

**SHIFTING EMPLOYMENT PARADIGM: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE
REVIEW ON GENERATION Z'S PREFERENCE FOR VIRTUAL EMPLOYMENT****Jestoni C. Siarot**<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9963-2001>

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a systematic literature review on Generation Z's growing preference for virtual employment. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, a total of 18 studies published from 2015 to 2025 were identified, screened, and analyzed. The review highlights six key themes that shape Gen Z's shift toward digital work arrangements: workspace flexibility and work-life balance, technological competence and digital fluency, better work opportunities and benefits, structural constraints in traditional work settings, diversity and inclusion, and independence and job autonomy. These themes demonstrate how Gen Z's values and digital upbringing influence their career choices. With these points in mind, organizations can enhance their digital readiness, offer flexible work arrangements, and foster a culture that supports young talent. The findings serve as a guide for workforce planning in today's changing work landscape.

Keywords:

generation z, virtual employment, work preferences, digital fluency, workspace flexibility, employment landscape, structural constraints, PRISMA

INTRODUCTION

The rise of virtual employment has significantly transformed the global employment landscape. This shift has opened many opportunities for individuals and introduced a flexible working environment that particularly appeals to younger generations. Many young professionals now prefer virtual employment over traditional eight-hour office work, seeking greater autonomy and a better work-life balance. Beyond convenience, this preference reflects a transformation, emphasizing the need for innovative management approaches suited to the digital age.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted economic systems, compelling human resource leaders to balance employee welfare with organizational sustainability. Interestingly, recent findings reveal that Generation Z (Gen Z) workers (born 1997-2012) in the United States of America are the least likely generation to prefer fully remote work compared to older generations (Pendell & Agrawal, 2025). These shifts underscore the complex and evolving expectations of the global workforce, necessitating Human Resource (HR) leaders to adopt innovative and adaptable strategies to meet the diverse needs of employees.

In the Philippine context, the shift toward virtual work has also gained traction, particularly in industries such as Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing (Mateo, 2023). Moreover, according to JobStreet by SEEK's Employee Job Happiness Index (2024), Generation Z workers are increasingly dissatisfied with traditional office-based jobs and prefer virtual or flexible work setups. High traffic congestion, long commutes, and rigid office structures, especially in the National Capital Region, further drive this preference. Such trends

pose challenges for employers and government human resource offices in attracting and retaining young talent who increasingly value remote work opportunities over traditional employment.

In Davao Region, the increasing number of Gen Z individuals opting for online or freelance jobs instead of entering formal government or office-based employment presents a growing challenge for local human resource management. Many young professionals and graduates prefer flexible virtual work arrangements. According to SunStar Davao (2024), remote work opportunities have significantly expanded in the region, with Gen Z increasingly engaging in virtual assistance for foreign clients.

This study uses a systematic review to synthesize current evidence on the factors influencing Generation Z's shift toward virtual employment. Such an approach provides a comprehensive understanding that can inform policy development, workforce planning, and organizational strategies in the context of an evolving employment landscape.

OBJECTIVES

This paper reviewed published articles about Generation Z's preference for virtual employment through a systematic literature review. Considering the growing shift toward digital and flexible work arrangements, this paper sheds light on the factors influencing Gen Z's employment choices and the implications of this shift on organizations and labor markets. Accordingly, the objectives of this study were the following, which support a thematic synthesis following the PRISMA framework:

- 1) Determine the data sources used in articles examining Generation Z's preference for virtual employment; and
- 2) Determine the various factors and determinants identified in the literature that shape Gen Z's preference for virtual work arrangements.

METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a systematic review of the literature, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines to maintain transparency and structure in the selection, evaluation, and synthesis of studies (Page et al., 2021). A comprehensive search was performed across multiple academic databases to ensure contextual relevance. Articles published within the last ten years (2015–2025) addressing Generation Z's preference for virtual employment in both the Philippines and global contexts were included. Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection process, focusing on studies that employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs with empirical data and were published in English. Studies with unclear methodologies or lacking precision were excluded to uphold the quality and significance of the review. To ensure methodological consistency throughout the review process, the study also followed guidance provided in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (Chandler et al., 2019).

Figure 1 below illustrates the selection process using a PRISMA flow diagram, which outlines the steps of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. This method helped identify key themes and patterns in the chosen works, providing a clear and reliable view of Gen Z preferences for virtual employment.

Academic databases were used to gather studies, and the search followed a set of keywords such as “generation z employment”, “virtual employment preferences”, “generation z in the workplace”, “virtual job over traditional”, “young professionals”, AND “remote work” OR “online job” OR “virtual job” integrated Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” to optimize and broaden the search results. A total of 390 sources from 2015 to 2025 were collected from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Springer, Academia, and Philippine sources. After screening, checking for eligibility, and removing duplicates, 18 studies were included for synthesis.

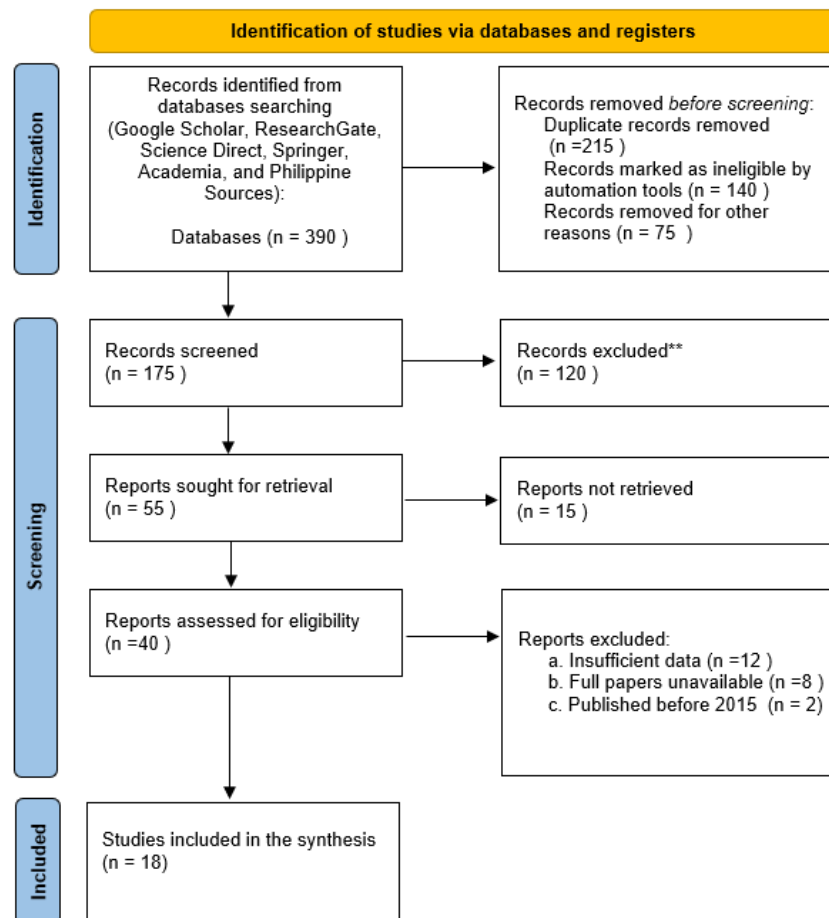


Figure 1. Selection Flow using PRISMA Guidelines

Source/Database	Number of Studies	Key Themes
Google Scholar	7	Workspace Flexibility and Work-Life Balance
ResearchGate	3	Technological Competence and Digital Fluency
Science Direct	2	Better Work Opportunities and Benefits
Springer	2	Structural Constraints in Traditional Work Settings
Academia	2	Diversity, Inclusion, and Workplace Culture
Philippine Sources	2	Independence and Job Autonomy

Table 1. Summary of Distribution of Studies and Key Themes in Peer-Reviewed Journals and Databases

As shown in Table 1, the distribution of studies reviewed and key themes for the systematic analysis is presented. Google Scholar has the highest number of studies ($n = 7$), with the key theme of Workspace Flexibility and Work-Life Balance. ResearchGate ($n = 3$) contributed to the key theme of Technological Competence and Digital Fluency, while Science Direct ($n = 2$) contributed to the key theme of Better Work Opportunities and Benefits. Springer ($n = 2$) contributed the key theme of Structural Constraints in Traditional Work Settings. Academia ($n=2$), which provided the key theme Diversity, Inclusion, and Workplace Culture. Lastly, Philippine Sources with the key theme of Independence and Job Autonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the PRISMA-guided review process, 18 peer-reviewed studies and institutional reports were identified and analyzed to evaluate the various factors for Generation Z's preference for virtual employment. Using data sources such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Springer, Academia, and Philippine

Sources, the analysis revealed six major themes that encapsulate the shift in the employment paradigm in this modern generation. These themes also serve as a framework for assessing the significance of organizational and leadership change in meeting the needs of Generation Z and staying relevant in today's employment landscape.

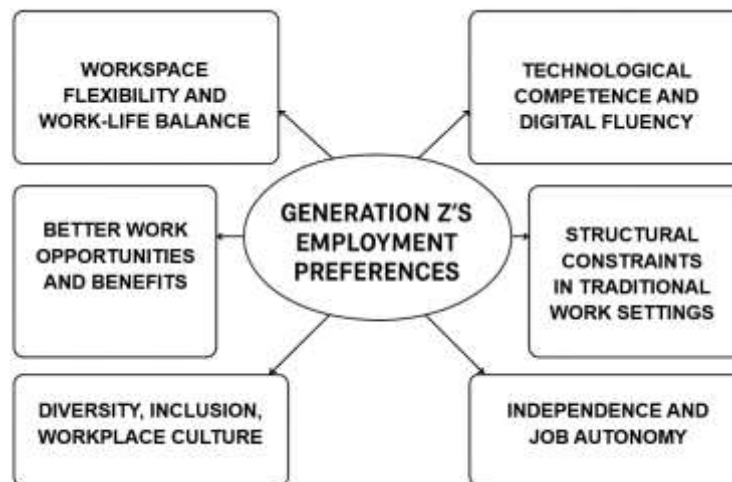


Figure 2. Conceptual Map of Key Themes Identified in the Study

Workspace Flexibility and Work-Life Balance. Lee et al. (2024) found that younger workers place significantly greater emphasis on workplace flexibility compared to older generations, viewing it as essential for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Flexibility is closely tied to autonomy, which Allam and Shaik (2020) identify as a key factor influencing overall quality of work life. Kompa (2019) further explains that flexible work arrangements help young employees better integrate their personal and professional responsibilities. Similarly, Hess and Jepsen (2016) reported that Generation Z is particularly motivated to achieve meaningful work-life balance and values flexible scheduling and mental well-being programs as essential contributors to job satisfaction. Browne (2018) also observed that the rise of remote work and digital office solutions has shifted attitudes about where and when work should be done, challenging the traditional, rigid nine-to-five work structure. Overall, these studies suggest that workspace flexibility and work-life balance are key factors influencing Generation Z's employment preferences. Overall, these findings indicate that Generation Z prioritizes flexibility and balance, reflecting a shift in expectations about work environments and employment conditions.

Technological Competence and Digital Fluency. Tulgan (2019) explains that Generation Z has been shaped by rapid technological progress and social change, resulting in a distinct set of values and expectations regarding work. Building on this idea, Smith and Nichols (2015) demonstrated how this technological upbringing influences workplace behavior, noting that digital tools impact Gen Z's productivity, communication, and ability to collaborate with others. Their survey of young professionals and managers revealed strong adaptability and a strong view that digital tools are essential for clear communication and effective performance. This reliance on technology stems from lifelong exposure to devices, the internet, and social media, which shape both their habits and expectations. As a result, Gen Z is perceived as educated, informed, and interconnected (Ocampo, 2021; Nieżurawska, 2023), a view supported by numerous studies on their preference for digital settings, balanced work arrangements, and evolving career aspirations. Lazar et al. (2023) refer to them as digital natives, emphasizing their natural ease with digital tools. They also expect workplaces to be innovative and well-equipped, with job roles shaped by digital readiness rather than physical space. In line with this, Saputra et al. (2021) found that Gen Z prefers companies with strong technological systems that facilitate seamless work processes. Their advanced digital skills help raise productivity and support organizational

performance, adding value and strengthening competitiveness (Chillakuri, 2020). These findings indicate that Generation Z's technological competence and digital fluency shape their expectations for modern workplaces and influence organizational strategies for engagement and productivity.

Better Work Opportunities and Benefits. The work environment, company policies, leadership style, employee relations, compensation, benefits, and growth opportunities, along with personal and professional development, are key factors that motivate Gen Z employees to perform well (Gochangco and Ocenar, 2024). This generation seeks connections with groups that support their goals and align with their values (Rice and Potts, 2024). Villena (2020) notes that freelancers choose home-based work mainly because it offers flexible schedules, competitive pay, and higher job satisfaction, with many receiving good evaluations and completing projects with satisfied clients, sometimes earning more than the minimum wage. Following the emergence of burnout, time poverty, and financial insecurity among older generations, Gen Z expects more from workplaces, including additional time off, remote work options, responsible practices, and higher salaries (Francis, 2022). Son (2022) found that approximately 22% of employed Gen Zs hold multiple jobs, with 31% running small businesses and 25% engaging in online or freelance work, including clerical tasks, data entry, bookkeeping, writing, and translation. They take extra work to gain experience, cover expenses, and prepare for labor market risks, while also building new skills and exploring personal interests. Income and career growth remain top priorities, with salary and advancement shaping job choices, along with benefits, flexible work arrangements, and meaningful work aligned with personal advocacies. Some even earn more than entry-level teachers through specialized roles (Necesito and Mamaril, 2025). Research by EY (2016) indicates that Gen Z prefers organizations that offer learning and development opportunities, fair pay and promotion, job security, work-life balance through flexible options, and diverse and inclusive environments that welcome different styles, genders, races, and perspectives. These findings suggest that Generation Z highly values competitive compensation, career growth, and supportive workplace environments, which strongly influence their employment decisions and engagement.

Structural Constraints in Traditional Work Settings. Villena (2020) notes that one of the most pressing issues in the Philippines is the limited availability of quality job opportunities that offer fair and competitive compensation. Although talented job seekers may secure positions in competitive work environments, these roles often lead to experiences of being overworked and underpaid. Despite government initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment, the scarcity of adequate local employment options has driven many Filipinos to pursue freelance and online work as a more viable alternative. Environmental and infrastructural factors also influence work preferences. Moglia et al. (2021) explain that transportation accessibility and proximity to the workplace shape individuals' decisions regarding on-site versus remote work. When commuting is convenient, employees are more inclined to work on-site; however, limited accessibility can strengthen the preference for remote arrangements. Further supporting this shift, Necesito and Mamaril (2025) found that inadequate salaries and persistent underemployment have encouraged many young professionals to seek higher-paying online opportunities, often with international clients. Additionally, widespread contractual and probationary employment conditions in the country have motivated workers to pursue more stable and empowering income sources through digital and freelance work. These findings suggest that the limitations of traditional work settings are prompting Generation Z to seek alternative employment arrangements that offer greater stability, income potential, and flexibility.

Diversity, Inclusion, Workplace Culture. Marjka (2024) highlights that remote work strongly resonates with Gen Z, as it supports a more inclusive and progressive organizational culture. Unlike traditional workplaces dominated by rigid hierarchies and office politics, remote arrangements foster collaboration, flexibility, and autonomy. They also expand access to global opportunities, allowing Gen Z employees to collaborate with diverse teams and organizations without geographic limitations. For Gen Z, the presence of well-defined diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies is a key factor in workplace commitment, influencing whether they stay with or leave an organization (Robinson & Stubberfield, 2020). This underscores the importance of embedding D&I into core leadership practices. Having matured in an era of rapid technological and societal change, Gen Z brings unique perspectives and expectations to the workplace. They are drawn to organizations that actively

embrace diversity, provide meaningful growth opportunities, and make a tangible impact on society (Ng & Parry, 2016). These findings indicate that Generation Z prioritizes inclusive, flexible, and socially responsible workplaces, shaping organizational culture and talent retention strategies.

Independence and Job Autonomy. Gen Z shows a strong preference for managing their own projects, seeking opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities without relying on others to complete tasks. They often favor independent work over teamwork and tend to be cautious about collaborative arrangements (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Ogunsola et al., 2024). Many reject contingent pay for group performance, reflecting a mindset shaped by growing up as only children and facing challenges in collaboration, which positions them as some of the most individualistic contributors in group settings (Nieżurawska, 2023). Kukla and Nowacka (2019) highlight that a significant portion of Gen Z exhibits entrepreneurial tendencies, gravitating toward self-employment or independent work to maintain autonomy and resist conforming to others' expectations. Remote work further supports these preferences. According to Hossain (2023), it offers freedom and flexibility, enabling employees to balance professional duties with personal obligations. For Gen Z, such arrangements align with their core values of independence, flexibility, and control over their work environment. Overall, these findings suggest that Generation Z's preference for autonomy and independent work influences their career choices, shaping the types of roles and organizational structures they find most appealing.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings emphasized the growing preference among Gen Z for work arrangements that align with their values and lifestyle. As organizational structures continue to evolve and a new generation gradually enters the workforce, there is a clear need to update existing policies and procedures. Many problems, including limited career growth, slow systems, poor work-life balance, inadequate support for digital skills, and a lack of competitive benefits, continue to deter Gen Z from pursuing government work, contributing to increased turnover. Moreover, it is worth noting that this study is limited to published studies from 2015 to 2025 and does not provide direct empirical measurements. To address these issues, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary, including:

- Support digital skill development programs that prepare young workers for modern work demands.
- Provide flexible or hybrid work options to meet Gen Z's preference for autonomy and balance.
- Redesign recruitment to align with Gen Z expectations by highlighting growth and meaningful work.
- Increase benefits and career pathways to make public and office-based roles more competitive.
- Implement mental health and work-life balance initiatives to support overall well-being.

Implementing these measures can transform the workplace, creating a progressive, adaptive, and inclusive employment landscape that the next generation will inherit, improve, and sustain for long-term organizational success.

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