

Managing Multigenerational Talent In The Public Sector: An Empirical Study Of Recognition, Work Design, And Career Growth

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Abstract

Talent retention has become a critical challenge in public sector human resource management, particularly in sustaining high-quality civil servants from Generations Y and Z. This study investigates the influence of recognition, work design, and career growth on talent retention among young civil servants in Indonesia. Using a quantitative approach with Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), data were collected from 253 employees of the National Institute of Public Administration in Indonesia. The findings reveal that recognition and career growth significantly enhance talent retention across both generations, while job design does not exert a meaningful effect. These results highlight that psychological and developmental factors play a stronger role than structural aspects in shaping retention decisions of younger generations. Theoretically, the study advances Human Resource Management and Talent Management literature by demonstrating the limited relevance of traditional job design for multigenerational workforces. Practically, the study suggests that public organizations should adopt generation-sensitive retention strategies, focusing on meaningful recognition systems and transparent career pathways, rather than relying solely on rigid structural job frameworks.

Keywords: Talent Retention, Recognition, Work Design, Career Growth

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Talent Management in the Indonesian Public Sector

The concept of talent management emphasizes the strategic management of employees' skills and capabilities as valuable organizational assets that must be systematically nurtured. The implementation of talent management enables organizations to identify, develop, and retain talent so that individuals can grow optimally and contribute more effectively to organizational performance. Furthermore, talent management strengthens organizational competitiveness by ensuring the availability of the required skills and competencies to achieve institutional goals. Through continuous employee development and well-designed succession management programs, organizations can ensure the smooth transfer of talent across generations of employees.

According to Gallardo (2020), research on talent management remains very limited and is often situated at a marginal level. Existing studies frequently lack organizational context, making it particularly challenging for both practitioners and academics to fully interpret and apply the findings. In Indonesia, research conducted by Linawati (2023) shows that discussions on talent management in scientific articles have only emerged since 2011, or within the last twelve years—considerably later compared to neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Within the public sector, the study further reveals that out of 29 articles addressing the phenomenon of talent management in Indonesia, only eight specifically focus on the public sector, while the remainder examine the private sector or do not clearly distinguish between public and private sector contexts.

Indonesian civil servants, represent the backbone of bureaucracy and must therefore be managed strategically. Talent management within the public sector was formally recognized in Government Regulation No. 11/2017, which identifies talent management as one of the core elements of the merit system, encompassing workforce planning, development, career pathways, and succession planning. This mandate was further elaborated in the Ministerial Regulation of the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform No. 3/2020 on Public Servant Talent Management, which stipulates that institutional talent management must include stages of acquisition, development, retention, and

placement of talent. These processes are prioritized for filling strategic positions, based on the highest potential and performance levels, through structured mechanisms.

As of 2023, Indonesia had 4,282,429 civil servants distributed across multiple generations. The majority are Generation Y, born between 1981 and 1994, comprising 50% of the total workforce, followed by Generation X (1965–1976) at 40%. In contrast, the proportion of Generation Z (1995–2010) and Baby Boomers (1946–1964) remains relatively small, at 5% and 4% respectively. These demographic dynamics underline the increasing importance of multigenerational workforce management and the urgency for adaptive talent management strategies in the Indonesian public sector.



Figure 1. Civil Servant in Indonesia

Source: National Civil Service Agency of Indonesia (2023)

1.2 Generational Shifts and Talent Retention Challenges

Over time, new generations inevitably enter the labour market. The most recent cohort, Generation Z—often referred to as i-Gen—has begun to join the workforce. A generation is defined as a group of individuals born within the same age range, living in the same socio-cultural context, and sharing similar life experiences (Gabriellova, 2021). Generation Z is characterized by its deep integration with digital technology, constant reliance on the internet, widespread use of smartphones, and familiarity with laptops and computers.

The entry of new generations into the workforce has consistently attracted the attention of both practitioners and scholars, as individuals from different generational cohorts tend to hold distinct attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and values (Gabriel, 2022). Generation Z is particularly noteworthy because their population size is gradually surpassing that of Millennials globally. As such, understanding the characteristics and expectations of Generation Z is crucial, both to retain them within organizations and to harness their talents effectively.

The differences in preferences between Generations Y and Z regarding talent retention have become a critical area of concern, given their distinct work values and career expectations. Generation Y tends to emphasize job stability and loyalty to the organization, while Generation Z places greater importance on work flexibility, personal development, and the use of digital technology in the workplace (Sriwulan et al., 2021; Permana, 2025). This divergence underscores the need for retention strategies that are sensitive to generational values and expectations in order to strengthen employee engagement and reduce turnover. Recent studies affirm that adaptive talent management plays a pivotal role in retaining employees across generations, especially Generation Z, which is highly responsive to technology-based training programs and work environments that prioritize mental well-being (Wafiq, 2023; Permana, 2025). In contrast, Generation Y responds more favourably to policies that emphasize the development of practical skills and recognition of tangible contributions (Sriwulan et al., 2021). Hence, organizations must design retention strategies that go beyond generic approaches, tailoring them instead to the unique needs and characteristics of each generation to ensure long-term sustainability.

Understanding how generational dynamics can be leveraged enables organizations to foster stronger relationships with employees, address their evolving needs, and build a healthier organizational community. By effectively analyzing generational information, organizations can improve workforce

management and respond more strategically to employee expectations (Nieżurawska, 2023). This study is therefore highly relevant for developing effective talent retention strategies for Generations Y and Z within the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA). By capturing the perspectives of both cohorts, the research not only offers insights for retaining talented civil servants but also contributes to improving the overall quality of public service delivery in a sustainable manner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in a multi-level theoretical framework that integrates grand theories, middle-range theory, and applied theories to explain the dynamics of talent retention in the public sector. At the grand theory level, Human Resource Management (HRM), Behaviour Theory, and Goal Setting Theory provide the foundational lens for understanding how organizational practices, individual behaviours, and motivational mechanisms influence employees' intention to stay. These theories emphasize that retention is not merely a structural outcome but also a function of psychological drivers and goal-oriented behaviours. At the middle-range level, Talent Management theory offers a more focused perspective by addressing how organizations systematically identify, develop, and retain talent across generational cohorts. Finally, at the applied level, the study operationalizes these perspectives through specific constructs: Talent Retention, Career Growth, Recognition, and Work Design. The integration of these theoretical layers enables a comprehensive analysis, bridging abstract conceptual frameworks with practical organizational realities, while also highlighting the generational nuances that shape retention strategies in the public sector.

Table 1. Literature Review

Variable		Literature Review	Hypothesis	Linear to Hypothesis
X1	Recognition (R)	Cho & Lewis (2012), Dwiputranti (2023), Ibudunni (2015), Mihardjo, L. W. W., et al (2021), Yuniasih (2022), Salleh et al (2023), Chopra & Sahoo (2023), Murtiningsih, R. S. (2020), Bharadwaj, S., Khan, N. A., et al (2019), Fei, L. K., et al (2024), Zainee., Puteh, (2020), Usman, F., et al (2024).	R influence talent retention	H1 & H2
		Rasheed., et al (2022)	R influences talent retention with mediator Career Planning	
X2	Work Design (WD)	Dwiputranti (2023), Yuniasih (2022), Salleh et al (2023), Tee (2018), Lin, C. Y., & Huang, C. K. (2021), Patra, G., Datta, S., & Bose, I. (2023). Mukherjee, B., et al (2020).	WD influence talent retention	H3 & H4
		Drewery, D. (2019), Sharma, A., & Bora R. (2020)	WD does not directly affect talent retention	
		Schieman, S., et al (2020).	Connection WD with employee appreciation and depression	
X3	Career Growth (CG)	Yuniasih (2022), Salleh et al (2023), Tee (2018), Fei, L. K., et al (2024), Dalayga, B., et al (2021), Mukherjee, B., et al (2020), Ferawati Usman, et al (2024)	CG influences talent retention	H5 & H6

		Hariyanto (2020)	CG is component talent management which is commonly implemented	
		Salleh et all (2024)	CG affect job satisfaction	
		Murtiningsih, R. S. (2020).	Career Growth Does not affect job satisfaction	

Source: Data processed (2025)

2.1 Research Gap

2.1.1 Research Objectives

This study seeks to examine the generational dynamics of talent retention in the Indonesian public sector by analyzing the effects of recognition, work design, and career growth on the intention to stay among Generations Y and Z. Specifically, it aims to investigate how recognition, work design, and career growth independently influence retention decisions across these two cohorts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of generational differences in public sector talent management.

2.1.2 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, this study seeks to address the following questions:

- To what extent does recognition affect the intention to stay among Generations Y and Z in the public sector?
- How does work design influence the retention decisions of Generations Y and Z employees?
- What role does career growth play in shaping the intention to stay across both generational cohorts?

2.1.3 Research Hypothesis

Drawing on the theoretical framework, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- **H1–H2:** Recognition positively influences talent retention among Gen Y and Z.
- **H3–H4:** Work design positively influences talent retention among Gen Y and Z.
- **H5–H6:** Career growth positively influences talent retention among Gen Y and Z.

3. METHOD

The object of this study consists of civil servants from Generations Y and Z employed at the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) in Indonesia. NIPA is a Non-Ministerial Government Institution established on August 6, 1957, under overnment Regulation No. 30/1957. The generational distribution of NIPA employees includes 47 Baby Boomers, 224 Generation X employees, 618 Generation Y (Millennial) employees, and 116 Generation Z employees

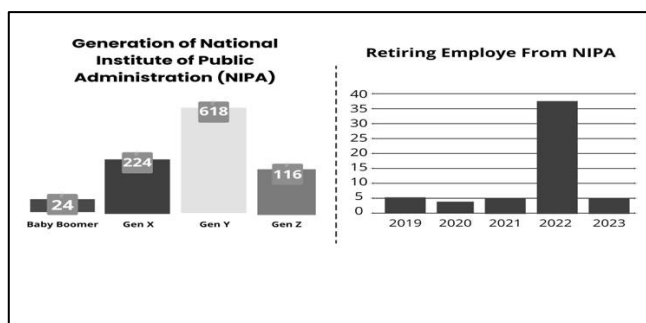


Figure 2. Civil Servant of NIPA

Source: National Institute of Public Administration (2023)

The determination of sample size was based on quantitative methodological principles and the requirements of multigroup analysis using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). According to Hair et al. (2019), an adequate sample size is critical to ensure the validity and reliability of SEM results. The calculation of the minimum required sample was conducted using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, which considers population size and a 95% confidence level. Based on the total population of 663 civil servants from Generations Y and Z at NIPA, a sample size of at least 252 respondents is recommended.

Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the analytical technique in this study. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for exploratory research, theory development, and complex models that include multiple constructs and interrelationships (Hair et al., 2019). Compared to covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM is more robust with smaller sample sizes and does not require strict assumptions of multivariate normality, making it highly appropriate for studies conducted in organizational settings where data characteristics may vary.

The use of PLS-SEM with multigroup analysis (MGA) also allows for the examination of generational differences between Generations Y and Z. This is particularly relevant for this study, as generational comparisons are central to understanding talent retention dynamics in the public sector. By applying MGA within the PLS-SEM framework, this study can empirically test whether the structural relationships among recognition, work design, career growth, and talent retention differ significantly across the two generational cohorts. Such an approach not only enhances the rigor of the analysis but also provides richer theoretical and practical insights into generationally sensitive human resource management strategies.

NO	Variable	NO	Indicator	Scale
1	<i>Talent Retention</i>	1	Employee engagement in work and organization	Skala Likert
		2	Effective work-life balance	Skala Likert
		3	Organizational support for employee needs	Skala Likert
2	<i>Recognition</i>	1	Fair and consistent financial rewards	Skala Likert
		2	Positive image of the organization	Skala Likert
		3	Awards for high-achieving employees	Skala Likert
3	<i>Work Design</i>	1	Variation and expansion of tasks	Skala Likert
		2	Challenging work	Skala Likert
		3	Freedom to complete tasks	Skala Likert
4	<i>Career Growth</i>	1	Structured succession planning	Skala Likert
		2	Effective career management	Skala Likert
		3	Continuous competency development	Skala Likert
		4	Job rotation opportunities	Skala Likert

Table 2. Operationalization of Variables

Source: Data processed (2025)

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire distributed to respondents resulted in 246 respondents returning completed questionnaires with the following description. The questionnaire distributed to respondents resulted in 246 respondents returning completed questionnaires with the following description.

Table 3. Respondent profile

No.	Details	Gen Y	Gen Z
1	Number of respondents	165	88
2	Male respondents	75	36

3	Female respondents	90	52
4	Staff Position	16	35
5	Certain Functional Positions	139	53
6	Structural Positions	10	0

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

No.	Variabel	Mean		Median		Modus	
		Gen Y	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen Z
1	Talent retention	3,92	4,16	4	4	4	4
2	Recognition	3,80	4,09	4	4	4	4
3	Work Design	3,97	4,22	4	4	4	4
4	Career Growth	3,56	4,07	4	4	4	4

Source: Data processed (2025)

The analysis shows that, overall, the mean values for all variables are above 3.50, indicating that respondents' perceptions of their working conditions are generally positive across both Generation Y and Generation Z.

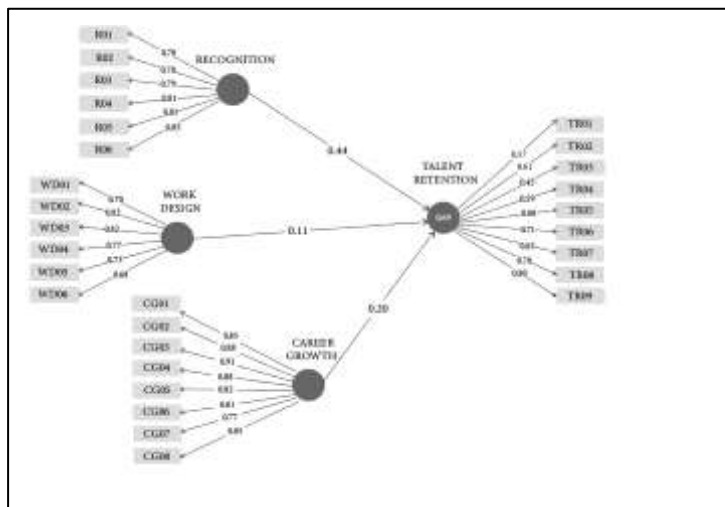


Figure 3. Loading Factor I

Source: Data processed using PLS-SEM (2025)

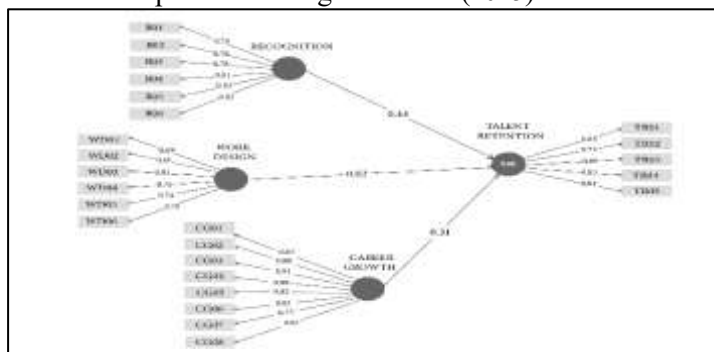


Figure 4. Loading Factor II

Source: Data processed using PLS-SEM (2025)

Table 5. Path Coefficients Gen Y

	Original Sample	T Value	P Values
Work Desain -> Talent Retention	0.112	1.608	0.108
Recognition -> Talent Retention	0.511	3.071	0.002
Career Growth -> Talent Retention	0.366	2.429	0.015

Source: Data processed using PLS-SEM (2025)

Table 6. Path Coefficients Gen Z

	Original Sample	T Value	P Values
Work Desain -> Talent Retention	-0.010	0.095	0.924
Recognition -> Talent Retention	0.364	2.438	0.015
Career Growth -> Talent Retention	0.285	2.181	0.029

Source: Data processed using PLS-SEM (2025)

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

No.	Hypothesis	Status	Theory	Consistency
H1	Recognition → Gen Y	Accepted	<i>Goal Setting Theory, Behaviour Theory</i>	Consistent recognition strengthens the motivation to persist and serves as a positive stimulus..
H2	Recognition → Gen Z	Accepted	<i>Goal Setting Theory, Behaviour Theory</i>	Consistent recognition strengthens the motivation to persist and serves as a positive stimulus.
H3	Career Growth → Gen Y	Rejected	<i>HRM, Behaviour Theory</i>	Inconsistency, possibly because Gen Y's expectations of the meaning of work are more dominant than the structure of work, which causes a discrepancy with the theory.
H4	Work Desain → Gen Z	Rejected	<i>HRM, Behaviour Theory</i>	Inconsistent, Gen Z May respond more to flexibility than to the formal design of jobs, so design aspects do not have a significant effect on their retention.
H5	Career Growth → Gen Y	Accepted	<i>Goal Setting Theory</i>	Consistent, long-term goals provide ongoing motivation.
H6	Career Growth → Gen Z	Accepted	<i>Goal Setting Theory</i>	Consistent, career-level expectations are a powerful motivator.

Source: Data processed (2025)

Hypothesis H1: Recognition and Talent Retention among Gen Y

The results for H1 confirm that recognition has a positive and significant effect on talent retention among Generation Y employees. This finding indicates that acknowledging employees' achievements and contributions is a crucial factor in retaining talent within this generational cohort. Recognition may take various forms, including formal or informal appreciation, awards, and constructive feedback, all of which contribute to employees feeling valued and motivated to continue contributing to the organization.

This result is consistent with Herzberg's motivation theory, which identifies recognition as a key motivator that enhances job satisfaction and employee loyalty (Herzberg, 1966). Recognition of employee contributions thus plays a crucial role in fostering commitment and loyalty among Generation Y civil servants. When recognition is delivered consistently, it strengthens employees' emotional attachment to the organization and reduces their intention to leave. This finding also aligns with the talent management perspective, which underscores the importance of recognition as a fundamental strategy for retaining high-potential employees (Kalinin, 2022). Accordingly, recognition emerges as a pivotal mechanism in retaining Generation Y civil servants in the Indonesian public sector.

Hypothesis H2: Recognition and Talent Retention among Gen Z

The results for H2 indicate that recognition has a positive and significant effect on talent retention among Generation Z employees. This finding suggests that members of Generation Z place high value on appreciation and acknowledgment of their contributions in the workplace. Recognition in the form of praise, formal awards, or constructive feedback plays a critical role in enhancing their motivation and emotional attachment to the organization.

The acceptance of H2 confirms that recognition is a key determinant of talent retention for Generation Z. This outcome reinforces the relevance of Human Resource Management theory, behavior theory, and goal-setting theory in explaining retention phenomena within the digital work environment. By providing contextual, responsive, and meaningful recognition, organizations can cultivate stronger relationships with younger employees and sustain organizational competencies amid the intensifying global competition for skilled talent.

Hypothesis H3: Work Design and Talent Retention among Gen Y

The results for H3 show that work design does not have a significant effect on talent retention among Generation Y employees. This finding indicates that although work design is an important aspect of human resource management, it does not directly influence Generation Y's decision to remain in an organization. This may be explained by the fact that Generation Y places greater emphasis on intrinsic motivation and the need for recognition and self-development rather than the formal structure or variety of tasks within their jobs.

Elements of work design such as task variety and enlargement, challenging work, and autonomy in task completion, did not prove to directly influence the retention decision of Generation Y employees. This finding provides a critical insight: the structured aspects of job design, traditionally assumed to enhance motivation and loyalty, are not central determinants of retention for Generation Y.

Hypothesis H4: Work Design and Talent Retention among Gen Z

The results for H4 reveal that work design does not significantly affect talent retention among Generation Z employees. This suggests that aspects of job design, including task variety, challenging assignments, and autonomy in task completion, are not decisive factors influencing Generation Z's decision to remain in an organization. While this outcome contradicts the predictions of several established theories, it opens opportunities for theory development grounded in empirical realities.

Within the framework of Human Resource Management (HRM), job design has long been considered a strategic element in fostering employee engagement and retention (Cooke, 2020; Sakti, 2023). Kalangi (2021) argues that effective job structures—encompassing task variety, role clarity, and opportunities for role development—enhance employees' sense of ownership of their work and organization. However, the present findings suggest that for Generation Z, conventional job design is less relevant or no longer a primary factor in retention. This aligns with Machado's (2022) observation that Generation Z tends to prioritize flexibility, meaningful work, and technological integration over rigid job structures. Thus, the findings challenge the validity of traditional HRM approaches in addressing retention among digital-native generations.

Hypothesis H5: Career Growth and Talent Retention among Gen Y

The results for H5 demonstrate that career growth has a positive and significant effect on talent retention among Generation Y employees. This finding confirms that opportunities for development—such as structured succession planning, effective career management, continuous competency development, and job rotation—are key factors shaping Generation Y's decision to remain within the organization. Career growth thus remains a primary determinant in retention strategies for this generation, particularly in an increasingly dynamic and competitive labor market.

From an HRM perspective, career growth serves as a cornerstone in fostering long-term relationships between individuals and organizations (Cooke, 2020; Kalangi, 2021). Contemporary HRM emphasizes the importance of career pathways, mentoring, job rotation, and structured training in strengthening employee motivation and loyalty (Sakti, 2023). Machado (2022) further notes that for Generation Y, career advancement is not solely about promotion but also about meaning, personal growth, and recognition of potential. These findings reinforce the validity of development-oriented HRM approaches, in which organizations function not only as employers but also as facilitators of long-term employee growth. To enhance retention through career development, management must design transparent and equitable career systems based on competence and performance, with realistic yet challenging growth trajectories and opportunities for involvement in cross-unit strategic projects.

Hypothesis H6: Career Growth and Talent Retention among Gen Z

The results for H6 indicate that career growth has a positive and significant effect on talent retention among Generation Z employees. Opportunities for learning, professional development, and promotion serve as key motivators for this generation to remain within an organization. This finding underscores the importance of clear, transparent, and responsive career development systems in fostering the loyalty of Generation Z employees. Such mechanisms are particularly relevant in the post-pandemic era, characterized by heightened career mobility and younger generations' demands for clarity and acceleration in professional growth.

Within the HRM framework, this finding is consistent with the perspectives of Kalangi (2021), Cooke (2020), and Sakti (2023), who highlight career development as a critical factor in retaining high-quality human resources, especially in multigenerational workplaces. Contemporary HRM no longer relies solely on "linear career paths" tied to tenure but instead promotes competency-based progression, personalized development, and agile approaches to internal mobility. Machado (2022) specifically emphasizes that Generation Z has high expectations for rapid and meaningful career progression, seeking work environments that provide clear learning paths, micro-credentialing opportunities, and recognition of both digital and social skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that recognition has a significant influence on talent retention among both Generation Y and Generation Z. This result is consistent with Goal Setting Theory and Behaviour Theory, which conceptualize recognition as a positive stimulus that strengthens individual motivation to remain within an organization. Recognition is shown to function not only as a symbolic reward but also as a psychological factor that provides meaning, a sense of being valued, and legitimacy for employees' contributions.

In contrast, work design was found to have no significant impact on talent retention for either Generation Y or Generation Z. This result diverges from the theoretical assumptions of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Behaviour Theory, which typically argue that well-structured jobs enhance organizational commitment. The rejection of this hypothesis suggests that both generations prioritize dimensions such as flexibility, meaningful work, and dynamic work experiences over the formal structures of job design.

Career growth, however, was confirmed to significantly affect retention for both generations. For Generation Y, career development opportunities align with their orientation toward stable, long-term goals. For Generation Z, career growth serves as a strong motivational driver, reflecting their preference for rapid, clear, and aspirational career trajectories. This indicates that career-related factors remain a

universal determinant of retention across generational cohorts, although preferences and expectations differ.

Overall, this study emphasizes that the retention of younger civil servants is more strongly influenced by psychological and developmental factors (recognition and career growth) than by structural factors (work design). Consequently, public sector human resource management needs to shift its focus from structural approaches to motivational and developmental strategies. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on multigenerational retention, while practically it offers guidance for talent management in public sector organizations.

From a managerial perspective, public organizations should strengthen non-financial recognition systems that are personal, transparent, and relevant to young civil servants' performance. Recognition need not be material but may take the form of public appreciation, positive feedback, or opportunities to engage in strategic projects. Such measures represent effective strategies to enhance retention, particularly for Generations Y and Z, who perceive recognition as legitimizing their contributions.

The insignificance of work design suggests the need for reorientation in job design practices. Instead of emphasizing rigid structures, public organizations are advised to promote flexibility, autonomy, and cross-functional opportunities, which align more closely with Generation Z's expectations. For Generation Y, organizations should reinforce job meaningfulness and the sense of alignment with organizational goals to maintain relevance with their aspirations.

Career growth strategies should be institutionalized through clear, progressive, and inclusive policies, such as the establishment of talent pools, intergenerational mentoring, and accelerated competency development pathways. These measures will address Generation Y's preference for long-term career certainty while simultaneously meeting Generation Z's demand for rapid and transparent career progression.

Finally, as a managerial implication, public organizations should adopt a generationally sensitive talent management approach. While both recognition and career development are universally relevant, the differing preferences toward job design call for more adaptive strategies. By embracing generation-based approaches, public organizations can reduce the risk of turnover among younger civil servants, while creating an inclusive and sustainable work ecosystem.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited in scope as it examines talent retention only through the variables of recognition, work design, and career growth. While these variables provide meaningful insights, they do not fully represent the broader range of determinants that may influence retention. Moreover, the study is restricted to civil servants from Generations Y and Z working at the National Institute of Public Administration Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other institutions, sectors, or generational cohorts.

Future studies could expand the model by incorporating additional variables such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, or digital readiness as potential mediators or moderators to enrich the analysis. Comparative research across different public institutions, private sector organizations, or cross-cultural contexts would also be valuable to assess the external validity of the findings. Furthermore, longitudinal designs may help capture changes in generational attitudes and retention dynamics over time, offering deeper insights into sustainable talent management strategies

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