

# The Mismatches Between the Workplace in the Service Industry and Generation Z: A General Misalignment

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**Abstract.** Generation Z, as the new generation entering workplaces, is considered the future of many industries. However, as Gen Zers first step into workplaces, many of them struggle to satisfy their employers' expectations and to adapt to their workplace culture. Structural mismatches between these young talents and their workplaces emerged in the past few years, leading to severe consequences, especially in the service industry. Being a customer-centric, experience-demanding, and ever-changing industry, the service industry witnessed more Gen Zers struggle to adapt. In the past few years, due to physical separation and the digitalisation of the service industry, more problems emerged and have made the mismatch between Gen Zers and the industry unprecedentedly widespread and severe, limiting businesses to recover and young employees to succeed. This article aims to identify the mismatches between the traits of Generation Z and the characteristics of the service industry, categorised based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, seeks to define and explain the mismatches, and provides fixing recommendations for managers to create a better environment for Gen Zers to thrive.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Service Industry, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory.

## 1. Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z), the cohort born after Millennials, is generally defined by the Pew Research Center [1] as those born between 1996 and 2012. The recent Deloitte [2] survey found that nearly half (46%, highest among all generations) of Gen Z employees felt persistent stress and burnout were straining them. Gen Z employees also had a job-switching rate 134% higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to minimal changes among other generations [3] Gen Z also showed the highest dissatisfaction with their jobs (59%), pressure (62%) and work-life balance (56%) among all generations post-pandemic [4].

As an industry strongly affected by the pandemic during the past few years, the service industry has experienced frequent fluctuations and massive changes in working environments. Social distancing and remote work have accelerated digitalisation within the industry, reshaping the work environment and workplace culture, and resulting in a structural mismatch between employers' requirements and employees' skill sets. Some sectors of the industry are experiencing a talent shortage, while many Gen Zers are struggling with job hunting and promotions within the industry, indicating that there has been a structural mismatch in skill sets and competency between the young talent and the industry, which is hindering both the industry's recovery and young employees' career growth.

Previous research has indicated that some of the psychological traits of Gen Zers have mismatches with the rapidly changing service industry and its requirements. Employers consider that Gen Zers lack soft skills, relevant experience and a proper mindset to work in this customer-centric industry. At the same time, Gen Z employees are generally frustrated with toxic working environments, unsatisfactory compensation, and the absence of promising career paths that meet their high expectations. The mismatches between the industry and Gen Z employees are also reflected in their differing mindsets and perspectives.

These phenomena have resulted in widespread dissatisfaction, structural unemployment and high turnover rates, emphasising the significance of bridging the gap between both sides. To enable the service industry to fully recover from the recession in the past few years, and develop sustainably,

the force of Gen Zers needs to be utilised; to let Gen Zers thrive in the service industry and get onto desirable career trajectories, the industry also needs to make changes and adapt to new talents. Thus, it is reasonable to proclaim that the mismatches, both technically and psychologically, need to be properly addressed.

This paper will try to summarise the mismatches between Gen Zers and the service industry based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory perspective [5], and try to find mutually beneficial solutions for both HR managers to maintain their young talents and motivate them based on existing research, as well as for the young talents to focus on the required skill sets for adapting the new industry.

## 2. Background and Theoretical Framework

The psychological traits of Gen Z have been widely discussed in various research disciplines. By rearranging the traits described by former research based on Hofstede's dimensions, we can get a glimpse of the origins of the mismatches.

### 2.1. Upcoming Gen Zers Joining the Service Industry

As the youngest generation ever to enter workplaces and considered digital natives, Gen Z employees are expected to utilise their strong affinity for technology and be adept at multitasking [6]. Gen Z is described as being interested in modern technologies, preferring simplicity, encouraging safety, liking to escape the world's reality, having raised expectations, and exerting efforts toward exceptional experiences [7]. Considering the outstanding traits those young talents possess, Gen Z employees are considered to possess remarkable skills to adapt themselves to the evolving labour market quickly [8].

### 2.2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory [5] is a systematic model for understanding cross-cultural social differences in the context of international business relations [9]. Hofstede's model consists of six dimensions to distinguish cultural differences, which are Power Distance (PDI), Masculinity (MAS), Individualism (IDV), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Long Term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence vs. restraint (IVR) [10]. The definitions of these dimensions are categorised in the table below.

**Table 1.** Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimensions	Meaning
Power Distance	The extent to which powerful members of organisations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally
Individualism and Collectivism	The degree to which people are related to separated individuals or integrated into groups
Masculinity and Femininity	Masculinity stands for the preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success; Femininity stands for the preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life.
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	The tolerance for ambiguity, in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown or away from the status quo
Long Term Orientation	A lower degree of LTO indicates that people treasure traditions and steadfastness more; a higher degree of LTO indicates that people adapt to new things faster and treasure pragmatic problem-solving skills.
Indulgence Vs Restraint	Whether a society allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun, or controls gratification of needs and regulates it by social norms

Although Hofstede [11] emphasised these dimensions are distinctive, stable, and vary across national cultures for various national cultures, some of these indicators have shown a tendency to converge across different cultural contexts in the past few decades [12]. Thus, it is relatively reasonable to discuss intergenerational differences between Gen Z and other generations, generally, within the framework of Hofstede's theory, out of cultural context to some extent. In this paper, the mismatches between the service industry and Gen Z employees will be identified and analysed based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory.

### **3. Literature Review**

The literature review is based on academic resources, mainly from EBSCO and business reports published by consulting companies. After categorising the psychological traits of Gen Zers that have been discussed by existing research based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory, and comparing them with the requirements of the service industry, the issues can be discovered and exposed for the solution-finding process.

#### **3.1. Characteristics of Gen Zers in Workplaces**

Gen Zers, known as the generation which has grown up with digital technologies, have distinct characteristics different from the baby boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. This section will discuss Gen Zers' distinct characteristics which are different from other generations in different aspects based on previous works.

##### **3.1.1. Digital Orientation**

Often defined as digital natives, their high familiarity with and proficiency in using the latest digital technologies are considered major characteristics of Gen Zers. Being such natives makes them more tech-fluent than previous generations, and they depend more on technology-based communication, learning and socialising [13]. In workplaces, Gen Z employees also generally prefer virtual teamwork and communication over traditional methods [14]. However, being technology natives does not necessarily mean that Gen Zers are digitally savvy. After the pandemic, due to years of remote working experience, the service industry underwent digitalisation, becoming more technology-driven and physically decentralised in management. Since then, Gen Xers and Millennials have made significant strides in adapting to these changes and have become more familiar with digital technologies and the new industry [15], Gen Zers, as digital natives, have struggled to integrate into the new environment. They often use digital devices primarily for entertainment and passive scrolling [16, 17]. Digitalisation has not given a significant advantage to the digital natives, however, it has caused many Gen Zers to struggle in organisations and teams, especially, in terms of interpersonal relationships.

##### **3.1.2. Interpersonal Relationships**

Gen Zers do not approach interpersonal relationships the same way as their older generations do. This young generation embraces environments with less rigid class distinctions than in the past. Gen Zers not only typically prioritise working individually unless teamwork is unavoidable, as this allows them to better distinguish work and life; they also prefer virtual teamwork to traditional one [14]. In terms of their relationships with their supervisors, the concept of power distance among Gen Zers has been widely studied. Gen Z, compared to other generations, indicates lower and declining power distance [18]. Excessively high power distance or forced assignments may make work feel uninteresting to Gen Zers and feel burnt out or a lack sense of purpose. These characteristics in one's job are considered the most demotivating to Gen Z workers [19].

##### **3.1.3. Achievement and Long-Term Orientation**

In addition to pursuing interesting job content and a sense of purpose, Gen Z is also described as achievement-oriented and places greater emphasis on long-term career success compared to previous

generations [20]. Gen Zers also have better economic well-being and place a higher priority on education than previous generations [21]. They also highly value the social environment, financial security and stability at work [22], as well as in-person opportunities for professional advancement and greater job security [23]. Gen Zers are often seen as realistic and pragmatic in their career expectations, looking forward to clearly defined career expectations and development plans [24]. To improve their chances of career success, Gen Z also tends to work for stable and large multinational corporations rather than working for small start-up-level businesses [25]. Working in such environments not only provides higher income and better job security but also offers greater opportunities for Gen Zers to acquire advanced perspectives and skills necessary for achieving their long-term goals.

#### **3.1.4. Work and Life Balance**

Gen Z has a proclivity for healthcare benefits and financial stability, flexitime, a supportive work environment, and upward mobility [26]. Scholars also argue that the demarcation between work and domestic life is becoming increasingly blurred with digitalisation [27, 28], which conflicts intensely with the expectations of Gen Zers. On one side, Gen Z employees have been familiar with the lower work intensity due to physical separation, struggling to face the full workload of offline work intensity; on the other hand, with the increasing digitalisation of work communication in recent years, the infraction of work into life tend to maintain even though the physical separation has been eliminated. This put Gen Zers in a difficult position to balance and separate work and life.

#### **3.1.5. Ethical and Creativity Orientations**

Gen Zers put much more emphasis on ethical and equity issues than other generations and have a preference towards non-repetitive knowledge-based jobs. For example, as discussed in existing research, as employees, Gen Zers put a strong emphasis on soft skills, creativity, work, knowledge and perceptions towards gender equality between men and women [26]. Concerns about ethics and equality present a trend to be more highly concerned in recent years. However, in some business entities, these ethical issues are still yet to be emphasised, and the job contents of many entry-level jobs for Gen Zers cannot satisfy their expectations as well as cannot utilise their creativity and knowledge to let them feel cherished and motivated.

### **3.2. Characters of the Service Industry**

As an industry that provides services rather than products, compared to agriculture and manufacturing industries, working in the service industry is massively different from working in others. Not only do the workplace environments differ a lot from other industries, but also working in this industry requires different skill sets and distinct characteristics to succeed.

#### **3.2.1. Workplace Environment of the Service Industry**

The service industry has its unique workplace environment that differs from other industries. Many traits of the workplace environment can be the origin of the mismatches between the industry and the young employees.

##### ***Customer-Centric Working Environment***

The workplace environment in the service industry is usually customer-centric, requiring customer-facing frequently and demanding emotional stability and responsiveness from employees. Sometimes, the work environment can be intense and fast-paced, requiring multitasking and handling unpredictable customer demands, in contrast to the manufacturing industries where young employees can follow predetermined and structured processes.

##### ***Lower Stability of Success***

Based on the customer-centric basics of the industry, job stability, job security and working hours within the industry can fluctuate based on customers' needs. The stability of working in the service industry is generally lower than working in other industries, at least the employees tend to feel less stable.

### ***Ever-Changing and Subtle Standards of Services***

The logic of performance measurement and appraisal formulas in the service industry also differ from those in other industries. The success of service highly depends on customer satisfaction and whether the problems of customers have been solved well and in time. Unlike other industries where success is largely evaluated based on quantitative measurements such as efficiency, production output and quality control, the service industry often does not have clear quantitative measurements, but qualitative ones instead.

### **3.2.2. Required Skillset of the Service Industry**

The skillset and traits required in the service industry are also different from other industries.

#### ***Communication Skills and Problem-Solving Skills***

Working in the service industry requires strong interpersonal and communication skills since employees have to interact directly with various customers, requiring not only knowledge basis but also emotional intelligence, practical problem-solving skills and adaptability to different customers.

#### ***Experience Dependency***

Rather than following structured processes in other industries, the service industry relies more on improvisation, drawing from extensive accumulated experience rather than textbook knowledge. Facing various problems in the service industry also requires flexibility and versatility, which cannot be easily attained in formal education but fostered by practical experience. Whereas in other industries, knowledge and technical skills can be larger factors in success.

#### ***Ambiguity of Traits***

Furthermore, even though managers reasonably emphasised and implemented the traits required in the industry, these traits remain difficult to quantify, measure and justify during the recruitment and promotion processes for managers. Most times, seeking such traits can only be based on an “eye test” rather than a “stat test”. This may cause talents to be undermined and employees to be confused and frustrated.

## **4. Findings and Discussions**

### **4.1. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension Theory Based Mismatches**

Considering the traits and personal career expectations of Gen Zers discussed by existing works, attempting to align them with the requirements for the service industry employees and comparing them with the environmental circumstances in the industry while categorising them based on Hofstede’s dimensions, we can systematically understand the mismatches better.

#### ***Power Distance***

As discussed in existing research, Gen Zers prefer lower PDIs to higher ones. Despite that Gen Zers expect and prefer their supervisors to be seniors rather than peers, they prefer a closer power distance and highly value respect for their point of view from their employers. However, in the past few years, due to the physical distances and difficulties during the pandemic, the service industry experienced digitalisation to be more technology-based and physically separated in management. Especially in terms of the digitalisation of management and decision-making, Gen Zers felt marginalised, lacked in-person opportunities for professional advancement, felt pessimistic about getting greater opportunities and being promoted, and directly caused their lack of motivation and genuine engagement. In an industry that intensively requires engagement and a genuine attitude, this phenomenon set many Gen Z employees to stumble in their work. The service industry also inherently has a higher power distance between service providers and customers compared to other industries, which results in a strong mismatch with the traits of Gen Zers as well.

#### ***Individualism and Collectivism***

There have not been many individualism and collectivism mismatches discussed in existing works, since job descriptions of different service works can vary to a large extent. It shows that working in an environment promoting individualism can be more favourable for Gen Zers. Since Gen Zers prefer

individual assignments to team cooperation, complex service jobs which require frequent teamwork can make Gen Z employees struggle and frustrated, especially when cooperating with undesirable colleagues is unavoidable. In addition, some service corporations, especially high-end service businesses, emphasise strong organisational culture and assertively demand their employees to coordinate with such collective culture, while the young generation tends to care less about such culture and treasure chances of self-expression more.

### ***Masculinity and Femininity***

Considering the MAS indicator, Gen Zers do prefer work-life balance but still have similar pursue to achievement and material rewards for success. Yet, compared to older generations, the tough mentalities these seniors possess cannot be matched by most Gen Zers. When facing excessive workloads or temporary frustrations and failures in an organisation where standards of toughness are set by seniors, Gen Zers, who tend to have a higher femininity indicator, can get burnt out more easily or may experience worsened mental health due to a lack of care from their senior supervisors.

Moreover, although there is no strong ideological conflict between the industry and the employees, most Gen Zers care about ethics, fairness and caring for the weak more than the traditions and perspectives of their elder supervisors.

Although ideological conflicts between Gen Z employees and their employers in workplaces are not intense, senior generations who take charge of organisational culture and ethical standards usually cannot match the ethical criterion of Gen Z. This mismatch can result in Gen Zers feeling a lack of motivation and purpose at work, or feeling themselves working in a toxic environment or working for an organisation lacking social responsibility.

### ***Uncertainty Avoidance Index***

Having grown up in better economic conditions, Gen Zers generally have a higher UAI index in terms of job security and long-term stability than other generations and take it into account when making job choices and career evaluations. This caused a mismatch due to the impact of the pandemic within the service industry and the rapid change and restructuring of the industry, which has boosted the uncertainty of not only the careers of service employees but also the future of various service businesses and the entire industry. Although this mismatch makes Gen Zers uncomfortable, the rapidly shifting industry also creates challenges that require every employee to adapt, which means the higher adaptability of Gen Zers can provide them with competitive edges and opportunities.

In terms of the job content, many Gen Zers tend to have jobs that can utilise their creativity. The service industry seems to require creativity and improvising skills to deal with various demands from their clients. However, jobs in the industry are still strictly regulated to prevent dissatisfaction and crisis, and creativities have to be complemented with experience, which usually mismatches with Gen Zers' expectations.

### ***Long-Term Orientation***

As discussed in existing research, Gen Zers score high on the Long-Term Orientation (LTO) index. They have clear plans and expectations of their career trajectory and will not avoid being pragmatic to achieve such expectations, nor do they mind choosing unconventional career development methods. Thus, Gen Zers tend to take more education instead of internships and working opportunities [29] which directly limits their chances of accumulating working experience in the early stages of their career, making them struggle to integrate into the experience-demanding industry and feeling their long-term objectives cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future due to instant struggles.

### ***Indulgence Vs Restraint***

As a result of the higher LTO and lower MAS indicators, Gen Zers care less about restraint norms but emphasise instant rewards. Being raised in a wealthier era than the elder generations, Gen Zers are fond of high-quality lives and have a higher indulgence index than other generations. Having such tendencies means that they require high rewards, flexible schedules and more leisure time, which conflict with the nature of customer-centric schedules and working routines. Having unsatisfied requirements and requirements that are not seemingly to be satisfied shortly causes a lack of motivation among Gen Z employees, resulting in a lack of commitment so that the services have

lower chances of succeeding. Generally, Gen Zers have higher indulgence indicators than their seniors and the general perceptions of this industry that is mainly led by those seniors, who do not understand Gen Zers' demands and use these demands as motivators.

#### **4.2. Fixing the Mismatches**

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the mismatches between Gen Zers and the service industry are multi-dimensional and have various reasons. Fixing such mismatches requires both the corporations and managers' side and Gen Z employees' side to make changes and mutual commitments. Such making changes and commitments to fix the complex multi-dimensional mismatches are easier said than done for either side. However, as the more dominant side, there are more efforts can be made by corporations to get the mismatches fixed more effectively and more efficiently.

##### ***Understand Gen Zers' Needs and Motivate Correspondingly***

For employers and corporations, the first major thing to be stressed is to understand the new generation. It is important to understand the formative events that are unique to this generation and how it has shaped them as learners and future employees [30]. Once they understand Gen Zers, service managers must focus on motivating them and fostering their commitment, employee motivation and full engagement are crucial for a service business's success. In the service industry, firms with engaged employees can more easily achieve higher customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and earnings per share, along with lower turnover, absenteeism, and service failure rates [31]. Understanding these basics of Gen Z and the industry and making good use of the basics are the starting points for fixing the mismatches mechanically.

##### ***Align HR Policies with Gen Z Values***

It is reasonable to assert that employers need to meet the expectations of Generation Z by redrafting HR policies so that they resonate closely with Generation Z [32]. In addition to implementing institutional changes to help Gen Zers integrate more smoothly on a structural level, assisting them in psychologically adjusting to the industry and its culture is also crucial. Since Gen Zers have a lower proclivity to collectivist narratives, letting each individual know that their idea and commitment are well encouraged and treasured by the organisation can make a huge difference psychologically. This can not only keep them motivated extrinsically but also let them know that their future is promising and their career trajectories are in good hands. Furthermore, organisationally, actively engaging in social justice and CSR initiatives, fostering a culture of safety, and understanding their behaviour and the distinct needs that Gen Z employees have in the workplace can be considered priorities for managers [33]. This can keep the young team cohesive by providing a sense of belonging and identify, and letting the young talents feel comfortable to commit.

##### ***Provide Motivating Organisation Culture***

In addition to helping Gen Zers feel motivated extrinsically by their organisations and supervisors, making the young talents self-motivated is even more crucial. To let Gen Zers feel motivated to engage extrinsically and intrinsically, managers need to foster a strong workplace culture which fits Gen Zers' perspective, especially, let Gen Zers understand the meaningfulness and potential of their work despite how basic services they are providing. Gen Zers also exhibit a high entrepreneurial orientation and a low inclination toward traditional career paths, prioritising autonomy over micromanagement [34]. To foster a sense of autonomy among Gen Zers, the flexibility of work needs to be addressed if possible, both in terms of flexibility of the forms of work to satisfy the IDV and IVR indicators, as well as the contents of work to unleash the creativity of Gen Zers.

##### ***Emphasise Meaningfulness of Work***

Other than organisational culture, encouraging leadership can also be motivating by letting Gen Zers understand their initiatives and take responsibility for specific tasks while letting them understand the potential and meaningfulness of the tasks and stay motivated and committed. With leaders' support, guidance, and trust in their decision-making abilities, instead of micromanaging,

Gen Zers can obtain the experience they desperately need, integrate into the industry more quickly and thrive.

### ***Construct Beneficial Training and Mentoring Systems***

Although the psychological fit is crucial, the technical fit is even more dominant in terms of determining the success of services. Addressing psychological mismatches is valuable, but resolving technical mismatches has a more immediate impact on outcomes. As newcomers to the industry, Gen Zers must obtain the required skill sets and experiences. Since the tendency to take more education prevents Gen Zers from obtaining such abilities in advance, effective training and reflection systems can benefit the young talents and the organisation greatly.

### ***Create an Effective Feedback System***

Good service corporations and manager teams can provide constructive, specific, and timely feedback on a task basis, which managers can use to boost the morale, motivation and confidence of Gen Z employees by handling them deliberately. Based on the feedback, constructing a training and mentoring system within the organisation will let Gen Zers feel cherished, on the right track and gain a strong sense of belonging. After being well trained and guided, giving challenging but achievable goals assigned to Gen Zers and helping them succeed can match their expectation of being cherished, feeling progressing and in a good career trajectory, as well as stretching their abilities in the same period. These actions can gradually satisfy Gen Zers' ambition and motivate them to engage and boost service quality and team cohesion.

## **5. Conclusion**

Considering what has been discussed, addressing these mismatches has become an urgent task for both managers and Gen Zers for their business and career success. It takes mutual efforts to help the service industry get rid of the current undesirable situation.

In the coming decades, Generation Z is expected to gradually make up the largest proportion of the workforce as time goes by. The significance of these young workforces fitting the corporate environments and requirements matters to the sustainability of the industry. Thus, the importance and urgency of this problem cannot be overstated. Considering the challenges put forward within the service industry, both the Gen Z youth and the corporations must discover a mutually beneficial method to fix the cultural and individual mechanism mismatches.

However, despite the generational traits that might provide helpful inspiration, HR managers must also consider the complexity of workplace dynamics. As Dick [35] suggests, focusing solely on intergenerational differences is insufficient; it is essential to account for individual variations among employees, not solely focusing on intergenerational differences. The service industry consists of various types of companies and sub-industries, in which various contexts will make huge differences. These contexts must be considered so that the research can be used to solve practical problems in the service industry.

In conclusion, based on the synthesis of existing research, bridging theoretical and practical perspectives, it is crucial to gain insights into the mismatch between the traits of Gen Zers and the current service industry. This understanding is not only critical for managers seeking to address real-world challenges but also provides a foundation for more rigorous research on the evolving relationship between Gen Z employees and their employers.

## **6. Limitations**

Despite providing a synthesis of existing research and analysing studies about the research on Gen Z in the service industry, this paper has several limitations. Due to constraints in time and resources, this paper does not present new experimental or survey data, instead relying on existing secondary research. The paper focuses on Gen Z while relatively neglecting others, which can be compared with others comprehensively if traits of other generations are included. Additionally, the methodologies,

definitions, and study populations across reviewed articles may have differences in samples and context; this heterogeneity is treated relatively homogenously to draw commonalities and common results. Lastly, given the rapidly evolving nature of the industries and the field, some recent developments may not be fully captured, while some previous works need to be updated in a new context, necessitating continuous updates for a more complete understanding. For further research, the relationships between Generation Z and the exacted branches of the service industry can be measured and defined to provide more detailed guidance for managers.

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