of job hopping, freelancing, and project-based work among Generation Z, indicating that they prefer dynamic career paths over traditional careers within a single organization.

Third, organizations need to strengthen competency-based training that focuses not only on hard skills but also on soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem solving. Training tailored to industry needs will help bridge existing competency gaps. This aligns with human capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of investing in skill development to boost productivity (Becker, 1993). In practice, many companies are now beginning to offer digital-based training, such as data analysis, artificial intelligence, and soft

skills development through workshops and bootcamps, as part of efforts to align employee competencies with industry needs.

Fourth, enhancing psychological empowerment is also a key strategy, particularly through the provision of autonomy (self-determination) and opportunities to make a tangible impact in their work. With trust and opportunities to contribute, Generation Z will be more motivated and engaged in their work, thereby enabling them to optimize their performance (Spreitzer, 1995). However, in practice, many organizations have yet to fully provide such opportunities, leading young employees to feel less involved in decision-making and lacking a sense of ownership over their work.

And finally, fifth, adapting organizational culture is also a factor of equal importance. Organizations need to create a more flexible, inclusive, and collaborative work environment to align with the characteristics of Generation Z. This aims to bridge the gap in values between individuals and the organization, thereby making the career development process more effective. Current trends indicate that many companies are beginning to implement hybrid and flexible work systems in response to Generation Z's demands for work-life balance. This reinforces the notion that alignment of values between employees and the organization influences engagement and work performance (Twenge, 2017).

Therefore, effective career management strategies must focus not only on enhancing individual competencies but also on adapting organizational systems and culture. Empirical evidence demonstrates that when organizations successfully adapt to the dynamics of Generation Z, career development processes can proceed more effectively, and competency gaps can be minimized.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that career management for Generation Z has strong potential to bridge the competency gap between individual capabilities and organizational requirements, although it has not yet been fully optimized. Generation Z demonstrates a flexible and self-directed approach to career development, as reflected in the concepts of protean and boundaryless careers. However, this has not entirely resolved the competency gap, as an imbalance remains between relatively strong technical skills and weaker soft skills, particularly in communication, collaboration, and adaptability. The effectiveness of career management is influenced by internal factors, such as low confidence and limited control in career adaptability, as well as external factors, including rigid organizational structures and limited competency-based training.

To handle these issues, organizations need to implement adaptive and ethically grounded career management strategies. These include strengthening career adaptability, providing comprehensive competency-based training, implementing flexible career systems, enhancing psychological empowerment, and aligning organizational culture with Generation Z values. Ultimately, bridging the competency gap requires collaboration between individuals and organizations, where alignment between individual capabilities and

organizational systems can improve employee performance, increase productivity, and support long-term organizational sustainability.

FUTURE STUDY

This study extends prior research on career management and skills mismatch by reconceptualizing the competency gap among Generation Z is not merely caused by a lack of technical or soft skills, but rather by a systemic misalignment between individual career adaptability and organizational career management systems (Savickas, 2013; Rudolph et al., 2022). While previous studies have predominantly examined career adaptability, psychological factors, or organizational systems in isolation, this research integrates these dimensions into a unified framework. In doing so, it offers a more comprehensive explanation of how individual readiness and organizational structures interact to shape competency alignment outcomes.

Based on the empirical findings of this study, Generation Z demonstrates a paradoxical condition at the individual level. While they possess strong digital literacy and high levels of curiosity, which support continuous learning (Schroth, 2019), they still exhibit weaknesses in the dimensions of control and confidence within career adaptability.

This finding aligns with prior research indicating that Generation Z often struggles with decision-making and resilience in the workplace (Fitri et al., 2023). Interview data further reveal that many informants experience uncertainty when facing career choices and workplace pressures, despite having adequate technical competencies. This indicates that the competency gap extends beyond skill possession and is strongly influenced by psychological readiness.

Furthermore, this study finds that psychological empowerment acts as a critical mediating factor in transforming individual competencies into actual job performance. In line with Spreitzer (1995), the dimensions of meaning and competence are relatively strong among Generation Z, as they tend to be motivated by purposeful work. However, the dimensions of self-determination and impact remain relatively low, primarily due to limited autonomy provided by organizations. Empirical evidence from this study indicates that when employees are not given sufficient authority to make decisions, their competencies are not fully utilized, leading to suboptimal performance outcomes.

From an organizational perspective, the findings reveal that traditional career management systems remain a significant structural barrier. Many organizations still rely on rigid hierarchical structures, linear career paths, and standardized training programs, which are increasingly incompatible with Generation Z's preference for flexibility and rapid development (Twenge, 2017). The data shows that informants often perceive organizational systems as too restrictive, limiting their ability to explore and develop competencies dynamically. This misalignment reduces employee engagement and contributes to higher turnover intentions.

More importantly, this study highlights that the effectiveness of career management is strongly influenced by the degree of person organization fit.

The findings indicate that misalignment in values particularly regarding work-life balance, flexibility, and meaningful work creates significant friction between Generation Z employees and organizational systems, reinforcing the argument that competency alignment is not purely a technical process, but also a psychological and cultural alignment process. When alignment is low, even well-designed training programs fail to produce optimal outcomes.

In addition, this study identifies the emergence of hybrid career patterns among Generation Z, characterized by the integration of protean and boundaryless career orientations (Rudolph et al., 2022), which enable individuals to independently manage their career paths across organizational boundaries and gain diverse experiences and skills. However, the findings also show that without structured guidance from organizations, such flexibility may lead to in fragmented competency development rather than coherent career growth.

In the Indonesian context, these dynamics are further complicated by structural challenges, particularly the mismatch between higher education outcomes and industry needs. The findings align with national data indicating a high rate of educated unemployment due to skills mismatch. This study reveals that the transition from education to employment remains a critical phase where competency gaps are most evident. Therefore, bridging this gap requires not only organizational intervention but also stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industry.

Based on these findings, this study proposes an integrative framework referred to as the Career Management Strategies for Generation Z, which emphasizes the interaction between five key domains which is career adaptability, flexible career systems, competency-based training, psychological empowerment, and adaptive organizational culture. The model highlights that sustainable competency alignment can only be achieved when these five elements are developed simultaneously and in a balanced manner.

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