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An Analysis of Generation Z's Work Culture Preferences and Their Implications for Human Resource Management in the Tourism Industry: A Case Study of Jember Mini Zoo

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Abstract

This study explores the work culture preferences of Generation Z employees in the tourism sector and examines their implications for human resource management (HRM) strategies within Jember Mini Zoo, a local tourism organization dominated by Gen Z workers. As digital natives with distinct expectations regarding communication, development, and workplace well-being, Gen Z employees require organizational adjustments that differ from conventional management approaches. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The results show that Gen Z values clarity of task instruction, supportive leadership, psychological safety, and opportunities for skill development. Meanwhile, several organizational practices—such as rigid scheduling, emotionally demanding service roles, and limited development structures—do not fully align with their expectations. These misalignments contribute to decreased motivation and increased turnover intentions. The findings underscore the importance of adaptive HRM strategies that are more human-centered, collaborative, and development-oriented to maintain organizational sustainability in tourism environments.

Keywords: Generation Z, Work Culture, Human Resource Management, Tourism Industry, Employee Preferences

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1997 and 2012, has recently entered the workforce in significant numbers and is projected to become one of the most influential segments within various

industries, including tourism. As digital natives, they are accustomed to rapid communication, flexible structures, and environments that value openness and personal well-being. These

expectations shape how they interpret work culture and how they respond to managerial practices. As such, organizations employing a predominantly Gen Z workforce need to understand their preferences in order to design human resource policies that enhance engagement and performance.

In the tourism sector, organizational challenges are unique due to its service-intensive nature, reliance on emotional labor, and operational dependency on visitor traffic. Tourism employees often carry out diverse tasks ranging from front-office interaction to animal handling, hospitality, and maintenance activities—all of which require consistency and professional service demeanor. These demands can conflict with Gen Z's preference for meaningful work, balanced schedules, and supportive environments.

Jember Mini Zoo provides a strategic case setting because approximately 89% of its employees belong to Gen Z. Although the organization promotes a youthful and creative brand identity, daily work routines sometimes impose physical and emotional burdens that shape Gen Z's experiences and expectations. Understanding these dynamics is not only valuable for this particular organization but also for tourism entities more broadly that seek to build sustainable HRM strategies.

This study aims to analyze: (1) the work culture preferences of Gen Z employees, and (2) their implications for HRM strategies in tourism organizations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Characteristics of Generation Z

Gen Z is characterized by technological fluency, a strong desire for independence, and a preference for work environments that support open communication and psychological safety. Prior studies show that they seek roles that allow creativity, personal expression, and purposeful contribution. They tend to value leadership that is transparent, empathetic, and participative rather than authoritarian. For Gen Z, meaningfulness in work becomes a central factor influencing motivation and long-term commitment.

2.2 Work Culture Concepts

Work culture refers to shared values, assumptions, and norms that guide behavior in an organization. According to Denison's model, involvement, adaptability, consistency, and mission clarity are essential cultural dimensions that shape employee experiences. For Gen Z, involvement and adaptability are especially relevant, as they prefer organizations that encourage participation in decision-making, provide constructive feedback, and allow flexibility in task execution. A disconnect between cultural expectations and organizational realities may lead to reduced engagement.

2.3 HRM in Tourism Organizations

The tourism industry involves high levels of customer interaction, dynamic workloads, and fluctuating operational demands. HRM in this sector must balance structured routines with employee-oriented practices. Successful tourism organizations implement coaching-based leadership, continuous learning opportunities, and recognition systems. In addition, ensuring employees' emotional resilience and well-being is crucial due to the emotional labor inherent in the sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative single-case design focusing on Jember Mini Zoo. This approach allows an in-depth exploration of

how Gen Z employees perceive work culture in a natural setting. Data were collected through:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with Gen Z employees, supervisors, and HR personnel.
- **Non-participant observations** of communication patterns, leadership behavior, and workload distribution.
- **Document analysis** including organizational guidelines, internal memos, and HR records.

Thematic analysis was used to categorize patterns and derive insights. Triangulation of data sources strengthened the reliability of findings, while member-checking helped validate interpretations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Role Clarity and Structured Guidance

Gen Z employees appreciate clear explanations, step-by-step instructions, and defined responsibilities. They tend to experience stress when expectations are ambiguous, especially in high-demand tourism settings. Clarity helps them maintain confidence and reduces errors, supporting a smoother operational flow.

2. Supportive and Approachable Leadership

Young employees prefer leaders who function as mentors. They expect frequent feedback delivered constructively, opportunities to ask questions, and leadership that demonstrates empathy. A supportive supervisor helps establish psychological safety, which in turn encourages creativity and initiative.

3. Work-life balance and Well-being

Tourism work at Jember Mini Zoo often requires prolonged physical activity, emotional labor, and irregular workloads during peak seasons. Gen Z employees value rest periods, supportive peer relations, and equitable workload distribution. When these needs are unmet, fatigue and reduced engagement become common outcomes.

4. Learning and Skill Development

Gen Z seeks meaningful development pathways. They feel more committed when exposed to new skills, cross-departmental tasks, and roles that encourage creativity. Training initiatives that emphasize practical, hands-on learning are particularly appreciated.

5. COLLABORATIVE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Gen Z prefers flat communication structures, transparent information flow, and teamwork-based activities. They respond positively to environments where their ideas are heard and validated.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR HRM

Recruitment and Onboarding

Organizations should provide realistic job previews and emphasize the balance between creative tasks and routine responsibilities. Early communication about expectations minimizes psychological gaps.

Leadership Development

Supervisors should be trained in coaching techniques, active listening, and empathetic communication. A leadership style that acknowledges the emotional and developmental needs of Gen Z improves retention.

Performance Management

Continuous feedback systems are more effective for Gen Z than traditional annual evaluations. Recognition of small achievements, transparent KPIs, and collaborative goal setting enhance work motivation.

Employee Development

Cross-training, micro-learning modules, and structured skill development programs meet Gen Z's desire for growth. Clear career pathways help them envision long-term progression.

Well-Being and Emotional Support

Tourism organizations must strengthen rest provisions, workload rotation, and mental health awareness initiatives. Friendly peer relations and supportive supervisors are crucial protective factors for well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Generation Z's work culture preferences center around clarity, supportive leadership, balanced workloads, and opportunities for development. Misalignments between these preferences and organizational realities can reduce engagement and contribute to turnover. Tourism organizations must adopt adaptive HRM practices that acknowledge generational differences, focus on human-centered leadership, and foster psychological safety. By doing so, organizations can optimize workforce performance while supporting long-term sustainability.

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