



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN**

**Sustainable Human Resource Management and Generation Z
in Japan**

What does the Japanese Generation Z value in work-life?

日本のZ世代は、ワークライフにおいて何を重視しているのでしょうか。

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Abstract

This study is about Generation Z in Japan and their work-life related values. The background for studying this generation and focusing on Japan is the historical background of Japanese work-life culture and the expectations the general theory of Generation Z as it applies to their future employers.

Whitin management, the base theory around organizational development and employee attractiveness is human resources management. Sustainable human resource management is the most recent theory. This is analyzed in combination with the theories of Generation Z. To further understand the Japanese aspect of this, Postmodernism and the Senpai-Kouhai Relationship theory were used.

The chosen method used to collect data was a combination of a quantitative questionnaire and deeper qualitative interviews. All questions were given both in English and Japanese to deepen the understanding of the underlying values of the respondents.

The study shows the complexity of this generation's values in the Japanese environment. It both confirms that their values follow the theoretical assumptions as well as indicates variations created by the Japanese culture.

抄録

本研究は、日本におけるZ世代と、彼らのワークライフに関連する価値観に関するものである。この世代を研究し、日本に焦点を当てる背景には、日本のワークライフ文化の歴史的背景と、Z世代の一般理論が彼らの将来の雇用主に適用される要求がある。

マネジメントは、組織開発、従業員の魅力を中心としたベースとなる理論が人的資源管理である。持続可能な人的資源管理は、最も新しい理論である。さらに理解するために、日本のポストモダニズムと日本の「先輩・後輩」という上下関係の理論が使われた。

データ収集の方法としては、量的研究のアンケートと、質的研究のインタビューを組み合わせ実施した。回答者の真の価値観の理解を深めるために、すべての質問は英語と日本語の両方で行われた。

この研究は、日本の環境におけるこの世代の価値観の複雑さを示している。彼らの価値観が理論的な前提に沿ったものであることを確認すると同時に、日本文化によって生み出されたバリエーションを示しているのである。

* 本論文は英語で書かれています。

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Sustainable Human Resource Management	4
1.2 Generation Z.....	4
1.3 Background	4
1.4 Research Problem and Question.....	6
1.5 Disposition.....	7
2. Theory	8
2.1 Sustainable Human Resource Management	8
2.2 Generation Z.....	10
2.2.1 Japanese Generation Z Population	11
2.3 Postmodernism	12
2.3.1 World Value Statues.....	13
2.4 Senpai – Kouhai Relationship	15
2.5 Discussion of the theoretical framework.....	16
3. Method	17
3.1 Research Methodology	17
3.2 Choice of Respondents	17
3.3 Data Collection.....	17
3.3.1 Questionnaire.....	17
3.3.2 Interviews	18
3.4 Data Analysis	19
3.4.1 Reliability and Validity	19
3.4.2 Ethical Considerations.....	19
4. Results	20
4.1 Questionnaire.....	20
4.2 Interviews	24
4.2.1 Education and Job-hunting	24
4.2.2 Core Value and Values.....	26
4.2.3 Work-Life.....	27
4.2.4 Career Aspirations and Development.....	29
4.2.5 View of Work-Life, Then and Now	30
5. Discussion	32
6. Conclusion.....	36
6.1 Limitations And Avenues For Future Research	37
References	38

1. Introduction

People make organizations, and organizations are only as good as the people who work in them. – Sitko (2023)

In the introduction, a summary of the theory Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM), will be given together with the theory of Generation Z. The background will explain these theories together with information about the work culture in Japan. These then form the base for the research problem and question.

1.1 Sustainable Human Resource Management

HRM is based on the theory that people are the key to the success of an organization. In other words, an organization is as good as the people working in it. (Sitko, 2023). The word 'sustainable' can be used in various ways and one of these is the sustainable way of managing human resources in our businesses. Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) can be explained in different ways and models, one of which is to see how human resource management is used to achieve certain goals such as social, environmental, and business ones (Sitko, 2023). The opposite of sustainable HRM is the unsustainable way which Sitko (2023) means is still used today even though the interest and focus on the sustainable factors has increased over the decades. In other words, the world has been, currently is, and will continue to change. However, these changes happen at different speeds and in different periods around the globe, and sometimes no change at all might be the current reality. What we do know about today is that the coming generation will most likely bring some type of change with them.

1.2 Generation Z

Generation Z, often called Gen Z, are people who are born between 1995 and 2012. This generation is often talked about and mentioned in association with work culture and how the future will look when they all enter the workforce. One of the reasons mentioned in the article *DITTO for Gen Z* by Pichler, Kohli and Granitz (2021) is that since this generation grew up with the internet, they have easy access to a lot of information, which is expected to be received quickly. This generation experienced Covid-19 at either the beginning of their career or while still in school, which means that their view and expectations of the workplace will probably differ from older generations. How is the situation in Japan and what is the next generation's expectations?

1.3 Background

The country of the rising sun has been a popular topic in many different areas for years, with everything from samurai principles and lean production to animation and robots. What makes Japan the dream destination for many can be discussed pages up and down but what is usually not put into the light as something dreamy is their work culture. Japanese work culture is often associated with a lot of overtime, unhealthy work environments, strict hierarchy and even death due to over-work.

What makes Japan an interesting study subject? For one, the country has a history of strong hierarchy and commitment to one's job (Gordon, 2003). With rather few vacation days, compared to Sweden, the life of a normal Japanese person is about their job most hours of the

week. Japan has a different hiring system compared to the one used in Sweden. This system is not based on a specific job description but rather matching individuals to companies, where they will be trained and taught before assigned the position they will work at. Sitko (2023) connects this system and the term of life-long employment to the traditional HRM seen historically in Japan. Even though the lifelong employment style might be changing, the system of applying for a company rather than a job position seems to be remaining. This means that most students in Japan do not know which sector they will work in before entering their new job after graduating university. In alignment with this system Japan also works around the job-hunting-season, 就活 *shūkatsu*, which is gradually changing but still very present, where companies only hire new staff once a year. One argument for this system might be that they can then easily gather all the new graduates and teach them in groups before sending them out to their roles within the company. However, it also means that you are bonded to the system and that it is harder to follow your ‘own route’ to your dream job or career.

真島 *Majima*’s (2023) article, which can be translated to: *Why would you want to leave a ‘white company’? Three ways to make your company an ‘ideal workplace’ for young employees* (2023), discusses the theories of ‘black’ and ‘white’ companies in Japan, what they stand for historically, and how they might need to change in the future. The companies in Japan are unofficially labelled as either ‘white’ or ‘black’ depending on the work culture, mainly focusing on working hours. Companies with extensive overtime and uncomfortable working hours are seen as ‘black’, and the ones where you can leave on time are considered ‘white’. *Majima* (2023) also writes about the fact that the younger generation tends to choose black companies, even if they have a bad reputation. Moreover, younger employees do not always feel like the white companies of today in Japan are a good match for them (*Majima*, 2023). Why is that and what type of company does this younger generation in Japan want?

Timming’s (2020) article discusses another topic related to Japanese working culture; the question as to why Japanese people work themselves to death, described in the theory using the Japanese word “*karoshi*” translated to “death from overwork”. It discusses different reasons and arguments to why this concept is widely more common in East Asia, especially Japan, than anywhere else. The conceptual model (*Timming*, 2020) used to explain this phenomenon is the micro-meso-macro model by *Baumann*, *Cherry*, and *Chu* (2019) together with an additional part added to the model: molecular (genetic). There are different arguments, reasons, and theories as to why one person would go so far and work oneself to death. To clarify: “death from overwork” is likened to occupational stress (*Timming*, 2020), meaning that it can e.g., be cardiac arrest, heart failure, stroke, and suicide. However, *Timming* (2020) highlights the fact that it is possible that a lot of data is missing from these statistics concerning *karoshi* and working hours in Japan. It is difficult to clearly connect the cause of death to the work directly, partially because all working hours and overtime might not be reported (*Timming*, 2020).

1.4 Research Problem and Question

As mentioned above, Japan has faced difficulties with their work culture for years, but are slowly seeing a change coming with the younger generation, Gen Z. However, less people are born in this generation compared to the previous ones (e-Stat, 2022) meaning that there are fewer employees entering the workforce every year. In the close future this change might lead to an employee market where their values will play a bigger role in the company's future than seen today. This change has already started globally, but what makes Japan interesting is the different fundamental grounds that they are starting this change from.

Previous research shows that the definitions of companies as 'black' and 'white' might seem extreme, but it is terms actively used when describing an employer in Japan. Tamura (2023) further discusses the issues highlighted by Majima (2023) and explained that one of the reasons the younger generation might avoid these 'white' companies, even though they seem to be perfect on paper, is the definition of 'lax environment'. It is discussed that the younger generation of Japan focus on their career steps and then see these 'white' companies as factors that might not give them the knowledge or learnings that can help them in their careers (Tamura, 2023). Some companies might be both 'black' and have had cases of 'karoshi' but still have pillars of applications from the younger generation. That might be because they seem to offer something that is attractive enough to "offer your freedom" for but it is hard to know.

According to Tamura (2023) many of the values the younger generation has go hand in hand with factors that can be found in SHRM. However, how these are implemented in the companies and society of Japan today might not be what it right for the future. To start this process of change, the begging question will then be:

- What does Generation Z in Japan value in their future or current employment?

1.5 Disposition

Theory: The chapter will present the theoretical framework used in this report to analyze and discuss the results of the research, interviews, and questionnaire. It includes theories of the latest organizational management and Generation Z to get a deeper knowledge about their requirements and how to organize and manage a company. The theoretical framework about Japan includes postmodernism and theories within that framework as well as the differences in mentoring systems and collectivism between Japan and the western world. Finally, it will give a deeper knowledge about the working culture in Japan.

Method: The chapter describes the process data collection from the chosen respondent group, Japanese Generation Z. It includes motivation of the qualitative and quantitative mixed study with questionnaire as well as deeper interviews and factors taken into consideration during the process of this study.

Results: The following chapter's first part will show the results of the conducted questionnaire. It will be presented with graphs, tables, and figures to easier give an overview of the respondents' answers. The latter part of this chapter will then focus on the interviews, their summarized results, and quotations.

Discussion: This chapter will focus on the discussion and analysis of the results in relation to the theoretical framework, previous studies and the research question.

Conclusion: The final chapter will summarize the conclusion made from the discussion of the results and theories as well as discuss limitations and ideas for further research.

2. Theory

2.1 Sustainable Human Resource Management

The theory about Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) has its base in Human Resource Management (HRM). HRM is a theory describing that people are the key to the success of an organization. In other words, an organization is as good as the people working in it (Sitko, 2023). Sitko (2023) describes sustainable human resource management as the use of HRM to achieve long-term goals e.g., social, environmental, and business-related.

Sustainability has been around for a very long time. Sitko (2023) mentioned that even the ancient Greeks made use of their resources in a responsible manner, without excessive consumption, and this without using the word ‘sustainability’.

Later, an awareness was raised that there is a link between economic, social, and environmental systems. Sitko (2023) takes this a step further and describes that these ideas are connected to the ‘corporate social responsibility’, CSR. CSR is an umbrella term describing that corporations have social, environmental, and ethical responsibilities, not only financial goals.

HRM can be used by organizations to achieve their economic responsibility. Sitko (2023) gives an example that work absence and staff turnover is often very costly. If the managers in the organization practice stress management and work on improving employee’s well-being then it can reduce cost and improve the financial situation of the organization.

A common term used to measure the social, environmental, and economic objectives of an organization is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), according to Sitko (2023). These are summarized as the following:

- **People:** It is about how the company interacts with and the impact it has on its employees, customers, community, and other stakeholders
- **Planet:** The impact on the natural environment. How the company processes and products affect it.
- **Profit:** The business financial profit, occasionally including a broader perspective of its impact on the local and international economy.

The TBL can be translated into another model called ROC, which is often used in sustainable HRM. ROC describes three areas; these are areas where sustainable HRM differ from traditional HRM (Sitko 2023):

- **Respect.** Is about emphasis on respect and engagement for the employees. It describes a more responsible and ethical approach to HRM. Examples of areas related to Respect are development of its employees, focus on their engagement and empowerment, using proactive health and well-being management, open discussions

on work-life balance, mutual beneficial flexibility, constructive stress management and fostering a culture of cooperation.

- **Openness.** Using HRM to look at the organization from the outside using a wider view of its role in society. It is for example the natural environment protection, but also equality, diversity, and inclusion. Examples related to this area are diversity management, how to take care of an ageing workforce, implementing environmentally friendly solutions, and transparency of labour relations. How to take responsibility and interact with local communities related to society and education.
- **Continuity.** This focuses on individual employability on a long-term basis. How the organization should survive and develop while having a long-term perspective. However, practices of life- long employment are things from the past. Employability is about the attributes that make a person gain and maintain his employment. Examples related to this area include developing employability, exchange of experience, employment relations using a long-lasting perspective, being an attractive employer and compliance beyond labor regulations.

Sitko (2023) brings up the impact that an unsustainable HRM could have. An unsustainable business practice could cause harm to the environment, both socially and environmentally. It could also have a negative impact on the long-term productivity and profitability for the company. Many of these are considered the norm within many organizations. Examples are expectations of working excessively long hours at the expense of the employer's health, or managers expecting e-mails and messages to be checked outside work hours. It creates pressure for employees to be on stand-by outside of office hours. It creates a risk of losing the employee due to indirect discrimination or that they will be burned out.

There are also work systems within HRM that have the purpose to both advance employees' abilities and motivation as well as to provide cost-effective results for the company. Sitko (2023) brings up 'High-performance work systems', HPWS, which are a number of HRM practices related to this purpose. The challenge is how to ensure that organizations do not fixate on creating value for the organization itself and not for the employees. Examples of HPWS mentioned by Sitko (2023) are flexible job assignments, extensive training, competitive compensation, extensive benefits, participative decision making, teamwork etc.

Sustainable HRM is practiced differently around the world. Sitko (2023) brings up examples from Japan. The country's system of lifelong employment is about to change. The employees were offered employment for the rest of their working life and were expected to be loyal to their employer and fully devote their time and energy to the success of the company. The price paid by these employees and their families is very high, sacrificing precious time together in favour of working for their company. A transformation of Japanese HRM may create an opportunity for more sustainable forms of people management.

2.2 Generation Z

The explanation of generations can be vague, and some might feel that they do not fit into these boxes of how one should be based on their birth year. However, using these definitions and generalizations helps to understand the bigger, more general, picture of what has been seen and what might become of the future.

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, are individuals born in the late 1990s to the beginning of 2000s. However, compared to other generations not enough research has been done on Gen Z when it comes to the impact this generation will have on our future. Dimock (2019) decided in their research that the millennial generation ends in the year of 1996 and all who are born from 1997 to 2012 are considered Generation Z. It is mentioned that they did not decide on the name 'Generation Z' from the beginning, the name came to be popular in journalism and popular culture during 2019. The name 'Generation Z' or 'Gen Z' became the most popular search to describe people born after 1996 which meant that it was natural to keep that term, even without any scientific background to it, in their future research as well.

According to Dimock (2019) there is no agreed span of time when this generation ends and begins but taking different happenings into account can help motivate the decided cutoff years. Dimock (2019) means that there are several reasons that can describe why the year 1997 is a good starting point for the new generation. One major factor that is unique to this generation, compared to the previous generations, is the fact that they have grown up with all the new, "always on", technologies and environment (Dimock, 2019). Dimock (2019) also points out that others have good arguments to why the generation may start earlier than 1997 and that they are open in their studies that this year might change in the future depending on the data and research that will be available. However, Dimock (2019) highlights that as historically shown it is hard to define this, as generations may differ between as well as within the generations. Giving that what is 'right' or 'wrong' is hard to determine.

As mentioned above, the exact starting year of this generation seems to be undecided and varies between different sources. Some say the generation starts in 1995, whereas others 1996 or 1997, meaning that it is difficult to choose which one is 'right'. Pichler, Kohli and Granitz (2021) state in their article that this generation includes the ones born from 1995 – 2012. Many of the factors that are important for this generation can be found in the theory of sustainable human resource management, which is the reason for the use of these theories together in this report. Pichler, Kohli and Granitz (2021) mean that Gen Z, who grew up in a world of technology and many of them more well off than their previous generation, are more open to diversity as well as individualism.

Deloitte (2019) writes in their report *Welcome to Generation Z* that this new generation will make up more than half of the world's population. Their entry will have a quick and deep impact, causing significant changes in the workplace, as well as commercial, technological, political, and cultural spheres. Unlike Millennials, who were born just before Gen Z, this generation has a completely different perspective on careers and what it means to succeed in life and work. (Deloitte, 2019)

Entire industries and businesses will rise and fall in the wake of the Gen Zers. Yet few industries or organizations seem to be ready for it. Are you? – Deloitte, 2019

In their study, Deloitte (2019) found that Gen Z are not entirely different from previous generations that joined the workforce. However, they have a distinct approach to work compared to earlier groups. Deloitte (2019) moves on to point out that to attract them, organizations need to personalize career experiences just like they personalize offers for customers. They mean that this personalized approach will not only attract Gen Z and encourage them to work for the companies, utilizing their diverse skills to solve customer problems, but will also benefit workers from other generations by helping to attract and retain talent more widely.

Table 1. Behaviors and Trends of Gen Z (Deloitte, 2019)

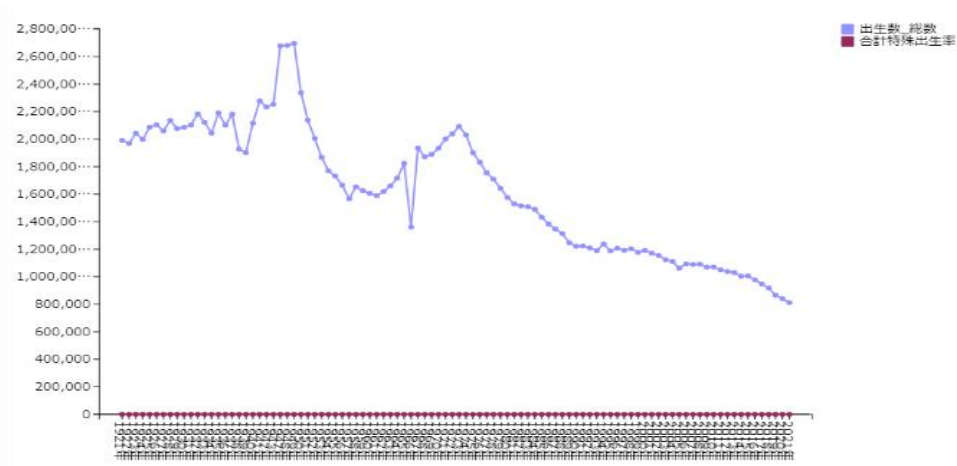
Career Aspirations	Work in industries that they interact with in their personal lives.
Career Development	Desires diverse and entrepreneurial opportunities with safe and stable employment.
Working Style	Prefer individual tasks, but value physical connection.
Core Value	Opinions of company is based on their ethics, practices, and social impact.
Core Values	Prioritize financial security over “personal fulfillment”.
Behavior & Character	Attachment to social media will pose implications to how they interact and want to be perceived.
Diversity	Defines diversity in more dimensions than generations before them.

According to Deloitte (2019), while money is important for Gen Z their perspective on salary and compensation is more complex. At the same time that money is important, they also value work-life balance, flexible hours, and additional perks and benefits. In other words, Deloitte (2019) means that although salary remains a significant factor in their job decisions, Gen Z values it less compared to other generations.

2.2.1 Japanese Generation Z Population

The Japanese population is shrinking and statistics from e-Stat (2022), Japanese Government Statistics, show that the birth rate per year has been declining steadily since 1973 (marked as the last top on graph x.). In relation, with fewer younger people there is a growing elderly population meaning that the working-age population that will support them is shrinking each year. According to e-Stat (2022) in the year 1973 the birth number in Japan was at 2,091,983 people, a number that has declined to 811,622 people in 2021. Currently, the Gen Z (1997-2012) population in Japan is 17,887,434 (e-Stat, 2022) which means that they are 14 % of the population. Japan’s total population is 125,681,593 (World Bank, 2021).

Graph 1. Total Birth per Year 1921-2021, Japan (e-Stat, 2022)



2.3 Postmodernism

Postmodernity has been a term used since the 1970s and sometimes has unclear and diverse meanings. In the era of postmodernism, there is a widespread loss of trust in religions, metaphysical systems, and ideologies. This is due to the recognition that only partial, subjective, and individual truths can exist in such a complex diverse world. People no longer believe in the ‘modern pre-project’ idea, which aimed to improve society through advances in science, technology, and rationality. These have been abandoned in favor of pursuing their own, narrower, and personal goals. Many postmodern theorists believe that multiculturalism and eclecticism are important characteristics of this new way of thinking. (Nationalencyklopedin, 1994)

Table 2. Examples of Postmodern Values

More Important:	Less Important:
Less impersonal society	To maintain a stable economy
Ideas should count more than money	Strong defense forces
Influence on politics	Fighting crimes
Freedom of speech	Economic growth
To have a say at work	Maintaining a stable order

When discussing postmodernism and how to explain the societies of today, the ‘World Value Statues’ are often used. The following part of this chapter will explain this study.

2.3.1 World Value Statues

World value statues refers to the seat of attitudes and beliefs that people hold towards various social and political issues, such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and cultural diversity. It reflects the cultural, social, and economic conditions of different societies around the world and how they prioritize and perceive these issues. The world value status can vary widely among different regions and countries, and it is constantly evolving over time as societies undergo social and economic changes. The concept of world value statues is based on the World Values Survey, a global research project that has been conducted periodically since the 1980s. The survey aims to measure the values and beliefs of people from different cultures and societies around the world, covering a wide range of topics such as family, religion, politics, gender, and social issues. The survey data provides insight into the changing values and attitudes of people in different regions and countries. It is also widely used by social scientists, policymakers, and businesses to better understand cultural differences and social trends across the globe. (World Values Survey Association, 2022)

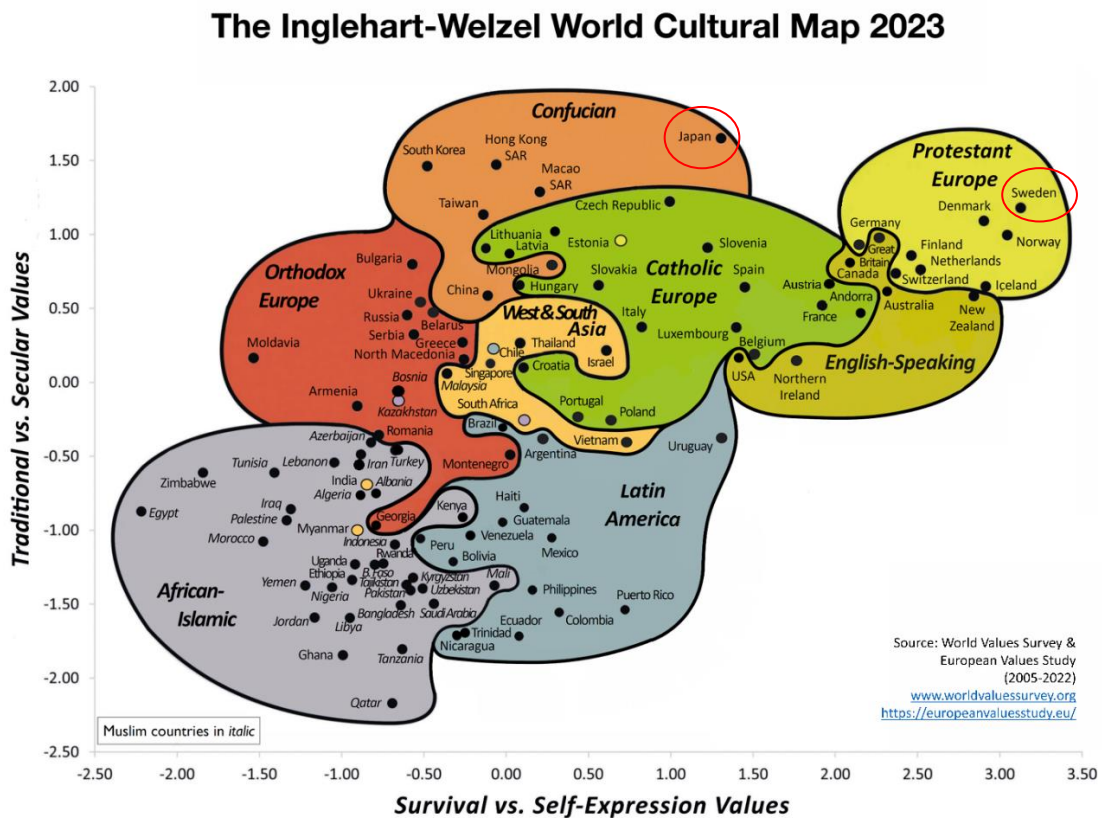
2.3.2 Inglehart – Welzel Cultural Map

The map shows that cultures around the world have changed a lot, but some traditions still remain. The main idea is that as countries become wealthier, their values also change. Two researchers named Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel studied data from the World Value Survey and found that there are two major ways that cultural beliefs differ around the world:

1. *Traditional values* versus *Secular-rational values* i.e., some people believe in traditional values like religion and authority, while others believe in more modern and scientific values.
2. *Survival values* versus *Self-expression values* i.e., some people prioritize survival needs like safety and economic stability, while others prioritize self-expression and individual freedoms.

(World Values Survey Association, 2022)

Figure 1. Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map



Both Japan and Sweden, marked with red circles in figure 1, are shown as examples by the World Values Survey Association (2022) for being societies with high scores in ‘secular-rational’ as well as ‘self-expression’ values.

In more detail, the traditional versus secular-rational values dimensions compare societies where religion is important and connected to authority, family, and patriotism, with societies where religion is less significant. Traditional societies prioritize family, national pride, authority, and conformity. Secular-rational societies on the other hand have opposite preferences on these topics. (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005)

The survival versus self-expression dimension compares societies that prioritize security and conformity with those that value autonomy and self-expression. In secure and advanced societies, people focus on their wellbeing, being involved in their communities, and expressing themselves (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). However, according to Inglehart and Welzel (2005) in insecure societies, people are more concerned about their basic needs and tend to be intolerant of others who are different. They hold onto traditional gender roles and prefer strong authority. Moreover, they mean that this dimension also reflects a shift from valuing material things to valuing personal fulfillment and participation in decision-making. Societies that embrace self-expression have higher well-being, trust, and support for equality, while those focused on survival have lower well-being, trust, and tend to favor materialism and authoritarianism. As societies become more secure, they become more accepting of diversity and seek new experiences. (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005)

2.4 Senpai – Kouhai Relationship

Iain Bright (2005) writes about the differences between Western and Japanese mentoring systems where he mentioned the Japanese ‘senpai-kouhai relationship’; 先輩 *senpai*, the senior who mentors and supports, 後輩 *kouhai*, the junior. He focuses his research and study on the working life and its relations, but this ‘relationship’ can be seen in different settings throughout one’s life in Japan, but specifically apparent in school, club activities (sports, teams etc.) as well as at work.

According to Iain Bright (2005) there are three reasons why this comparison is worthwhile; Firstly, Japan’s culture is rooted in groupism, where individuals naturally form broad-based relationships with others, reminiscent of ancient kinship relations. This cultural acceptance of strong personal bonds between unrelated individuals mirrors familial relationships. Secondly, Japan has a well-developed concept known as ‘personal relationships in vertical society’. These “vertical relationships” are based on the idea that older and more experienced individuals are inclined to assist younger and less experienced individuals in both work and personal matters. This concept aligns with the traditional notion of mentoring, where a mentor guides and supports a mentee. Thirdly, Japan possesses two types of one-to-one vertical relationships that correspond to Western mentoring. The senpai-kouhai relationship is associated with mentoring within organizations and bears similarities to contemporary mentoring practices in the Western context. On the other hand, the *oyabun – kobun* (leader – subordinate) relationship is linked to apprenticeships and aligned with Western mentoring stemming from apprenticeship programs.

The term ‘senpai-kouhai’ can refer to two types of relationships within an organizational context. Firstly, it denotes a specific one-to-one relationship between a senior and a junior, where the senior individual guides the junior in various aspects of their role, including customs, behaviors, and competencies. Additionally, the senior person serves as a source of guidance on personal matters. This relationship is often initiated by the junior, based on personal qualities, and is informal and unofficial in nature. This bond prioritizes the emotional bond between the individuals rather than focusing solely on the transfer of knowledge or strategic benefits for employee recruitment and retention. The ‘senpai-kouhai’ relationship is often described using terms like protection, socialization, human connection, openness, benevolence, gratitude, assistance, informality, and relaxation. (Iain Bright, 2005)

According to Ekholm and Ottosson (2018) the school has a very central role in Japanese society, like in many others. However, since the general school system came into place in 1872 the focus was not on the individual but instead the collectiveness and the uniformity that the education created. Historically the country was closed for many years, affecting how the culture and society developed along other countries after it opened its doors to the world. The idea of one Japanese nation with its own culture became a big political focus which characterized the development of the country until today. The feeling of ‘we’ is still very present in the school culture of today. The uniformity and following others are in focus. Things are slowly changing, and we can see more individual focus-based education in university. However, the pressure of still being part of the ‘we’ seems to be remaining. (Ekholm and Ottosson, 2018)

2.5 Discussion of the theoretical framework

Gen Z and sustainable human resource management theories have many connections. The way SHRM describes a well-managed company fulfills many of the values described in the Gen Z theory.

The theory chosen to describe the society of today is Postmodernism. There are other theories as well that could be chosen. Postmodernism was chosen because it is close to the theory of Gen Z. It is about multiculturalism, freedom and self-oriented, which is a strong value among Gen Z. Even though money is important to Gen Z, they also value work-life balance and to be flexible. It could be connected to the values of Postmodernism where ideas count more than money. The explanation about societies today within Postmodernism and the 'world value status' and the Inglehart – Welzel Cultural Map' describes Japan from a Global perspective. It was chosen as a theory to give further understanding of Japan compared to other countries.

To describe the work culture in Japan the theory of 'senpai-kouhai relationship' was chosen. This cultural acceptance of strong personal bonds between unrelated individuals mirrors familial relationships and has affected Gen Z in Japan during their studies and work-life. There are other theories describing the work-life in Japan, but this was chosen to describe the culture many Gen Z has and will experience. Gen Z values safe, stable employment and physical connection which the theory describes. However, this theory also describes how seniority is the one in charge and decides right and wrong. It goes against Gen Z preference of a personalized approach utilizing their diverse skills.

3. Method

3.1 Research Methodology

Since the purpose of this study is to collect the values and thoughts of the respondents Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) means that a qualitative approach is a good way to capture this. However, to also be able to get more numbers and a wider respondent group, a quantitative based questionnaire was also conducted.

Patel and Davidson (2019) write about three different approaches to relate empirical data with the theories: deduction, induction, and abduction. They explain that deduction is when reasoning drives from already known theory and induction is when individual cases form the theory. This study has an abductive reasoning i.e., a combination of deduction and induction to some degree (Patel & Davidson, 2019).

3.2 Choice of Respondents

Respondents for this study are Japanese Gen Z. The generation is interesting to study since it is a generation that will bring change to work-life and cultures according to the theory. Most studies of Gen Z have been conducted in America, who has a different background and culture compared to Japan. The population in Japan is declining (e-Stat, 2022) which make this generation 14 % of the current population and will later make out most of the workforce in Japan. Previous studies and research show different starting years for this generation, which made it difficult to decide which one to follow. However, most studies tended to follow Dimock (2019)'s view of the generation starting in 1997. The oldest respondents in this study were therefore born in 1997. The generation also includes up to 2012, giving individuals who are 11 years old this year. I decided to narrow the year to the ones who recently started university in Japan to be the youngest participants in my interviews and questionnaire. The year is those people born 2004 – 2005 since the school year in Japan is starting in April. The questionnaire was therefore sent out to respondents born 1997 – 2005. The interviews were conducted with individuals currently working or currently looking for jobs, meaning this group was narrowed down to individuals born 1997 – 2002.

In both the questionnaire and interviews the university students get categorized based on their 'major' and then not the specific study area but instead the overview of their studies which in Japan often is separated into two different ones: 文系 *bunkei* are studies related to humanities and social science and 理系 *rieki* are studies related to natural sciences. Which is a good way of grouping the students and their studies into bigger, more general, groups.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire sent out to broader group of Gen Z in Japan and 100 respondents were received. Out of 100 respondents, 65 were 'students or unemployed looking for job' and 35 were 'currently working, employees. The questionnaire was in base quantitative with qualitative inspired questions that are based on the thoughts and experiences of the respondents. E.g., they could they either answer with 'strongly disagree' or 'strongly agree' on a scale from 1 to 6.

The questions were both in English and Japanese to make sure the respondents understood the questions easier to make the results as truthful as possible. The risk of an untruthful answer will still be present and need to be taken into consideration while analyzing the results. The questions translations were also checked with a Japanese native speaker beforehand to make sure the questions in English were rightfully translated to Japanese.

The questionnaire was created in Google Forms and the link sent out to contacts I have at different universities in Japan as well as exchange students currently in Sweden. I also posted it through my own networks of 'older' Gen Z to reach the ones who are working as well.

3.3.2 Interviews

The interviews were conducted with twelve respondents, consisting of seven students and five employees in various industries. Choosing interview as a method is based on the factors of wanting to deeper understand of the respondents, their beliefs, thoughts, emotions and opening up for them to further explain. The interviews were conducted with English questions as a base, however, if the respondents wanted to, they could answer in Japanese or receive the question one more time translated to Japanese. This gave the possibility of deeper understandings and thought-through replies without the language barrier.

Questions were qualitative based semi structured where the respondent was given the opportunity to express their view and thoughts around the topic. The interview guide base was the same for the two groups, students, and workers, but some questions were changed to fit their current position. A pilot interview was conducted to test out the questions and rewrite any unclarity and parts that might be misunderstood. The timeframe was also tested to see how long time they might take and to be able to inform the participants beforehand of the expected time.

The interviews were held over Zoom with a length of 40 to 70 minutes each. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview and that they will be anonymous and that all collected data is for this report only.

The interview questions are 'low structured' and 'semi standardized'. Meaning that there is a low degree of structure to give room for the respondents to answer based on their background and previous experiences. 'Semi standardization' of the questions means that there is a specific order of the questions, but they might be changed depending on the respondents' previous answers and attitude to answer. (Patel & Davidson, 2019)

'Semi structured interviews' is another term that might be used here as well. Patel and Davidson (2019) describe this as a similar form mentioned above but what might differ a little is that the questions are based on specific themes, but the respondents are still able to freely answer from their own view and ideas.

Patel and Davidson (2019) highlights that it is recommended to do some type of preparation before conducting qualitative interviews. For this report the questionnaire also served as a hypothesis test and information gathering on the topic before the first interviews. The questionnaire was then still open to respondents during the interview process as well.

Formulating the questionnaire questions helped create better understanding of how interview questions in the themes and on this topic could be written.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data collection from the questionnaire ended on the 15th of May to give time to summarize and process the material. The last interview was conducted earlier on the 5th of May given the fact that the summarization of the conducted interviews will take and took longer time than the questionnaire.

The result from the questionnaire was given in an excel file. The data was analyzed, and tables, graphs, and figures were created from the major themes found.

Interview materials, notes and voice recordings were transcribed, and sorted out under the themes of the questions asked. It gave an easier overview of the collected data. The result was analyzed and the technique of categorization (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) where key words and factors were connected to major areas, was used.

3.4.1 Reliability and Validity

The questions in the questionnaire are based on theory research to make them accurate to the subject. The respondents could only answer the questionnaire ones and could not change their answers after submitting the responses. The questions were tested before hand to make sure they were both translated correctly as well as easy to understand the meaning of the question, by the Japanese Gen Z respondents. To make the questionnaire inclusive and easily understood, all questions were both in English and Japanese. It made it possible to collect data also from those who do not feel as comfortable in English. There was an opportunity offered to have the interviews and communication in Japanese which often deepened the answers as well as the understanding. Moreover, the questions for the deeper interview were changed to make sure the respondents could express their own answers more freely to be able to capture their beliefs and thoughts on the topics.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

Patel and Davidson (2019) mean that it is important to state the reason for the interview and questionnaire to try to motivate and make sure the respondent answers with interest to contribute. It is also important to inform them of confidentiality and anonymity which need to be introduced to the respondents clearly beforehand.

All answers in the questionnaire are anonymous and no data of the respondents are saved. The answers will only be used for this report and not given to any third party. The respondents were informed in text before answering the questionnaire.

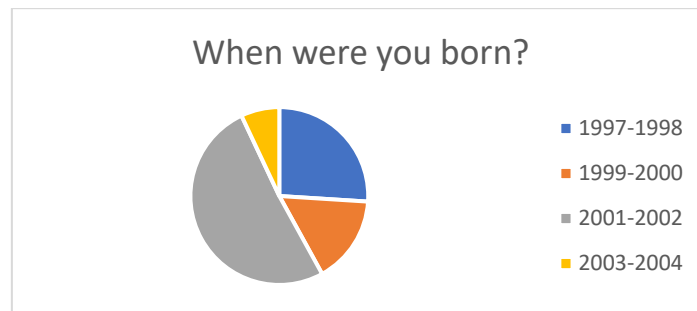
The respondents of the interviews were informed of the purpose of the interviews and that they could at any time decide that they do not want to participate without reason. Consent was also given to record the audio of the interviews and informed that all audio and notes taken during the interview will be deleted after the report is done. All respondents will be kept anonymous in the results.

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent out to both students as those that have started to work. 100 answers were received, 65 respondents are currently studying and looking for a job and 35 respondents are working. 71% of the respondent are women, 26% men and rest were non-conforming.

Graph 2. the spread of the age among the respondents.



Among the working group;

- 88% had a bachelor's degree, 6% a master's and 6% high school.
- About half of them consider themselves to be working at a 'white' company, 20% at a 'black' and the rest did not know.
- About half of them believe their working situation is better than their parents'.
- One third consider their view of the company to be better than expected when entering the company and one third that it is worse.

The students were all currently at university. The answers around the job support show that.

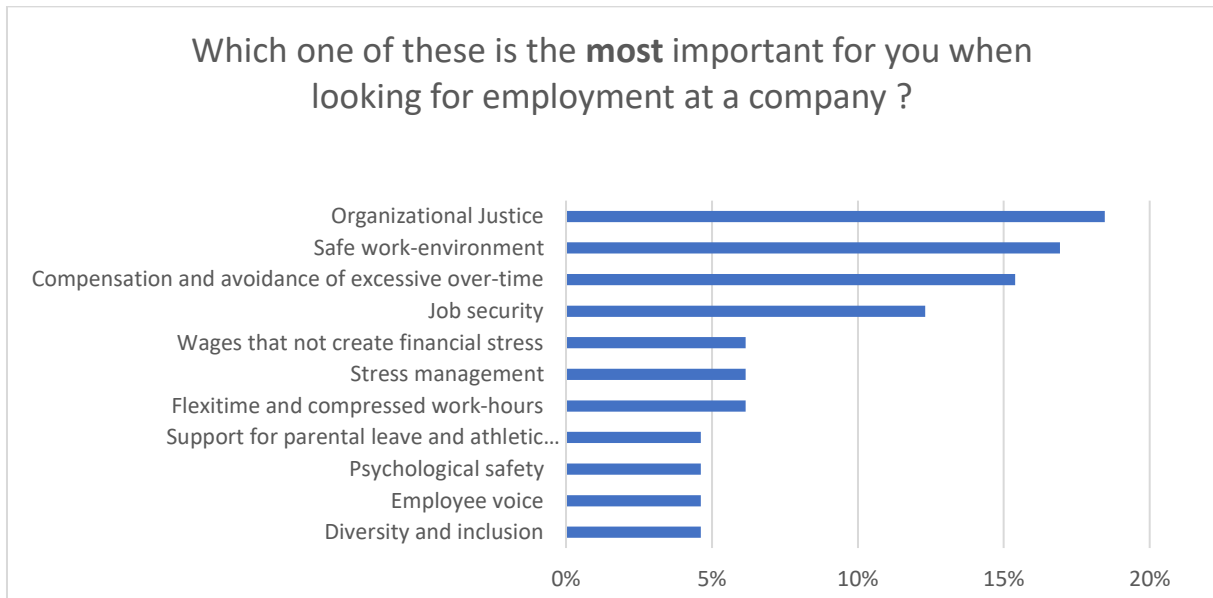
- Most of the universities help the students to find internships at companies, 85% of the students were aware of it and the rest did not know if the university has the service.
- All students had support from the career center at the university supporting them in job hunting.
- 77% of them believe the hiring system through 'job-hunting season' is not good at all.

Of all respondents 27% have heard about the theory 'sustainable human resource management'. In the student group only 12% know about it, while among the workers 54% were acquainted with the theory.

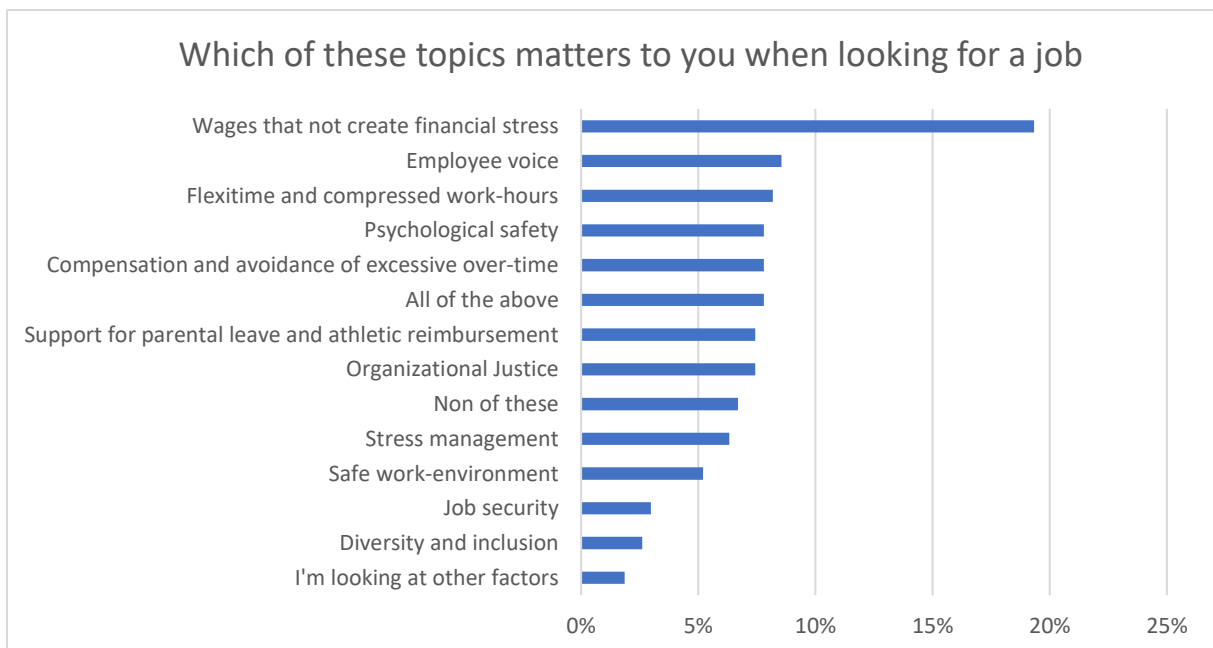
When asking for overtime hours, among the workers, 66% of them stated that they were working less than 20 hours overtime per month, while 9% stated that they worked more than 45 hours per month. About half of them thought their salary reflected the position and workload, while the other half thought they should get paid more. Most of the workers thought they were stressed, about 60%, only a few stated that they were under stimulated and 10% that they were neither of it. If they had the possibility to change workplace most of them would do that, 57%, while the rest were unsure or believed to do it at a later stage.

When asking for SHRM factors to students the following answers are shown in the graph below. Graph 3 shows the most important factor and in graph 4 the result when more than one factor could be chosen.

Graph 3. The most important SHRM factor, where only one could be chosen, in the student group

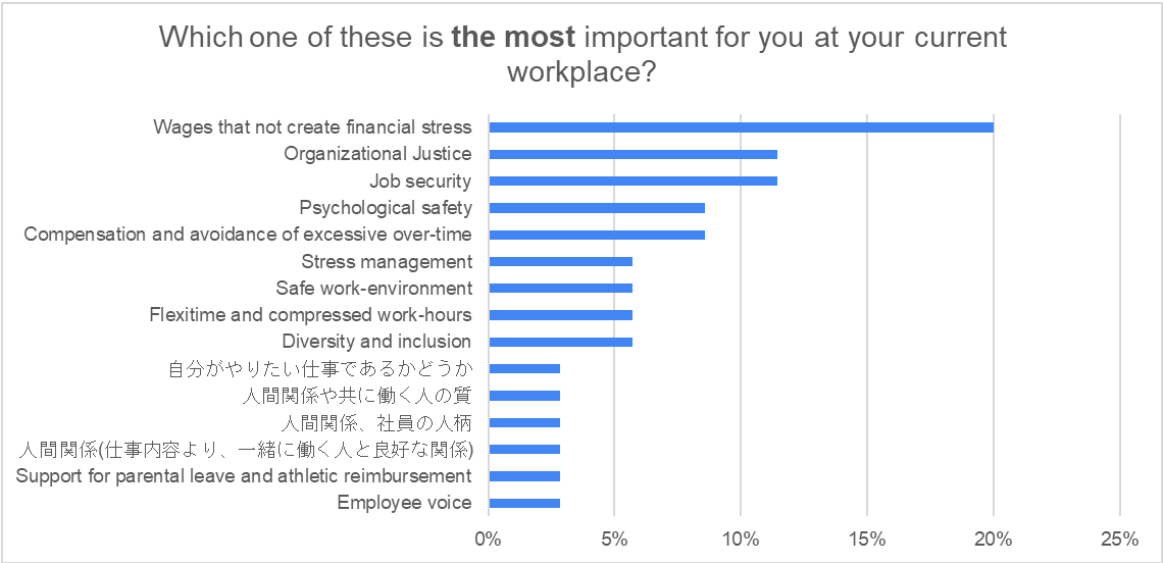


Graph 4. The most important SHRM factors, where more than one could be chosen, in the student group.



In the working group graph 5 shows the most important factor and graph 6 the result when more than one factor could be chosen.

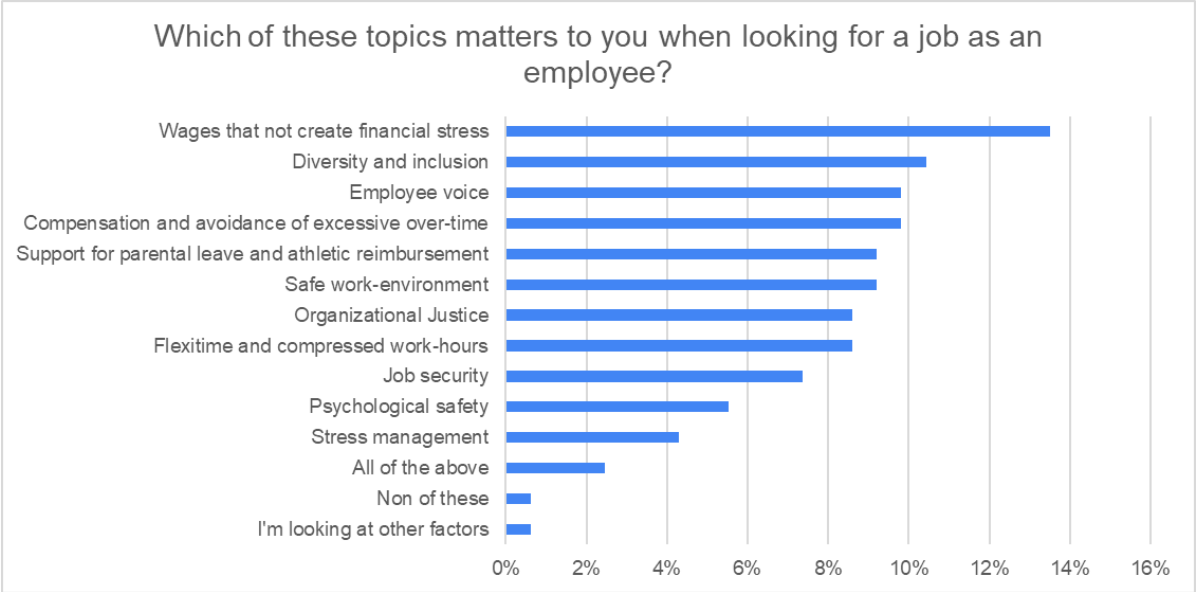
Graph 5. The most important SHRM factor, where only one could be chosen, in the working group.



The four results, in Japanese, of graph 5 were put in under ‘other’ and can be translated into:

1. Whether it is a job you want to do
2. Quality of relationships and people working together
3. Relationships and employee personality
4. Relationships (good relationships with the people you work with, rather than the work you do)

Graph 6. The most important SHRM factors, where more than one could be chosen, in the working group.

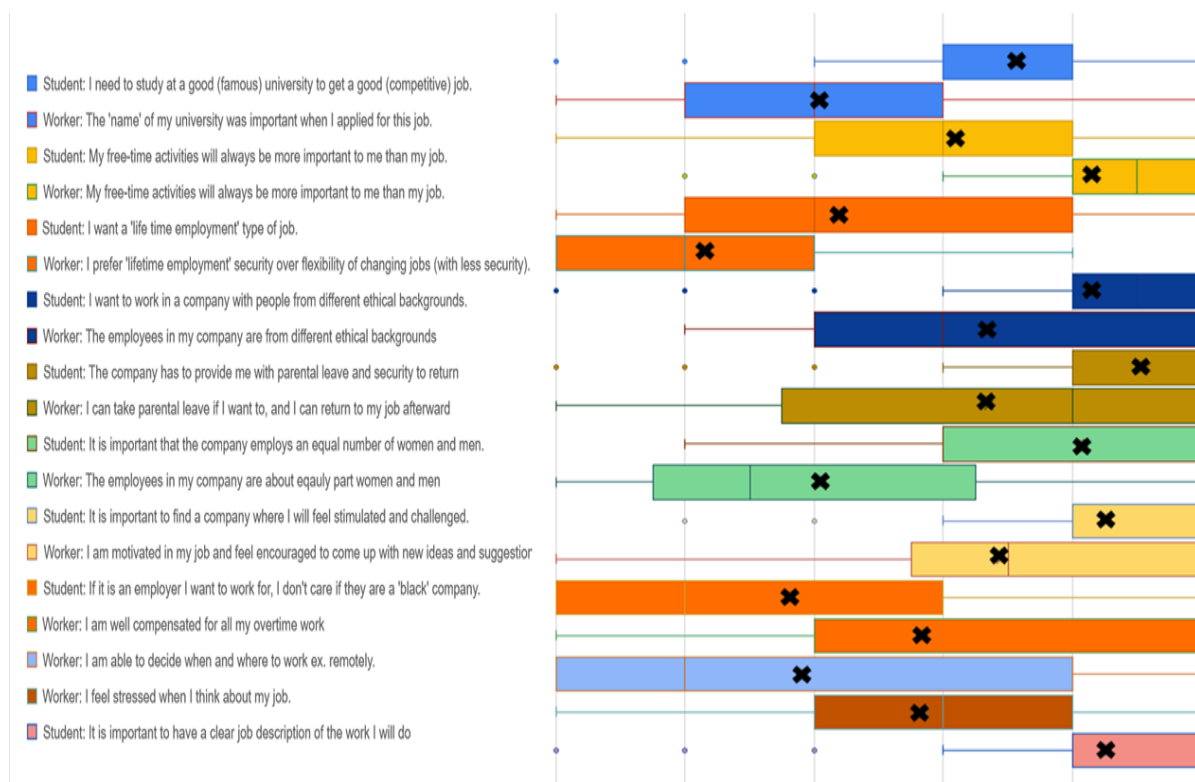


The most important factor when choosing a new job given by respondents, which are shown in graph 3 and 5, give a somewhat different picture depending on if the respondent are an

student or employee. The most important factor for the employees is ‘wages that do not create financial stress’, while among students this was on the 5th place. Student value the most ‘organizational justice’ and ‘safe work-environment’. They both share organizational justice to be important, but safe-work environment is on the 6th place among the workers. When the respondents could choose from among many alternatives shown in graph 4 and 6, the top one for both groups were clearly ‘wages that do not create financial stress’. Also on the top in both groups were employees voice, diversity, and inclusion as well as compensation for overtime and avoidance of excessive over-time.

The respondents were asked to qualify statements on a scale from 1 to 6, where the question was rated from strongly disagree (left) to strongly agree (right), Graph 7. The colored boxes show the spread of the answers with the average values marked with ‘X’ on the graph as well as the extreme values marked as the smaller dots.

Graph 7. Qualified statements on SRHM questions to all responders. Some questions were unique to the students and the workers.



Graph 7 shows that most of the questions were answered differently in the student group than in the working group. The students’ opinion was in most cases very strong, that the statement was very important for them. However, the same statement to the working group gave a less important result. The statement that gave the highest score in both groups were:

- Free-time activities are more important than the job.
- Important with different ethical backgrounds
- Ability to take parental leave and come back to work.
- That they get stimulated, challenged, and encouraged.

4.2 Interviews

The following part of this chapter will be a summary of the interviewed respondents as well as quotations. When conducting the interviews several themes became clear in the respondents answer and the summarization of the interviews is therefore separated into these major themes. The following table shows the respondents alias name, year of birth and current university or industry they are working for.

Table 3. Interview Respondents

Respondent	Born	Major / Industry
Student 1	2002	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Student 2	2001	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Student 3	2000	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Student 4	2002	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Student 5	1997	Master's in Sciences : 理系
Student 6	2001	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Student 7	2001	Bachelor's in Arts/Humanities : 文系
Employee 1	1999	NPO – event organizer and HR recruiting: 非営利団体
Employee 2	1998	Consulting – Financial Industry: コンサルティング
Employee 3	1997	Social Welfare Service: 社会福祉事業
Employee 4	1997	Steel Manufacturing Industry: 鉄鋼業
Employee 5	1997	NPO – event organizer (2 nd job), previous job as office assistant: 非営利団体

4.2.1 Education and Job-hunting

When looking for a job as a new graduate, the university major seldom matters in Japan. Only to some extent when it is relevant to have certain knowledge. But overall, companies are looking for ‘good’ university names on the applicants’ papers. Some of the respondents say that it was not always the case, but most of them thought they assured a ‘good job’ by entering a ‘good named’ university.

All respondents have had some type of education or learning experience abroad which most of them mentioned had influenced their view of Japan. Some of them had changed their view while being abroad, while others confirmed what they thought before the experience.

I chose the company based on the factors that are important for my self-growth, development and learning process. – Student 2

The respondents tended to see work as an opportunity to learn and develop individual skills. Their focus was to gain personal learnings and experience in life.

Japan is slow in everything. We still use cash a lot, cards took a long time. Japanese people do not want to take a risk. Top risk avoiders. Losing a job is heavy, no one wants that. Work becomes part of your personal life. Part of your identity. Could say that they are careful. But at the same time; slow and scared to change. – Student 3

Most of the respondents shared the view that they only had two alternatives after bachelor, either do a master or start a job. If they started a job, they thought that they cannot do a master later in life.

More common in Sweden to do masters after working a couple of years. A lot less common to do that in Japan. Not as easy to do master after bachelor. Some of my friends in Japan wanted to do it but hinderance as finances and life style change procedure etc. stopped them. – Student 5

Since the major seldom matters many skills are thought of directly at the workplace. It makes the job an extension of education and learning in a far more broader meaning.

Had two months' training, first month business manner and how to do power point, excel etc. The second month I learned basic coding and basic data skills. Good since I didn't do anything of that at university. Because of covid everything was online – which was good for me. – Employee 2

How does the job-hunting system, 就活 *shūkatsu*, work in Japan? – One of the respondents explained that the Japanese government has restricted the release, start of, new jobs until March 1st. Students can attend events and presentations of companies to learn about different industries and what the market currently has to offer. Applications are usually accepted from March until April. The interviews start after that. Officially there are stricter regulations where interviews cannot start until 1st of June of your 4th year of university. However, unofficially the respondents shared same view of that they are recommended, often by the universities, to start looking for jobs in the 3rd year of university (4-year studies for bachelor's). Students are then motivated to look at their life, pinpoint factors about who they are today and what they want to do in the future. These two sides of official and unofficial are mixed and everyone, both students and employers, do not follow anything strictly. Historically it started in the 4th year of university, but today it starts in 2nd or 3rd year. Which means that some companies hire them already in their 2nd year of university.

Job hunting mostly consists of a lot of paperwork: resume, personal information, reason for applying to that company, as well as interviews and tests. Respondents point out that it is popular to join short summer internships, lasting only one to three days, to be able to visit the company and see how they work. Students who will graduate in 2025 are currently preparing for summer internships.

Companies train their new employees – what is required for the job. They don't really care what you did before (your university major). – Student 3

We cannot pick our position. I did not like that, I did not know what I would be working with when I entered the company. – Employee 2

There are nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that offer 'one on one' tutoring session as well as other types of support, e.g., web platform, job fair, CV readings, for students before and during their job-hunting season. Most of the respondents have career centers and other forms of support at their universities. Some universities are collaborating with bigger employers who host events and invite students to present themselves and what type of employees they are looking for.

I did around 80% on my own, my university had a support system, but I didn't use it. Instead, I got help from an NPO that helps students who are looking for a job. – Student 1

The respondents highlighted that the system around job hunting in Japan might differ a lot of form what other countries and non-Japanese are used to. Many of them therefore rarely thought of which positions they liked or would be working in, but rather focused on the companies. Some of the students had an idea of what position they wanted, but most of them focused on companies that matched their current interest and were a good steppingstone in their future careers.

My image of shakai jin (business man) normally sell something, I really want to focus on what I sell. Production – easy to imagine what I sell. that's why I focus on the companies, name, and what they do. – Employee 4

Another thing that shocked me (new grad position) how underpaid there are in Japan. I was shocked compared to Sweden. Income tax is higher here in Sweden but even after tax they are lower.– Student 5

5

Hard to apply from overseas, problem: I cannot meet the company employees in person. Difficult to grasp what the companies are like, the atmosphere etc., and it takes longer time to understand the companies. – Student 6

After coming to Sweden, I changed my way of thinking. I want to work more internationally (company) not Japanese. If it is for an international business I can do any position. – Student 6

In summary, the information from the responses highlights the importance of self-reflection to understand their strengths and past experiences, which can benefit their future career and job search. These experiences did not always seem to be connected to previous work experience but rather what type of extra activities they participated in university, for example volunteered in a project. Coaches play a role in matchmaking students with suitable employers. Moreover, job hunting apps and web platforms like LinkedIn allow individuals to showcase their skills, experiences, and education to recruiters.

4.2.2 Core Value and Values

Figure 2. The Respondats Values



The figure summarizes the words or concepts that were center topics for the respondents.

Inclusion and Diversity – I value respecting people to live life the way they want to live it. Even if it is different from the “norm”. Each person should have their own rights. Individuals live their own life.

In Japan there are a lot of expectation how to live and who to be etc. – Student 5

It is very important to have time for hobbies, and I feel the support for it from work. – Employee 4

I am always caring about communication. How others feel when communicating with me and how to have efficient collaborations. – Student 6

4.2.3 Work-Life

Summary of the respondents’ thoughts about a ‘good’ employer:

- Clear vision and mission. Companies exist to help customers and society.
- Value global and international culture.
- Dynamic – people and culture that accepts openly and possibilities.
- Brotherhood – respect, some competitiveness, not close nor not distance.
- Where I will be able to work abroad with diverse culture and have work-life balance
- Where I can help others with my skills and experience.
- Want to have responsibility. Want my voice to be heard.

No hierarchy, open to new ideas, flexible, more holidays and employees who know how to balance work life with private life. – Employee 1

I want to work with something I like. – Employee 2

Have fun at work. – Employee 4

The individuals are seeking a working environment that prioritizes certain factors. Some factors highlighted by the respondents were: healthy work-life balance with the ability to take vacation days, a flat hierarchy where personal relationships are valued, a good and balanced salary that reflects the amount of work, an innovative and growth-oriented company, fair treatment of employees, driven and passionate colleagues, inclusive and diverse collaboration, an international working environment, and a positive work culture.

One of the respondents emphasized the importance of open-mindedness in both the company and its employees, aiming for a supportive and respectful atmosphere. Another valued hierarchical structure to some extent, respecting senior staff while also accepting and balancing the input of younger employees. Furthermore, they seek an environment that allows women to work without undue stress or strict limitations. One of the respondents pointed out that they are motivated to contribute to solving social problems and consider this as a significant aspect in their job search.

Some of these ‘black’ companies are really hard to get into, popular even with “bad” reputation. If you work, there as your first career you can then easily change to your next job. Ex. Like the movie Devils Wears Prada – if you work there for one year, and survive, everyone wants you. – Employee 5

Overtime, 残業 *zangyou*, is expected to be present in their work life. Both students and currently employed respondents shared the view of the fact that a lot of people work overtime in Japan. However, there are different kinds of overtime as well as compensations which the respondents had a more split response to.

Table 4. Vocabulary Translations

見込み残業代 <i>mikomi zangyou-dai</i>	expected overtime pay
サービス残業 <i>sabizu zangyou</i>	unpaid overtime “service overtime”

It is fine for me to work a lot of overtime in my 20s. I want to grow and gain knowledge and skills. So, it would be okay for around five years, but after that, if I get married, I do not want to work overtime.

– Student 2

I do not think too much about it. All young people go through it. – Student 3

The view of overtime was split among the respondents. Some seemed to have accepted that it is the reality. While others highlighted words such as ‘work life balance’ and that it is important to have private time outside of the office hours. However, they all shared, to some degree, agreeing that free time such as weekends and vacation is always a plus and can make them happy if they have it.

I am quitting my job this year. One of the major reasons is a lot of overtime. I usually finish at 11pm and can’t even take vacation as I want. – Employee 2

It also seemed as if some companies ‘pushes’ you to work overtime, not official, but it can become like a requirement to be ‘accepted’ by other employees. Which was one of the reasons one of the respondents accepted overtime, since everyone is doing it, it will look bad if one goes against the stream.

I personally do not want to work overtime. Being expected to do it is a no go for me. Still shocked – every single new grad included overtime salary in their base salary. Every single company expected their employees to work overtime (mikomi). Even the white companies. Every single position. In their base salary. Chocking and heart breaking. Main factor that made me reconsidering applying for jobs in Japan. – Student 5

There are a lot of strict ways to check organizations today. There are technologies which help to see how many hours the companies expect overtime as well as by information from current employees. They can see how many days of paid vacation are usually granted. It is possible to get a lot more inside numbers today than historically.

At university I didn’t care about overtime, I thought it was the symbol of working hard. But now I think it is a waste. You have 8 hours; you should be able to finish if you focus. Outside of Japan, there are countries that work less hours and are more efficient. (...) It’s a negative tradition in Japan. –

Employee 1

One respondent expressed a preference to have control over when they work overtime and when they do not want to. In their company, overtime is paid, but there is a limit of 45 hours. If someone exceeds that limit, they must submit paperwork to justify the extra time spent on

their job. However, the process of explaining the reasons behind the overtime work is seen as burdensome, and as a result, many employees choose not to go through with it.

The issue of 'sabizu' was discussed, which refers to working extra hours without being paid. They based this problem on poor management and organizational practices, emphasizing the need for improvement. They pointed out that people often accept and do not question this situation, as they grew up seeing their parents working overtime and consider it normal. One of them questioned this mindset of the Japanese and believed that there are alternative working environments where overtime is not as prevalent.

Since I was a child, my father has also worked long hours, 9pm, 10pm, I have seen him doing so – think it is normal and thought I would also have to do that in the future. – Student 6

They mentioned that some individuals choose to work in demanding jobs with long hours, such as in black companies, because they might be considered prestigious and important. One individual personally prefers to avoid working for long periods but is willing to adapt if others are making the effort to work extra hours.

I think it is really strange with mikomi. I was really surprised when I looked for jobs where they stated their overtime on the website. Overtime has become and seen as "normal". – Student 7

They also pointed out that there might be a management system that is the base problem. A system that cannot function properly if one individual is unable or unwilling to work overtime means that they are relying heavily on one individual's efforts. Moreover, the respondents state that working with more balanced distribution of responsibilities might be the solution. They say that many workers in Japanese companies learn a specific task and skill but that there are few individuals having a broader perspective, helicopter view, that can be seen as the skill to support and assist their colleagues.

4.2.4 Career Aspirations and Development

The majority of them did not see themselves work for the same company forever. Rather the opposite, many of the students, even before entering the work force seemed to have decided that they will only work for the first company one to three years.

Changing job was risky and seen negatively before, but more common today and a way to change your career. Respondents also pointed out that a lot of advertisements about changing jobs are to be seen on subways and social media.

But I would say it is getting better and better. Seniors listen more to younger people. Improve the business. Competitions for youngers to show business plans etc. – They have to improve more though. – European working system – there are some systems. Europeans have more freedom for their working style. Japanese companies also have to learn from foreign companies. – Student 6

4.2.5 View of Work-Life, Then and Now

Work life balance is something we younger think more about. – Employee 3

There are differences between how we and our parents' generation view work and work life. It was more common before to work your whole life for one and the same employer. But a lot more people are changing jobs today; it seems like it is easier and more accepted to change jobs today than before. However, it might be hard, seems to be difficult, to change jobs when you get older.

One of the respondents highlighted that the older generation might be scared of start-ups and ventures as they do not seem to be stable and secure. Job security, lifelong employment, was in focus for their parents' generation and historically in Japan. This is changing but it is hard to know how fast and to what extent it truly does.

Getting too close to somebody. What I've heard from my father: work also becomes your private life. Drinking with the same people you have been working with. A big part of your personal life as well. Like to draw a line between private and work life. Keeping a good working environment and relation to college doesn't mean I need to know everything about them. – Student 3

Mentioned were also the different historical aspects of when their parents and grandparents' generation applied for jobs and how it is today. Born in the 60s and applying for jobs in their 80s meant that Japanese economy was booming, and many companies needed manpower. Japan was seen as 'amazing', and you could feel and see the development and growth. However, society does not look like that today. Japan has stagnated and the economy is not like its ones were. Meaning it has effects on job search as well. The future seems unclear, some of the respondents mentioned that it is hard to know which companies will still be here in a few years.

The view of work, especially after the war (world war two) can be summarized in this quotation from Student 2 – *The week consists of two Mondays, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Friday.*

As recruiter experience: I saw so many companies looking at age – usually say no to over 45 etc. of course this is outside of the record. Took away candidates that were "too old". Don't even meet them. (...) On the other hand, candidates often ask about the job overtime, salary, and also why people leave that company, the reason behind the vacant position. Especially candidates who have changed jobs before. – Employee 1

They describe the traditional mindset of their parents, where job stability and long hours of work were valued, even if the job was not enjoyable. Taking time off was seen as negative, but the situation has improved today. One respondents' father worked in black companies with excessive overtime in the past, however he still does and sometimes the respondent feels like much has not changed for them either.

The majority of the respondents have a different mindset from their parents, where they want to find a job that suits them personally, rather than prioritizing stability or following in their parents' footsteps. They express a desire for a life outside of work and independence. However, noted by many of them where the fact that companies are resistant to change, although the government seem to try to do something.

In Japan I feel like everyone should be the same, unspoken rule, that's what I hate about Japan. I think uniqueness is important. – Employee 2

After coming to Sweden, I realized the Japanese working style is strange. Japan is not really looking at other working cultures. They still think that work is in the center. They are seeing new things, but the change is really slow. Not good at adapting to new trends, styles, influences. Looking at the world like it is truly foreign. Hard to connect and see in their own world and culture. – Student 7

One expressed a shift in their perspective towards societal expectations and personal priorities. They used to care a lot about meeting societal goals such as wealth and the traditional path of working hard in their 20s and then getting married. However, they observed that even today many of their female friends now prioritize marriage, while the male friends focus on their careers and job changes.

They mention the strict hierarchy prevalent in many Japanese companies, where new graduates entering the workforce find it challenging to voice their opinions or question their superiors. They note that Japanese companies often follow uniform structure, with employees of the same age entering and progressing together.

Respondent lifted however the growing acknowledge of the value of diversity and change that they have seen spreading on social media. They acknowledge that the system is slowly changing to provide better support for e.g., working parents, such as increased parental leave. However, they note that cultural factors and economic constraints make it difficult for both men and women to take advantage of these changes fully.

They mentioned the frustration often caused by having to cover for colleagues on leave, which often gets focused on the individual and not the lack of support from the company. They stress the need for companies to handle such situations better, e.g., hiring more staff or implementing interim solutions. They highlight the dilemma between the responsibility of the company and the country to address these issues.

A lot of them (women) are going back to work after taking maternity and parental leave but it is hard with kids so a lot of them go down from full time to shorter time. – Employee 3

They note that even if the systems are in place, individuals may not utilize them due to various reasons.

I am very hopeful for Gen Z and the next generation. They are sustainable towards environment, mental health, and other people. – Employee 5

5. Discussion

This study was conducted to capture an idea, a starting point, of what Generation Z in Japan today values and highlights to be important when entering the work-life. Gen Z are of the age to either be in school, working or neither of it. It is relevant to the management of companies to focus the view and deepen the understanding of their values related to employment and work-life. The Japanese culture stands out in many areas which makes it an interesting country of choice. The Japanese people most likely are affected by their surroundings leading to that the Gen Z in Japan and their values might deviate from the general theories. The results of this study however showed two sides, both going along with previous research and theories as well as factors that stand out from the theories of this generation.

An interesting finding was that student group of Gen Z had some different values of what is important as well as how important the factors were compared and to the working group. The results show that something happens with their values as they enter a company. On the other hand, the working group showed more awareness of the SHRM theory than the student group. The reason behind the change in values could be the shift in environment from school to work but could also relate to the 'senpai-kouhai' theory. Meaning that the seniors at work show and advocate different values than what they bring from university. The working group might not like some of the values in the workplace but accept them or change some of their own values as others become more important. The changes to a more sustainable workplace will most likely continue, as the awareness of SHRM increases when Gen Z enters the workforce. However, it might be with a slower phase due to the traditional culture and impact of 'senpai-kouhai' culture.

Change towards a more sustainable workplace has already started as more companies are so-called 'white' companies. However, previous studies (Majima, 2023 & Tamura, 2023) show that these are not as popular for Gen Z, even if they fulfill most of their values. The communication around what these companies offer may have been misunderstood. One argument might be that the traditional culture in Japan has a strong impact. The younger generation feel insecure and not motivated at these companies, i.e., the lack of information and bad management of some of these firms has led to the misbeliefs that these companies will help them in their career development. This can then be discussed to lead to an undeveloped labour market which stagnates in the old traditional ways. The conclusion is then that Gen Z in Japan, as of now, prefer clear work environment with rules rather than an open one where their own initiative is valued. The results show the value of 'on-job-training' and what that means for their future career. It is so important for some that overtime is more valued than free time at the beginning stage of one's career.

The change towards more sustainable workplace needs to start already at university to prepare the student to take more initiatives and trust their skills. The change in Japan will most likely take longer time based on their schooling system and the way new graduates are employed at a company and not in a position i.e., hired to be formed by the companies and not because they can help form the companies themselves.

In the following part of this chapter the results will be discussed based on the major themes from the result chapter. The results will be both from the questionnaire and the interviews.

Education and Job-hunting

There is a support at university to succeed in job-hunting, however, the results also show that in the student group it was very important to go to a 'good' university. On the other hand, when asking the current employed if their university name was important the responses were that it was of less or medium importance. This result from the questionnaire is also supported by the deeper interviews with individual students and employees.

There is a uniformity in Japan meaning that everyone needs to follow to be accepted. However, that is not always the current case in Japan today, but the system has not yet adapted to this change.

Core Value and Values

The values lifted by the respondents in the interviews match to some extent the theory of what is important for Generation Z in general (Deloitte, 2019). Examples of important factors that are common for Gen Z in Japan as well are given in the theory are: 'free time is more important than my job'; 'feel stimulated and challenged', 'diversity and inclusion' and 'employees voice'.

The results also show that some factors differ from this theory to some extent. These could be related to work-life balance and to some degree flexible hours. Which shows that the younger generation in Japan is influenced by the tradition and history of Japanese work-life.

The factors that the respondents seem to value and look for in their employment can be found in the SHRM theory and model ROC, respect, openness, and continuity (Sitko, 2023). However, the factors of continuity seem to not be as valuable since many of the respondents only see themselves work for one to three years at one company. The model highlights that life-long employment is in the past but what 'continuity' means here is the attractiveness of the employer to keep its personnel because they 'want to stay' and not because 'they have to stay'. However, even though the respondents mentioned a lot of values that they thought important, their attitude intrigued that they might not believe to fully find such employment and therefore don't follow through with their value points from these theories when deciding on their work-life. Worth mentioning however, going into the next theme, is the tendency that the results show that the current workers seem to change more of their values towards sustainable human resources management as they spend time in the workforce.

Work-Life

The most important areas for an employer expressed in the results can be discussed and connected to the values that are in relation to Generation Z theory such as work-life balance, ability to vacation, salary that reflects the work load, inclusive and diverse work experience etc. However, even if the majority of the results show that it goes in the same direction as the theories of Generation Z as well as sustainable human resources management some factors diverge from these and could be explained as follows.

Japan's score on the 'world cultural map' (figure 1.) shows an interesting discussion. Japan value conformity, i.e., to value the behavior that follows standards, rules, laws or what's expected by a specific group or society, meaning that is a country that values what others think about them and that it is important to not stand out too much. This value base goes against the conceptual studies of generation z. The study shows that gen Z in Japan value diversity as well as individualism in more dimensions than previous generations, however at some points the study show it might also be connected to conformity way of thinking.

The 'senpai – kouhai relationship' model of mentoring is a good example of the cultural factors that affect the results of Gen Z in Japan compared to other countries, but mostly in comparison to general conceptualized theory. The reason for this is that this relationship creates and relicense and belief that you should follow what the senior advice you to do. Going against the idea of Gen Z valuing individualism and diversity in the sense that their thoughts and values might not be their own but rather influenced by 'senpais' in their lives. As mentioned before this relationship is not only seen at workplaces but following the 'normal' citizen of Japan throughout their life, in school, free time activities and other locations of group interactions. This is not a discussion of if this is a good or bad relationship but rather that it is a model of the Japanese culture that has effects on its generations and the further development in many different sectors but in this case, especially in the values of its people.

An example of this that we can see in the result is accepting that others (senpais) are working overtime and seeing it as obvious that they should do the same. Getting 'training' when entering the companies in manners, behaviors, business language and of course practical skills as well. However, specifically these trainings in behavior indicate that the companies seek some sort of uniformity, which is already decided at the company. Even though the senpai-kouhai relationship models indicate that it is the junior choosing its senior, which might not always be the case at one's job or school. The seniors are already at the company, so there might not be much to choose from, and the junior might not find a 'match' that has the same base values as oneself. Is then everyone strong enough to stand up for themselves and go against this model or the general system of society?

View of Work-Life, Then and Now

Generation Z represents 14% of the population, which means that their influences will be in stronger focus when they all have entered the workforce. The data shows that the values of the respondents seem to change from students to employees. The understanding of the surrounding effects gets more important after some years in the workforce. Why are they changing their values?

Value factors such as work-life balance are seen to be more in focus today and the results show that the value of the 'older generation' and the 'younger generation', Gen Z is different and changed. The respondents' parents' view of wanting to have stability, security and often in the form of life-long employment are factors seen in the traditional HRM theory. Gen Z value security as well, but it seems they do not connect it with staying at one company forever showing that they are changing value points from the previous working generation.

There are also different historical events that has played a big role in the Japanese labor market and work-life style. For example, the post-world war two recovery, the booming economy in the 80s and the stagnated economy of today.

There are also different societal expectations on the behavior when entering the workforce as well as building a family for the younger generation compared to the older one. For example, more emphasis on parental leave is expressed by the Gen Z, even though some are still having a traditional view.

Some companies today still have a uniform structure, with strict hierarchy and people entering the companies at the same time all the same age. It makes a strong reminding base for senpai kouhai. To take a leave was very unusual for the older generation, but even today it is socially difficult due to the strong feeling of not wanting to be a burden on someone else. The responsibility is taken on a personal level, not on the way the organization is managed.

Women often left the workforce to be mothers in the early days. Today they work and sometimes reduce their work hours, however some still quit since it is hard to find other solutions. Meaning that there is a positive change in work-life balance but we are still seeing that it is not equally spread over the genders.

6. Conclusion

In relation to the research question: What does Generation Z in Japan value in their future or current employment? – This study shows that the Gen Z in Japan value many factors that goes in line with the theory of Generation Z as well as Sustainable Human Resource Management. The disparities show indications of cultural aspects described with the Postmodernity view of a uniform country and with social structure values based on, among others, the ‘Senpai-Kouhai’ relationship. However, change is shown, and if these values, when implemented throughout the whole system, and not stays as only wishes from the employees but implemented as actions by the employers, would create a whole new, or at least developed, work-life structure in Japan.

The study shows that what might create difficulties in implementing a more sustainable way of work, and the points form the SHRM theory, fully are factors such as history aspects and culture. Especially, factors such as respecting seniority and following the group rather than standing out individually will have effects on what the changes will be and the speed of such a development. Previous studies also show that the current companies that seem to be implementing more of the sustainable values are not as popular since they do not seem to fulfill the value of the possibility to learn and develop at the company to secure a career stepping ladder. This cultural contrast indicate that one can not only implement SHRM into a Japanese company and expect it to work perfectly. Slow reforms where information and knowledge are spread evenly and transparent throughout the process will be needed to maintain sustainable developments.

Moreover, the younger generation in Japan might lean towards more SMHR values but as long as the older generation does not, a combination and compromission between these two views and values is needed. A need to respect the seniors but also a need to listen more to the juniors and create a more equal and sustainable work-life.

6.1 Limitations And Avenues For Future Research

To truly capture the values of the generation a respondent group of equal parts between the gender would be preferred for better understandings if those answers might differ. This might therefore have affected the results, however, the more equal parted interviews showed that the differences between genders did not show that much.

It is hard to know if all the respondents truly understood the questions, especially the questionnaire leading to those results might not be fully honest. Mistranslations made between Japanese, English and Swedish might have happened which as well of course will affect the outcome.

The aspects of the respondents having experience abroad will have effects on their answers, view of Japan as well as view of the world. It is therefore important to take this into account when analyzing the results. And that these results might not show the values of the Japanese Generation Z as a whole.

To further deepen the understanding of Generation Z in Japan, their values, and beliefs, as well as how different management theories are implemented and what effects they will have on the Japanese labour market further research need to be done.

- Are these values we see trend something that is equally spread throughout the country, or are the younger generations values in their work-life affected by their living surroundings?
- Will focused education and teaching of SHMR in relation to Generation Z bring a wider understanding in Japan that can help them view their working culture differently and make changes that is in relation to their culture as well?
- Can changes be made from schools' perspective to influence the labour market and make it more sustainable?

Further studies in these fields will lead to deeper understanding of the future of Japan, its labour market and work-life culture, and what can be done today to help lay the ground of the path to this future.

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