

Assessing the Influence of Age and Gender on Soft Skills Among Emerging Gen Z HR Professionals

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
N/A. ..	<p>Gen Zers enhanced with technological proficiency and global outlook are entering and about to enter the workforce. However, there are many concerns regarding the readiness of these Gen Zers for people centric roles like HR. Through this study, the researchers tried to explore the influence of age, gender and education on the soft skills. Incorporating descriptive research design, the data are collected from 72 respondents using structured questionnaire. The data are analyzed using regression analysis and two-way ANOVA.</p> <p>It was found that the Gen Z HR professionals lagged in non-verbal communication, emotional intelligence, HR domain knowledge and intuitive and strategic thinking. They are moderately proficient in team work, written communication and problem-solving. While gender was found to have no significant influence on the soft skills, education and age exhibited marginal and statistically significant influence on soft skills.</p> <p>.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

Human Resources are the most critical resources of an organization that enable it achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Huselid, 1995). The effectiveness of the human resources of an organization depends on the effectiveness of the Human Resource Management processes of the organization. Organizations with effective HR policies and practices implementing the HR functions effectively are more likely to have an effective Human Resource Management.

Human Resource Management refers to that aspect of the organizational administration which is involved in bridging the gap between employee performance and strategic foals of the organization by efficiently managing the human resources of the organization. The advantage of successful accomplishment of organizational goals and empowerment of the employees through providing opportunities aimed improvement of their roles and professional development, is achieved by effectively and efficiently managed human resources of the organization.

Human Resource Professionals are vested with the responsibility of strategically mapping the workforce with the dynamically evolving jobs at the organizations. They have to ensure a pipeline of suitably skilled talent and are responsible for bridging the skill gaps in the C-suite and boardroom leaders. They should continuously engage with institutions in the community like colleges, state and local chambers, employers, educators, policymakers, etc. to have a positive influence on the future workforce of the nation.

The pandemic lead to increased desire among the employees flexibility regarding when, where and how to work to accommodate their preferences to lead a healthy, happy, less stressed and more productive life. Management of the employees working remotely is even more challenging than those working from the office. e



Employee turnover is an inevitable phenomenon that occurs due to varied reasons such as better opportunities, career change, illnesses etc. The HR professionals are required to put an extra effort to formulate strategies to attract and retain talent in the tight labour market with competitors offering competitive salaries, employee benefits and the like. Insufficient or improper execution of such services adversely affects the performance of the organization alongside the performance of individuals (Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

The issues of employee disengagement and job satisfaction have always been there to deal with. The most popular two kinds of disengagement are “quite quitting” and “loud quitting”. Quite quitting is said to occur when the employees perform the bare minimum requirements of the work and psychologically disconnect from their job (Detert, 2023). Loud quitting refers to the situation where employees voice their dissatisfaction and desire for change as well their purpose to leave (Harter, 2023).

An organization cannot leverage on the opportunities to the full extent if the skills of the human resources of the organization are not in alignment with the current requirements of the industry (White & Rittie, 2022). Upskilling and reskilling the employees helps to develop greater resilience towards the problems posed by the dynamic environment.

Every organization is putting in the efforts to make the employees comfortable. To ensure this the human resource professionals are the ones to deal with the concerns and apprehensions of the employees and also extend support their mental and emotional well-being. The human resources employees have to make and implement strategic choices and acts to accommodate the new work arrangements and maintain the engagement and morale of the employees (Adikaram, et. al., 2021). The department of the human resources is the one that is responsible to maintain the work environment ascertaining the job security of the employees. They are the ones responsible for carrying out the processes like talent acquisition, payroll management, performance appraisal and so on.

The word generation is used to refer to the people who have a common birth period, upbringing and historical context. The business world currently encompasses the generations such as baby boomers, generation x, generation y, generation z and generation alpha.

The baby boomers are those born between the years 1946 and 1964. They are named so due to the increased birth rate of babies during the period post World War II. The increase in the population caused boom in housing, infrastructure and the economy aiding to the empowerment of this generation. The people born in this generation can be said to have shaped the society by pushing back the political decisions, participating in the protests, caused the rise in the feminism and desired for equality. They brought a massive change in the culture, society and economy.

Generation X are the people born between 1965 and 1979. Generation X had the advantage of enjoying the time of economic prosperity and many of them owned the properties at a younger age. They welcomed and actively pursued entrepreneurial opportunities.

The people born between 1980 and 1994 are referred to as Generation Y or Millennials. This generation has seen the ups and downs of the economy with the experiences like tragic incident of September 11, 2001 and covid era. These events had significantly shaped the global outlook of this generation. This generation locked themselves out of the housing market due to the accelerating prices of houses and flats. This generation are presently entering the family life stage as they are moving into their 30s and 40s.

Generation Z describes the people born between the years 1995 and 2009. They have become more conservative and resilient due to the adaptations they underwent both socially and economically. They are aware of the fact that they need to continuously upskill and retrain themselves embracing life-long learning to survive in the competitive environment of the day. Their main focus is on values and fulfillment. They are financially conservative and save in the dream of buying a house.

Generation alpha are those born between 2010 and 2024. Alpha is the first generation to be born in the 21st century and shaped in the new era of increasing globalization as well as empowerment and connectedness. The generation beta refers to people born between 2025 and 2039.

The generation in the limelight of today's employers in generation Z also called as gen Zers, iGen or post-millennials. Being shaped in the era of constant technological changes, Gen Zs prefer to working in the tech sector. They have known the usage of technology along with how to interact on social networks since early stages of their life. They are more informed about the happenings across the globe and are perceived to think and then act. They are financially conscious. Gen Zers are established to be more realistic, self-confident and ambitious with a unique perspectives while staying true to their values, goals and themselves.

This generation has been through a period of political instability, terrorism, global financial catastrophe and nearly irreversible climate problem. The personality, vision and the ability to adapt to the dynamic global environment of Gen Zers have been shaped by these events.

The entry of Gen Zers into the labour market is posing new responsibilities to the HR professionals like keeping up with the latest technologies, internships, ambassador programs, benefits, ensuring friendly atmosphere and corporate social responsibility activities. The HR professionals are vested with the task of taking courageous step of breaking the traditional



ways by putting the existing tools to different usages. HR departments should also be prepared to introduce new values into workplace along with modifying the existing values and culture to the extent necessary.

With Gen Zers coming to the workplace, the organizations would have four or five generations working together. The millennials and the Gen Zers

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Aruna Dubey, Et. al., (2024) in their research on training needs of Millennials Gen Zers, established that both the groups expressed the need for training on communication, technical proficiency, teamwork and industry knowledge. They also reported difficulty in dealing with the ego and breakdown of the senior members.

Dingot Hamonangan Ismail, Joko Nugroho and Teti Rohayati (2023) found that the Gen Zers need to be equipped with the following ten soft skills to succeed in Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision making skill, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility.

Dunaetz, et. al., (2022) stated that the six barriers to achieve small group leadership among the millennials and the Gen Zers are lack of ability to lead, group dynamic skills, social support, biblical foundation, stability and desire to positively impact others.

The findings of the research conducted by Pujiawati, et. al., (2022) indicated that the Gen Zers need improvement in areas such as human skills, digital literacy and technology to prepare them to compete on a global basis.

Jose Magano et. al., (2020) stated that there is a need to equip the Gen Zers with both soft and hard skills to optimize their productivity and mitigate weaknesses.

Problem Statement

While some of the Gen Zers are already working, some of them are entering and some are in the phase of preparing themselves. This is the generation that is most affected by the Covid-19. While Gen Zers are likely to introduce high technology skills in their workplaces, there are concerns regarding the interpersonal skills of the Gen Zers. With their multidisciplinary and global approach to the work the emphasis on these skills is further heightened. HRs are in addition to the need to adapt to the workplace the need for cohesion and cooperation between the various generations, adds to the complexity.

While there are researches on soft skills in general, very few studies have been conducted with Gen Z HR professionals in consideration. Significant gap has been observed in studying the influence of demographic variables on soft skills among Gen Z HR professionals. This study aims to quantitatively evaluate the influences of demographic variables on soft skills among Gen Z HR professionals.

Objectives

- To identify the area of shortage of skills among the Gen Zers working in the HR field.
- To study the impact of select demographic variables on the skills among Gen Zers.
- To analyze the impact of the shortage of skills among Gen Zers in the HR field.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive Design is used to analyze in detail the phenomena, behaviours and characteristics in a systematic way.

Sampling Method: The research uses non-probability sampling method of convenience sampling.

Sample Size: The sample size considered for the study is 72.

Variables: The independent and dependent variables in the study are:

Independent: Gender, Age Education

Dependent: Soft Skills Scores

Data Collection Tool: The data collection tool used to gather the data for the purpose of this research is questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire are divided into cognitive and analytical skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and team spirit, HR domain knowledge, professional ethics and emotional intelligence.

Data Collection Method: The method used for collection of data is sample survey.

Statistical Tools: Regression Analysis, ANOVA

Analysis and Interpretation



Descriptive Statistics

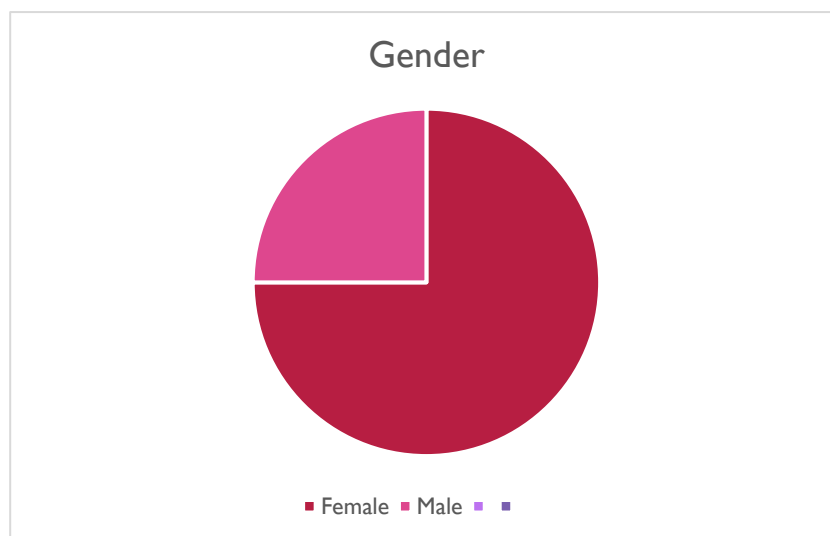


Figure 1: Distribution of Male and Female respondents

The distribution of the sample once again provided support to the notion of predominance of the females in the field of HR with them being 54 (75%) among 72 samples collected and the remaining 18 (25%) are males in the field of HR.

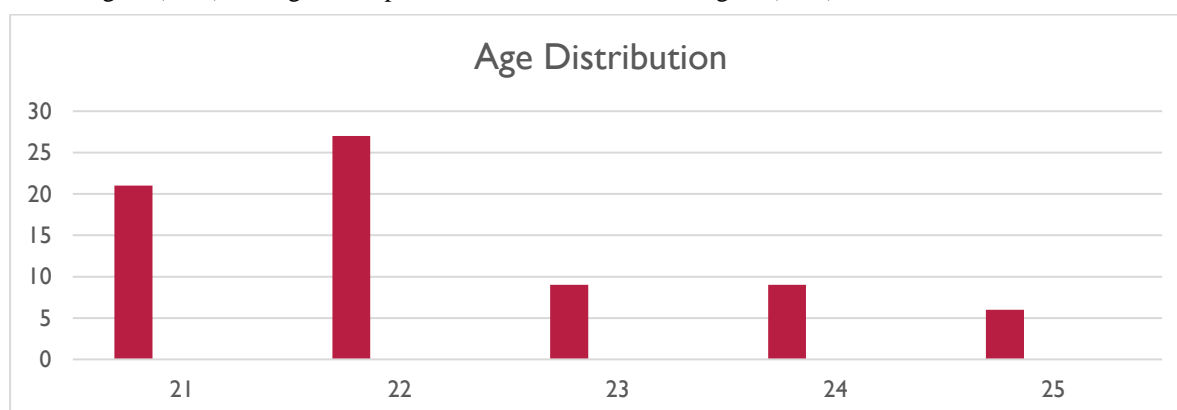


Figure 2: Age based Distribution of respondents

The age of the sample of Gen Zers working as HR professionals sourced for this research range from 21 to 25 with sample numbers of each year being 21 (29.2%), 27 (37.5%), 9 (12.5%), 9 (12.5%) and 6 (8.3%).

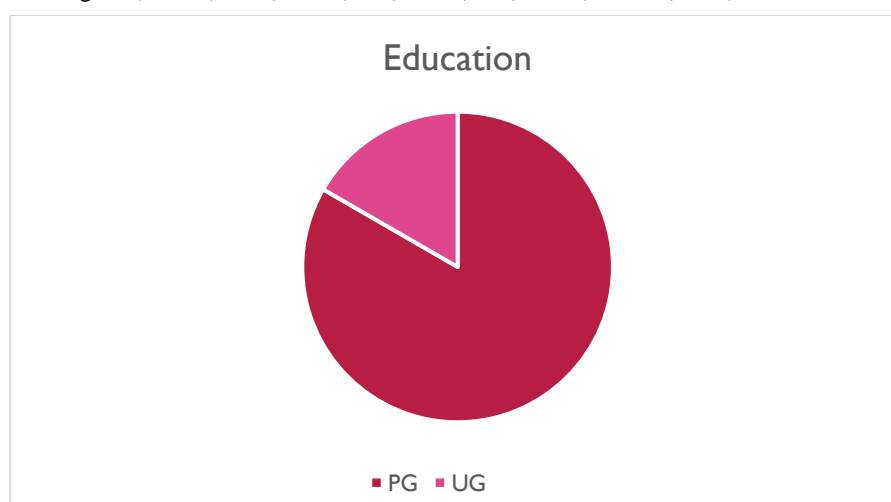


Figure 3: Education based Distribution of respondents



The majority of the respondents with number equal to 60 (83.3%) have completed their Post-Graduation while a minor part of 12 (16.7%) are serving as HR professionals after the completion of their Under-Graduation.

S.No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I perform computations and approach practical problems with different mathematical techniques	9	36	24	-	3
2	I create documents such as letters directions, manuals, reports, graphs and flowcharts	12	27	21	9	3
3	I receive, attend to, interpret and respond to basic verbal messages /cues	15	21	21	9	6
4	I organize basic thoughts, ideas and messages in writing	9	36	15	9	3
5	I locate, understand and interpret the information in documents such as manuals, graphs and schedules	12	30	12	12	6
6	I can recognize problems, devise and implement plans of action	6	33	27	3	3
7	I work well with people from diverse backgrounds	21	27	15	6	3
8	I clearly communicate my ideas	15	36	12	6	3
9	I persuade and convince others	18	21	21	12	-
10	I contribute to group efforts	18	30	15	6	3
11	I successfully resolve the conflicts that occur between the members of the organizations	6	33	21	12	-
12	I ensure timely completion of HR tasks even during peak seasons	9	30	18	12	3
13	I feel strong in the HR domain knowledge and am able to leverage it	9	33	15	9	6
14	I can tailor my communication style while communicating with different stakeholders in the organization	12	27	15	12	6
15	I can control and regulate non-verbal display of emotion (such as anger, anxiety, joy, and delight, etc.)	12	30	18	9	3
16	I have the awareness and understanding the verbal communications of others	15	24	18	9	6
17	I can effectively use non-verbal communication such as through facial expression, posture, body	6	27	21	9	9



	movement, eye contact, etc. to communicate effectively					
18	I have complete knowledge about company's procedures, products, services and other things	6	30	18	9	9
19	Ability to bring focus and clarity to a conversation (by adding knowledge and information)	3	36	21	9	3
20	I remain calm and focused even in high pressure situations	18	21	18	12	3
21	I enthusiastically take on new challenges and acquire new skills	15	27	18	6	6
22	I try to maintain integrity and transparency in all my actions	12	27	21	9	3
23	I adhere to schedules and routines, ensuring consistent performance	9	27	21	12	3
24	I treat people with courtesy	15	27	15	12	3
25	I efficiently research and gather the necessary data for decision-making	18	24	18	6	6
26	I graciously acknowledge praise without arrogance	21	24	12	9	6
27	I critically assess the outcomes to refine strategies	12	27	21	9	3
28	I articulate my thoughts clearly and convincingly in conversations	-	33	24	12	3
29	I have proficient knowledge on social and labour welfare norms	6	33	15	15	3
30	I have a strong understanding of how different functions contribute to the overall success of the organization	9	36	12	6	9
31	I use forward-thinking approach to plan for future challenges	9	33	15	12	3
32	I anticipate unspoken concerns of the people	6	33	12	12	9

Table 1: Frequency distribution of soft-skill competencies among Gen Z HR professionals

From the above table it can be interpreted that while the respondents were good in teamspirit, interpersonal skills, written communication, problem solving and analytical skills, with their mean scores being greater than the average score, the Gen Zers are required to concentrate on improving their non-verbal communication, conflict resolution skills, technical knowledge related to HR domain and also on emotional intelligence, intuitive and strategic thinking. There is also need to emphasize intuitive thinking among the Gen Zers.

Statistical Analysis

Interpretation of Regression Analysis of Gender: The scores of respondents corresponding to soft skills on the basis of gender has been fit into regression obtaining the equation, $y=8.44x+108.39$. In the regression analysis carried out to find out the influence of gender on soft skills, it has been found out that only 1.6% of the variance in scores is explained by gender. The F statistic 0.3511 indicates weak explanatory power of gender to the variations in scores of soft skills. From this it can



be said that the difference of scores between males and females is not statistically significant and gender alone cannot be considered as a strong predictor of soft skills scores.

Interpretation of Regression Analysis of Age: The collected data has been fitted into regression by giving the equation of $y=3.92x+27.71$, depicting a positive linear relationship. Only 8.4% of the variation in the soft skills scores is explained by the age. The average increase of 6.04 in the score for 1 year increase in the age is not statistically significant at 5% level of significance. This suggests that there might be other factors influencing the change in the scores. The correlation coefficient of 0.29 suggest weak positive correlation between age of the respondent and obtained score for soft skills.

Interpretation of Regression Analysis of Education: The regression equation obtained for education by fitting the scores of respondents is $y=15.85x+111.4$. A non-linear trend has been observed in the scores. No statistically significant difference was observed in the scores of respondents with UG and PG classification. The R-squared value at 0.077 establishes the weak relationship between level of education and scores of respondents for soft skills. The correlation coefficient of 0.28 suggests a weak positive relationship between the level of education and soft skills of the respondents.

Interpretation of Two-way ANOVA of Gender and Age:

Factor	Sum of Squares	df	F-value	p-value
Gender	1109.17	1	2.10	2.10
Age	2996.27	4	1.42	1.42
Gender x Age	6516.38	4	3.08	3.08
Residual	9507.38	18		

Table 2: Interaction Effects of Gender and Age on Soft Skill Scores

While the p-values 0.165 and 0.249 indicate that gender and age alone do not have significant impact on the soft skills among the respondents, the p value of 0.05 indicates that there is an almost significant interaction effect among the variables gender and age. The moderate positive correlation value of 0.3266 suggests that scores of the respondents relating to soft skills tend to increase with increase in age.

Interpretation of Two-way ANOVA of Gender and Education:

Factor	Sum of Squares	df	F-value	p-value
Gender	448.2	1	0.83	0.37
Education	1922.5	1	3.55	0.07
Gender x Education	986.3	1	1.82	0.19
Residual	11964	20		

Table 3: Interaction Effects of Gender and Education on Soft Skill Scores

The p-value of 0.37 indicates that gender does not have significant impact on the soft skills while the p-value 0.07 corresponding to education indicates marginally significant effect of education on soft skills. The p-value corresponding to interaction between gender and education standing at 0.19 indicates not significant interaction between both the variables.

Interpretation of Two-way ANOVA of Age and Education:

Factor	Sum of Squares	df	F-value	p-value
Age	6800.5	4	4.73	0.008
Education	1294.0	1	3.60	0.07
Age x Education	562.7	2	0.78	0.47
Residual	6462.0	18		

Table 4: Interaction Effects of Age and Education on Soft Skill Scores

The p-value 0.008 indicates the statistically significant impact of age on the soft skills while p-value corresponding to



education 0.07 indicates marginal significance. The interaction effect of age and education is not significant with $p=0.47$ indicating that the effects of age and education on soft skills are independent.

Other Major Findings

- Higher consistency has been observed among the scores of male respondents.
- The higher age groups of 24, 25 have higher average scores than younger groups
- Higher consistency of scores has been observed in the scores of respondents aged 24 and 25 while scores of other groups of respondents with age 21, 22, 23 explained greater variation.
- Gradual improvement has been observed in the levels of soft skills of respondents with ages from 21 to 23, but with high variability.
- An increase in both average scores along with improved consistency has been observed in the scores of respondents belong to the ages of 24 and 25.
- The scores of UG students are observed to be more consistent than the scores of PG students.
- Increase in age and higher age have contributed to increase in consistency among the scores of soft skills.

4. DISCUSSION

The current study carried out to identify the levels of cognitive and analytical skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and team spirit, HR domain knowledge, professional ethics and emotional intelligence among the Generation Z HR professionals. The influence of the demographic variables of gender, age and educational qualification are studied.

The areas the Gen Zers exhibited high proficiency are team collaboration, interpersonal skills, written communication and problem solving skills. Notable deficiency was observed in the areas of non-verbal communication, conflict resolution, technical knowledge of HR domain and emotional stability. These observations in the lack of socio-emotional skills can be attributed to absence of real time professional experiences and interactions due to the pandemic induced virtual dominated work environments. Low levels were reported in the intuitive and strategic decision making, the essential attributes of leadership roles especially in the domain of HR.

With the gender accounting for negligible proportion (1.6%) of variance in soft skill scores of the respondents, the soft skills among the Gen Z HR professionals are not statistically significantly influenced by gender.

Age is a statistically significant predictor of soft skill scores. The respondents with higher ages of 24 and 25 not only scored high but also exhibited greater consistency emphasizing the importance of professional exposure, maturity and incremental skill acquisition.

Education has demonstrated marginal significance pointing towards the impact the education has on the overall development of the individuals. The weak positive linear relationship also emphasized the need for curricular reforms to incorporate things like incorporate experiential learning, behavioral training and skill-based assessments.

In the multivariate analysis carried out to analyze the interaction effect among gender and age, gender and education, and age and education, it has been found out that age moderates the influence of gender on soft skills, there is uniform influence of education on gender and the influences of age and education on the soft skills are independent of each other with minimal interdependence.

Practical Implications

- The wide variance in scores suggests organizing intervention programs to people with lower levels of soft skills while those with higher levels of soft skills can be directed to take on mentoring or leadership roles.
- The aspect of improving consistency among the subgroups of the demographic variables considered should also be focused.

Recommendations

- Interventions aimed at improving the soft skills should focus on factors causing variability and reducing the variability of soft skills among various groups.
- Activities like Soft Skill Enhancement Programs (SSEPs), Role Plays, Case Study Interventions, Mentoring and Reverse Mentoring Frameworks should be introduced in both work environments and curricula.
- Behavioural Assessment Tools can be used to review, track and support the development of soft skills.
- Customized soft skill audits can be carried out for designing customized training and development programs.
- Activities like team-building interventions, emotional resilience workshops, and conflict resolution bootcamps can



be organized.

- Inclusive team strategies could be introduced to enhance collaboration and foster mutual understanding among people with diverse backgrounds

5. CONCLUSION

The current research examined the soft skill proficiencies among the Gen Z human resource professionals. The demographic variables considered for the study are gender, age and education. The findings of the research demonstrated the proficiency of Gen Z HR professionals in team collaboration, written communication and problem solving while deficiencies were observed in non-verbal knowledge, emotional intelligence, HR domain knowledge and intuitive and strategic thinking.

The analysis carried out using regression analysis and two-way ANOVA revealed that among the selected demographic variables only age had statistically significant influence on soft skills. This indicates the insufficiency of demographic variables alone to analyze the soft skills and suggests to consider them along with psychological, experiential and pedagogical variables.

The study establishes the pressing need for developing immersive learning environments and design targeted interventions that align with evolving organizational dynamics. Strengthening these skills and competencies enhance the Gen Z's effectiveness and make them ready for people-centric roles more emotionally intelligent, agile and future ready human resource professionals.

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