

Career expectations of Gen Zs on their career decision-making intentions: An empirical study in Sri Lanka

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Generation Z (Gen Z) individuals, possessing distinct career expectations and aspirations that differ from those of previous generations, are increasingly entering the workforce. Career expectations encompass individuals' beliefs and anticipations regarding their future professional decisions, shaped by both subjective perceptions and objective considerations. While existing research has focused on factors related to career expectations of employees, such as rewards and job security, the influence of intrinsic and altruistic values, as well as the work environment, remains less well understood. Moreover, existing theories, including expectancy theory, psychological contract theory, equity theory, and social cognitive career theory, have not fully explained which career expectations drive these intentions, particularly for Gen Z in contemporary organizations. This study addresses this gap by integrating Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Affective Events Theory (AET) to examine the cognitive, social, and emotional drivers of Gen Z's career expectations. Based on this integrated framework, the study aims to identify the career expectations of Gen Z that shape their career decision-making intentions. Five hypotheses were proposed examining the impact of rewards, intrinsic values, altruistic values, job stability, and work environment on Gen Z's career decision-making intentions. Adopting a positivistic, deductive, and quantitative approach, data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire from Gen Z employees in the IT-BPM sector in Sri Lanka. Quota sampling ensured the inclusion of participants based on age, employment status, and geographic location, while excluding foreign nationals and non-English speakers. Career decision-making intentions were measured using a six-item scale, and career expectations were measured across five dimensions, including rewards, intrinsic and altruistic work values, job stability, and work environment. Empirical findings reveal that Gen Z's career expectations are shaped by a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with rewards, job stability, and work environment significantly influencing career decision-making intentions. The study contributes theoretically by integrating cognitive and affective perspectives for understanding career expectations of Gen Z individuals and provides practical implications for organizations. In particular, human resource managers can leverage these insights to develop strategies for attracting, engaging, and retaining Gen Z talent. Ultimately, by addressing the determinants of Gen Z's career expectations, organizations can refine recruitment, development, and retention practices to better align with the expectations of the Gen Z workforce.

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