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Gen Z Onboarding Experiences and Career Intentions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate Gen Z perception of the onboarding experience and if the effective onboarding can positively influence affective organizational commitment, work engagement and their intention to pursue career in the hospitality industry. Due to hospitality's reputation as unattractive career option for young talent, the matter of retaining young and educated talent is becoming highly important. This study is based on data collected from Gen Z members (1996-2010) who already have work experience in the hospitality industry. The most significant findings suggest that the three mentioned variables; affective organizational commitment, work engagement and career intention are in positive correlation with effective onboarding experience. This study can be used by hospitality employers, HR professional and educational organizations with the purpose of understanding younger generations and the importance of onboarding experience.

Keywords: onboarding experience, affective organizational commitment, work engagement, career intention, hospitality industry, Gen Z

Gen Z Onboarding Experiences and Career Intentions

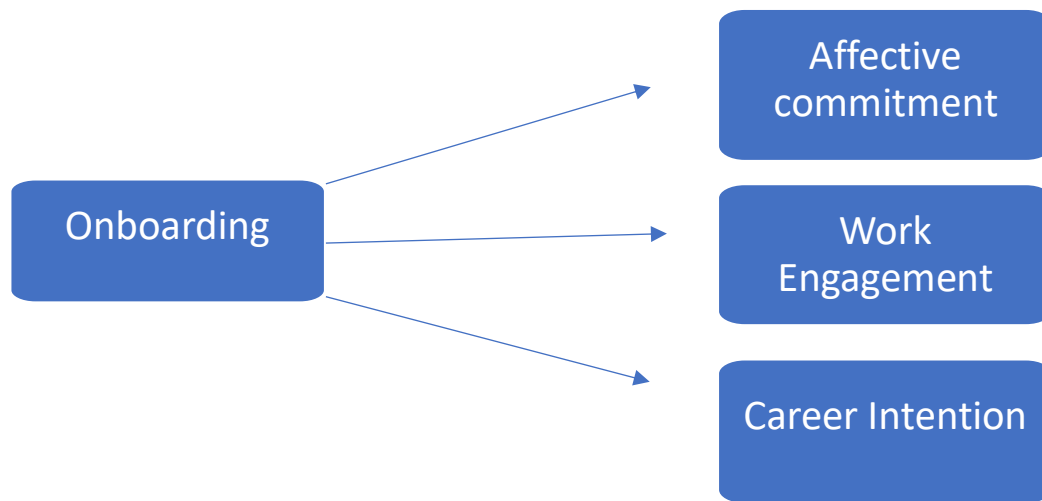
Generation Z or 'Gen Z' members are born between 1996 and 2010, and in 2021, they will represent 41% of all people on the planet, making up a significant portion of the workforce (Bryce, 2021). Furthermore, it is anticipated that they will change workplace dynamics due to different attitudes towards professional life (Schroth, 2019).

Lately, hospitality has been struggling with the reputation as an unattractive industry (Taggart, 2021). Labor shortages and high employee turnover are influencing its operations. Additionally, Gen Z-ers are planning to move on from their current employer in fewer than three years, and only one in four plans to work for an employer for five years or more (Yello Recruiting, 2019). Considering the aging workforce, and the high expectations from younger generations, employers in general, and hospitality employers even more so must understand and adapt to these changes in order to attract and retain the best employees on the market.

Onboarding can be defined as a 'process of learning, networking, resource allocating, goal setting and strategizing that ends with new hires quickly reaching maximum productivity (Mortevdt, 2009). Likewise, The Work Institute defines onboarding as a 'process by which new members of staff acquire knowledge, skills and behaviors in the organization they are joining'. Research shows that 25% of employees want to quit their job within the first 6 months because of the lack of a clear informative onboarding process (Schroth, 2019).

The purpose of this research project is to determine if the variable of the onboarding experience (OE) correlates with affective organizational commitment (AOC), employees' work engagement (WE) and one's intention of pursuing his or her career in the hospitality industry, in the context of the Generation Z.

Figure 1 – The relationship of Onboarding experience, affective commitment, work engagement and career intentions



Source: Author

Based on the proposed model, the paper will examine the following hypotheses:

H1: Effective onboarding process is positively related to affective organizational commitment.

H2: Effective onboarding process is positively related to employees' intention to pursue career in hospitality industry.

H3: Effective onboarding process is positively related to employees' work engagement.

Gen Z Onboarding Experiences and Career Intentions

According to research done by World Travel & Tourism Council (2021), in 2019, travel and tourism industry has been accounted for supporting 334 million jobs (10.6% of all jobs) and was responsible for creating 1 in 4 of all new jobs across the world. As a consequence of COVID-19 pandemic, industry has suffered losses of 62 million jobs, impacting entire industry's ecosystem. In order to meet the expectations of increasingly demanding customers, hospitality businesses heavily depend on young and energetic employees (Robinson et al., 2019). This has resulted in interdependence between young talent and the industry itself in terms of employment. In most cases, tourism is their first paid work experience, and can significantly influence their perception of work. Research has shown that motivated and educated hospitality workers are often disappointed about the industry from their beginner or internship experiences (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Thus, the hospitality industry could substantially benefit from understanding and accommodating Gen Z, their values, expectations, and motivations.

In 2021, The Post-Millennial Generation also known as Gen Z (1996-2010) represented 41% of all people on the planet, making up a significant portion of the workforce (Bryce, 2021). As a result of opposing opinions among the scholars, research on defining traits of Gen Z is still in its infancy (Bharat, 2020).

This paper is focused towards understanding Gen Z and their perception of effective onboarding experience. To be precise, the research is done in order to understand if the effective onboarding experience can and to which extent positively influence affective organizational support, work engagement, and their intention of pursuing career in the hospitality industry. The first part of the literature review is focused on describing Generation Z traits, as well as their expectation from the future employers. In the following part, each variable will be discussed separately and connected to latest HR research.

Generation Z

Prior studies have reported that generational differences occur due to events and technological advancements that happened over the past few decades (Bharat, 2020). Therefore, each generation is special and must be understood differently. Generation Z (born between 1996-2010) has started entering the workforce, and managers need to be prepared for its arrival (Schroth, 2019). Lack of experience, era of smartphones, popularity of social media, social justice movements and growing up in a culture of safety are some of the major factors that influenced Gen Z traits. It is well known that Gen Zers share a lot of characteristics with the Millennials. Still, they bring in new behavioral patterns can greatly influence workplace dynamics. Understanding their behavior, values, and expectations can help managers to better integrate the new hires into the workplace. According to the research done by Barna Group (2018), Gen Z has been found to be the most achievement-oriented of the generations. Additionally, Gen Zers are higher educated, have greater economic well-being, and entrepreneurial and outcome orientation. They are the first generation that has never seen the world without the Internet (Bharat, 2020), and due to exposure smartphones from the early ages, Gen Zers are consider tech-savvies. However, they lack work experience and are most likely to suffer from depression and anxiety (Schroth, 2019). In order to prepare them for the workplace, managers need to take time to help manage their expectations. One of the ways to do it is by having an effective onboarding process which can help them make sense of the new environment and reduce anxiety.

Onboarding Experience

An onboarding process begins with human resources department, by ‘finding the best candidate that is the right fit for the organization, the culture, and the job expectations’ (Palmer-Roberts, 2020). As the competition for skilled workforce is fierce, human resources have an important role in determining success of the organization. Onboarding can be defined as ‘a process of introducing new hires into the new job, acquainting them with the organization’s goals, values, rules, responsibilities, procedures, and socializing the employee into an organizational culture, thereby helping the new employees adjust to social and performance aspects of the new job’ (Bharat,2020). Likewise, Ed Bancroft and George Bradt describe onboarding at ‘the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating, and accelerating new team members, whether they come from outside or inside the organization’ (Gaul, 2017).

The main purpose of an onboarding process is to boost the confidence of the new employees by providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills, tools, and resources required for their job position (Palmer-Roberts, 2020). Moreover, the process helps employees to become fully productive as early as possible, and in that way, contributing to the company. Successful onboarding will result in mutually positive relationship between the organization and employees (Bharat, 2020). Furthermore, onboarding can help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety that new hires experience by understanding their role in the organization (Schroth, 2019). Due to Gen Zers higher levels of anxiety, the need for good onboarding practices significantly increases.

The process may differ for each organization in procedures, learning techniques, style, and duration (Bharat, 2020). Commonly, it begins from the day an offer is made and lasts from six to twelve months. Whatever approach the company decides to implement, the fact is that faster a new hire is integrated into the company, sooner the employee will be able to contribute to the business. A number of studies have found (Bharat, 2020; Schroth, 2019) that effective onboarding results in better performance, job satisfaction, loyalty, and self-efficacy. In addition, Palmer-Roberts (2020) found that effective onboarding can be motivation for higher employee performance and engaged employees who want to contribute to the organization are less likely to leave the company.

A survey conducted by Korn Ferry (2017) has shown that 25% of new employees want to quit their jobs within the first six months due to poor onboarding. Moreover, 98% of participants said that onboarding programs are a key factor in retention efforts. Other research found that ‘only 12% of new hires say their company did a good job onboarding them, and 87% say they do not have the optimum level of knowledge and tools necessary to do their job’ (Schroth, 2019).’ Lastly, Schroth claims that ‘Gen Zers have reported that they could have performed closer to their bosses’ expectations if they were given more clear instructions and training on the job’. As a result of the generational gap, Gen Zers have different expectations of the onboarding. In a study which set out to understand Gen Z expectations on effective onboarding, Bharat (2020) found that the meaningful work, performance management and work-life balance are the top three variables that need to be addressed in the process. Managers have important role in the onboarding, as they are the one who should assist new hires in understanding their role and contribution to the success of the company. If they fail in doing so, employees often feel like their job is meaningless or repetitive, influencing their levels of

motivation and contribution to the business. Additionally, Gen Zers prefer real-time feedback and in-person approach. As they are career ambitious, they want to understand and find ways to improve their weaknesses on a regular basis, instead of waiting for the annual feedback. Lastly, Gen Z prefers flexible work arrangements, which enables them to balance out their work and personal obligations. In addition, they believe there should be no reason for not implementing flexible working schedule as long as the performance is not affected.

Affective Organizational Commitment

Many HR and organizational behavior scholars have been interested in affective organizational commitment because of its effects on the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Rani and Samuel, 2019). Organizational commitment model has been developed by Allen and Mayer (1991) and described as ‘psychological state that characterizes the employee’s relationships with the organization’ and can have influence one’s decision to continue working for the organization. The model demonstrates three forms of commitment: affective, continuance and normative. Affective organization commitment (AOC) refers to the employee’s emotional connection with the organization. Employees who possess this form of commitment are continuing to work for the organization because they want to do so. Continuance commitment is described as individual’s awareness of the costs if he/she decides to leave the organization. Lastly, normative commitment refers to obligatory feeling to continue employment due to their loyalty to the organization. All three forms contribute to portraying the complex nature of organizational commitment. Still, AOC is considered to be the most effective form (Rani and Samuel, 2019) as it is intrinsic and self-determined, while other two forms are driven by feelings of obligation or pressure. Consequently, AOC has stronger correlation to high job performance, low turnover, stress, and attendance.

The relationship between AOC and different generations has been widely investigated over the past decade. Nabahani and Riyanto (2020) claim that younger generations are more eager to pursue better opportunities if they find themselves in favorable position, causing problems for organizations to retain young talent. Furthermore, Gen Zers are known to be “job hopper” generation for various reasons, and such behaviour is certainly connected to AOE. Nabahani and Riyanto (2020) suggest using organizational commitment model to achieve Gen Z’s loyalty to the organization. Additionally, psychological capital such as hope, self-efficacy, optimism and resilience proved to have positive influence on Gen Z’s commitment.

Work Engagement

Recent study has shown that engaged employees make an organization more productive and competitive on the market (Putra, Cho & Liu, 2017). Moreover, engaged employees boost profits, decrease expenses such as labor costs, increase employee retention rates, improve overall employee satisfaction.

The term work engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990) and describes as motivation and positive attitude employees have towards their work responsibilities. Kahn identified three psychological conditions that enable it: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Meaningfulness refers to employee's sense of rewards for their job performance, and if they find they found their job relevant enough to fully engage. Next, safety is connected with sense of trust and security in the work environment. Lastly, availability of physical and psychological resources needed to perform the job. Furthermore, Kahn (1990) defines it as 'simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performance'. Additionally, he distinguishes engagement from everyday hard work, as engaged employee will take care of the work because they want to, and genuinely want to contribute to the organization. A broader perspective has been adopted by Schaufeli et al. (2002) who further investigated psychological conditions, and added three more: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to physical or mental strength, and amount of effort put into the work. Next, dedication is related to one's enthusiasm towards work, and meaningful work. Thirdly, absorption is related to committing oneself with full concentration. In interview with Workforce magazine (Workday, 2015), Kahn suggested how managers and leaders could apply this theory on workplace, "Approach employees as true partners, involving them in continuous dialogues and processes about how to design and alter their roles, tasks and working relationships—which means that leaders need to make it safe enough for employees to speak openly of their experiences at work."

Career Intention

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and hospitality employed 334 million people across the world and was accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council 2021). In 2020, 62 million jobs were lost and putting entire industry's ecosystem out of balance. In order to meet the expectations of increasingly demanding customers, hospitality businesses heavily depend on young and energetic employees (Robinson et al., 2019). This has resulted in interdependence between young talent and the industry itself in terms of employment. (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). According to the International Youth Foundation (2013), more than 62% of young people have difficulties finding a decent job, resulting in frustration and cycle of displacement. Due to lack of resource, inadequate training and education opportunities, and government policies, youth unemployment rates are too high and can lead to economic instability and lost generations. For many young people, their first paid work experience is in tourism industry, and can significantly impact their perspective on the work and the industry itself (Robinson et al., 2019). Even though young people have important role in quality of tourism experiences, and can influence the image of destination, their voices have been largely unheard. Moreover, research has shown that motivated and educated hospitality workers are often disappointed about the industry from their beginner or internship experiences (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). In addition, irresponsible HR practices in the industry often cause labor exploitation of young workers (Robinson et al., 2019). Consequently, the hospitality industry faces the major issues of being unattractive career option for young talent (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021).

Method

The purpose of this research is to determine if the variable of the onboarding experience (OE) correlates with affective organizational commitment (AOC), employees' work engagement (WE), and one's intention of pursuing his or her career in the hospitality industry in the context of the Generation Z. The method of this research paper was a survey, and its participants were members of Generation Z (1996-2010) who have already gained experience in the hospitality industry.

Survey can be defined as 'a method of primary data collection based on communication with a representative sample of individuals' (Herkenhoff et al., 2017). Thus, working with only a sample, instead of the entire population of responders, can have certain limitations to the data. Besides sample validity, lack of answer scale validity as well as social desirability bias, can have impact on the survey results. In addition, Jack and Clarke (1998) argued how one of the biggest disadvantages of this method is lack of open-ended questions, where respondents do not have an opportunity to share their full perspective on the subject.

In this study, the survey was constructed out of two parts: first related to the mentioned variables and had a total of 16 questions using 5-point Likert scale, and second one with 8 questions related to demographic information.

The first five questions were related to onboarding experience and were taken from the Palmer-Roberts (2020) instrument which she used in her study 'Utilization of Onboarding Activities by Leaders on Employee Engagement, Performance, and Retention'. Examples of statements are 'The company helped me feel informed and knowledgeable of the organization and the role that I was expected to play' and 'I was invited by my supervisor to voice my opinion and provide regular feedback'.

The next 6 questions were drawn from the instrument done by Allen and Meyer (1993) and used to measure affective organizational commitment. Some of the statements were 'I felt a strong sense of belonging while working at this company' and 'I was proud to tell others I have worked for that company'.

Work engagement was measured using UWES-3 measuring instrument created by Schaufeli et al. (2019). According to the authors', work engagement manifests itself in three conditions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. There were 3 questions, each measuring one of the

conditions of the work engagement. For example, 'At work, I felt bursting with energy' was used to measure vigor, and 'I was enthusiastic about my job' to measure dedication.

Lastly, career intention was measured by taking two out of three questions from the instrument done by Zopiatis and Theorcharous (2013), and the example of the statement is 'The exposure I gained from this experience increased my desire to pursue a career within the hospitality industry'.

The survey was distributed via e-mail in an online format (Google Forms) due to its practicality and wider reach of responders. To gain demographical information about the sample, the last section of the survey was dedicated to information about gender, age, current educational level, if their education is related to the hospitality, and the highest degree earned. In addition, participants were asked to refer to their most recent work experience, and answer in which department they worked in, type and size of the business.

Sample

The research participants were members of Gen Z, who already have work experience in the hospitality. Survey was distributed via e-mail in an online format and sent to students at University of Dubrovnik and RIT Croatia, Dubrovnik campus. The total number of completed surveys was 77, but 10 were disregarded as they were not members of Generation Z. Out of 67 respondents, 44 were female (65.7%) and 23 were male (34.3%). Majority of respondents (n=54, 74%) stated that they are currently studying hospitality and 5 respondents (10.4%) stated they have already finished studies in hospitality. Additionally, 54 respondents (80.6%) stated that they are undergraduate students, and 7 (10.5%) are graduate students.

Respondents were mainly hotel employees (n=34, 50.75%) and F&B (restaurant, bar) employees (n=14, 21%). Most frequent departments they have worked in were Front Office (n=24, 35.8%), F&B (n=20, 29.9%) and Sales and Marketing (n=13, 19.4%). Out of four categories that questioned the size of the businesses, 28 (41.79%) respondents answered they have worked in medium size businesses (51-250 employees), and 14 (20.9%) have worked in large businesses.

Table 1: Demographic table of respondents

	N	%
Gender		
Male	23	34.3%
Female	44	65.7%
Area of study		
Currently studying hospitality	54	74.00%
Already finished studies in hospitality	5	10.40%
Studies not related to hospitality	8	15.60%
Current Education Level		
High School student	3	4.5%
Undegraduate student	54	80.6%
Graduate student	7	10.5%
Already graduated	3	4.5%
Department		
Sales & Marketing	13	19.4%
F&B	20	29.9%
Housekeeping	1	1.5%
Finance	1	1.5%
Human Resources	4	6.0%
Front Office	24	35.8%
IT	2	3.0%
Spa & Wellness	1	1.5%
Other	1	1.5%
Type of business/property		
Hotel	34	50.75%
F&B (restaurant, bar)	14	21.00%
Travel Agency	7	10.45%
Other	12	17.90%
Size of the organization		
<10	13	19.40%
11-50	12	17.91%
51-250	28	41.79%
251<	14	20.90%

Source: Author

Results

In regard to the onboarding variable, the results have shown that Gen Zers had above average onboarding experience in their most recent workplaces, i.e. their employers provided them with the necessary knowledge, skills, tools, and resources required for their job position (M=3.77, SD=1.07). The lowest results were delivered for affective organizational commitment variable (M=3.34, SD=1.33). Next, work engagement variable results were above average (M=3.67, SD=0.96), indicating high levels of engagement at their workplaces. The item testing dedication had the highest results (M=3.84), while the lowest results were related to item testing vigor (M=3.4). Lastly, career intention variable shows that majority of Gen Zers are willing to pursue their careers in the hospitality industry (M=3.4, SD=1.08).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	Min	Max	Average	SD
Onboarding experience (5)	8	25	3.77	1.07
Affective Commitment (6)	8	30	3.34	1.33
Work Engagement (3)	4	15	3.67	0.96
Career Intention (2)	2	10	3.4	1.08

Source: Author

Table 3: Correlations between variables

	AOC	WE	CI	OE
Affective Commitment	-	0.50**	0.46**	0.70**
Work Engagement		-	0.36**	0.37**
Career Intention			-	0.41**
Onboarding Experience				-

Source: Author

The three variables were tested using correlation analysis in order to yield results for three initial hypotheses. (Table 3)

H1: Effective onboarding process is positively related to affective organizational commitment.

The hypothesized positive relation between effective onboarding process and affective organization commitment delivered highest results and strongest correlation of $r=.70$ ($p<0.01$). Therefore, the set hypothesis is confirmed.

H2: Effective onboarding process is positively related to employees' intention to pursue career in hospitality industry.

The hypothesized positive relation between effective onboarding process and employees' intention to pursue career in the hospitality industry reported a very significant correlation coefficient of $r=.41$ ($p<0.01$) and confirmed the set hypothesis.

H3: Effective onboarding process is positively related to employees' work engagement.

Lastly, there is a significant relationship between effective onboarding process and employees' work engagement ($r=.37$, $p<0.01$), which confirms our set hypothesis.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of the Generation Z towards onboarding experience and its correlation to affective organizational commitment, work engagement and intention of pursuing career in the hospitality industry. The significance of the results can be used to better understand young cohort that has already started entering the workforce. Moreover, the study investigates if the onboarding can be used as a way of retaining young and educated talent in the hospitality industry, as well as delivering higher affective organizational commitment and work engagement results.

To be specific, hospitality employers, HR professionals and educational organizations, can use this study to understand the importance of onboarding process. Consequently, they can start implementing it in their workplaces and simultaneously increase affective commitment, work engagement, and influence one's decision of pursuing the hospitality career. Hospitality industry has been facing major employment issues, especially after COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, young talent does not find hospitality to be an attractive industry source (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Therefore, HR professionals must start implementing changes in order to attract and retain young talent, and onboarding should be one of them.

First hypothesis assumed a positive relationship between onboarding experience and affective commitment. The assumption relied on the notion that in the instance of effective onboarding experience, the employee would have stronger affective commitment i.e. stronger emotional connection towards the organization. Lowest results for onboarding were delivered on the question regarding the regular feedback provided by supervisors. As mentioned in the literature review, Gen Zers believe that effective onboarding process should include performance management (Bharat, 2020) Since they are career ambitious, they prefer real-time feedback, so they can improve and excel faster. Additionally, the lowest results for affective commitment were related to one's desire to continue their professional career within the same organization which could have been expected as participants are just starting to enter the workforce. The previous studies have shown a strong correlation between AOC and high job performance and low turnover (Rani and Samuel, 2019). Moreover, Gen Zers are known as 'job hoppers', which creates problems for organizations to retain young talent. In author's view, combination of using both onboarding process and AOC model could deliver the highest results when it comes to retaining young talent. Onboarding is a process that will attract them to a specific company, but in order to retain them, organization must create emotional connection with its employees. Furthermore, the onboarding must be adjusted to Gen Zers and their perceptions of effective onboarding process.

Second hypothesis assumed a positive relationship between onboarding experience and one's intention to pursue career in the hospitality industry. The results strongly imply that effective onboarding can be used to increase one's intention to pursue hospitality career. In addition, recent studies have shown that motivated and educated hospitality workers are often disappointed about the industry from their beginner or internship experience (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). In author's opinion, hospitality industry cannot afford to lose educated hospitality professionals, especially after COVID-19 pandemic which created interdependence between young talent and the industry itself in terms of employment. Therefore, hospitality businesses should develop onboarding processes in accordance with Gen Zers preferences if they want to retain young talent.

Third hypothesis assumed a positive relationship between onboarding experience and work engagement. Strong correlation coefficient proves that effective onboarding should be implemented in order to increase work engagement. According to the previous research, engaged employees help increase revenue, increase employee retention rates, improve overall employee satisfaction (Putra, Cho & Liu, 2017). In the long-term, high work engagement could positively impact one's decision to stay in the hospitality. Moreover, work engagement can be increase by continuous discussions about the processes and employees' roles in achieving company's goals. Such approach would be greatly valued by Gen Zers due to their preference of regular and open feedback and doing meaningful work (Bharat, 2020).

The results from this study can be beneficial mainly for hospitality employers and Gen Z members. As they are still a young cohort, not much scientific research has been done. Therefore, studies exploring such topics can help managers prepare better for Gen Zers. Furthermore, career services in schools and other educational organizations can use this research as a way of improving the quality of internships. Knowing the fact that effective onboarding can be one of the factors of influencing one's intention to pursue career in hospitality, they can develop standards implying how effective onboarding should look like.

Limitations

Although the present results clearly support tested hypothesis, it is appropriate to recognize several potential limitations. A first limitation concerns the sample and its size. The current study has only examined the perception of Gen Z and sample were mostly students from the same region. In the future, it would be interesting to assess both Gen Z and Millennials perspective, as well as using larger sample size of participants. A second limitation concerns the time limitation for acquiring data, i.e. survey participants. Consequently, this study used convenience sampling which does not reflect the way a general population group feels about anything specific and can result in bias responses.

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