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Generation Z and Perceptions in the Labor Market: The Employee Value Proposition

Simone Oppido*

Department of Economics

University of Molise

E-mail: s.oppido@studenti.unimol.it

Francesca Di Virgilio

Department of Economics

University of Molise

E-mail: fradivi@unimol.it

Maria Cristina Manocchio

Department of Economics

University of Molise

E-mail: m.manocchio2@studenti.unimol.it

** Corresponding author*

Abstract

This study explores Generation Z respondents' perceptions within a labor market undergoing profound transformation, focusing on three dimensions potentially relevant to organizational attractiveness and the Employee Value Proposition: organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence technologies. The empirical investigation was conducted on a sample of 193 Generation Z undergraduate students approaching graduation and recent graduates with prior work or internship experience. Data were collected through a questionnaire including sociodemographic/background information and exploratory Likert-scale items related to the three analytical dimensions. The findings provide exploratory and context-specific evidence on respondents' perception patterns. Organizational flexibility and psychosocial well-being emerged as highly valued dimensions, suggesting that flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, psychological support, burnout prevention, recognition, and the right to disconnect may represent relevant components of an EVP oriented toward younger workers. With regard to Artificial Intelligence, the results indicate the coexistence, at the aggregate level, of positive expectations regarding AI-related opportunities and moderate concerns regarding AI-related risks, rather than direct evidence of psychological ambivalence at the individual level. Additional subgroup analyses suggest no statistically significant gender differences, while disciplinary area appears to be associated only with limited differences in psychosocial well-being. Overall, the study offers preliminary insights into how flexibility, well-being,

and AI integration may inform the design and communication of organizational value propositions, while also highlighting the need for further research based on larger and more diversified samples and more robustly validated measurement instruments.

Keywords – Generation Z; Labor Market; Organizational Flexibility; Psychosocial Well-Being; Artificial Intelligence; Employee Value Proposition

Paper type – Academic Research Paper

Sommario

Generazione Z e percezioni nel mercato del lavoro: l'Employee Value Proposition. – Questo studio esplora le percezioni dei partecipanti della Generazione Z all'interno di un mercato del lavoro in profonda trasformazione, concentrandosi su tre dimensioni potenzialmente rilevanti per l'attrattività organizzativa e la proposta di valore per i dipendenti (Employee Value Proposition – EVP): flessibilità organizzativa, benessere psicosociale e adozione di tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale. L'indagine empirica è stata condotta su un campione di 193 studenti universitari della Generazione Z prossimi alla laurea e neolaureati con precedenti esperienze lavorative o di tirocinio. I dati sono stati raccolti tramite un questionario che includeva informazioni sociodemografiche/di background e item esplorativi su scala Likert relativi alle tre dimensioni analitiche. I risultati forniscono evidenze esplorative e specifiche del contesto sui modelli di percezione dei partecipanti. La flessibilità organizzativa e il benessere psicosociale sono emersi come dimensioni altamente apprezzate, suggerendo che modalità di lavoro flessibili, equilibrio tra vita professionale e privata, supporto psicologico, prevenzione del burnout, riconoscimento e diritto alla disconnessione possono rappresentare componenti rilevanti di un'EVP orientata ai lavoratori più giovani. Per quanto riguarda l'Intelligenza Artificiale, i risultati indicano la coesistenza, a livello aggregato, di aspettative positive riguardo alle opportunità legate all'IA e di moderate preoccupazioni riguardo ai rischi ad essa correlati, piuttosto che prove dirette di ambivalenza psicologica a livello individuale. Ulteriori analisi di sottogruppo non evidenziano differenze di genere statisticamente significative, mentre l'area disciplinare sembra essere associata solo a differenze limitate nel benessere psicosociale. Nel complesso, lo studio offre spunti preliminari su come flessibilità, benessere e integrazione dell'IA possano influenzare la progettazione e la comunicazione delle proposte di valore organizzative, sottolineando al contempo la necessità di ulteriori ricerche basate su campioni più ampi e diversificati e su strumenti di misurazione validati in modo più rigoroso.

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1 Introduction

The transformation of the labor market over recent decades has assumed an unprecedented scope, driven by the simultaneous impact of digitalization, the increasing attention devoted to organizational well-being, and the emergence of a new generation of workers characterized by distinct values and expectations (Póznér & Kozák, 2025). The digitalization of firms and organizational processes has been largely enabled by the increasingly widespread adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, understood as systems capable of operating with varying levels of autonomy and generating outputs such as predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence the environments with which they interact (European Parliament & Council, 2024). These transformations are reshaping not only organizational processes and managerial practices, but also the way current and prospective employees evaluate organizations as attractive places to work. Within this evolving context, Generation Z (Gen Z) constitutes a particularly relevant analytical lens for understanding the future trajectories of organizations. As this cohort progressively enters the labor market, recruitment and retention strategies have become central priorities within contemporary human resource management systems (Sicca, Di Virgilio, Scarozza, & Ferraro, 2024; Dutta, Mishra, & Varma, 2021). Gen Z has developed its work expectations in a context marked by digital acceleration, hybrid work arrangements, increasing attention to mental health, and growing exposure to AI-based technologies. Consequently, organizational attractiveness can no longer be understood only in terms of salary, job stability, or traditional career advancement, but must also be examined through the perceived capacity of organizations to offer flexible, supportive, and technologically adaptive work environments. This issue is particularly relevant for the Employee Value Proposition (EVP), which represents the overall set of benefits, values, meanings, and employment promises through which organizations seek to attract, retain, and engage current and potential employees (Kontos, Nikandrou, & Papachristopoulos, 2025). In contemporary labor markets, the EVP does not merely communicate what an organization offers; it also signals the extent to which organizational values, managerial practices, and technological choices are aligned with the expectations and identity schemas of target employees. For Gen Z, this alignment may be especially important, since younger workers tend to evaluate organizations not only according to instrumental benefits, but also according to perceived flexibility, psychological sustainability, ethical coherence, and opportunities for personal and professional development. Drawing on reports published by Eurofound (2022), the World Economic Forum (2023), and Deloitte (2025), this study identifies three key analytical variables through which Gen Z's perceptions of organizational attractiveness can be examined and compared with the EVP characterizing current organizational ecosystems. The first variable is organizational flexibility, including flexible working hours, hybrid work, remote working,

compressed workweek arrangements, autonomy, customizable working hours, and reduced exposure to excessive hierarchical control. This dimension is relevant because it captures the extent to which respondents value autonomy, individualized work arrangements, and more flexible forms of organizing work. The second variable is psychosocial well-being, which includes psychological well-being, work–life balance, support services, organizational culture and well-being, burnout prevention, recognition, peer support, and the right to disconnect. This dimension is central because organizational attractiveness increasingly depends on the perceived capacity of firms to protect mental health, sustain meaningful work, prevent burnout, and support positive interpersonal relationships. The third variable concerns perceptions of AI integration, including both perceived opportunities, such as efficiency, decision support, innovation, creativity, and personalized learning, and perceived risks, such as job substitution, technostress, surveillance, algorithmic opacity, and the possible weakening of human relationships at work. AI is therefore examined not only as a technological innovation, but also as a factor that may reshape how younger workers perceive the employment relationship and the credibility of the organizational value proposition. Based on this framework, the study advances the following exploratory research propositions:

P1. Gen Z respondents are expected to assign high perceived importance to organizational flexibility as a component of organizational attractiveness and EVP alignment.

P2. Gen Z respondents are expected to assign high perceived importance to psychosocial well-being as a component of organizational attractiveness and EVP alignment.

P3. Gen Z respondents are expected to report positive perceptions of AI-related opportunities, while also reporting concerns regarding AI-related risks.

P4. Perceptions of organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, AI-related opportunities, and AI-related risks may differ according to gender and disciplinary area.

Accordingly, the present study is guided by the following research questions: How do Gen Z respondents perceive organizational flexibility? How do they perceive psychosocial well-being? How do they evaluate the opportunities and risks associated with AI integration in organizational contexts? Finally, do these perceptions differ according to gender and disciplinary area? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the literature on Gen Z, organizational attractiveness, and EVP

by offering exploratory and context-specific evidence on the dimensions that younger workers may consider relevant when evaluating organizations as desirable employment contexts.

2 Literature review

2.1 Generational perceptions of organizational attractiveness: A continuous evolution

Over time, generational cohorts have progressively altered their preferences and perceptions regarding the factors that determine higher or lower levels of organizational attractiveness (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat, & Jitendra, 2016). However, these shifts should not be understood as abrupt transitions between discrete generational categories, but rather as part of a broader and continuous evolution in the relationship between individuals, organizations, and managerial systems. Generational differences in work-related expectations emerge within specific historical, institutional, and technological contexts; therefore, they should be interpreted alongside the transformation of managerial frameworks, employment relations, and HR practices rather than as isolated cohort effects. From this perspective, earlier managerial frameworks, commonly associated with Baby Boomers and early Gen X, were largely grounded in hierarchical structures, standardized career paths, compliance-oriented systems, and top-down coordination (Parry & Urwin, 2021). Within such organizational settings, Gen X, born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s, was often associated with expectations related to employment continuity, clearly defined authority structures, and opportunities for hierarchical advancement (Parry & Battista, 2019). These preferences reflected not only generational characteristics, but also the dominant managerial logic of the period, in which organizational attractiveness was strongly linked to stability, internal career progression, and formalized organizational structures. As Millennials, born from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, became increasingly prominent in the workforce, managerial and HR frameworks gradually moved toward more participative, developmental, and individualized approaches. Their expectations did not simply replace those of previous cohorts; rather, they reconfigured them by combining the search for employment stability with a stronger emphasis on professional growth, employability, feedback, mentoring, flexibility, and meaningful work (Twenge, 2023; Parry & Urwin, 2021). In this phase, organizational attractiveness became increasingly connected to the organization's capacity to support career development and employee engagement, while still providing a credible sense of security and continuity. Contemporary technological and social transformations have further intensified this evolutionary process for the generation born after 1995, namely Gen Z (Dolot, 2018). As Gen Z enters organizations while Millennials increasingly occupy managerial roles, many contemporary managerial frameworks are moving toward more

employee-centric, values-driven, flexible, and technology-integrated approaches. In this context, leaders are increasingly expected to manage intergenerational relationships, adapt leadership styles, foster autonomy and inclusion, support work-life balance, and respond to changing patterns of motivation, teamwork, and social interaction (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Pichler, Kohli, & Granitz, 2021). Accordingly, the determinants shaping a positive perception of organizations among Gen Z – thereby influencing their perceived level of attractiveness – tend to favor those firms capable of integrating flexible work models, fostering psychological well-being, and incorporating AI technologies into organizational practices (Thomas & Sharma, 2025). At the same time, this evolutionary reading requires caution. Generational labels can be analytically useful, but they should not be treated as rigid or self-sufficient explanatory categories. Critical research warns that managerial frameworks based too heavily on broad generational classifications may oversimplify the complex interaction among age, period, cohort effects, and individual differences (Parry & Urwin, 2021). Therefore, generation should be understood as one interpretive lens among others, useful for identifying historically situated patterns in work expectations, but insufficient on its own to explain organizational attractiveness. This approach supports the interpretation of Gen Z preferences not as a radical break from previous cohorts, but as the latest stage in a cumulative transformation of managerial assumptions, HR practices, and employee–organization relationships.

2.2 The strategic role of Employee Value Proposition in the labor market

The EVP represents the human resource strategy adopted by organizations to attract, retain, and develop talent (Kontos, Nikandrou, & Papachristopoulos, 2025), constituting the overall value offering addressed to current and potential employees and designed in accordance with specific roles, target groups, and organizational needs. More specifically, the EVP can be understood as a system of tangible and intangible benefits, meanings, and values through which an organization presents itself as a desirable place to work. It encompasses a wide and heterogeneous set of variables, which are reflected in the organization's internal and external communication of its overall employment offering. However, the attractiveness generated by an EVP does not depend solely on the objective content of what is offered, but also on the extent to which such offerings resonate with individuals' identity schemas, namely their core values, self-definitions, professional aspirations, and life priorities. This identity-based dimension is central to understanding how the EVP translates into organizational attractiveness. Rynes and Barber (1990) emphasize the organization's ability to generate positive perceptions among job candidates by fostering the impression that the firm represents a desirable place to work. Subsequently, Morin (2006) identifies four main factors shaping organizational attractiveness: corporate reputation, candidate-organization alignment, interviewer behavior, and organizational values.

These contributions suggest that organizational attractiveness emerges not only from instrumental benefits or reputational strength, but also from the perceived congruence between individual identity schemas and the symbolic, normative, and cultural attributes communicated by the organization. Research on person-organization fit conceptualizes this mechanism as value congruence, namely the perceived match between individual and organizational values (Kristof-Brown, Schneider, & Su, 2023; Satzger & Vogel, 2023). When such congruence is high, individuals are more likely to perceive the organization as a place in which they can express valued aspects of the self, experience belonging and psychological safety, and pursue goals that are personally meaningful. In a further refinement, Fray, Morin, and Renaud (2015) distinguishes between perceived attractiveness, which depends on psychological variables and individual candidate potential, and identity-based attractiveness, which derives from organizational characteristics. This distinction is particularly relevant for the EVP, since it highlights that organizational attractiveness is shaped through the interaction between individual-level perceptions and organization-level value propositions. An effective EVP therefore operates as a mechanism of identity-value alignment: it translates organizational values into a coherent employment promise capable of connecting with the self-concepts, career expectations, and desired work identities of current and prospective employees. In this sense, signals of organizational values, such as inclusive workplace policies, CSR initiatives, sustainability commitments, or green certifications, may enhance perceived prestige and person-organization fit, thereby increasing attractiveness and employee loyalty (Guillot-Soulez, Saint-Onge, & Soulez, 2021). Similarly, when individuals perceive a strong alignment between who they are and what the organization stands for, this congruence can support identification, commitment, engagement, helping behavior, and innovative behavior (Subramanian, Billsberry, & Barrett, 2022; Cai, Zhu, & Jin, 2024). Organizations capable of developing an effective EVP are thus able to strengthen their positioning within the labor market (Kearney, Bruno, & Field, 2022), reducing employee turnover while enhancing retention, and playing a fundamental role in determining organizational attractiveness (Jiang et al., 2012). Moreover, the EVP exerts a positive effect on employee engagement by fostering strong emotional attachment, loyalty, and a willingness to exert discretionary effort in support of organizational success (Putri & Mayasari, 2025). Nevertheless, a critical understanding of EVP requires recognizing that identity–value congruence is not unambiguously beneficial in all circumstances. If interpreted too narrowly, value fit may reinforce excessive homogeneity, weaken diversity of perspectives, and limit critical thinking, particularly when attraction-selection-attribution dynamics lead organizations to privilege similarity over pluralism (Subramanian, Billsberry, & Barrett, 2022). Therefore, while congruence between individual identity schemas and organizational values represents a central mechanism through which EVP enhances organizational attractiveness, it must be carefully managed. A robust EVP should support authenticity,

shared purpose, and meaningful identification without becoming a mechanism of exclusion or rigid cultural sameness.

2.3 Organizational flexibility and psychosocial well-being

Organizational flexibility has emerged as a core component of contemporary digitalized work models (Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, & Vrontis, 2022), functioning as the mechanism through which technology affordances (TAs) enable organizations to implement flexible work arrangements – such as smart working, flexible working hours, and the compressed workweek – thereby fostering organizational excellence (Alfalah et al., 2025). Within workplace contexts, TAs enhance both in-role job performance and innovative job performance by increasing employee autonomy, focus, and opportunities for creative experimentation (Ishaq, Sarwar, Aftab, Franzoni, & Raza, 2024). Workplace flexibility also represents a key determinant of employee satisfaction, as it improves work-life balance by reducing work-family conflict and stress levels, while simultaneously contributing to psychosocial well-being (McNall, Masuda, & Nicklin, 2009; Salazar & Diego-Medrano, 2021). However, although organizational flexibility constitutes an important antecedent of psychosocial well-being within organizational settings, it is insufficient on its own to fully capture the multidimensional nature of the construct (Ryff, 1989). In organizational contexts, psychosocial well-being can be understood as a multidimensional condition that integrates emotional and mental health, positive affect and vitality, social connectedness, and the individual's perceived capacity to function meaningfully across work and life domains (Amodu, Agyare, Doe, & Abraham, 2025; Nunes, Proença, & Carozzo-Todaro, 2023). This definition moves beyond a narrow understanding of well-being as the mere absence of stress, anxiety, depression, or burnout, and instead includes both hedonic components, such as positive emotions and low strain, and eudaimonic components, such as meaning, personal growth, self-realization, purpose, and flourishing (Ryff, 1989; Sonnentag, Tay, & Shoshan, 2023; Węziak-Białowolska et al., 2023). This distinction is particularly important from a critical perspective. Research on workplace well-being has often privileged hedonic indicators, focusing primarily on positive affect, job satisfaction, low stress, or reduced exhaustion, while paying comparatively less attention to eudaimonic dimensions such as meaning, growth, authenticity, and the development of positive relationships (Ryff, 1989; Sonnentag, Tay, & Shoshan, 2023). Such reductionism risks producing a fragmented understanding of psychosocial well-being at work, in which employees may appear “satisfied” or “not stressed” while still lacking purpose, autonomy, relational quality, or opportunities for personal development. More comprehensive approaches therefore conceptualize well-being as “complete well-being” or flourishing, integrating multiple domains such as emotional and physical health, meaning and purpose, character, social connectedness, and financial security

(Węziak-Białowolska et al., 2023). In this sense, workplace spirituality, self-acceptance, and positive interpersonal relationships represent key dimensions of psychosocial well-being, since they capture the extent to which individuals experience work not only as a source of income or performance, but also as a context for meaning, belonging, and personal development (Das et al., 2024). From a methodological standpoint, psychosocial well-being should therefore be measured through multidimensional and validated instruments rather than through single-item or exclusively satisfaction-based indicators. In organizational research, psychosocial well-being is commonly assessed through validated self-report instruments capturing affective states, psychological distress, vigor, exhaustion, burnout, general well-being, and work engagement (Nunes, Proença, & Carozzo-Todaro, 2023; Sonnentag, Tay, & Shoshan, 2023). More integrated approaches also rely on multi-domain assessments based on flourishing theory, which capture broader dimensions such as emotional health, physical health, meaning, purpose, character, social relationships, and financial security (Węziak-Białowolska et al., 2023). At the organizational level, psychosocial safety climate and caring climate are typically measured through brief climate scales, which help explain variation in stress, exhaustion, engagement, and broader flourishing over time (Aust et al., 2023). These measures are particularly relevant because they show that psychosocial well-being is not only an individual condition, but also a work-related outcome shaped by job design, leadership practices, organizational climate, and HR policies. The outcomes associated with psychosocial well-being further confirm its strategic relevance for organizations. Higher levels of well-being and engagement, together with lower levels of burnout and psychological distress, are associated with better job performance, productivity, innovative behavior, organizational commitment, and retention. Conversely, poor psychosocial well-being is linked to turnover intentions, lower job satisfaction, reduced professionalism, lower safety outcomes, and higher organizational costs (Aust et al., 2023). Therefore, psychosocial well-being represents a strategic variable given its positive association with overall organizational outcomes (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Within this framework, organizational flexibility should be interpreted as one important enabling condition rather than as a complete solution: flexible work arrangements may reduce stress and work–family conflict, but their contribution to employee well-being depends on whether they are embedded within broader organizational systems that promote psychological safety, meaningful work, positive relationships, autonomy, and sustainable performance.

2.4 The role of Artificial Intelligence on organizational attractiveness and retention

AI can be defined as the set of systems designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and capable of generating outputs such as predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence the environments with which they interact (European Parliament & Council, 2024). The introduction of AI

systems within organizations entails a reconfiguration of processes, roles, and expectations (Köchling, Wehner, & Ruhle, 2025). In this sense, AI should not be understood merely as a technological tool, but as an organizational variable capable of reshaping how work is designed, how HR practices are delivered, and how the employment relationship is perceived by both current and prospective employees. Within HR processes, AI provides tools that may enable personalization, workload reduction, data-driven decision-making, and the creation of more flexible and inclusive work environments. In particular, the adoption of AI in recruiting, onboarding, employee development, and talent management can enhance organizational attractiveness, especially among younger talent, while also improving retention by fostering more engaging, responsive, and tailored work experiences (Thomas & Sharma, 2025; Stone, Lukaszewski, & Johnson, 2024; Köchling, Wehner, & Ruhle, 2025; Rožman, Oreški, & Tominc, 2023; Zirar, 2023). As such, AI emerges as an additional variable to be incorporated into the internal and external communication of the organization's overall value proposition. Consistent with the literature reviewed, Table 1 summarizes the main determinants and impacts of AI on the EVP, organizational attractiveness, and employee retention.

Table 1 – AI determinants and impacts on EVP, organizational attractiveness and retention

AI/EVP factor	Impact on Gen Z	Effect on organizational attractiveness and retention	Sources
AI-Driven personalization	Individual empowerment	Increased organizational attractiveness	Rožman, Oreški, & Tominc, 2023; Thomas & Sharma, 2025; Zirar, 2023.
Transparency and governance	Trust and security	Better retention	Ateeq et al., 2025; Malik, Budhwar, & Kazmi, 2023; Zirar, Ali, & Islam, 2023; Charlwood & Guenole, 2022.
Automation and support	Stress reduction	Engagement and retention	Cramarenco, Burcă-Voicu, & Dabija, 2023; Rožman, Oreški, & Tominc, 2023; Thomas & Sharma, 2025.
Job replacement fear	Anxiety and resistance	Turnover risk	Bankins, Ocampo, Marrone, Restubog, & Woo, 2024; Malik, Budhwar, & Kazmi, 2023; Zirar, Ali, & Islam, 2023; Köchling, Wehner, & Ruhle, 2025.

Source: Authors' elaboration

However, the contribution of AI to organizational attractiveness and retention is not automatic. From the employee perspective, perceptions of AI represent a critical factor, as positive perceptions may facilitate adoption, upskilling, engagement, and openness to technological change, whereas negative perceptions may give rise to resistance, cynicism, anxiety, and increased turnover intentions (Ateeq et al., 2025; Bankins, Ocampo, Marrone, Restubog, & Woo, 2024; Cramarenco, Burcă-Voicu, & Dabija, 2023; Lee, Scheepers, Lui, & Ngai, 2023; Malik, Budhwar, & Kazmi, 2023; Rožman, Oreški, & Tominc, 2023; Yu, Xu, & Ashton, 2023; Charlwood & Guenole, 2022). Positive perceptions of AI are more likely to emerge when integrated technologies are perceived as instruments of empowerment, personalization of the work experience, enhanced flexibility, and support for individual capabilities rather than as mechanisms of surveillance, replacement, or control (Valtonen, Saunila, Ukko, Treves, & Ritala, 2025). Organizations that adopt personalization – and engagement – oriented strategies, including those enabled by AI, are therefore perceived as more attractive by Gen Z (Thomas & Sharma, 2025). At the same time, a critical reading of the literature shows that employers' and managers' attitudes toward AI are also ambivalent. While AI is often associated with efficiency gains, improved decision-making, and strategic value creation, its implementation raises concerns related to trust, transparency, ethical risks, job displacement, and loss of control. Research on organizational decision-making shows that managers' attitudes and intentions toward AI are shaped not only by perceived benefits, but also by a “dark side” of AI, including personal concerns and fears about its impact on jobs (Cao, Duan, Edwards, & Dwivedi, 2021). Similarly, multilevel research indicates that acceptance of AI among managers and workers depends on perceived usefulness, ease of use, compatibility with existing practices, and, crucially, trust in AI systems (Bankins, Ocampo, Marrone, Restubog, & Woo, 2024). In recruitment, perceived technological complexity may discourage AI adoption, while technological competence and regulatory support can facilitate it (Enholm, Papagiannidis, Mikalef, & Krogstie, 2021). Qualitative evidence from senior managers in finance and high-tech firms further identifies barriers such as lack of trust and transparency, perceived loss of power and control, and ethical concerns when AI is used for automated decision-making (Booyse & Scheepers, 2023). In HR and talent management, although many organizations recognize the strategic value of AI, managerial adoption often remains cautious, partial, and incomplete (Zirar, 2023). Therefore, the role of AI within the EVP should be interpreted through a balanced perspective. On the one hand, AI can strengthen organizational attractiveness by signaling innovation, personalization, flexibility, and developmental support. On the other hand, if AI is perceived as opaque, intrusive, unfair, or threatening, it may undermine trust and weaken the organization's employment promise. The evidence summarized in Table 1 suggests that AI contributes positively to EVP, organizational attractiveness, and retention only when its implementation is transparent, ethically governed, aligned

with employee needs, and embedded in HR practices that enhance rather than diminish human agency. In this sense, AI becomes attractive not simply because it is technologically advanced, but because it is perceived as useful, trustworthy, empowering, and coherent with the organization's broader value proposition.

3 Methodology

The aim of the analysis is to examine how Gen Z respondents perceive organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and AI integration in relation to organizational attractiveness and EVP alignment. The study adopts a quantitative research approach with a descriptive and exploratory design, in which data are collected at a single point in time. This methodological choice allows for capturing a snapshot of participants' opinions and preferences, without the intention of observing changes over time. The research design is non-experimental, as it does not involve the direct manipulation of independent variables but is instead limited to measuring respondents' perceptions. Data were collected through a questionnaire composed of two parts. The first part collected sociodemographic and background information, including age, gender, field of study, level of education, prior work or internship experience, and exposure to or training in AI (Table 2). The second part included 28 Likert-scale items related to the theoretical dimensions of the study (Table 3): organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and AI integration. The Likert-scale section was adapted from Magano et al. (2020) and organized into four analytical item sets: organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, AI-related opportunities, and AI-related risks.

Table 2 – Structure of the questionnaire: Sociodemographic and background information

Preliminary section	Collected data	Survey instrument
Sociodemographic and background data	Age, gender, field of study, level of education prior work experience, exposure to or training in AI.	Open-ended question

Source: Questionnaire adaptation (Magano et al., 2020)

Table 3 – Structure of the questionnaire for the items (n=28)

No.	Dimension	Subdimension	Item code	Item wording	Survey instrument
1	Organizational flexibility	Flexible working hours	OF1	I consider it essential to be able to manage my working hours autonomously.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
2		Hybrid work	OF2	I prefer hybrid work models that combine on-site and remote work.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
3		Remote working	OF3	The possibility of working remotely increases my productivity.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
4		Compressed workweek	OF4	The four-day workweek is an effective model.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
5		Autonomy	OF5	Decision-making autonomy increases my sense of responsibility.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
6		Customizable working hours	OF6	I value customizable working hours more positively than fixed working hours.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
7		Control climate	OF7	Excessive hierarchical control reduces my motivation.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
8	Psychosocial well-being	Psychological well-being	PWB1	Psychological well-being should be an organizational priority.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
9		Work–life balance	PWB2	I feel more productive when work-life balance is protected.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
10		Support services	PWB3	The organization should provide psychological support services.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
11		Culture and well-being	PWB4	Organizational culture affects my state of well-being.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>

12		Burnout prevention	PWB5	Burnout prevention should be a structural organizational practice.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
13		Personal recognition	PWB6	Recognition of personal contribution supports my motivation.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
14		Peer support	PWB7	Peer support contributes to my well-being at work.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
15		Right to disconnect	PWB8	The right to disconnect is essential for my balance.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
16	AI integration	AI as opportunity	AIO1	I believe that AI improves the efficiency of work processes.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
17		AI as opportunity	AIO2	The use of AI frees up time for higher value-added activities.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
18		AI as opportunity	AIO3	AI can support more informed and timely decision-making.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
19		AI as opportunity	AIO4	I am interested in acquiring specific skills in AI.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
20		AI as opportunity	AIO5	I believe that AI fosters innovation and creativity.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
21		AI as opportunity	AIO6	AI can personalize learning and development pathways.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
22		AI as opportunity	AIO7	I feel comfortable using AI-based tools.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
23		AI as risk	AIR1	I fear that AI may replace certain human tasks.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
24		AI as risk	AIR2	The intensive use of technologies generates information overload.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
25		AI as risk	AIR3	AI may reduce the quality of human relationships at work.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>

26	AI as risk	AIR4	The lack of transparency of algorithms concerns me.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
27	AI as risk	AIR5	The use of AI may increase the perception of surveillance.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>
28	AI as risk	AIR6	I experience technostress when using digital tools for prolonged periods.	<i>Likert scale 1-5</i>

Source: Questionnaire adaptation (Magano et al., 2020)

Distributed via the mailing list of a university association among undergraduate students and recent graduates belonging to Gen Z with at least one prior work or internship experience, the questionnaire yielded a final sample of 193 respondents after the exclusion of seven incomplete or out-of-scope questionnaires (with a clear majority of participants originating from the Molise region, Italy). The sample comprised 58.5% women ($n = 113$), 39.4% men ($n = 76$), and 2.1% individuals identifying with other gender categories ($n = 4$). The mean age of respondents was 23.4 years ($SD = 2.7$), with the age distribution concentrated primarily within the 21–25 age range (65%). With regard to educational background, 72% of participants were enrolled in undergraduate or master's degree programs, while 28% had already completed their university studies. The predominant disciplinary areas were Economics and Management (42%), Engineering and Computer Science (27%), Social and Human Sciences (19%), and Medicine (12%). Given the non-probabilistic and geographically concentrated nature of the sample, with a clear majority of participants originating from the Molise region, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and context-specific rather than generalizable to the entire Gen Z population.

As shown in Table 4, internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach's alpha for the four item sets corresponding to organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, AI-related opportunities, and AI-related risks. The coefficients did not reach conventional thresholds for satisfactory internal consistency. This result suggests that the items should not be interpreted as interchangeable indicators of single unidimensional latent constructs. Rather, they capture heterogeneous but theoretically related facets of the broader dimensions under investigation. Accordingly, and in line with the exploratory nature of the study, the subsequent analysis was conducted primarily at the item and subdimension level, while aggregate mean scores were used only as descriptive summaries and interpreted with caution.

Table 4 – Internal consistency diagnostics of the item sets

Scale	Item code	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Internal consistency
Organizational flexibility	OF1–OF7	7	0.083	Low internal consistency
Psychosocial well-being	PWB1–PWB8	8	0.078	Low internal consistency
AI integration (opportunity)	AIO1–AIO7	7	-0.010	Low internal consistency
AI integration (risk)	AIR1–AIR6	6	-0.019	Low internal consistency

Source: Authors' elaboration based on survey data

An exploratory factor analysis was subsequently conducted on the 28 Likert-scale items related to the theoretical dimensions of the study, as summarized in Table 5. Before factor extraction, the suitability of the data was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Bartlett's test was significant, $\chi^2(378) = 451.34$, $p = 0.006$, indicating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix. However, the KMO value of 0.428 was below the commonly recommended threshold for a robust factor analysis. Moreover, the exploratory four-factor solution explained 23.84% of the total variance and did not produce a factor structure fully consistent with the expected theoretical dimensions. Consequently, the results of the factor analysis were interpreted as preliminary diagnostic evidence rather than as a definitive validation of the adapted instrument. The theoretical organization of the item sets was therefore retained on the basis of the literature and the exploratory aims of the study, while the empirical results were interpreted primarily at the item and subdimension level. Future studies should refine the measurement instrument and confirm its dimensional structure using larger and more diversified samples.

Table 5 – Exploratory factor analysis diagnostics

Indicator	Result
KMO	0.428
Bartlett's test	$\chi^2(378) = 451.34$
p-value	0.006
Number of extracted factors	4
Total variance explained	23.84%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on survey data.

Mean scores were interpreted using descriptive intervals applied to the five-point Likert scale. Since the scale ranged from 1 to 5, the interval width was calculated as $(5 - 1) / 5 = 0.80$. Accordingly, values between 1.00 and 1.80 were interpreted as very low, values between 1.81 and 2.60 as low, values between 2.61 and 3.40 as moderate, values between 3.41 and 4.20 as high, and values between 4.21 and 5.00 as very high. These thresholds were used exclusively as descriptive interpretive ranges and not as statistically validated cut-off points (Table 6).

Table 6 – Mean scores and descriptive interpretation of Likert-scale items

No.	Dimension	Subdimension	Item code	Mean scores (Likert 1-5)	Interpretation
1	Organizational flexibility	Flexible working hours	OF1	4.11	High perceived importance
2		Hybrid work	OF2	3.95	High perceived importance
3		Remote working	OF3	3.93	High perceived importance
4		Compressed workweek	OF4	3.85	High perceived importance
5		Autonomy	OF5	4.20	High perceived importance
6		Customizable working hours	OF6	4.10	High perceived importance
7		Control climate	OF7	4.18	High perceived importance
8	Psychosocial well-being	Psychological well-being	PWB1	4.18	High perceived importance
9		Work–life balance	PWB2	4.16	High perceived importance
10		Support services	PWB3	4.19	High perceived importance
11		Culture and well-being	PWB4	4.13	High perceived importance
12		Burnout prevention	PWB5	4.32	Very high perceived importance
13		Personal recognition	PWB6	4.30	Very high perceived importance

14		Peer support	PWB7	4.26	Very high perceived importance
15		Right to disconnect	PWB8	4.18	High perceived importance
16	AI integration	AI as opportunity	AIO1	3.85	High perceived agreement
17		AI as opportunity	AIO2	3.81	High perceived agreement
18		AI as opportunity	AIO3	3.76	High perceived agreement
19		AI as opportunity	AIO4	3.83	High perceived agreement
20		AI as opportunity	AIO5	3.76	High perceived agreement
21		AI as opportunity	AIO6	3.80	High perceived agreement
22		AI as opportunity	AIO7	3.75	High perceived agreement
23		AI as risk	AIR1	3.64	High perceived concern
24		AI as risk	AIR2	3.22	Moderate perceived concern
25		AI as risk	AIR3	3.22	Moderate perceived concern
26		AI as risk	AIR4	3.10	Moderate perceived concern
27		AI as risk	AIR5	3.23	Moderate perceived concern
28		AI as risk	AIR6	3.37	Moderate perceived concern

Source: data elaboration

The mean results reported in Table 6 provide a preliminary descriptive overview of respondents' perceptions of organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and AI integration. For ease of interpretation, Table 7 reports the aggregate mean scores for the main dimensions. With regard to organizational flexibility, all subdimensions showed high mean scores, ranging from 3.85 to 4.20. The highest scores were recorded for autonomy ($M = 4.20$), control climate, understood as sensitivity to excessive hierarchical control ($M = 4.18$), flexible working hours ($M = 4.11$), and customizable working hours ($M = 4.10$). Hybrid work, remote working, and the compressed workweek also showed high

values. Overall, these findings suggest that flexibility is perceived not only as the possibility of working remotely, but as a broader set of organizational practices related to autonomy, time management, and reduced excessive control. Psychosocial well-being recorded the highest mean scores. In particular, burnout prevention ($M = 4.32$), personal recognition ($M = 4.30$), and peer support ($M = 4.26$) reached very high levels of perceived importance. Psychological well-being, work–life balance, support services, culture and well-being, and the right to disconnect also showed high values. These results suggest that respondents attach particular relevance to organizational conditions capable of supporting psychological health, recognition, positive relationships, and the sustainability of the work–life relationship. For AI integration, items related to opportunities showed high values, ranging from 3.75 to 3.85, indicating a generally positive perception of AI’s potential in terms of efficiency, decision support, innovation, and personalization. Items related to AI risks showed lower scores: AIR1 reached a high value ($M = 3.64$), while the remaining risk items fell within the moderate range, between 3.10 and 3.37. Therefore, the data suggest the coexistence, at the aggregate level, of positive expectations toward AI and moderate concerns regarding its possible risks. This result should not be interpreted as direct evidence of psychological ambivalence at the individual level, which would require specific measures. Overall, the results indicate strong relevance attributed to organizational flexibility and especially psychosocial well-being, while AI emerges as a more complex and nuanced dimension. However, the findings should be considered preliminary and specific to the sample analyzed.

Table 7 – Descriptive aggregate scores of the main dimensions

Dimension	No.	Mean scores (Likert 1-5)	SD	Interpretation
Organizational flexibility	193	4.05	0.28	High perceived importance
Psychosocial well-being	193	4.21	0.23	Very high perceived importance
AI opportunities	193	3.79	0.30	High perceived agreement
AI risks	193	3.30	0.34	Moderate perceived concern

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on survey data.

Gender differences were explored by comparing women and men through Welch’s t-tests (Table 8). Respondents identifying with other gender categories were reported only descriptively due to the small size of this subgroup. The results did not show statistically significant differences between women and men for organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, AI opportunities, or AI risks. Effect

sizes were negligible, suggesting that, within the analyzed sample, gender was not substantially associated with differences in perceptions of the dimensions considered.

Table 8 – Gender differences in the main dimensions

Dimensions	Women M	Men M	t	p	Cohen's d
Organizational flexibility	4.05	4.04	0.13	0.893	0.02
Psychosocial well-being	4.21	4.23	-0.81	0.420	-0.12
AI opportunities	3.78	3.82	-0.83	0.409	-0.13
AI risks	3.30	3.30	-0.03	0.973	-0.01

Source: Authors' elaboration based on survey data

A further analysis was conducted to examine whether respondents' perceptions varied according to disciplinary area. One-way ANOVAs were performed on the four aggregate dimensions. As summarized in Table 9, the results did not show statistically significant differences for organizational flexibility, AI opportunities, or AI risks. A significant difference emerged only for psychosocial well-being, $F(3, 189) = 3.22$, $p = 0.024$, $\eta^2 = 0.049$. Tukey's post-hoc comparison indicated that respondents from Social and Human Sciences assigned a higher mean score to psychosocial well-being than respondents from Economics and Management. However, the effect size was small, and given the limited size of some subgroups, this result should be interpreted with caution.

Table 9 – Differences by disciplinary area

Dimensions	F	p	η^2	interpretation
Organizational flexibility	0.60	0.619	0.009	Not significant
Psychosocial well-being	3.22	0.024	0.049	Significant, small effect
AI opportunities	1.38	0.251	0.021	Not significant
AI risks	0.65	0.582	0.010	Not significant

Source: Authors' elaboration based on survey data

4 Discussion and managerial implications

The findings provide exploratory evidence on how Gen Z respondents perceive organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and AI integration in relation to organizational attractiveness and EVP alignment. Overall, P1 and P2 are descriptively supported at the item and subdimension level, as respondents assigned high or very high importance to the facets related to organizational flexibility and psychosocial well-being. P3 is also supported in a cautious sense, since respondents reported high perceived agreement with AI-related opportunities and moderate concern regarding AI-related risks. However, this pattern should be interpreted as the coexistence of positive expectations and concerns at the aggregate level, not as direct evidence of psychological ambivalence. P4 received only partial support: no significant gender differences emerged, while disciplinary area was associated with a significant difference only in psychosocial well-being. These findings suggest that the EVP aimed at younger workers should not be designed around isolated benefits, but around an integrated employment promise combining flexibility, psychological sustainability, ethical technology adoption, and human-centered management. In particular, the high scores recorded for burnout prevention, recognition, peer support, and the right to disconnect indicate that respondents attach relevance not only to work arrangements, but also to the broader quality of the organizational environment.

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer several indications for organizations seeking to strengthen their attractiveness among younger workers. First, flexibility should be communicated and implemented as a multidimensional organizational practice, including not only remote or hybrid work, but also autonomy, customizable working hours, and reduced excessive hierarchical control. Second, psychosocial well-being should be embedded structurally within HR policies rather than treated as an occasional welfare initiative. Practices such as burnout prevention, psychological support, recognition systems, peer support, and the right to disconnect may contribute to a more credible and attractive EVP. Third, AI integration should be managed and communicated carefully. While respondents recognize AI-related opportunities, they also express moderate concerns regarding job substitution, technostress, surveillance, and algorithmic opacity. Organizations should therefore accompany AI adoption with transparent communication, clear governance policies, employee involvement, and training initiatives aimed at strengthening AI-related competencies. In this sense, AI may enhance organizational attractiveness only when it is perceived as useful, trustworthy, supportive, and aligned with human-centered work design.

5 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the research design is cross-sectional and non-experimental; therefore, the findings cannot support causal claims regarding the relationship between the analyzed dimensions and organizational attractiveness. Second, the sample is non-probabilistic, geographically concentrated, and composed of undergraduate students approaching graduation and recent graduates with prior work or internship experience. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and context-specific rather than generalizable to the entire Gen Z population. Third, the internal consistency diagnostics and the exploratory factor analysis suggest caution in treating the item sets as validated unidimensional scales. Cronbach's alpha values did not reach conventional thresholds for satisfactory internal consistency, indicating that the items capture heterogeneous but theoretically related facets rather than interchangeable indicators of single latent constructs. Moreover, the low KMO value and the limited variance explained by the four-factor solution suggest that the dimensional structure of the adapted instrument requires further refinement and validation. Future studies should therefore replicate the analysis using larger and more diversified samples and apply confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement model more robustly. Fourth, the interpretation of AI-related perceptions should be considered preliminary. The coexistence of positive expectations and moderate concerns at the aggregate level does not constitute direct evidence of psychological ambivalence at the individual level. Future research should include specific measures of ambivalence and examine how AI-related attitudes evolve over time as younger workers gain more direct experience with AI-based organizational systems.

6 Conclusions

This study explored Gen Z respondents' perceptions of organizational flexibility, psychosocial well-being, and AI integration in relation to organizational attractiveness and EVP alignment. The findings suggest that flexibility and psychosocial well-being are highly valued by the analyzed sample, while AI integration is perceived as a more complex dimension involving both opportunities and concerns. The study contributes to the debate on Gen Z and organizational attractiveness by showing that younger workers' evaluations of employment contexts may be shaped by an integrated set of expectations concerning autonomy, psychological sustainability, technological innovation, transparency, and human-centered management. However, given the exploratory design, the restricted sample, the low

internal consistency of the item sets, and the preliminary evidence emerging from the factor analysis, the results should be interpreted with caution and primarily at the item and subdimension level. Future research should further refine and validate the measurement instrument and examine these relationships across broader and more heterogeneous samples.

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Abruzzese Salute ETS

Via Umberto I, 78/80

65010 Cappelle sul Tavo (PE)

Italy



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