

Article

Fostering Work Meaningfulness for Sustainable Human Resources: A Study of Generation Z

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Abstract: This study is drawn from the psychology of sustainability exploring meaningful job characteristics for Generation Z and their influence on employee retention. We hypothesised that intrinsic qualities of job characteristics foster experienced meaningfulness which, in turn, enhances employees' intention to stay. An online survey targeted to Generation Z was adopted for the study. We received 746 usable responses for the analysis. Nested model comparisons with a structural equation approach and chi-square difference tests were used to assess the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the hypothesised relationships. The best-fit model to data was then used for hypotheses testing. We found that skill variety, autonomy and task significance engender experienced meaningfulness for Generation Z. Work meaningfulness was the mechanism underpinning the relationships between these job characteristics and intention to stay. Task feedback was not significant for either meaningfulness or intention to stay, whereas task identity affected only intention to stay but not meaningfulness. This research contributes to the literature on work meaningfulness and generations by examining the work behaviours of Generation Z. Because experienced meaningfulness can enhance Generation Z's willingness to stay and support organisational sustainability, an organisation can retain its generational cohort by providing selective work design strategies to fit the generation's characteristics.

Keywords: work meaningfulness; Generation Z; job design; employee retention; Thailand



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1. Introduction

Meaningfulness in work is the subjective experience of work perceived by employees as purposeful and significant [1,2]. Di Fabio [3] explained that meaningfulness is integral to sustainability because meaningful work experiences can promote employee wellbeing and stimulate self-development and the pursuit of success and goal accomplishment. A recent review highlighted that work meaningfulness is the mechanism that can attract and retain talent, keep employees intrinsically motivated and engaged and enhance employee performance [4]. As such, meaningfulness can promote human resource sustainability to ensure enhanced organisational performance and competitiveness in the long term [3,5]. This study explores work characteristics that can enhance Generation Z's experienced meaningfulness and influence the cohort's decision to remain with an organisation.

The Generation Z cohort, born between 1995 and 2010, is gradually joining the workforce and by 2025 will make up roughly a quarter of the global labour force [6]. Digital disruption and technological advancement have differentiated the members of Generation Z from their predecessors. Generation Z places a high value on purpose, meaningfulness and intrinsic motivation [7]. Empirical studies show that the generation is more concerned with need satisfaction—especially the fulfilment of intrinsic motivation and work meaningfulness—than previous generations [8–10]. Cugini [11] explained that generational characteristics and values can influence generation members to identify some facets of work that motivate them more than others. This phenomenon has been reported previously in, for example, the United States [12], Canada [8], New Zealand [10], South Korea [13] and Thailand [14]. Accordingly, as Generation Z enters the workforce in higher numbers every year, managers will face different employee expectations, and job design

that cultivates experienced meaningfulness in work will be required to motivate and retain these employees.

Sturges et al. [15] explained that experienced meaningfulness, especially early in a career, can be driven by employees' job experiences that align with their work values and through which they can grow and build a career [2]. Accordingly, we argue that the intrinsic qualities of the work itself can enhance experienced meaningfulness and retention among Generation Z. This is because work activities, such as taking on challenges and more responsibilities, learning new skills and making a difference in the community to which they belong would allow Generation Z employees to experience their potential and meaning and to fulfil their higher purpose [7,16,17]. Previous research into Generation Z has focused on the alignment of generational characteristics with specific occupations, such as hospitality and service [18], work flexibility and engagement [13], subjective wellbeing [19], sustainable volunteering [20], work values [8,10,21] and different cultural societies [22]. This study provides additional insight into the workplace behaviours of Generation Z by characterising meaningful work for employee retention.

Specifically, we assessed meaningful job characteristics for Generation Z and examined the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the relationships between job characteristics and intention to stay. Our study contributes to the literature on work meaningfulness and generations by examining the views of Generation Z regarding the characteristics of meaningful work and motivational work activities for employee retention. In addition, we respond to the call for more evidence from emerging markets on work meaningfulness [4,23]. Some work characteristics may be unable to motivate the new generation while others may nurture meaningful experiences and establish a link with the employing organisation. Accordingly, our study can validate the meaningfulness of the job characteristics model [24] in the context of Generation Z, which grew up in the age of digital disruption. Our findings can help business managers sustain the effectiveness of human resources by guiding implementation of selective work design strategies—such as arranging work activities to ensure employees experience positive and meaningful work—to fit Generation Z's characteristics. This would in turn enhance Generation Z's willingness to stay with the organisation.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Generation Z in the Age of Digital Disruption

A generation consists of people of similar age who have experienced similar social and life events, economics, politics, technology and culture [25]. These shared experiences form the personalities of a generational group and have a profound effect on attitudes, values, beliefs and expectations towards work, authority and organisation [26]. Edmunds and Turner [27] asserted that generations across borders could experience an event simultaneously through networks, media and technologies. Statista reported in 2021 that younger generations represent 50% of global online users [28] who use social network platforms to keep up with friends and families' lives, receive inspiration for a passion, follow people who share their interests and find like-minded people and groups [29]. Therefore, Generation Z will likely share some common beliefs and characteristics through these networks across the globe. For example, Farrell and Phungsoonthorn [22] found that work values among Generation Z members in Thailand were largely consistent with international generational expectations revealing the strongest preference for intrinsic motivation and altruistic rewards.

Members of Generation Z or Gen Z'ers, born between 1995 and 2010, are the youngest generation of employees entering the workforce. They are versatile and self-reliant, and have purpose, entrepreneurial spirit and a concern for financial stability [7,9,30]. These characteristics are driven by their experiences in the formative years of technological advancement, social networks, the global financial crisis of 2007–2009, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, global warming and social issues, such as corruption and human rights. For example, social media and online channels allow Generation Z to recognise online threats such as cyber-bullying and identity theft and to observe social justice issues, such as the

legalisation of same-sex marriage and transgender recognition. This has shaped the new generation to respect and care about individual rights, privacy and equal opportunity, find purpose in supporting the wellbeing of their communities and make a difference in the world rather than focusing solely on themselves [7,20,31].

In addition, an environment facing uncertain business conditions and an economic downturn, such as the one precipitated by the global financial crisis, has engendered in Gen Z'ers a focus on financial stability, employability and growth [30]. Accordingly, the Gen Z'er is willing to work hard, is keen on learning new skills and seeks work experiences that can support their future career. Recent research from WARC [32] supports the view that the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong financial effect across generations in Thailand and that Generation Z showed the most concern about financial uncertainties, often seeking extra work to reduce its financial burden. While Generation Z seems concerned with extrinsic rewards to secure their financial stability, Mahmoud et al. [8] found that intrinsic motivation outranks extrinsic rewards in the authors' work motivation study of Generation Z. Similarly, Farrell and Phungsoonthorn [22] reported that Generation Z in Thailand had the strongest preference towards intrinsic motivation. In sum, Generation Z is intrinsically motivated, a term which could be characterised as self-reliant, keen on learning and growth, purposeful and eager to make an impact on others. We argue that Generation Z employees will stay longer in a workplace in which they can experience meaningfulness in work.

2.2. Work Meaningfulness and Employee Retention

Employee retention is the state in which the organisation can maintain its human resources to sustain the organisation for long periods of time and prevent them from leaving [33], resulting in positive sustainable organisational development [3]. In contrast, failure to retain employees can have a negative impact on organisational competitiveness and performance [5]. A survey illustrated that the key reasons employees stayed in a job involved their experiences with work activities, job characteristics and career [34]. Therefore, work activities that integrate the goals, values and beliefs that serve the needs of Generation Z's intrinsic motivation should allow positive work experiences for Gen Z'ers, resulting in their decision to remain with the employing organisation [1].

Meaningfulness in work is the subjective experience of employees perceiving work as purposeful and significant [1,2]. Previous research shows that work meaningfulness can be driven by factors such as job design and workload [35], and that it is the mechanism that keeps employees intrinsically motivated and engaged [4]. As such, organisations have begun cultivating work meaningfulness experiences to engage and retain employees. Organisations especially seek insights into this cohort to drive the design and implementation of people policies targeted to their characteristics [36].

The intrinsic work qualities that align with the values and needs of an early career workforce, such as Generation Z, such as tasks with a significant impact on others, can enhance this cohort's experienced meaningfulness [8,37]. As organisations no longer offer a career for life, as was once the case, meaningfulness in work can be fostered by work activities, e.g., acquiring skills and knowledge to support career progression, that allow employees to grow professionally [15,38]. This poses a challenge to designing work activities for Generation Z employees that can cultivate experienced meaningfulness in work and consequently encourage them to stay with the organisation. Thus, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 1. *Work meaningfulness is positively associated with intention to stay.*

2.3. Job Characteristics

Hackman and Oldham [24] were among the first work design scholars to theorise and demonstrate that employees require job resources to experience meaningfulness in work, to be motivated and to perform well. The authors advocated for enriched or intrinsic qualities of job characteristics, including: (a) skill variety, which involves the need for varied skills and talents to accomplish work; (b) task identity, which involves a completion of a whole

piece of work; (c) task significance, which entails producing a positive impact on the lives of others; (d) autonomy, which allows for flexibility and employee discretion in decision making and (e) task feedback. According to self-determination theory, these enriched characteristics can meet the intrinsic motivation of employees and fulfil the psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy [39]. Empirical studies show positive relationships between these five intrinsic qualities—especially task significance [37] and work meaningfulness [17].

In the context of Generation Z, these intrinsic job qualities can arguably also provide experienced meaningfulness. Dachner et al. [38] explained that Gen Z'ers seek task feedback because it can improve their skills and ability to influence outcomes. Therefore, jobs with task feedback and skill variety correspond to Generation Z's values of learning and growth. Task significance is an action targeted to others that can facilitate the fulfilment of Gen Z'ers' higher purpose by enabling them to make a difference in their communities [7]. Goh and Baum [18] reported that Generation Z employees found working in quarantine hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic meaningful and were willing to 'go the extra mile' to make a difference because they could make the world safer. The World Economic Forum [6] also addressed the importance of work autonomy, flexibility and empowerment for Generation Z, recognizing that providing opportunities to try new ideas and work methods accentuates Generation Z's attributes of self-reliance and independence. Therefore, it is expected that Generation Z employees—whose work values emphasise intrinsic motivation—will experience meaningfulness in work if their jobs embrace these intrinsic job characteristics.

Hypothesis 2. *There are positive associations between (a) skill variety, (b) task significance, (c) task identity, (d) autonomy and (e) feedback and work meaningfulness.*

Frankl [40] contended that the search for meaning is a universal instinct. As such, an organisation's provision of resourceful work whose meaning and worth is easily grasped can elicit a measure of gratitude among its employees. Consequently, employees will return the goodwill by exerting effort to support sustainable organisational development and by remaining active members of the community [41]. Previous research supports the positive relationships between work meaningfulness and employee retention and other outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour [16]. Thus, intrinsically motivated job design can reasonably improve the retention of Generation Z through work meaningfulness experiences.

Hypothesis 3. *Work meaningfulness mediates the relationships between (a) skill variety, (b) task significance, (c) task identity, (d) autonomy and (e) feedback and intention to stay.*

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sample and Procedures

This study aimed to identify meaningful job characteristics from the viewpoint of Generation Z in Thailand. In 2021, Generation Z accounted for 19% of the population in Thailand, with the first Generation Z cohort joining the workforce in 2018–2019. Our study targeted Gen Z'ers who were currently in the workforce and employed by an organisation. We used online survey snowball sampling with a group of Gen Z'ers with some work experience as the initial seed and asked them to share survey links with individuals within their networks who fitted our criteria. We used screening questions to include only those who were born between 1995 and 2010 and were employed by an organisation at the time of the survey. Upon accessing the survey, participants were informed of the study purpose, were provided contact details for queries and were notified that their response was confidential and anonymous. We received 746 usable survey responses. Most respondents held bachelor's degrees (96%) and had up to two years of organisational tenure (89%). Respondents belonged to occupation categories that included accounting and finance,

information technology, engineering and logistics. Males and females comprised 51% and 49%, respectively, of respondents (Table 1).

Table 1. Profile of the sample ($n = 746$).

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Male	383	51.3
Female	363	48.7
Education		
Vocational	30	4.0
Bachelor's	713	95.6
Master's	3	0.4
Occupational Category		
Accounting and finance	279	37.4
Computer and information technology	113	15.1
Engineering	99	13.3
Logistics	54	7.2
Sales	84	11.3
Administrative support	96	12.9
Other	21	2.8
Tenure		
Less than 1 year	31	4.2
1–2 years	629	84.3
More than 2 years	86	11.5

3.2. Measures

All study measures were established measures previously used in the literature. We followed Brislin's [42] pedagogy of language translation to maintain the content validity of the Thai translation version. Exogenous variables (the five job characteristics) were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and criterion variables (work meaningfulness and intention to stay) were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Podsakoff et al. [43] recommended this alternative scale technique to allow researchers to methodologically minimise common method variance, as some of the covariation observed among the constructs resulted from consistency in scale properties. We also conducted the Harman's single factor test; the results revealed that common method bias was not an issue for the analysis [43]. All measures attained acceptability for validity and reliability [44,45].

3.2.1. Job Characteristics

Five core job characteristics theorised by Hackman and Oldham [24], i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback, were measured using the scale developed by Morgeson and Humphrey [46]. A sample item for skill variety is, 'The job requires me to utilise a variety of different skills in order to complete the work'; for autonomy, 'The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work'; for task identity, 'The job is arranged so that I can do an entire piece of work from beginning to end'; for task significance, 'The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people' and for feedback, 'The job itself provides me with information about my performance'. Cronbach's alpha for the five core dimensions ranged between 0.77 and 0.86.

3.2.2. Work Meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness measures the degree of positive meaning that individuals discover in their work-related activities using the 6-item scale reported by May et al. [47].

Sample items include ‘My job activities are personally meaningful to me’ and ‘I feel that the work I do on my job is valuable.’ The reliability coefficient of the measure is 0.93.

3.2.3. Intention to Stay

Intention to stay measures employees’ willingness to remain with the employing organisation using the 3-item scale reported in Price and Mueller [48]. A sample item is ‘If you were completely free to choose, you would prefer to continue working in this organisation.’ The reliability coefficient of the measure is 0.87.

3.2.4. Controls

Gender, tenure and occupation group were controlled given the potential influence these demographics could have on the study variables [49]. For example, years in position and gender can influence the level of challenge experienced on the job and can affect experienced meaningfulness [50]. Furthermore, we controlled for occupation group because employees in professional careers and those in administrative support may be exposed to different levels of intrinsic work activity. These demographics were therefore included in the analysis to rule out alternative explanations of study findings.

4. Results

4.1. Validity and Reliability Measures

An exploratory factor analysis with principal component extraction and varimax rotation was conducted. Results identified seven factors, with most items loading reliably on their predicted factors. All measures attained acceptability for reliability and convergent validity [44,45]. Cronbach’s alpha ranged from 0.77 to 0.93 and the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.5, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and adequate convergent validity (Table 2). Moreover, all square roots of AVEs were greater than all correlations of each pair of study variables, suggesting all measures attained acceptability for discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 2. Validity and reliability of measures.

Measures	Factor Loadings	AVE	Cronbach’s α
Skill variety		0.588	0.823
The job requires a variety of skills.	0.798		
The job requires me to utilise a variety of different skills in order to complete the work.	0.805		
The job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills.	0.823		
Task significance		0.556	0.778
The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people.	0.802		
The job itself is very significant and important in the broader scheme of things.	0.756		
The job has a large impact on people outside the organisation.	0.761		
Task identity		0.545	0.773
The job involves completing a piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end.	0.755		
The job provides me the chance to completely finish the pieces of work I begin.	0.807		
The job is arranged so that I can do an entire piece of work from beginning to end.	0.782		
Autonomy		0.677	0.864
The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work.	0.779		
The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own.	0.863		
The job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions.	0.809		
Feedback		0.587	0.808
The work activities themselves provide direct and clear information about the effectiveness of my job performance.	0.627		
The job itself provides me with information about my performance.	0.860		
The job itself provides feedback on my performance.	0.830		

Table 2. *Cont.*

Measures	Factor Loadings	AVE	Cronbach's α
Work meaningfulness		0.777	0.934
The work I do on this job is very important to me.	0.822		
The work I do on this job is worthwhile.	0.803		
The work I do on this job is meaningful to me.	0.874		
I feel that the work I do on my job is valuable.	0.815		
Intention to stay		0.700	0.874
If you had to quit work for a while (for example, because of studying), you would return to this organisation.	0.768		
I plan to stay in this organisation as long as possible.	0.777		
If you were completely free to choose, you would prefer to continue working in this organisation.	0.815		

Note: AVE = Average variance extracted.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and discriminant validity.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Skills variety	3.72	0.75	0.77								
2 Task significance	3.47	0.85	0.43 ***	0.75							
3 Task identity	3.77	0.89	0.35 ***	0.41 ***	0.74						
4 Autonomy	3.53	0.86	0.49 ***	0.41 ***	0.51 ***	0.82					
5 Feedback	3.75	0.72	0.48 ***	0.54 ***	0.42 ***	0.50 ***	0.77				
6 Work meaningfulness	4.08	1.14	0.38 ***	0.40 ***	0.31 ***	0.41 ***	0.36 ***	0.88			
7 Intention to stay	3.64	1.12	0.23 ***	0.32 ***	0.31 ***	0.29 ***	0.28 ***	0.62 ***	0.84		
8 Tenure	1.69	0.77	−0.03	0.05 *	−0.01	0.00	−0.01	0.13 ***	0.05	−	
9 Gender	0.51	0.50	0.04 **	−0.14	−0.01	0.02	0.00	−0.08 ***	0.03	0.04	−
10 Occupation	0.18	0.38	0.19 ***	0.04 *	0.08 ***	0.61 ***	0.03 *	0.10 ***	0.06	0.00	0.05

Note: The square roots of the average variance extracted are given along the diagonal; Scale score correlations are given below the diagonal, *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 3. These preliminary relationships of study variables indicated that all variables performed consistently with their related concepts and theories and, hence, were robustly valid for further testing.

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

A structural model with maximum likelihood estimation using Mplus 6.1 was employed to assess the mediating role of work meaningfulness on the relationships between job characteristics and intention to stay. The best fit model was then used to test path estimates according to the study hypotheses. We also conducted an indirect effects significance test through bootstrapping to demonstrate the mediating function of work meaningfulness in the model. The details of model comparisons, the corresponding path estimates, and the results of the indirect effects significance test are presented in Tables 4–6.

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, we specified the partial mediation model (Model 1) whose exogenous variables were freely estimated such that work meaningfulness and intention to stay were regressed by all five job characteristics, and work meaningfulness was established to link directly with intention to stay. Path estimates for Model 1 shown in Table 5 revealed that the relationships between four job characteristics (skill variety, task significance, autonomy and feedback) and intention to stay were not significantly different from zero.

Table 4. Testing the mediating role of work meaningfulness on the relationships between job characteristics and intention to stay.

Model	Model Description	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	Model Comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$
Model 1: Full model (Partial mediation)	Five facets of job characteristics were specified to freely estimate both work meaningfulness and intention to stay. Work meaningfulness was specified to link with intention to stay.	717.311	248	0.050	0.935	0.923	-	-
Model 2: Constrained model	Based on Model 1, but the non-significant pathways of job characteristic variables (skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback) on intention to stay were constrained to zero.	720.805	252	0.050	0.935	0.924	Model 1 vs. Model 2	3.494
Model 3: Constrained model	Based on Model 2, but the significant pathway of task identity with intention to stay was constrained to zero.	727.485	253	0.050	0.935	0.923	Model 2 vs. Model 3	6.68 **

Note: $n = 746$. ** $p < 0.01$; χ^2 = chi-squares; $\Delta\chi^2$ = difference in chi-squares between models; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

Table 5. Path estimates for the models in comparison.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Work Meaningfulness	Intention to Stay	Work Meaningfulness	Intention to Stay	Work Meaningfulness	Intention to Stay
Facets of job characteristics						
Skill variety	0.14 **	0.03	0.15 **	0.00	0.15 **	0.00
Task significance	0.21 **	0.06	0.21 ***	0.00	0.21 ***	0.00
Task identity	0.09	0.15 *	0.09	0.12 **	0.10	0.00
Autonomy	0.19 ***	−0.09	0.18 ***	0.00	0.18 ***	0.00
Feedback	0.06	−0.03	0.06	0.00	0.06	0.00
Mediator						
Work meaningfulness		0.66 ***		0.66 ***		0.70 ***
Controls						
Tenure	0.17	0.05	0.17	0.05	0.17	0.06 *
Gender	−0.19 ***	0.03	−0.19 ***	0.04	−0.19 ***	0.05
Occupation	0.15 **	0.04	0.15 **	0.04	0.14 **	0.03

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Value 0.00 in the table is the constrained path detailed in the model description in Table 4.

Table 6. Indirect effects of job characteristics on intention to stay.

	Indirect Effects ^a		95% CI	
	Estimate ^b	S.E.	Lower	Upper
Facets of job characteristics				
Skill variety	0.10 *	0.04	0.03	0.16
Task significance	0.14 **	0.05	0.06	0.21
Task identity	0.06	0.16	−0.01	0.13
Autonomy	0.12 **	0.04	0.05	0.18
Feedback	0.04	0.44	−0.04	0.12

Note: ^a Indirect effect in the presence of work meaningfulness as the mediator. ^b Estimated coefficient using bootstrapping with 5000 samples. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

These non-significant pathways were constrained to zero in Model 2. Model 1 was then compared with Model 2, the nested model. The chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2$) in Table 4 revealed that Model 2, the more parsimonious model, was a better fitting model to the data. To confirm the robustness of Model 2, we compared Model 2 with Model 3, the nested model, in which one additional parameter of the link between task identity and intention to stay was constrained to zero in addition to the non-significant paths specified in Model 2. The difference in chi-square between Models 2 and 3 was significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.680$, $p < 0.01$),

suggesting that Model 2—the larger model with more freely estimated parameters—fitted the data better than Model 3 (Table 4). Path estimates for Models 2 and 3 are reported in Table 5.

Together, our model comparisons suggest that Model 2 was the best fit model to explain the mediating role of work meaningfulness on the relationships between job characteristics and intention to stay of Generation Z (RMSEA = 0.050, CFI = 0.935, TLI = 0.924). To confirm the significant role of work meaningfulness as the mediator in the relationships reported in Model 2, the indirect effects of job characteristics on intention to stay were estimated through bootstrapping (Table 6). The effects and accompanying confidence intervals consistently revealed that work meaningfulness fully mediated the relationships between intention to stay and skill variety, task significance and autonomy. Path relationships reported in Model 2 (Figure 1) and the test of indirect effects shown in Table 6 were used as bases for hypotheses testing.

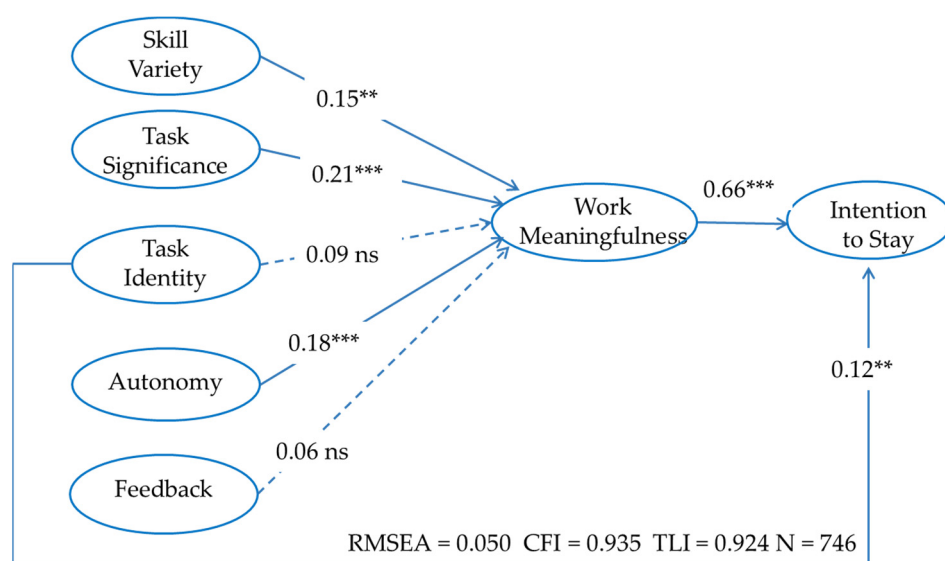


Figure 1. Structural model and path relationships. Note: Solid lines are significant relationships. Dotted lines are non-significant relationships. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Together, our results established that work meaningfulness was positively associated with intention to stay ($\beta = 0.66$) and was found to fully mediate the relationships between intention to stay and skill variety, task significance and autonomy. Thus, H1, H2 (a, b, d) and H3 (a, b, d) were supported. Task identity and feedback were not significantly different from zero in their relationships with work meaningfulness; thus, we could not test the mediating role of work meaningfulness on the relationships between these two job characteristics and intention to stay, as hypothesised. As a result, H2 (c, e) and H3 (c, e) were not supported. However, task identity had a direct and positive effect on intention to stay ($\beta = 0.12$); we will discuss this in the next section.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributed to the generations and meaningfulness in work literature, revealing that skill variety, autonomy and task significance are meaningful job characteristics for Generation Z. Our study supported the view that an organisation can retain its generational cohort by providing meaningful work experiences that correspond to Generation Z's values and preferences. We also provided further evidence that work meaningfulness has a strong and positive association with employees' desire to remain with an organisation [16] and that meaningfulness in work could serve as the underlying mechanism between these facets of job characteristics and the employees' intention to stay. Consequently, organisations can retain their Generation Z cohorts by providing them with the work qualities that

correspond to their intrinsic values, as these activities cultivate experienced meaningfulness which in turn underpins human resource sustainability to support long-term organisational sustainability.

Specifically, Generation Z employees associated experienced meaningfulness with work activities that utilised their skills, provided them with autonomy and made a significant impact on others. Therefore, a decentralised work environment, allowing substantial freedom with work schedules and the way in which skills and abilities are used to accomplish assigned tasks, can result in experienced meaningfulness. This further allows employees to demonstrate their true selves and their abilities to the full extent, thereby strengthening their confidence in their current roles and future careers [7,15]. As such, experienced meaningfulness contributes to employees' desire to maintain their membership in the organisation [16]. Similar to their Thai counterparts, Gen Z'ers in a US study reported their willingness to switch to a job that allowed for flextime and independent work, especially project work [6].

Moreover, consistent with previous research [17], task significance is the strongest predictor of work meaningfulness among the five job characteristics. Increased task significance can improve retention of Generation Z through the enhancement of the meaning of work. Tasks that have a significant impact on others promote meaningful work because they resonate with Gen Z'ers' higher purpose of supporting their communities [20,37]. For example, a study in Australia reported that Generation Z staff were willing to work at quarantine hotels for COVID-19 patients to make the world a safer place [18].

However, we found that task identity was the only job feature that directly influenced Generation Z employees' decision to stay in an organisation, although it did not drive meaningfulness in work. Generation Z has grown up in a technologically advanced environment and is reported to have fewer in-person social interactions and a higher degree of loneliness [9]. Therefore, Generation Z employees may experience strong ties to an organisation when they identify with assigned tasks, especially those that provide clear links with an organisation's goals and objectives [51]. As such, task identity can fill a void for Generation Z employees by making them feel more secure through having affiliates and being part of a real organisation, a feat that social network groups may be unable to achieve.

As for task feedback, Dachner et al. [38] asserted that Generation Z employees would like to receive feedback for their development and that offering and receiving feedback are familiar activities in their social network groups [9]. Our Generation Z sample did not associate the value of feedback with work meaningfulness or intention to stay. They possibly regard job feedback as similar to the responses they receive on their social network content. Job feedback is therefore a minimum job expectation and thus does not affect Generation Z's experienced meaningfulness.

5.2. Practical Implications

Our results have considerable implications for business managers for fostering meaningfulness in work to retain their human resources. Managers can adopt a proactive development approach to work design in which the assigned tasks enhance the skill repertoire that matches the career goals of their Generation Z employees [38]. Managers should also allow Generation Z employees to use their talents and have discretion over how and when to perform. Additionally, follow-up meetings to reflect the ongoing progress of employees and to remind them of what they have become would be useful. These can benefit them with learning, growth, and employability and can also help them identify with organisational objectives.

Moreover, managers should share stories of Generation Z employees who have made a significant impact on others and supported the organisation's purpose. This can emphasise their pride in being resourceful in supporting their peers, the organisation and the communities to which they belong. These impact-on-others activities and manage-

ment recognition should engender experienced meaningfulness in work and contribute to retention of Generation Z employees with the organisation.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Our study responded to the call for more evidence from emerging markets on work meaningfulness. Our findings on meaningful job characteristics for Generation Z in Thailand are somewhat different from those previously reported in the literature for other generations. Research in other settings can be useful for future comparison and assessment if these differences are generalised to cohort characteristics. Future research should also consider a longitudinal study investigating job design, career success and work meaningfulness. Multiple time-point assessments can potentially provide insights into the intertwined effects of cohort characteristics and career success on work meaningfulness and the cohort's willingness to remain with the organisation. With these insights, an organisation can retain its valuable employees by adjusting work design to fit generational characteristics over the course of their careers. Moreover, further exploration of specific qualities of feedback that can provide positive meaning to work for Generation Z may be valuable. Finally, future research can also benefit from a comparative study of the design of meaningful work across different occupational groups.

6. Conclusions

Our study supported the view that an organisation can sustain its human resources by implementing selective work design strategies to fit Generation Z's characteristics. That is, to foster meaningfulness for Generation Z employees, organisations should design jobs that allow the new generation to utilise their various skills and talent, enjoy work autonomy, and make an impact on others. Moreover, we have demonstrated that work meaningfulness is the mechanism underpinning these intrinsic qualities of the job and Generation Z's intention to stay. In other words, experienced meaningfulness in work can enhance Generation Z's willingness to stay and support organisational sustainability in the long run. Accordingly, organisations can retain Generation Z employees by cultivating experienced meaningfulness through the design of work activities that correspond to their values and preferences.

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