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Workplace Flexibility Expectations Among Generation Z Employees: Evidence from the Mangaluru Region

Keerthan, Aishwarya

Department of P G Studies in Commerce, Govinda Dasa College, Surathkal

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Abstract: Generation Z is entering India's workforce with fresh expectations especially when it comes to flexibility and work-life balance. This study aimed to understand how young professionals in Mangaluru feel about workplace flexibility, and how those feelings affect their job satisfaction. To dig deeper, we conducted a survey among people working in education, IT/ITES, healthcare, and finance. The feedback was pretty consistent: most respondents preferred flexible options like adjustable hours, remote work, and even shared roles. These choices seemed to boost their sense of independence, trust in leadership, and mental well-being. Still, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Many workplaces haven't quite caught up. Some policies like compressed workweeks or access to extended leave—were either poorly implemented or not clearly communicated. A surprising number of people didn't even know if their organization offered mental health support. In short, Gen Z is ready for a more flexible future. But many organisations still have work to do. More awareness, better communication, and broader studies could help close the gap and create workplaces that truly meet the needs of this generation.

Key words: Generation Z, Workplace Flexibility, Employee Expectations, Remote Work, Work-Life Balance.

I. Introduction

The expectations of people for their jobs and the way they work have changed significantly in the last ten years. This is due to digital technology, generational shifts, and occurrences like the COVID-19 epidemic. New ideas and values are now brought to the workplace by Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012. Having come of age with technology, they would rather have flexible work choices including hybrid models, flexible hours, and remote work. For them, flexibility is a fundamental requirement that underwrites their personal development, work-life balance, and mental health rather than a perk. Companies must modify their conventional workplaces to satisfy these new needs as more Gen Z people enter the workforce.

Particularly in terms of flexibility, this research helps businesses know what Gen Z employees want from their workplace. Companies that grasp these expectations can design improved work environments that retain young workers happy, productive, and loyal. This helps to lower employee turnover in addition to being advantageous for corporate success. From an academic perspective, this study advances our understanding of how several generations perceive work and how businesses can successfully handle those changes. Additionally highlighting local areas like Mangaluru, where not much research is presently accessible, the center also

We know almost nothing about what Gen Z workers in tier-II cities such Mangaluru think about flexible working, even though there is plenty of research on workplace trends in big cities and other nations. This dearth of knowledge makes it difficult for local businesses to satisfy the demands of millennial workers. Companies who do not grasp these expectations could have low morale, low performance, and high employee turnover issues. By learning how Gen Z in Mangaluru perceives job flexibility and what companies can do to adjust, this study hopes to help to fill this hole.

II. Literature Review

Generation Z, commonly defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, is beginning to play a visible role in today's workforce. Their outlook on work has been influenced by growing up in a digital world and experiencing global changes early in life. As a result, their expectations around workplace flexibility, leadership styles, compensation models, and organizational culture differ in notable ways from previous generations. This review examines recent research to provide a clearer view of what Gen Z is seeking in modern workplaces.

Flexibility and Work-Life Balance: Flexibility has become a non-negotiable feature of work for many members of Gen Z. They tend to look for employers that offer remote or hybrid work options, flexible schedules, and mental health support. According to Reddy et al. (2024), these factors play a major role in how satisfied and productive Gen Z employees feel in their roles. Nair (2023) also found that Gen Z values organizations that support personal time, emphasize collaboration, and promote inclusive work cultures. For this generation, flexibility is closely tied to autonomy and overall well-being, rather than being viewed as a perk.

Leadership Preferences and Organizational Culture: Gen Z has different expectations from their leaders compared to earlier cohorts. They are more drawn to leaders who show empathy, are easy to talk to, and treat others fairly. In a study of IT professionals, Yılmaz, Kısactutan, and Karatepe (2024) observed that Gen Z prefers leaders who avoid rigid hierarchies and promote gender equality and open communication. A separate study by Vijay Anand and Mukesh (2024), focusing on management students, highlighted the importance of ethical conduct, supportive relationships, and transparent culture. These findings suggest that leadership training and organizational values need to shift toward greater emotional intelligence and integrity.

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Recruitment, Learning, and Career Development: The way Gen Z finds and learns about jobs has been shaped by their constant exposure to digital media. Traditional recruitment methods are less effective with this group. Pandit (2023) reports that approaches involving social media outreach, peer referrals, and campus-based activities tend to work better. Gen Z also prefers learning experiences that are flexible and self-directed. Nair (2023) points out that their education, which often included digital tools and hands-on experiences, influences how they engage with professional development. This highlights the need for training systems that are responsive, tech-enabled, and tailored to individual learning styles.

Compensation, Retention, and Employer Branding: Although fair pay remains important, Gen Z often looks beyond salary when deciding whether to stay in a job. Pandit (2023) found that many value personal growth, flexible working conditions, and being recognized for their contributions. Nair (2023) emphasized the importance of aligning organizational values with employee beliefs, especially when it comes to ethical leadership and brand image. For Gen Z, feeling connected to the mission of a company is just as vital as receiving a paycheck. Employers who want to keep them engaged should focus on purpose-driven work and transparent communication in addition to offering competitive compensation.

Objectives of the study

- To evaluate the impact of workplace flexibility on the expectations of Gen Z employees.
- To analyze the role of work-life balance in shaping the expectations of Gen Z employees regarding workplace flexibility.
- To investigate the influence of organizational culture on the expectations of Gen Z employees regarding workplace flexibility.

III. Research Methodology

Research Approach and Design: This research combines exploratory and descriptive methods to understand what Generation Z employees in Mangaluru expect when it comes to workplace flexibility. As Gen Z is a newer workforce group shaped by technology and cultural shifts, the exploratory part helps uncover new patterns in their preferences. At the same time, the descriptive side allows these patterns to be clearly laid out and analyzed in a structured way.

Research Design and Instrumentation: We gathered primary data using a structured survey. The questionnaire featured closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to gather consistent responses. Topics included flexible work setups, how much control employees have over their tasks, how supportive their organizations are, and how flexibility affects their satisfaction and work-life balance. This format helped make responses easy to compare and reduced the risk of researcher bias.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Strategy: The study focused on Gen Z employees those born between 1997 and 2012 working across sectors like IT, education, healthcare, and retail in Mangaluru. A sample of 120–150 was selected to provide a solid basis for analysis while keeping the findings relevant to the local setting.

To get a fair mix of responses, we used stratified random sampling. We grouped participants by sector, then selected them randomly within those groups. In cases where direct access was limited, snowball sampling was also used - meaning some participants recommended others from their networks. This approach allowed us to include a diverse group while keeping the process systematic.

Sources of Data: Primary data came from survey responses covering:

- Preferred work styles (remote, hybrid, on-site)
- Flexible working hours and schedule preferences
- Autonomy in handling tasks
- Views on how well organizations respond to flexibility needs
- The role of flexibility in productivity, satisfaction, and personal balance.

Secondary data came from academic journals, HR policy documents, government labour reports, company publications, and trusted databases. These sources helped give context to the findings and allowed comparisons with broader trends.

Data Analysis Techniques: We used descriptive statistics to analyze the data. These included:

- Frequency analysis to see how responses were distributed
- Percentage analysis to compare results across different groups

These tools helped break down the data and highlight patterns in a clear and accessible way.

Limitations of the Study: The study is limited to Gen Z employees in Mangaluru, so the results may not apply to other places. Although we used both random and snowball sampling, the diversity of the sample might still be limited due to time and resource constraints. Also, since the data is self-reported, it may include some bias or example, from memory gaps or participants trying to give socially acceptable answers.

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IV. Major Findings of the study

Insights gathered from Generation Z employees in Mangaluru highlight a distinct set of expectations around workplace flexibility, autonomy, and support. A look at the demographic data shows that women made up 59% of the respondents, and a majority 60% were in the 22–27 age group, reflecting a workforce that is both young and predominantly female. Most participants (71%) held full-time positions, with 35% working in education. This points to a growing normalization of flexible and hybrid work structures in sectors like academia, especially in the post-pandemic period.

One of the most consistent findings was a widespread preference for flexibility in how and when work is done. Most participants (88%) had access to flexible work hours, while 74% said they were allowed to work remotely. Additionally, 70% mentioned they could shift their schedules to suit their needs, showing that many organizations are accommodating personalized routines. Less traditional work formats like job-sharing (86%) and compressed workweeks (67%) also received favorable feedback. However, there was limited awareness around extended leave policies, suggesting a need for better internal communication about available options.

The survey also revealed how much importance Gen Z places on independence and well-being. A significant 92% of respondents wanted control over the timing and method of their tasks. Similarly, 86% felt they were trusted by their supervisors to manage their responsibilities. Around 72% said they maintained a healthy balance between work and personal life, and 89% felt their leaders supported them in doing so. Overall, the results underscore Gen Z's desire for a workplace culture built on trust, flexibility, and empathy.

V. Discussion

It's clear from the responses that Gen Z workers in Mangaluru aren't just hoping for flexibility they expect it. They want to choose when they work, where they work, and how they get things done. For them, remote work and flexible schedules aren't perks; they're just how work should be. This isn't surprising, especially since many of them grew up online and care a lot about balance between life and work (Reddy et al., 2024; Nair, 2023).

So what does this mean for employers? Flexibility can't be an afterthought anymore. It needs to be part of how companies run. If done well, it can reduce stress and keep people around longer. But if only certain teams or individuals get that freedom, it could cause friction. HR teams really need to make policies clear, especially around things like leave or wellness benefits. People can't value what they don't understand.

Another thing that stood out: Gen Z wants to be trusted. They don't like being micromanaged. Most of them said they prefer working independently, and they want leaders who treat them like adults. That's not always easy, especially for managers used to a different style. It might be time for leadership to shift a bit less control, more support. Things like mentorship or time management sessions could help, especially for younger workers still figuring things out.

VI. Conclusion

This research set out to understand how Generation Z employees in Mangaluru perceive and experience workplace flexibility. As digital natives entering the workforce during times of rapid transformation, their expectations are naturally different from those of earlier generations. What they value autonomy, meaningful work-life balance, and supportive leadership speaks to a broader shift in how work is defined and experienced today.

The findings show that for many Gen Z professionals, flexibility is more than a perk. It is a key part of what makes a job worth doing. The ability to adjust work schedules, access remote or hybrid arrangements, and be trusted to manage their own tasks ranked high in importance. While some organizations are already adapting to meet these needs, others fall short in areas like clear communication around extended leave, mental health support, and inclusivity.

This study also draws attention to the crucial role of leadership and workplace culture. Employees responded positively when managers trusted them, communicated openly, and demonstrated empathy. These human elements, often overlooked in policy design, appear to be just as important as structural changes like flexible hours or remote options.

Of course, the study is limited to a specific region and workforce demographic. Broader research that includes multiple sectors, cities, and career stages would offer deeper insight. Future studies might also explore how employers interpret flexibility, and whether their policies align with employee expectations.

Ultimately, the message is clear. For organizations looking to attract and retain Gen Z talent, flexibility must be more than a checkbox. It needs to be embedded into workplace culture, supported by leadership, and shaped by ongoing dialogue with employees themselves.

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