

Soft Skills and Motivation as Drivers of Workforce Readiness to Support Organizational Adaptability in Gen Z: A Systematic Literature Study

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Abstract. The rapid transformation of the business environment in the digital era requires organizations to develop a high degree of adaptability. This adaptability is largely influenced by the readiness of the workforce, particularly Generation Z (Gen Z), who are increasingly entering the labor market. As digital natives, Gen Z demonstrate strong technological literacy but often face gaps in non-technical competencies, especially soft skills. At the same time, motivation is considered a psychological driver that strengthens individual readiness to face dynamic workplace demands. This study aims to systematically examine the role of soft skills and motivation as drivers of workforce readiness to support organizational adaptability in Gen Z. Using a systematic literature review approach, relevant articles published between 2020 and 2025 were collected and analyzed to identify theoretical and empirical findings. The results indicate that communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving are among the most critical soft skills for enhancing work readiness, while intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both significantly contribute to Gen Z's adaptive capacity. Furthermore, the interaction between soft skills and motivation is found to reinforce organizational adaptability by enabling individuals to respond effectively to changes. This study contributes to human resource development strategies, particularly in designing interventions to improve Gen Z's employability and readiness for organizational transformation.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Motivation, Workforce Readiness, Organizational Adaptability, Generation Z.

I. Introduction

The rapid, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous nature of changes in the business environment demands that organizations develop sustainable adaptability (Muha & Silitonga, 2025). Organizational adaptability depends not only on strategic and technological policies but also on the quality of human resources as the primary actors implementing change. In the context of the demographic transition of the workforce, Generation Z, born approximately between the mid-1990s and early 2010, is beginning to dominate the workforce and presents unique characteristics that have implications for HR management needs (Aprilita, 2024). According to Fiansi (2024), Gen Z tends to be digital natives, with expectations of work camaraderie and a self-development orientation, and exposure to virtual education during the pandemic. Consequently, their non-technical competency patterns (soft skills) and motivational factors differ from those of previous generations.

Soft skills, including interpersonal communication, team collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and emotional regulation, are increasingly identified as key competencies determining work readiness and the successful integration of new employees into organizations (Prasetyo & Prabowo, 2025). Various international and cross-national studies have found that while Gen Z excels in digital literacy and technology utilization, there are gaps in essential soft skills perceived by job seekers as prerequisites for effective work, such as face-to-face communication, professional ethics, presentation skills, and collaborative work (Wilson, 2024). This gap raises the need for development programs that focus more on developing soft skills to enhance Gen Z's employability and adaptive capacity in a rapidly changing work environment.

Work motivation is an internal psychological variable that drives individual behavior, commitment, and perseverance in facing work demands (Ismiatun, 2024). According to Mardianty (2023), Gen Z's motivational dimensions extend beyond financial incentives. Aspects of recognition, psychological well-being, opportunities for competency development, and shared values between individuals and organizations play a crucial role in shaping work intensity and readiness. Research by Wibowo & Nugroho (2021) shows that motivation contributes to work readiness and strengthens individuals' adaptive capabilities during organizational change processes, making motivation management a crucial strategy for human resource managers.

Workforce preparation for Gen Z is a multidimensional construct encompassing technical competency, soft skills, professional attitudes, and psychological readiness to face job demands (Lasinta,

2024). Ratuela et al., (2022) found that soft skills positively influence work readiness, while work motivation acts as a reinforcement that can mediate or moderate the relationship between soft skills and work readiness (Mardianty, 2023). These findings suggest that the interaction between soft skills and motivation needs to be explained simultaneously to understand their contribution to organizational adaptability. This is supported by the following data:

Tahun	Program Studi	<6 Bulan	>6 Bulan
2022	Manajemen	32%	68%
	Akuntansi	33%	67%
	Ekonomi Pembangunan	25%	75%
2023	Manajemen	43%	56%
	Akuntansi	35%	64%
	Ekonomi Pembangunan	40%	56%
2024	Manajemen	22%	78%
	Akuntansi	19%	79%
	Ekonomi Pembangunan	15%	79%

Pict 1 Gen Z Waiting Time Data for Faculty of Economics and Business, UPN "Veteran" East Java

The data shows that graduate job readiness remains a major challenge that needs to be addressed immediately, as it relates to an individual's ability to enter the workforce effectively without undergoing a lengthy transition or adaptation period. This readiness encompasses physical aspects (health and fitness), mental aspects (emotional maturity and responsibility), and both technical and non-technical skills. Among these aspects, mastery of soft skills is a crucial factor. For Gen Z students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, UPN "Veteran" East Java, this is particularly relevant, given that although they excel in digital literacy and technology adaptation, strengthening soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving is still necessary for optimal job readiness and the ability to support organizational adaptability in the future.

In the realm of organizational adaptability, individual adaptive performance—the ability to adjust behavior and performance when tasks, roles, or work environments change—is a key indicator of an organization's ability to survive and thrive. Recent research on Gen Z emphasizes the role of inclusive leadership, job happiness, and creativity as factors that enhance adaptive performance; however, literature directly examining the contribution of soft skills and motivation to Gen Z's readiness to support organizational adaptability is relatively limited. In other words, there is a research gap regarding the

mechanisms by which soft skills and motivation simultaneously drive Gen Z's workforce readiness, which is oriented toward organizational adaptability.

Based on this literature review, this study aims to fill this empirical gap by examining the role of soft skills and motivation as drivers of workforce readiness among Gen Z in the context of supporting organizational adaptability. This empirical study, which combines the perspectives of non-technical competencies (soft skills) and work psychology (motivation), is expected to yield practical implications for human resource development policies, including the design of vocational education programs, university curricula, and onboarding and training practices in companies, ensuring that Gen Z is not only technically prepared but also adaptive to rapid organizational change.

II. Literature Review

1. Work Readiness

Work readiness is a concept that refers to the extent to which an individual possesses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to enter and adapt to the world of work (Slameto & Suniyarti, 2024). This readiness is determined not only by mastery of technical skills, but also by non-technical skills such as independence, intelligence, and self-management that support effectiveness in a professional environment. Meanwhile, according to Simanjuntak & Armanu (2023), job readiness is understood as a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable new graduates to adapt to the work environment while actively contributing to the achievement of organizational goals effectively and productively.

2. Soft Skill

According to Sari & Manunggal (2023), soft skills are abilities beyond technical aspects that help a person interact with others, communicate well, and organize themselves to work effectively in a professional environment. Soft skills are also a strong predictor of employability, and soft skill deficiencies are often identified as a cause of initial adaptation failure for new workers, as well as a barrier to organizational collaboration and productivity (Villegas, 2024). Gen Z tends to excel in digital literacy, learning speed, and technology adaptation, but some industry and academic evidence suggest a relative weakness in face-to-face interpersonal skills and emotional management in the workplace (Visser & Terblanche, 2025).

3. Motivation

According to Savero & Turangan (2025), motivation is understood as an internal drive that activates, directs, and maintains individual behavior in completing work tasks effectively. Work motivation is a crucial factor that contributes significantly to the level of work readiness of Generation Z. In addition to playing a positive role in preparing individuals for the world of work, work motivation also significantly increases a person's capacity to achieve goals, strengthens intrinsic motivation, and utilizes environmental support for more optimal work readiness (Andina et al., 2023).

4. Organizational Adaptability

Organizational adaptability is an organization's ability to quickly adjust to changes in both the external and internal environment in order to survive and compete in a dynamic era. Previous research emphasized that adaptability is influenced by individual factors, such as soft skills and motivation, as well as organizational factors, such as leadership and work culture (Gibson et al., 2020). In the context of the Industry 4.0 era, organizational adaptability is becoming increasingly important because technological disruption and rapidly changing market needs require organizations to be able to manage change, increase innovation, and utilize the potential of human resources, especially younger generations like Gen Z, who are flexible and digitally minded (Putra & Sari, 2021). Thus, organizational adaptability is not merely the ability to respond to change but also a long-term strategy for building sustainable competitiveness through the synergy between individual skills, work motivation, and organizational readiness to face uncertainty.

III. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review (SLR) method to analyze the role of soft skills and motivation in the work readiness of Generation Z in supporting organizational adaptability. Data were collected through searching articles in databases such as Scopus, Copernicus, and SINTA with relevant keywords, and selected using the inclusion criteria for 2020–2025 and exclusion of opinions without empirical data. The literature search strategy was applied using Google Scholar and Publish or Perish software. Validation was carried out using source triangulation and PRISMA guidelines. The main variables reviewed include soft skills, motivation, work readiness, and organizational adaptability. Data analysis used content analysis through reduction, presentation, and synthesis of findings to build a conceptual framework for the study. This method allows for comprehensive and systematic evidence collection and will form the basis for in-depth analysis and discussion in future research.

IV. Results and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the role of soft skills and motivation in the work readiness of Generation Z in supporting organizational adaptability through a literature review for the period 2020 to 2025. The approach used is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which includes the process of identifying, selecting, and analyzing articles related to soft skills, motivation, work readiness, and organizational adaptability. From the initial search results, 100 articles were obtained through the use of relevant keywords. After screening based on titles and abstracts, 50 articles were eliminated because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Furthermore, an assessment of the full text resulted in the elimination of an additional 35 articles due to lack of empirical data, non-peer-reviewed status, or limited relevance to the research focus. Finally, 15 articles were declared to meet the inclusion criteria and were analyzed further. The list of articles that passed the selection is presented in the following table:

No.	Author's Name	Year	Research Title	Research Design	Sample	Method	Main Finding	Conclusion
1	Mohammed, F. S. & Ozdamli, F.	2024	<i>A Systematic Literature Review of Soft Skills in Information Technology Education</i>	Systematic literature review	Gen Z	Science mapping / SLR	Finding the gap between formal teaching and soft skills needs in IT; recommendations for curriculum integration.	Curriculum integration and experiential approaches are needed to improve soft skills in IT graduates.
2	Villegas, C.	2024	<i>A Systematic Review of Research on Soft Skills for Employability</i>	Systematic review / bibliometric mapping	Gen Z	Science mapping	Mapping soft skills research trends; the need for longitudinal studies and standard measures.	Soft skills research is evolving, requiring continued empirical studies and standardization of measures.
3	Orih, D. et al.	2024	<i>A systematic review of soft skills interventions within</i>	Systematic review	Gen Z	Review quality assessment &	Hybrid (online + experiential) interventions are common; effectiveness varies depending on	Soft skills interventions are effective when using experiential learning and

No.	Author's Name	Year	Research Title	Research Design	Sample	Method	Main Finding	Conclusion
			<i>education</i> (Frontiers)				design & duration.	standardized assessments.
4	Katsaros, K. K.	2024	<i>Gen Z Employee Adaptive Performance: The Role of Inclusive Leadership and Workplace Happiness</i>	Quantitative (survey, mediation)	305 Gen Z employees (telecom, Greece)	Multi-phase survey, mediation analysis	Inclusive leadership improves adaptive performance; workplace happiness partially mediates this.	Inclusive leadership and workplace well-being enhance Gen Z's adaptive capabilities.
5	Katsaros, K. K.	2024	<i>Gen Z Tourism Employees' Adaptive Performance During a Major Cultural Shift</i>	Quantitative (survey/mediation)	Gen Z	Survey, mediation models	Leadership & employee voice improve adaptive performance in Gen Z in tourism.	Organizational support & soft skills development are important during crisis/change.
6	Surugiu, C.	2025	<i>Factors Motivating Generation Z in the Workplace</i>	Empirical / review (motivation drivers)	Gen Z	Mixed (review/empirical)	Identifying Gen Z motivators: recognition, well-being, growth, autonomy.	Understanding Gen Z motivators helps design HR programs for readiness & retention.
7	Maharani, K. Y.	2024	<i>Motivation Unlocks Gen Z's Path to Workforce Success</i>	Empirical (school sample)	Senior vocational students (SMK)	Survey, mediation analysis	Learning motivation mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness.	Learning motivation is important to translate competencies into work readiness.
8	Tushar, H.	2023	<i>Global employability skills in the 21st century workplace</i>	Semi-systematic review	Gen Z	Literature review	Identify the most sought-after soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem solving, adaptability).	Education needs to adjust output so that graduates are ready for the modern job market.

No.	Author's Name	Year	Research Title	Research Design	Sample	Method	Main Finding	Conclusion
9	Lyu, W. & Liu, J.	2021	<i>Soft skills, hard skills: What matters most? Evidence from job postings</i>	Empirical (job posting analysis)	Job postings Gen Z (big data)	Text mining / content analysis	Companies demand a combination of hard and soft skills; soft skills are important in many sectors.	Soft skills are becoming an important component in the demands of the modern workforce (relevant for Gen Z).
10	Benítez-Márquez, M. D. et al.	2022	<i>Generation Z Within the Workforce and in the Workplace</i>	Scoping review	Gen Z	Scoping review	Mapping themes: Gen Z hopes, technology, inter-generational issues.	Demonstrates the need for more specific research on Gen Z's job readiness & soft skills.
11	Visser, C.	2025	<i>The soft-skills characteristics of Generation Z employees — scoping review</i>	Scoping review	Gen Z	Scoping review / research agenda	Identifying the soft skills that organizations value most for Gen Z (communication, teamwork, adaptability).	Recommendations for research agendas and training practices focused on experiential learning.
12	Dwivedula, R.	2025	<i>Why Is Generation Z Motivated at Work?</i>	Qualitative (interviews)	Gen Z	Semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis	Gen Z's primary motivators: recognition, growth opportunities, well-being; relevant SDT context.	HR should develop policies that support these motivators to improve readiness & retention.
13	Zhou, X.	2025	<i>How organizational emotion resources enhance Gen Z's career adaptability</i>	Empirical (quantitative)	Gen Z	Quantitative (survey; analysis in full text)	Organizational emotional resources are positively related to Gen Z's career adaptability.	Organizational attention to emotional aspects strengthens Gen Z's career adaptability.
14	Ayaturrahman & Rahayu	2023	<i>Dampak soft skill terhadap kesiapan</i>	Empirical / mixed	Gen Z	Quantitative	Research has found that soft skills in the form of	The study concluded that to improve students' work readiness in

No.	Author's Name	Year	Research Title	Research Design	Sample	Method	Main Finding	Conclusion
			kerja mahasiswa di era industri 4.0				problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, and leadership skills have a positive influence on accounting students' work readiness.	the Industry 4.0 era, universities need to strengthen the development of soft skills.
15	Noah & Aziz	2020	<i>A Systematic review on soft skills development among university graduates</i>	Systematic review	Gen Z	SLR (meta-synthesis)	Demonstrate that certain interventions are effective (practicals, mentoring, project-based).	Concludes the need for a mixed approach to developing soft skills in graduates.

A literature review of 15 selected articles indicates that soft skills and motivation are the two primary drivers determining the readiness of the Gen Z workforce to support organizational adaptability. Research using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method (Mohammed & Ozdamli, 2024; Villegas, 2024; Orih et al., 2024; Noah & Aziz, 2020) emphasizes the gap between formal education and the needs of the workplace, particularly in mastering soft skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and adaptability. These findings demonstrate the need for integrated curricula based on experiential learning to enable students to develop competencies relevant to the demands of Industry 4.0.

Empirical studies on Gen Z (Katsaros, 2024; Maharani, 2024; Zhou, 2025; Ayaturrahman & Rahayu, 2023) also confirm that problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, and leadership skills positively influence work readiness, while learning motivation and psychosocial factors (such as inclusive leadership and emotional organizational support) can strengthen career adaptability. Other studies (Surugiu, 2025; Dwivedula, 2025) highlight that Gen Z is strongly influenced by intrinsic motivators such as recognition, well-being, and opportunities for self-development. Therefore, the combination of mature soft skills and strong motivation can make Gen Z better prepared to face work challenges and contribute to organizational adaptability.

Overall, these results support the research title "Soft Skills and Motivation as Drivers of Workforce Readiness to Support Organizational Adaptability in Gen Z: A Systematic Literature Study." Soft skills have been shown to be the primary foundation of work readiness, while motivation acts as a driving force that activates and optimizes this potential. Therefore, higher education institutions and organizations need to design strategies that not only strengthen soft skills mastery but also create an environment that fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This effort will ensure that Gen Z is not only job-ready but also capable of supporting organizational resilience and adaptability amidst the dynamic business environment.

V. Conclusion

This study confirms that soft skills and motivation play a crucial role in driving workforce readiness in Generation Z, which in turn supports organizational adaptability amidst the dynamic work environment of the Industry 4.0 era. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, the findings of this study

indicate that non-technical skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and leadership, when supported by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, can enhance Gen Z's ability to adapt to rapidly changing work demands. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of two key variables soft skills and motivation within a work readiness framework, which conceptually links individual readiness with the adaptive capacity of organizations.

The implications of these findings are not only theoretical, namely enriching the study of the relationship between workforce readiness and organizational adaptability, but also practical for educational institutions and organizations. Universities need to design experiential learning-based curricula to strengthen students' soft skills, while organizations are required to provide a work environment that encourages the motivation and well-being of young employees. Thus, this study contributes to building a more comprehensive conceptual framework regarding the role of soft skills and motivation, while also offering practical strategies to ensure that Generation Z is work-ready and plays an active role in strengthening organizational adaptability.

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