

**Adaptation of Onboarding Programs to Better Accommodate Gen Z Workers:
Exploring Needs-Supplies Fit and Work Values**

Lisa-Marie John (s2705184)

Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences (BMS)

University of Twente, The Netherlands

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Supervised by Meike Belter

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Abstract

Objective: This research seeks to optimize onboarding programs for the successful integration of Generation Z workers upon organizational entrance. The goal of HR practitioners is to find ways to facilitate integration and enhance performance to create value for both parties quickly. Every new generation brings unique combinations of expectations and demands, which makes it crucial to listen to their needs in order to ensure a higher person-organization fit (P-O fit) already during the onboarding phase. This study wants to identify points of attention and recommendations for action to better accommodate Gen Z workers. **Method:** To achieve this, an online survey gathered data on Gen Z's onboarding experiences and demands using Likert scales, and work values using an untraditional Q-sort assignment. This approach allowed for the comparison of the status quo of the needs-supplies fit with detailed insights into important work-related practices, helping to pinpoint necessary adaptations to onboarding practices. **Results:** Organizations were found to treat newcomers with honesty and respect, but do not provide remote opportunities during the onboarding phase. Gen Z workers greatest demands for a job are work-life balance, a positive atmosphere, and being treated with honesty and respect. The greatest room for improvement of the corresponding needs-supplies fit was found for versatility, aided integration into a new team, and mentorship. Most important work values are flextime, job interest, positive relationships and receiving benefits. **Conclusion:** Consequently, suggested adaptations surround integration and work-life balance which both require a more individualized approach during onboarding. A closer resemblance between needs and supplies is essential for an improved P-O fit and effective onboarding for Gen Z employees. Future research ought to focus on cultural, gender, and educational differences within Gen Z and the impact of specific work industries.

Keywords: Onboarding, Gen Z, Work Values, Adaptations

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Adaptation of Onboarding Programs to Better Accommodate Gen Z Workers: Exploring Needs-Supplies Fit and Work Values

The workplace is an evolving landscape shaped by the people, practices, and technologies within it. As the latest cohort of professionals, Generation Z is entering the labor market and already makes up 27% of the workforce, with a prospect increase to the largest share of 31% within the next ten years (McCrindle, 2023). To be considered a member of Gen Z, one needs to have been born between 1995 and 2010, hence have grown up in a highly developed digital and connected environment (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Bencsik et al., 2016). Bencsik et al. (2016) not only distinguish Gen Z from other generations by their constant desire to emerge in this environment but also characterize them as brave leaders who seek challenges, embrace change, have a lot of accessible information, and are agile but impatient. A new generation of workers always brings new ideas, values, and motivations from which organizations can benefit (Prund, 2021). To make quicker use of their full potential, bring them up to productivity faster, and make them feel welcomed in a new organization, companies employ onboarding programs (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). Any formal or informal measures taken to facilitate the newcomer's acclimatization can be categorized as onboarding activities (Klein & Polin, 2012). Nowadays, person-organization fit (P-O fit) is regarded as a more important consideration than a suitable skill set or education when hiring new employees (Acheampong, 2021). However, the match between organizational and employee characteristics and the fulfillment of needs in the form of resources and opportunities is crucial to ensure benefits for both parties (Kristof, 1996). Onboarding a new generation is therefore the first opportunity for organizations to actively accommodate Gen Z's expectations and needs to possibly achieve a better P-O fit from the beginning.

Creating an environment where motivation and communication are facilitated among everyone within the diversified workforce can be challenging for HR practitioners. According

to Graczyk-Kucharska and Erickson (2020), it is possible that a new generation entering an organization potentially faces a “mismatch in understanding” as a result of existing, outdated structures. In our networked society, single-sided communication and “one-size-fits-all assumptions during onboarding” (Jeske & Olson, 2022) are obsolete and instead require personalized satisfaction of societal, informational, and developmental needs. Organizations need to comprehend differences in demands and behaviors among age groups to best meet desires and requirements instead of generalizing across cohorts (Ganguli et al., 2022; Rathi & Kumar, 2023; Schroth, 2019). Thus, from a managerial standpoint, it is essential for organizations to be adaptable to a new generation and satisfy work-related needs to attract and retain talents (Cesário & Chambel, 2019), but also to leverage performance and ease the integration of new hires (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020; Kristof, 1996; Travaglianti et al., 2017). A suitable onboarding program that considers Gen Z needs and understands behaviors will consequently help acclimatization and lead to mutual success (Schroth, 2019). Consequently, identifying points for attention and areas for improvement of onboarding practices according to the expectations of Gen Z holds the potential for successful integration with several organizational benefits.

The motives of this research originate in the concept of P-O fit, therefore aiming to provide practical recommendations to organizations on how to tailor onboarding programs to better accommodate the needs of Gen Z new hires. By finding answers to the research question **“How can organizations adapt their onboarding programs to ensure a better person-organization fit with Gen Z workers?”** this study aims to make the welcoming phase as beneficial as possible for both parties and contribute to HR literature. The novelty of this study rests in its thorough examination of Generation Z's characteristics through an exploration of what exactly shifted for this generation, including investigations of Gen Z workers' onboarding experiences, priorities in work values, and most dominant demands. As a result, HR practitioners and managers will receive clear suggestions for efficient and effective

onboarding program adaptations that meet the unique set of expectations of their Gen Z workers. The quantitative nature of this study aims to reduce the impact of subjectivity and allow for comparison of results. The combination of two quantitative measures allows to not only reveal a mismatch between onboarding experiences and actual demands but will also prioritize needed adaptations based on the importance of Gen Z's expectations. The following chapter provides the [theoretical framework](#) and [conceptual model](#) for the introduced study. Afterwards, the applied [method](#) for data collection and subsequent data [analysis](#) are explained. Ultimately, findings and recommendations for actions are [discussed](#) and [concluded](#).

Theoretical Framework

The overarching research question of this study describes the relationship between “Gen Z workers” and the dependent variable “onboarding program adaptations”. Recommendations for adaptations and points for attention will be presented based on what work values and demands underlie Gen Z workers, but also compared to how they experienced their onboarding. Together, the demands and experience also help in determining the current needs-supplies fit while work values add an additional layer of depth to the analysis of importance of work-place related practices. The final dependent variable “person-organization fit”, will be positively influenced when onboarding programs better align with Gen Z expectations. The following more detailed elaboration will highlight each variable's importance and connection to the study design.

Gen Z Workers

A clear characterization of Gen Z workers and clarification of differences to other cohorts is crucial to better understand the reasons for needed adaptations to the onboarding processes. Other commonly used terminologies for people of this generation who were born between 1995 and 2010 are post-millennials, digital natives, or iGen (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Bencsik et al., 2016). The framework of Pichler et al. (2021) uses the acronym „DITTO” to

summarize the uniqueness of Gen Z's workforce, namely encompassing diversity, individualism, teamwork, technology, and organizational support. Compared to previous generations, Gen Z is the most diverse yet with an increased openness to diversity (Mărginean, 2021; Pichler et al., 2021). Their individualistic preferences make groupwork a challenge, which is contradictory to the widespread use of team-based structures within organizations (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Pichler et al., 2021). They seek organizational support in various forms, such as mentorship and development opportunities for ambitious members or guidance for social interactions that will consequently enhance well-being (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Pichler et al., 2021). A primary demographic of Gen Z is their digital literacy, which goes along with the synonym "digital natives". This stems from their closeness with technologies due to being born into the highly developed digital era and growing up with the internet (Bencsik et al., 2016; Pichler et al., 2021). These characteristics and personal experiences are determinants of work values and preferences, therefore human resource management practices need to be "responsive to generational sensitivities" (Acheampong, 2021). As with every generation, Gen Z has its strengths which can be beneficially utilized while also having weaknesses with a need for support. This understanding alone helps to be attentive to generational differences, but the realization that personality traits appear to be underlying what makes individuals happy at work (Furnham et al., 2005) needs a more in-depth approach to these concrete "work values" of Gen Z workers for this study.

Work Values

Shaped by generational characteristics are the workers' values underlying their demands. Work values are work-related features of employees that employers should take into consideration since they are perceived as important and weighted heavily by workers when looking for a new job or choosing to remain in their current position (Acheampong, 2021; Furnham et al., 2005; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023). These orientations are general, "not

referring to specific occupations, jobs, or content” (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) and influenced by experiences and personal traits (Acheampong, 2021). Studies often categorize them into the main categories of extrinsic and intrinsic work values (Acheampong, 2021; Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Furnham et al., 2005; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021), but also consider levels such as social work values (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021) or career values (Barhate & Dirani, 2021). Since the focus of this research lies on Gen Z and work values are found to be shaped by personality traits and society (Furnham et al., 2005; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023), the previously introduced DITTO characteristic consequently influences this generation’s expectations about the workplace. Existing scientific literature made use of work values to measure the extent of certain expectations or preferences, e.g. job-related by nationality (Ganguli et al., 2022), personality (Furnham et al., 2005) or gender (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) or an important consideration when comparing among generations (Bencsik et al., 2016; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Rathi & Kumar, 2023). To provide direction and keep this research within a manageable scope, the researcher classified commonly recurring work value preferences into three main thematic categories: "work-life balance", "development and career opportunities", and "work environment". These three areas present the baseline for the exploration of work values, since they appear to be major topics of concern for Gen Z workers.

Work-life Balance For employees and in the public discourse, work-life balance became an essential work value topic that impacts both, the person and the organizations. Organizations apply corresponding policies to reduce stress and the conflict between private and professional life, which motivates workers leading to increased productivity, engagement and commitment (Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016). Gen Z has a strong desire to keep work and free time separated, highly values their private life, and does not want to think about work outside off working hours (Acheampong, 2021; Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Bencsik et al., 2016; Ganguli et al., 2022; Rathi & Kumar, 2023). The compatibility of work and life can be

facilitated by flexible or remote work arrangements, which are also desired by this generation's workers (Acheampong, 2021; Ganguli et al., 2022; Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023; Mărginean, 2021). Organizations can consider Gen Z's priorities for work-life balance and private time by e.g. facilitating compatibility and attractiveness of the job through flexible or remote work arrangements.

Development and Career Opportunities Ensuring continuous opportunities for professional growth and advancement is crucial for employee engagement. Employees value an employer who offers training for professional skill development and personal growth over the course of their lifecycle coupled with the possibility to advance to higher positions, thus appreciate job enrichment and variation (Acheampong, 2021; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023). Generally, if facilitated correctly, Gen Z is considered committed and hardworking, also coined as “powerhouse of potential” (Ganguli et al., 2022). They seek personal growth and professional development through continuous learning opportunities and training and wish for constant feedback and mentorship (Acheampong, 2021; Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Ganguli et al., 2022; Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020; Mărginean, 2021). Training and development are priorities for Gen Z when selecting a workplace and also a key consideration when staying at an organization long-term (Acheampong, 2021). Simultaneously, they look for career advancement opportunities (Acheampong, 2021; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021) and desire transparency in this regard (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). According to Lassleben and Hofmann (2023), not only enhancing experiences and career opportunities make an employer more attractive, but also recognition from management adds developmental value. Over an employee's lifecycle, there should be numerous opportunities for advancement and development, that adhere to individual goals in order to ensure continuous professional growth and satisfaction.

Work Environment Another key consideration for employees at the workplace is the prevailing environment surrounding them. The work environment can be influenced and is

characterized by a diverse range of factors, including cooperation, the people, diversity, facilities, atmosphere, type of organization and supervisor relationship among other things (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). In general, Gen Z prefers an organization that can be characterized as innovative (Ganguli et al., 2022; Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). They seek a fun work environment with a positive work atmosphere, group work and positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues (Acheampong, 2021; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Ganguli et al., 2022; Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023; Mărginean, 2021). Also related to a comfortable work environment is the provision of all necessary and up-to-date work equipment in a good condition (Furnham et al., 2005; Travaglianti et al., 2017). Consequently, fostering cooperation and connections among colleagues within a modern workplace is wished for by Gen Z.

While speaking about the context of work environment, already meeting generational values during the onboarding phase will ease acclimatization to the new organizational surroundings. Despite national and cultural differences, the paper of Ganguli et al. (2022) describes an internationally prevailing preference for a “delightful onboarding experience” among Gen Z workers. This study puts emphasis on these three key areas that are particularly salient topics for Gen Z workers and hence provide a framework for navigating the importance of onboarding practices to optimize integration.

Onboarding Programs

As part of their welcoming for new employees, organizations organize an onboarding program that aims for quick task-related and social integration. Onboarding describes “all formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment” (Klein & Polin, 2012). Even though onboarding and socialization are closely intertwined activities when a new hire enters an organization, it is important to distinguish between them. Socialization is the internal

process within the new employee, whereas onboarding consists of the above-described activities employed by HR and managers in order to structure new hires' experiences and enable socialization (Klein & Polin, 2012). The mentioned informal practices also relate to the attitude of managers and coworkers towards the new hire, therefore welcoming takes place across various levels within an organization (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). It is noteworthy that onboarding is not a finite process, but the change between roles, teams or projects in the same organization makes reemployment of practices throughout employees working lives a necessity (Jeske & Olson, 2021). With this in mind, the applicability of the findings will not solely be limited to the organizational entrance of new hires but will apply to human resource practices across employees' entire life cycle in a company. Effective onboarding that facilitates socialization and adjustment requires a comprehensive approach with a mixture of formal and informal training, mentoring, and interaction with various actors of the organization at any moment an employee emerges into a new environment.

Besides socialization, a primary objective of onboarding programs is the dissemination of information from the organizational side. Not only will new employees be introduced to basics office systems and coworkers, but they will also be informed about organizational values and practices, clarifying their role and associated performance expectations which helps them recognize their contribution to the organization (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Jeske & Olson, 2022). Noteworthy is that the type of onboarding depends on the employment contract and can therefore occur in different forms and quantities, e.g. presentations, workshops, trainings or feedback sessions (Jeske & Olson, 2022). Participation in the onboarding program is one of the first contact points with the organization and its environment, making information dissemination about systems, values and expectations crucial for the new hire to understand the way of working.

Upon entering an organization, acquiring this knowledge allows the new employee to better understand the organization's history and core. This possibly helps in promoting the

development of social relationships that lead to increased engagement in interpersonal interactions and mutual acceptance (Klein & Weaver, 2000). Other positive outcomes of a successful onboarding program might be more effective communication with managers, stronger connections with coworkers and generally quicker cultural integration (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). Consequently, providing information during the arrival phase can help with socialization, confirming their intertwined nature. Overall, an effective onboarding program with successful integration positively impacts work engagement, work productivity, and affective commitment, therefore presenting a crucial part of an organization's attraction and retention strategy (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Jeske & Olson, 2022). Conversely, if generational trends are left unconsidered, Jeske and Olson (2022) argue that possible negative outcomes are productivity loss, damaged reputation and weaker team spirit. Overall, fostering of relationships and enhancement of communication with actors from various levels is essential for quick integration, both socially and task-related.

Of interest for this research is the extent to which specifically Gen Z members as the newest generation of workers experienced certain onboarding practices upon organizational entrance. Meaningful conclusions about needed adaptations can be drawn when the status quo of onboarding programs is contrasted with what Gen Z expects to determine the current fit between the two.

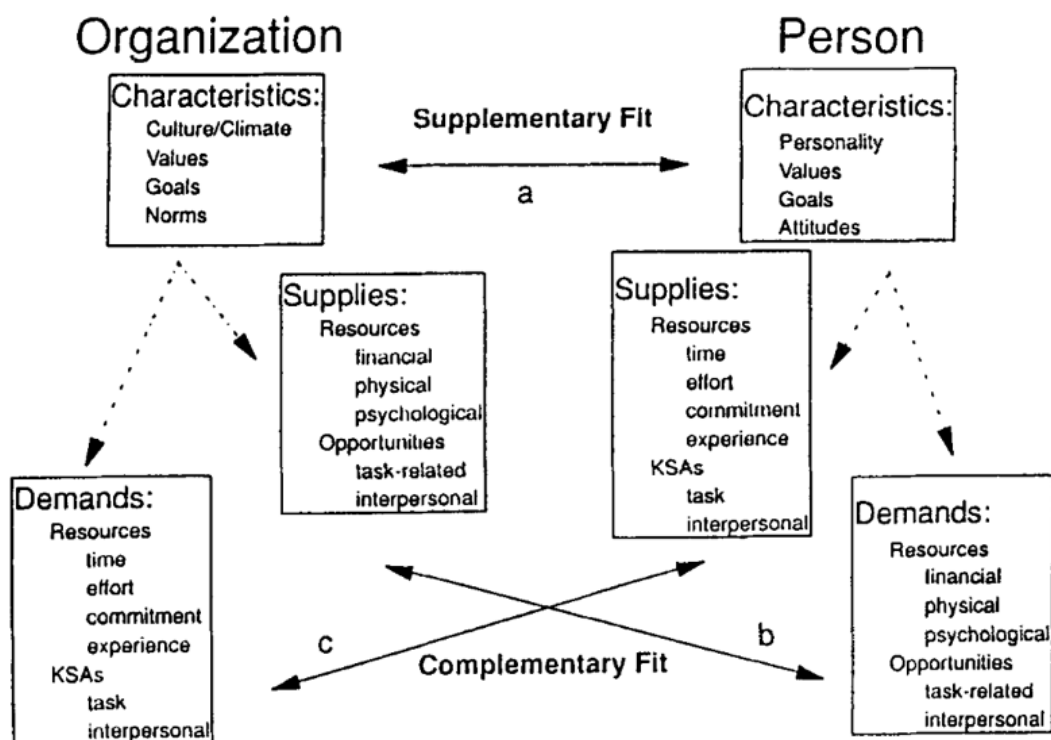
Person-Organization Fit

Previously introduced by the research question, the outcome of improved onboarding practices in favor of a better match between new hires and employers was a closer person-organization (P-O) fit. P-O fit describes “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (Kristof, 1996). The combined conceptualization of various academic studies, created by Kristof (1996) and visualized in Figure 1, helps in understanding the aim of this research. On the one hand, the match of characteristics between

organizations and employees is known as supplementary fit. Further, one's characteristics also influence what is supplied or demanded by the party. The remaining complementary fit between demands and supplies is bidirectional for and from both the organization and the employee. Central to this research is the perspective of the needs-supplies fit, which is optimally achieved when organizational supplies closely align with the employee's demands (Kristof, 1996), thus outcomes strive to give suggestions to HR practitioners or management. Since onboarding programs are supplied by the organizations and employees hold demands for organizational practices, the complementary fit marked as arrow "b" in Figure 1 is likely to be positively influenced when organizations understand and act on Gen Z demands, values and experiences. Referring to "supplies" over the course of this paper describes the provided onboarding activities that Gen Z experienced, while "demands" address Gen Z's general opinion on importance of certain organizational practices. Travagianti et al. (2017) found that the fit between demands and supplies influences behavioral outcomes such as job performance and citizenship. As a result, managers should focus on fulfilling work-related needs for leveraged professional and social performance instead of solely searching for someone with the suitable abilities to fulfill the role (Travagianti et al., 2017). Also visible in Figure 1 is that demands and supplies both consist of five subcategories, namely "financial resources", "physical resources", "psychological resources", "task-related opportunities", and "interpersonal opportunities". The retrospective report of corporate onboarding experiences and clarification of demands within these categories helps to measure the current needs-supplies fit between Gen Z employees and their organizations. These insights will allow for guided suggestions for adaptations that organizations can use to make an effort in designing programs that will help to achieve a better fit between the person and the company by accommodating Gen Z expectations.

Figure 1

Conceptualizations of Person-Organization Fit



Note. From “PERSON-ORGANIZATION: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF ITS CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, MEASUREMENT, AND IMPLICATIONS”

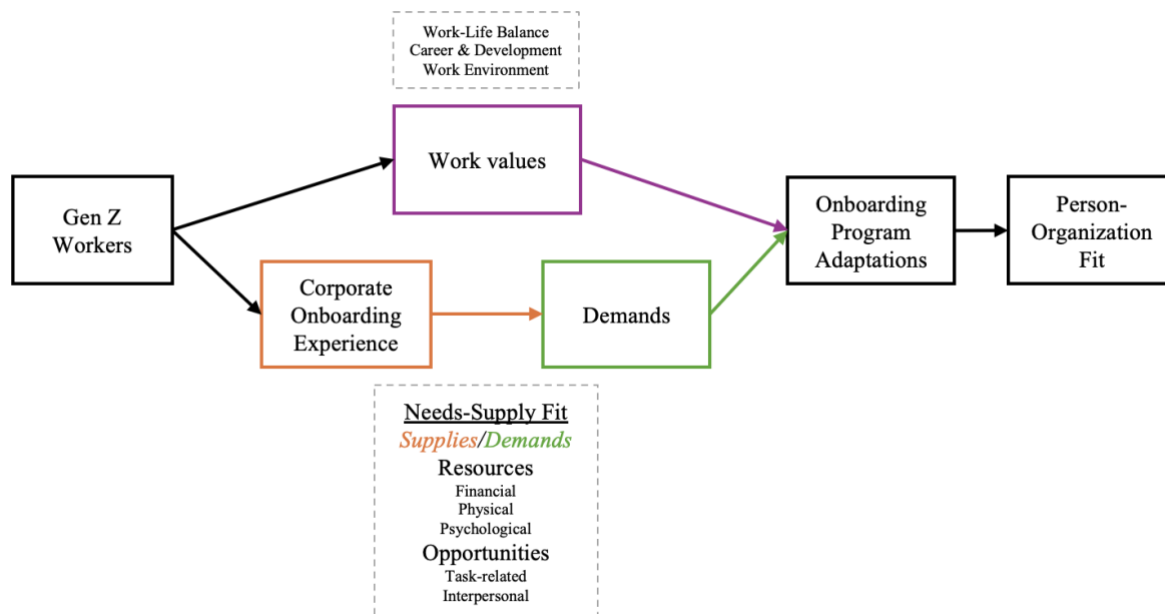
by A.L. Kristof, 1996, *Personnel Psychology*, 49(1), p. 4 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1996.tb01790.x>).

Research Structure

To ultimately answer the main research question about how organizations can improve person-organization fit by adapting their onboarding program to meet Gen Z workers' expectations, corresponding subquestions are introduced. Related to the P-O fit, SQ1 “How did Gen Z experience their corporate onboarding program?” and SQ2 “What demands does Gen Z have for the onboarding program?” are seeking to extract what organizations supplied and what Gen Z contrarily demands. In response to the overarching RQ, gaps for onboarding program adaptations will be revealed by contrasting the data collected for SQ1 and SQ2,

giving an insight into the current needs-supplies fit between organizations' supply and employees' demands during the onboarding phase. Lastly, SQ3 “What expectations does Gen Z hold for the onboarding program as a result of their work values?” will unveil the urgency and priority of work-place-related practices from the Gen Z perspective. In the end, Gen Z's work values, demands and identified poor needs-supplies fit will guide suggestions for necessary onboarding adaptations that positively influence the P-O fit.

For clarification, the relationship between all introduced variables is visualized in the conceptual model in Figure 2. Originating from “Gen Z worker” as the starting point and source of feedback, is the goal to provide points for attention and recommendations for action for “onboarding program adaptations” that in the end positively impact the “person-organization fit”, as reflected in the main RQ. The relationship between the here proposed changes and the workers is mediated by Gen Z's “work values” and the fit between their “corporate onboarding experiences” and the “demands” one has for the onboarding in a new organization. Corporate onboarding experience and Gen Z worker demands both consist of the five subcategories from the supplies-demands categories of the complementary fit of the P-O fit theory to ensure coverage of all onboarding domains. Work values on the other hand, are supposed to reflect expectations which will allow to draw conclusions on priorities and add an additional layer of depth to the interpretation of important work-related practices. Work values are shaped by and connected to Gen Z character traits and are known to influence the workers satisfaction and intention to stay in their current position, thus making listening to generational expectations a crucial component of HR practices. Hence, adaptations based on Gen Z workers' values and demands during the welcoming stage will help to achieve a closer alignment between needs and supplies as part of the overall person-organization fit.

Figure 2*Conceptual Model***Methods**

To answer all research questions and achieve the goal of a possibly improved P-O fit through onboarding program adaptations the chosen methodology is of quantitative nature in the form of an online survey. Quantitative data will give an insight into more perspectives of this generation since more people are able to partake, helping in the diversification of the sample while also clearly limiting the scope of the research to the predetermined issues presented above. Corresponding to the subquestions and the conceptual model, this research requires three scales to measure each of the variables “corporate onboarding experience”, “demands” and “work values”. Since Gen Z’s past onboarding experiences and present demands together describe the needs-supplies fit of the P-O fit theory, they share similar items on Likert scales to allow for comparison of ratings and reveal room for improvement by identifying their match. Further, an untraditional Q-sort assignment is included to classify work values by their priority to give more depth to the analysis of what is relevant to Gen Z. The combination of these two quantitative measures allows for building on existing scientific literature while also giving clear practical guidance to organizations as a final result. Besides

only measuring the rated importance of certain aspects, this study wants to challenge the status quo and compare it to what Gen Z really desires. This is done by revealing the existing match for the needs-supplies fit and considering Gen Z's most important work values.

Measures

Following the informed consent, demographic questions about age and work experience were asked to check participation requirements, while other demographics like gender, residence or education were asked to scan for potential influences. Afterwards, the questionnaire was sectioned into 3 categories, namely corporate onboarding experience, demands, and work values. The selection of papers used for the creation of the three sets of items is based on four articles that either measure supplied onboarding practices which were further adapted to also measure job-related demands (Gupta et al., 2017; Travaglianti et al., 2017), or are used as input for the ranking of work values (Furnham et al., 2005; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023). Table 1 shows an overview of the selected articles per scale and their initial applications. The following elaboration presents how the sets of items were composed and adapted to fit the purpose of this research.

Table 1

Measures Within the Survey and Their Origin

Measures	Variables	Literature	Initial items
Demographic questions	Gen Z Workers		
Two Likert scales for demands and experiences	Needs-supplies fit	Gupta et al. (2017)	Onboarding related items to measure experience
		Travaglianti et al. (2017)	Measure needs-supplies fit across different levels
Q-sort of work values	Work Values	Furnham et al. (2005)	Measure of work-values to determine connection with personality traits
		Lassleben & Hofmann (2023)	Measure of work-values to compare among gender

Measuring Corporate Onboarding Experience and Demands

To retrospectively measure how Gen Z workers experienced their own onboarding within an organization, participants were prompted to reflect on a 5-point Likert scale to what extent (1-non, 5-greater extent) certain onboarding practices occurred. This will correspond to the supplies perspective of the P-O fit since employees will give information on how they perceived the supplied onboarding practices of organizations e.g. “I had good working equipment“ and “The onboarding program was stimulating”. For this, the specific needs-supplies fit questionnaire of Travaglianti et al. (2017), which originally consisted of 37 items within 12 work-related need factors, was filtered for relevant items and accordingly recategorized into the five supply categories of the P-O fit model to ensure meeting the supply category all-encompassingly. After rephrasing them to suit retrospective experiences, items used in the study of Gupta et al. (2017) who measured the perception of certain onboarding practices were added to the questionnaire if not redundant or outside of scope. In total, 17 items across the five categories of resources and opportunities make up the scale to measure the experienced onboarding practices and find answers corresponding to SQ1 (see Appendix A).

Next, to find answers to SQ2, the same 17 items from the previous scale were used in their more general form e.g. “Have good working equipment“ and “Do a stimulating job”, to represent conditions that reflect the “demands” side of the needs-supplies fit (see Appendix A). To explore how relevant Gen Z perceives each of the aspects for the job, they were asked to indicate importance on a 5-point Likert scale (1-not at all important, 5-extremely important).

Setting up equal items against each other on similar scales allows to later compare demands and experiences, and determine their match which is supposed to reveal possible room for improvement and key demands. The combination of onboarding experiences and Gen Z demands to determine needs-supply fit reflects the first part of analysis for this study.

Measuring Work-Values

For the second part, analysis surround what expectations underlie the demands of Gen Z, thus participants were asked to rank prominent work values using an adapted version of the Q-sort assignment. Traditionally, Q-sort describes the sorting of items as part of the Q methodology, in which participants are asked to rank-order statements based on their opinion, in turn reflecting their subjectivity (Morea & Ghanbar, 2024). This forced distribution with a fixed number of items per score with fewer at the extremes allows to relate items to each other and determine priorities (Morea & Ghanbar, 2024). Then revealed subjective preferences in work values will indicate what is most and least important for Gen Z, giving additional depth to the other quantitative measure of the needs-supplies fit. However, deviating from the regular Q-sort methodology is the lack of discussion and participant engagement after the subjective rating of items due to the nature of an online survey, and a relatively small set of items (Watts & Stenner, 2005). This limited application does not consider the holistic picture and places the unveiling of patterns or backgrounds second by solely focusing on determining priorities quantitatively without going into too much detail. The creative application of the Q-sort which is an explorative technique (Watts & Stenner, 2005) was motivated by the objective to add a layer of interpretation to what is important to Gen Z and seamlessly integrate another quantitative measure into the online questionnaire without adding qualitative methods or significantly broadening the scope of the research. The 16 items used for the Q-sort (see Appendix B) were selected from the articles of Furnham et al. (2005) and Lassleben and Hofmann (2023) based on the three prominent domains “work-life balance”, “career and development”, and “work environment”, as previously explained in the framework. Originally, Lassleben and Hofmann (2023) measured Gen Z’s prioritization of employer attractiveness attributes while Furnham et al. (2005) sought to find associations between personality traits and work values. Redundant items from both articles were matched and items outside of these three categories were left aside. The unusual framing of items to begin

with “I expect...” directly links work values to work-place related occurrences. This approach indicates specific onboarding expectations of Gen Z, such as “I expect positive relationships with my colleagues,” while the Q-sort scores allow the determination of the most and least relevant items. Findings will correspond to the SQ3 about expectations based on work values, which will add an additional layer of depth to determine what’s important to Gen Z and the needs-supplies fit.

Using these three scales, answers to the three subquestions enable the analysis of experiences, demands and their match while also adding input from Gen Z’s work values. The next chapter highlights points of attention resulting from expectations and rated importance of onboarding practices that act as practical guidance to enhance welcoming programs and achieve a closer person-organization fit with Gen Z workers.

Sample and Procedure

The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics, allowed for anonymity and took most participants around 6-7 minutes to complete. The survey was partially distributed via a faculty-internal participant pool and published in the Survey Circle application, but also through snowball sampling among local school or university graduates of the last few years. This resulted in a sample of Gen Z participants mostly residing in the Netherlands or Germany.

The target population for data collection needed to be born between 1995 and 2010 in order to be considered a member of Gen Z. Further, to be categorized as a Gen Z worker, participants needed to possess work experience in the form of employment or at least a longer-term internship. For this study, the most important consideration is that people experienced the process of onboarding or welcoming within an organization, which allows them to reflect on past experiences. Due to ethical reasons and consent, the target group of the survey is limited to participants above the age of 16, narrowing the range to the birth years 1995-2008. Ultimately, the demographic analysis of this sample revealed that 68% of

participants identified as female and 31 % as male (“prefer not to say”/ “other” = 1%). Both, the median and mean of birth years were 2000, whereas the total span of birth years ranges from 1995 to 2005. As expected, the majority of participants resided in Germany (68,3%), followed by the Netherlands (17,9%), another European country (9,7%) or outside of Europe (3,4%). Since longer term emergence in an organizational environment was a requirement for participation, 14,5% of respondents reported an internship experience of several months and 85,5% possess work experience of which more than half are being employed longer than 2 years. Participants education ranges from middle school to master’s degree. However, the highest level of completed education for most people was the high school diploma (43,4%), followed by a bachelor’s degree (37,2%) and vocational training (11%).

Results

Over the course of three weeks, around 180 people participated in the Qualtrics survey. After deleting responses of those who did not meet the participation criteria, a total of 160 participants remained. During the cleaning of the dataset, 15 incomplete questionnaires were removed, leaving a total of N = 145 responses for the data analysis. All statistical analyses were done in R . For the need-supplies fit, data presentation is limited to descriptive analysis since the aim is to gain a summative overview into Gen Z opinions and experiences, and understand relationships. Work value rankings are primarily described in order to analyze priorities, but the typical factor analysis for Q-sorts is supposed to reveal underlying patterns in participants answers.

Needs-Supplies Fit

To determine the needs-supplies fit between what was experienced during the onboarding phase and what is demanded by Gen Z, both variables were measured using 5-point Likert scales. First, to lay the foundation for the analysis of the needs-supplies fit the mode of each of the two variables demands and supply was identified to determine the overall importance of work-related practices and level of onboarding experiences. The mode was

chosen since Likert-scale items do not have a fixed distance but rather present positions on that scale and provide a simple and comprehensive overview.

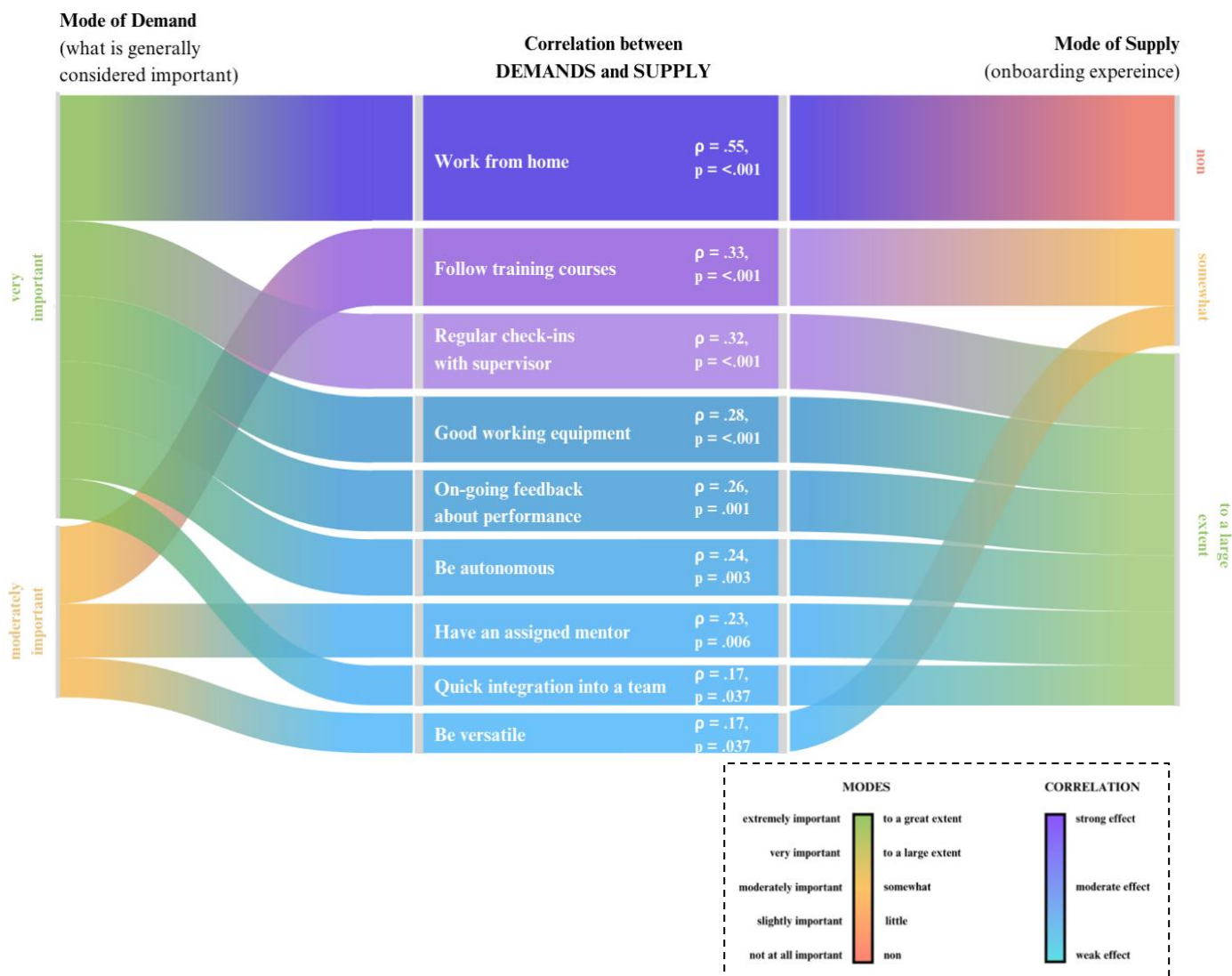
For Gen Z's onboarding experience, "(7) I was treated with honesty and respect from the start" was the only item with a mode of having experienced it "to a great extent" (n = 60), hence is a key element of a successful onboarding process for Gen Z. Contrarily, the lowest mode of "non" was only found for the item "(3) I had the opportunity to work from home" (n = 54), pointing towards minimal remote work opportunities during the onboarding phase. Besides the three items "(6) The onboarding program was stimulating", "(9) I followed training courses to extend my skills" and "(10) I had the chance to be versatile" with a mode of experienced "somewhat", the remaining twelve items were mainly experienced "to a large extent". This indicates that, although Gen Z workers found most aspects of their onboarding experience to be present, these three areas were mostly experienced only partially. If later analysis also reveals them as in demand by the workers, this suggests potential areas for improvement. The data was measured ordinally thus variability is stated by its range. The entire range of answers from the 5-point Likert scale could be found within each of the 17 supply items, reflecting a diverse palette of experiences possibly explained by the different environments of participants.

Besides experiences, the next steps involve the analysis of the demands of Gen Z measured on a similar 5-point Likert scale. According to their mode "extremely important", the highest-ranked demands for a job were "(7) Be treated with honesty and respect" (n = 98), "(8) Work in a positive atmosphere" (n = 71), "(16) Balance my private life and my professional life" (n = 89), and "(17) Have working hours that allow me to manage my private life" (n = 83). These four items are emphasized demands by Gen Z and should be taken into consideration by organizations. All other items were categorized either as "very important" or "moderately important" on the scale, still holding significant to medium importance for Gen Z. For the demands scale, the complete range of the Likert scale was covered, except for the

items “(6) Do a stimulating job” and “(15) Regular check-ins with my supervisor to answer any questions I may have” which were never selected as “not important at all”, indicating at least a certain amount of importance for every participant. Overall, the broad range of answers highlights the diversity in opinions among Gen Z workers which should be acknowledged by the organizations.

To now quantify the extent to which demands of Gen Z and onboarding programs supplied by organizations match or not, the two variables with mirroring items were contrasted. Computing the correlation between each pair of items using Spearman’s ρ (rho) acknowledges the ordinal nature of the Likert scale data and reveals the strengths of the bivariate relationship for the needs-supplies fit. A higher Spearman’s ρ points towards a closer resemblance between the needs and experiences of Gen Z workers. Conversely, the closer the value approaches zero the weaker the relationship between the variables. According to Cohen (1988), $\rho = .50$ is considered a strong effect, $\rho = .30$ a moderate effect, and $\rho = .10$ a weak effect. Further, the relationship requires a p-value of $<.05$ to be considered significant as this is the common significance level threshold in the social sciences. Categorized and ordered by their strength of relationship, Figure 3 provides an overview of all significant correlations between pairs of items in descending order in the middle. This complex visualization not only ranks and color-codes the significant relationships, but also refers back to the most common answers to each of the items’ initial variables “demands” and “supplies” which is supposed to give a full overview of the present needs-supply fit. Thus, the mode of demand items is reflected in the left outward connection, while modes of supply items are on the right side.

The most robust relationship was found for “working from home” ($\rho = 0.55$, $p < .001$) showing the strongest alignment or needs-supplies fit between what was experienced during the onboarding phase and the individually rated level of importance to members of Gen Z.

Figure 3*All Pairs Of Items with Significant Demand-Supply Correlations*

Note. Excluded from this visualization due to exceeding the allowed significance level of 5% are the items “(1) Receive benefits or monetary bonuses besides a fixed monthly income” ($\rho = .15, p = .079$), “(5) To have everything I need to work or at least know where to get it” ($\rho = .13, p = .123$), “(6) Do a stimulating job” ($\rho = .02, p = .795$), “(7) Be treated with honesty and respect” ($\rho = .11, p = .169$), “(8) Work in a positive atmosphere” ($\rho = .14, p = .089$), “(13) Be recognized by my superiors” ($\rho = .15, p = .064$), “(16) Balance my private life and my professional life” ($\rho = .10, p = .219$), and “(17) Have working hours that allow me to manage my private life” ($\rho = .14, p = .094$).

For each of the two variables “(15) Regular check-ins with my supervisor to answer any questions I may have” ($\rho = .32, p = <.001$) and “(9) Follow training courses to extend my skills” ($\rho = .33, p = <.001$) a moderate effect was found between what needs people indicate for a job and what they experienced during their onboarding phase. Regular check-ins are deemed a “very important” job demand, whereas training courses are considered “moderately important”. Other items showed weaker positive effects between demands and onboarding supplies. The weakest significant correlation was identified for “(10) To be versatile” ($\rho = .17, p = .037$) with a mode of “moderately important”. In total, nine out of 17 pairs of items show significant positive correlations, whereas the remaining eight pairs found non-significance with levels above 5%. Noticeable is that all demand items with a mode of “extremely important” were unable to score significant levels or reach correlations above $\rho = 0.15$. Even though there might be a weak positive effect between the items, there is not enough evidence to support and conclude a statistically significant relationship. Looking at the previously provided range of answers and significance levels, it is possible that the variability in responses was too high to draw clear conclusions.

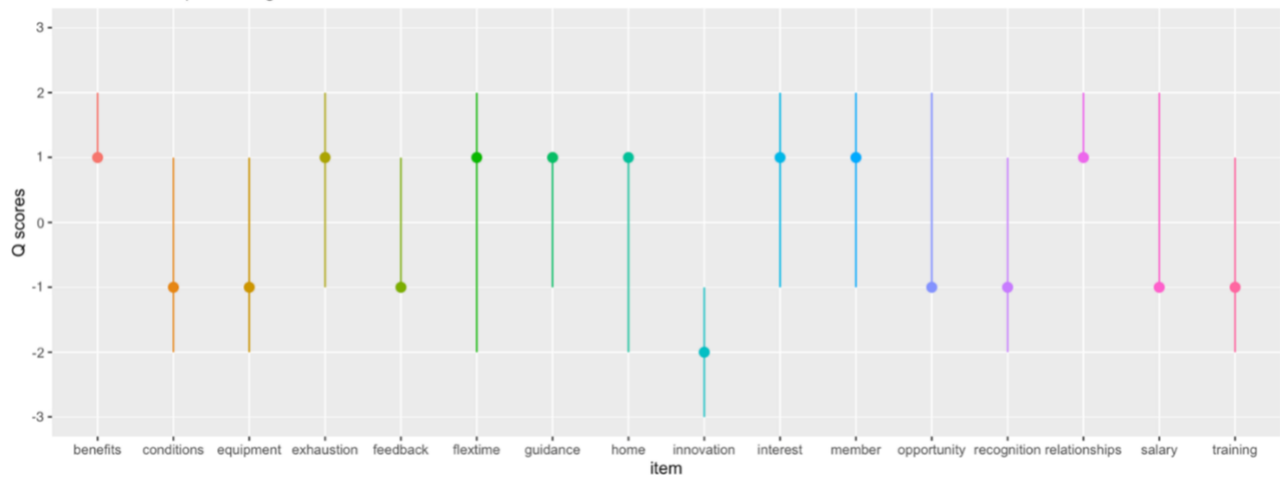
Work Values

For this research adapted Q-sort of 16 items was supposed to give insight into the importance of work values. Missing a more in-depth discussion about the background of ratings, quantitative rankings only describe surficial ranks which solely allows to determine general importance without reasoning as previously elaborated on. Therefore, interpretations treat items as the primarily variable of investigation placing the Q typical revealing of patterns within people secondary (Watts & Stenner, 2005). During the Q-sort assignment, participants sorted the items into different levels of greater and lesser categories. The highest positive and negative ranked item was assigned a value of +/- 3, the following three items scored +2 and - 2, and the remaining items received either a +1 or -1. For a general overview of ratings among

the participants, the median of items was computed to determine centrality since Q-sort data resulted in an ordinal assortment of scores. Only “I expect to work for an innovative employer” scored a median of -2, indicating the least preferences out of the set of work values. Noticeably, almost all medians equal either 1 or -1, which shows a wide spread of viewpoints since initial answers were ranked from -3 to +3. For a more detailed interpretation, the median (mdn) was accompanied by the computation of the interquartile range (IQR) which resulted in varying spread of responses. Figure 4 shows an overview of each item’s median with its corresponding IQR. Most dominant work values are receiving benefits and positive relationships both with a comparably high median of 1 and relatively consistent ranges (IQR = 1,2). Following are similarly high medians for exhaustion (mdn = 1 (IQR = -1, 2)), flextime (mdn = 1 (IQR = -2,2)), job interest (mdn = 1 (IQR = -1,2)), and accepted as member (mdn = 1 (-1,2)) but with some ratings increasing the IQRs showing a wider spread in opinion but remaining an important consideration for most. Work values with a weakened importance are training, recognition, work equipment and conditions all with a lower median of -1 and an IQR of 4 indicating more negative responses and lesser importance compared to other items. The employer’s innovativeness is the considerably lowest rated item with a median of -2 (IQR = -3,-1) representing the least important work value for Gen Z. It is crucial to highlight the total absence of the highest negative value for “I expect to receive benefits like vacation, sick leave, pension, insurance” and “I expect to not be overworked to exhaustion”, which indicate a universal importance to some degree among all participants. Further, the absence of the highest positive value for “I expect to be provided with all necessary and up-to-date equipment” and working for an innovative employer, means that it might not be the most critical factor or a high priority for all Gen Z workers. All other items received scores for all ranks, consequently presenting a broad range of what is subjectively considered important. Noticeably, the generally dispersed IQRs for the range of answers indicate a strong deviation in participants opinions.

Figure 4

Median and Inter Quartile Range of Q-Sort Items



Instead of thinking in boxes of previously theorized categories, every item was considered individually to reveal underlying patterns within participants. The application of exploratory factor analysis on the polychoric correlation matrix of the dataset of ordinal ratings revealed repetitive structures in the data of participants values, therefore effectively reduces the different viewpoints of many participants into factors of a more interpretable size. For this, the packages “*polycor*” and “*psych*” were used. The number of eight factors was determined using the Kaiser’s criterion (Eigenvalue >1) and “varimax” rotation applied. The output shows that each factor explains around 10 to 14% of the total variance within this model, thus each of these eight factors contributes moderately to entirely capture the variability in the data. On average, items are moderately complex (1,9) but the root mean square of residuals of RMSR= 0.04 suggests a good model fit. The underlying dimensions of work values are adequately represented and can guide organizational practices. An overview of all factor loadings for the 16 items and eight factors can be found in Table 2. Factor loadings higher than 0.20 and -0.20 are marked bold, since all other loadings are considered poor.

Table 2*Factor Loadings of Items to Reveal Underlying Patterns within Answers*

	<i>FA_1</i>	<i>FA_2</i>	<i>FA_3</i>	<i>FA_4</i>	<i>FA_5</i>	<i>FA_6</i>	<i>FA_7</i>	<i>FA_8</i>
<i>Flexitime</i>	-0.10	-0.06	0.98	-0.10	-0.09	-0.03	0.10	0.02
<i>Work from home</i>	-0.99	0.04	0.11	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	0.09	-0.10
<i>Receive benefits</i>	0.03	-0.18	-0.12	0.02	-0.25	-0.08	0.05	0.09
<i>Not overworked</i>	0.05	-0.03	-0.12	0.97	-0.01	0.17	-0.02	0.07
<i>Job interest</i>	0.06	0.02	-0.08	-0.13	-0.05	-0.07	-0.84	-0.09
<i>Training</i>	0.11	-0.12	0.01	-0.04	-0.07	-0.41	0.02	-0.15
<i>Guidance</i>	0.09	-0.11	-0.05	0.01	0.15	0.38	0.32	-0.25
<i>Feedback</i>	0.08	-0.21	-0.09	-0.18	-0.01	0.04	0.10	-0.57
<i>Career opportunities</i>	0.05	0.18	-0.04	-0.08	-0.02	-0.57	0.11	0.00
<i>Recognition</i>	0.03	-0.11	-0.18	0.02	0.98	-0.01	0.04	0.04
<i>Innovative employer</i>	0.01	-0.06	0.00	0.07	0.05	0.10	-0.27	-0.02
<i>Positive Relationships</i>	0.15	0.03	-0.11	-0.18	-0.10	0.33	-0.17	0.11
<i>Work conditions</i>	0.24	-0.17	-0.26	0.01	-0.12	0.00	0.11	0.51
<i>Equipment</i>	0.08	-0.12	0.04	-0.18	0.03	0.16	0.21	0.43
<i>Accepted member</i>	0.25	-0.08	0.01	0.13	-0.01	0.44	0.10	-0.11
<i>Competitive salary</i>	-0.05	0.98	-0.07	-0.03	-0.02	-0.15	0.11	0.03

Noticeable are the first five factors that majorly load on one item only, hence “work from home” (-0.99), “Salary” (0.98), “flexitime” (0.98), “Not being exhausted” (0.97) or “Recognition from management” (0.98) are highly dominant work values for some people. For these people, this one specific work value is a highly dominant priority that overshadows all other considerations. The negative loading of “work from home” for factor 1 can be explained by the desire for membership and conditions, showing a preference for being present in the office. Also factor 3 loading on “flexitime” can possibly be explained by a lesser loading on “comfortable, modern and clean work conditions”. The remaining three factors have moderate to high loadings on two or more items. Factor 6 scores negatively on “career opportunity” and “training” while positively on “accepted as member”, “relationships” and

“guidance”. Factor 7 scores highly negative on “job interest” but moderately positive on “guidance”. The last factor, moderately scores on “conditions” and “equipment” but less on “feedback” and “guidance”. All factors that moderately score on multiple items represent a combination of items without a clear dominance which suggests multifaceted patterns among Gen Z workers with diverse and interconnected priorities.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore what demands Gen Z has, how they experienced their onboarding program and what work values they hold. Demands and onboarding program were contrasted to investigate the existing match between the two. Further, underlying work values were analyzed for priorities and concealed patterns revealed. The focus of the research is to identify key areas for improvement of the status quo while paying attention to what’s considered important by Gen Z in order to improve the person-organization fit. In the previous section, results presented valuable insights into relationship between existing onboarding programs and prevailing demands, and a reduction of viewpoints on work values among the participants. In this discussion, it is essential to capture the implications of these findings through interpretations within the broader context. By answering the first two subquestions, onboarding experiences and generational demands are explored followed by an interpretation of their match. Next, Gen Z will be characterized by their work values before finally bringing needs-supplies fit and values together for practical implications. Lastly, theoretical implications and limitations of this research are elaborated on.

Identifying Areas for Improvement in Onboarding Practices according to Gen Z’s Perspective

Before answering the main research question, results to answer the subquestions need to be interpreted. The first question “How did Gen Z experience their corporate onboarding program?” allows for a straight-forward conclusion. Most workers experienced being treated with honesty and respect already from the beginning, which is a key psychological resource

for successful integration since it refers to fairness and recognition (Travaglianti et al., 2017). Conversely, the majority was unable to make use of work from home opportunities during the onboarding phase. This limitation is understandable, as in terms of socialization within a new environment, in-person interaction helps in building relationships and emerging in corporate culture. Chillakuri (2020) concludes that personal connections with colleagues and superiors especially upon organizational entrance help newcomers absorb the organization quickly and learn collaboratively which is also a preferred approach by Gen Z. Having technology as a mediator during the onboarding phase overshadows interpersonal experiences and the lack of physicality would conceal non-verbal cues (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Chillakuri, 2020). Many people found the onboarding program only somewhat stimulating, indicating general room for improvement to better align with their interests. According to the supply categories of the P-O fit, they somewhat lacked task-related opportunities in the form of training courses or the chance to be versatile during the onboarding phase. Important to consider is the finding of Frögéli et al. (2023) that training, regardless of structured or on-the job, is the most effective onboarding technique for task mastery, role clarity and the improvement of competencies. Aggregating a broader set of skills overtime will in return allow for more versatility on the job. Largely provided were interpersonal opportunities like work-life balance, regular check-ins, feedback on performance and recognition from management, but also physical resources like work equipment, accessibility of tools and integration into the new team. Overall, the variety of answers among participants indicates a range of different experiences that are possibly explained by the different organizations they emerged into or positions they took on.

Now turning to the other side of the needs-supplies fit, needs were supposed to be identified by SQ2 “What demands does Gen Z have for the onboarding program?”. Considered highly important are psychological resources like being treated with honesty and respect and working in a positive atmosphere. That atmosphere is generally an major aspect is

confirmed by the finding of Mărginean (2021) that more than 70% of Gen Z would prefer an environment that is characterized informal and relaxed. Further, especially the interpersonal opportunities related to work-life balance and workhours that allow managing one's private life are generally extremely weighted in a job for Gen Z. For them but also for other generations, work-life balance is indeed often treated as a top priority over other values or acts as a key determinant when choosing a job (Chillakuri, 2020; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). A stimulating job and regular check-ins with a supervisor are never not considered a work value of at least some importance to Gen Z members' work life. Therefore, the role of supervisors to facilitate engagement and provide support during the onboarding phase definitely needs to be fulfilled to a great extent (Gupta et al., 2017). Other interpersonal opportunities in the form of check-ins, feedback and recognition that are connected with their relationship with superiors seem of importance. Physical resources, like quality and availability of equipment, work from home or aided integration are also very important for Gen Z. Lastly, task related opportunities through training, mentoring or versatility are rated as moderately important, only autonomy is of higher importance. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) connect the desire for autonomy instead of being micromanaged with Gen Z's preference for individualism which will improve task efficiency. Again, the presented broad range of importance assigned to the different demands, indicates variation possibly explained by different organizational environments or other role-specific characteristics.

The comparison of Gen Z's demands with supplied onboarding programs by their organizations revealed areas of alignment ranging from a stronger to weaker match. Data analysis showed an already strong to moderate match for "work from home", "follow training courses to extend skills" and "regular check-ins with a supervisor to answer questions". This translates to the understanding that employees who for example favor remote working possibilities generally get the opportunities to do so, and conversely, since the majority of newcomers prefer to work on-site, they also get their demands met. For reasons previously

argued, remote work is not a priority for Gen Z and lacks physical interactions which might not be beneficial for the integration of new hires. Next, the same interpretation is applied to the moderately matches for experienced and demanded training courses and regular check-ins. If there is a high demand, people were usually offered sufficient possibilities by their organizations to fulfill their needs during the onboarding phase. Hence, expansion of one's skillset and regular clarifications of questions with a supervisor during the onboarding phase allow the Gen Z new hire a better overview of what is expected from them in terms of performance and organizational standards (Frögéli et al., 2023; Jeske & Olson, 2022). Again, it is important to highlight the importance of training as the most effective onboarding practice for not only skill development, but also role clarity and mastery (Frögéli et al., 2023). This study therefore found that organizations do not necessarily require significant adaptations to their onboarding programs to neither of these practices since they already resemble Gen Z needs.

The greatest room for improvement however could be found for “having a mentor”, “integration into a new team through a supervisor” and the “chance to be versatile” during the onboarding program. It is beneficial to aim towards a closer fit between these needs and supplies as it enhances identification with the organization which in turn also motivates task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Travaglianti et al., 2017). Currently, it appears as if mentors were generally provided upon organizational entrance, however, Gen Z only considers them moderately important, potentially explaining this weaker connection. Mentors are supposed to support career development and advancement (Barhate & Dirani, 2021, Ganguli et al., 2022). The outcomes of this study suggest that individual discussion with the employee about the extent of desired mentorship, type of support and other information should take place to achieve individual work and collective organizational goals (Jeske & Olson, 2022). This will take the individual preferences of the newcomer into consideration and allow for a more efficient attribution of resources. For aided integration by

a supervisor and versatility, it is challenging to determine if the weak relation between demands and supply stems from Gen Z demanding more than experienced or whether they experienced it to a greater extent than they demanded. It would again best to consider individual preferences by observing how the newcomer responds to the offered onboarding activities and adapt occurrences accordingly. Successful integration into a new team and a good relationship with the supervisor already during the onboarding phase are likely to quickly heighten employee satisfaction, their performance and organizational commitment (Cesário & Chambel, 2019, Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Versatility on the other hand is generally considered to be connected with a desire for a challenging job (Travaglianti et al., 2017) which varies among participants and therefore requires clear indications of the required learning associated with highly developmental jobs to allow individuals to decide whether that's what they seek or not (Aryee & Chu, 2012).

According to the needs-supplies fit, organizations generally meet Gen Z's demands in some aspects. Adaptations should be considered for the provision of mentorship, facilitated integration by supervisors, and offering the chance for versatility during onboarding. This strongly goes along with transformational leadership that encompasses "individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, [and] intellectual stimulation" (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023), since adaptations require the consideration of individual preferences among the Gen Z workforce through superiors.

Understanding Gen Z's Priorities

A variety of desires and individual preferences make each person prioritize different practices. To answer SQ3 "What expectations does Gen Z hold for the onboarding program as a result of their work values?", general preferences and combinations with other practices are explored. Generally, the highest-ranked work values among participants in this generation were flextime, job interest, positive relationships with coworkers and receiving benefits like vacation, sick leave, pension and insurance. Conversely, working for an innovative employer

was considered the least important. These varied work values are not possessed by each person to the same degree, hence there are many combinations of work values within individuals of the Gen Z workforce that can be used to characterize them. Having revealed these patterns, it highlights the necessity of more nuanced HR practices that consider the varied preferences in the workforce.

In more detail, individuals who solely prioritize flextime pay less attention to work conditions at the office. They emphasize their personal work-life balance over a comfortable, clean and modern environment. Another aspect of work-life balance that other personas mainly focus on is to not be overworked to exhaustion, which makes them place less importance on all other aspects of the job. Individuals who do not care about remote work possibilities at all, in return value work conditions at the office more and want to be accepted as a member. It is likely that those people like working on-site and value interpersonal connection. Also connected to the social domain are the members of Gen Z who prefer to be accepted as a member, have positive relationships with colleagues and receive guidance from a supervisor. Conversely, they care a little less about career and skill development opportunities.

The given diverse combinations of priorities make it difficult to generalize across the entire Gen Z workforce. All these varying characterizations of Gen Z workers present a good reason why individualization of onboarding practices is crucial to create a satisfying experience for everyone.

Practical Implications - Connecting Gen Z Work Values and Needs-Supplies Fit

Bringing together the findings of all subquestions, possibilities for improvements of the needs-supplies fit are connected with dominant work values and their combinations within Gen Z employees. Not only highlighting points for attention when onboarding Gen Z, but also concrete recommendations for actions combined with an outlook on possible outcomes are supposed to guide organizations' design of their programs for newcomers. An overview of

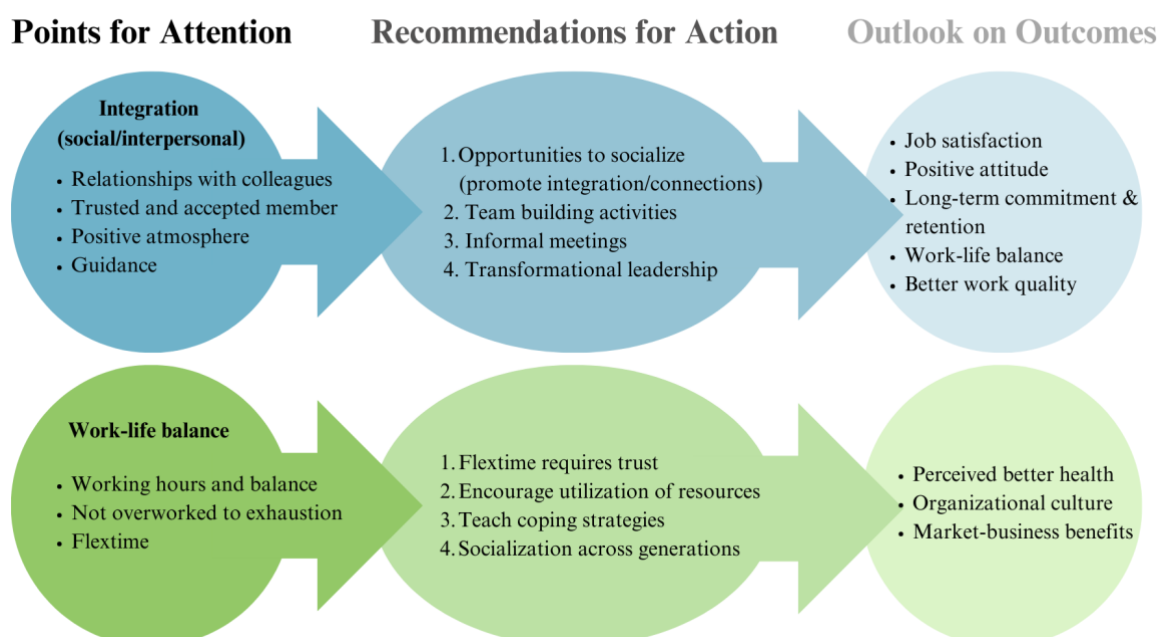
now presented areas for proposed change “integration” and “work-life balance” can be found in Figure 5. It shows the points for attention resulting from previous analyses with corresponding suggested adaptations and their possible outcomes, which will be elaborated on in more detailed in the following discussion.

Integration

Firstly, Gen Z highly values relationships with their colleagues which can be connected with their desire for a positive atmosphere. “A fun work environment with a positive team atmosphere and supportive relations with colleagues and superiors” (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) is what this generation mainly expects from a new employer. If an employee consequently cares about interpersonal connections, they usually also care about being accepted and trusted as a member and guided by a fair supervisor. This focus on social interaction at the workplace, weakens the importance of career and development opportunities for that employee.

Figure 5

Overview Practical Implications



Consequently, during the onboarding phase it is important to primarily promote the integration into a new team with the help of a supervisor, which today does not seem to meet the demands of Gen Z. New hires see their supervisor or manager as a representative of the company, therefore putting effort into building a relationship with the newcomer positively influences their perception of the organization as a whole (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). Organizations can enable smooth integration within the new work environment by fostering strong connections with actors from various levels. Managers require transformational leadership qualities (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) that allow them to encourage performance and make employees engage in citizenship behavior by acquiring knowledge about the individual needs of team members (Travaglianti et al., 2017). Their desire for guidance through a supervisor also corresponds to their expectations to “grow their knowledge which will help them develop laterally through the organization” (Barhate & Dirani, 2021), hence fosters interpersonal connections. Further, to promote citizenship and a sense of belonging, leaders should increasingly organize team-building activities and opportunities for Gen Z to socialize with colleagues on their terms (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). Gupta et al. (2017) and Jeske and Olson (2022) conclude that leadership and socialization are the crucial social resources that can reduce one’s turnover intention and lead to performance increases. Therefore, suggestions surround the customization of onboarding processes to individual needs through informal meetings, recognition of strengths and engaging tasks through their leader. Facilitating socialization, proper integration into a team and support from a supervisor are associated with “employee job satisfaction, work-life balance, commitment and intention to remain in the organization (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). Gabriellova and Buchko (2021) expands on this finding by concluding that not only the relationship between employee and leader will improve, but also an increase in effort, a more positive attitude and better work quality. The improvement of the onboarding experience to meet the expectations of Gen Z

employees in terms of integration will make them feel more welcomed and supported and deliver several leveraging effects on organizational practices.

Work-Life Balance

Secondly, findings point towards a desire for working hours and a general balance that allow for the management of both work and private life. Even though data collection did not allow for significant findings on the status quo of the needs-supplies fit, being in high demand and considered a high work value, work-life balance appears to play a crucial role for Gen Z at the workplace. Correspondingly, they value the possibility of flextime which allows them to be more responsive to both worlds. Someone who seeks a job that enables flexibility cares a little less about the work conditions present on-site. Flexibility and work-life balance are interlinked topics that are dominant in scientific research about the desires of Gen Z as summarized in Acheampong (2021) and confirmed by the findings of Lasseben and Hofmann (2023). According to Chillakuri (2020), flexibility should not be rejected if work is unaffected and highlights trust as the basis for flexible work arrangements which can take place in the form of varying working times or evolve around a core working time. Zheng et al. (2015) propose that management needs to encourage employees to make use of work-life balance policies like flextime, training, mentoring or a more individualized job design upon consolation to better handle different situations and meet needs. Through development programs it is suggested to support employees to “harness or develop [psychological] coping strategies” (Zhen et al., 2015) during training or advisory sessions. This will also allow to address Gen Z’s desire to not be overworked to exhaustion, which was found to be of importance in this study. Further, socialization with coworkers is associated with work-life balance (Cesário & Chambel, 2019), while interaction with other generations especially allows for knowledge transfer on this topic (Zhen et al., 2015). For the onboarding phase, it is then crucial to provide information on all resources the employees can make use of, but also to foster interaction and teach them ways to better cope with the workload individually.

If organizations provide opportunities for a better work-life balance and establish a culture that truly cares about an individual's needs, better health and wellbeing will be perceived by the employees (Zhen et al., 2015). In sum, Barhate & Dirani (2021) highlight that organizational management has a significant influence on employees' personal lives and the possibility of e.g. flextime would allow them to settle and manage life outside the new workplace during the onboarding phase. Implementation of corresponding policies hold the potential to change the organizational culture while also increasing organizational performance known as "market-business benefits" e.g. productivity, profits, image, stakeholder relationships, market share and more (Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016). Flexibility from the organizational side and a supportive culture will allow Gen Z to bring job performance and personal wellbeing into harmony, making it a necessity to listen to individual needs to create satisfying solutions on the personal level and gain organizational benefits.

Dual-Sided Approach

This research sheds light on the importance of a more personalized onboarding experience for Gen Z workers that is tailored to the individual employee. Onboarding encompasses formal and informal practices or resources that are supposed to facilitate newcomer adjustment and help them navigate the new environment (Klein & Polin, 2012). The primary challenge for HR practitioners is to find the right mix between these formally required and informal, personal onboarding practices. Perrin (2023) and Jeske and Olson (2022) agree on the approach of splitting the onboarding phase into one segment that focuses on communicating the general organizational mission, values, and priorities to every newcomer while another segment ensures optimal socialization through personalized messaging, role-specific and social introductions and supervision on performance and development. Generally, a positive onboarding experience is found to evoke engagement and positive attitudes within employees that consequently lead to a longer-term commitment to

their job and the organization (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Perrin, 2023). Thus, designing the onboarding process to the liking of Gen Z workers by employing a dual-sided approach will also meet their desire for individualism and address differences.

The adaptations presented originate in workers themselves, therefore design changes are likely to achieve a greater fit between the organization and the employee. The workforce presents a valuable source to inform, update and enhance onboarding processes since their opinion is invaluable in setting the baseline for the program's effectiveness (Jeske & Olson, 2022; Perrin, 2023). Newcomers of Gen Z expect a more personalized, consistent, and timely experience that sets them up for success in their new position (Chillakuri, 2020; Jeske & Olson, 2022). Complementary fit, according to the needs-supplies perspective, is achieved when "an organization satisfies individuals' needs, desires, or preferences" (Kristof, 1996). Hence theoretically, a closer resemblance between what is supplied by the organization during the onboarding and what is demanded by the newcomer holds potential to positively influence the P-O fit. The applicability of these findings requires sufficient resources, since individualization of practices and attention to individual circumstances or preferences are time intensive. In reality, organizations need to analyze whether they can afford to increase effort during the onboarding process and weigh it against expected outcomes. The long-term consequences of a high P-O fit which needs to be sustained or gradually built up from the beginning, are greater satisfaction and a weaker intention to quit (Acheampong, 2021; Kristof, 1996). Therefore, the dual-sided approach which closer resembles what Gen Z desires but requires efficient planning of resources, holds potential to also bring the benefits of a high P-O fit.

Theoretical Implications

Besides the primary objective of this research to provide practical implications, it also contributes to the general understanding of how Gen Z perceived their onboarding program and what they generally consider important for a job. The discussions surrounded the

importance of integration and work-life balance, underscoring the need for a more personalized onboarding experience according to Gen Z. This is argued to align with a dual-sided approach that pays attention to formal and informal onboarding practices. Hence, the presented findings support, acknowledge and emphasize this need as previously found by Perrin (2023), Jeske and Olson (2022) and other studies that advocate for more flexible and adaptive HR practices to meet the diverse needs of the modern workforce. Since some weak matches for the needs-supplies fit and a lack of stimulation during onboarding were found, this study confirms the notion of generational differences that are left unattended by outdated structures within organizations as introduced in the beginning (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). A thematically similar but qualitative study done by Chillakuri (2020) also found work-life balance and personal connections among other things to be crucial expectations of the Gen Z workforce for effective onboarding programs. Consequently, consistent results across different research methods confirm the requirement for adaptations to current practices. In contrast to the studies of Barhate and Dirani (2021) and Mărginean (2021) who found training and mentorship opportunities to be crucial considerations of Gen Z for personal and professional growth, it was surprising to find that Gen Z places less importance on such when compared to other demands. This divergence showcases the complexity and variability within an entire generation's expectations, making it difficult to generalize and therefore require further investigation of motives.

Finally, transformational leadership describes qualities a manager or supervisor should possess in order to allow for this more individualized consideration within onboarding processes for Gen Z (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023, Travaglianti et al., 2017). Theories on effective leadership need to emphasize a more personalized approach to better accommodate the generational needs during onboarding, enhance integration and overall fit with the new organization. By applying the complementary needs-supplies fit of the P-O fit in the onboarding context, this study expands possibilities for more specific application of this

theory since argumentations surrounded how tailored programs to accommodate Gen Z can potentially provide positive organizational and individual outcomes.

Limitations and Further Research

The scale of this study was unable to fully grasp the characteristics and behaviors of an entire generation. Especially cultural, gender or educational differences that were left unattended during this research and do not allow for a generalization of findings across the entirety of Gen Z. Additionally, the lack of context during the sampling process by not specifying work industry or specific organizational environments resulted in a diverse range of opinions that possibly impacted the strength of results. A more defined target group with few characteristics allows for a more tailored questionnaire that may lead to more accurate findings that can be generalized across this subgroup. Further, the adaptation of items and composition of survey scales from different scientific articles perhaps introduced inconsistencies in the data collection process. Since the Q-sort methodology did not follow the traditional approach entirely, results do not provide reasons for the subjectivity in answers and patterns.

Further research could expand on the findings of this study. First, future studies could encompass measuring P-O fit prior and post-implementation of these onboarding adaptations to assess their practical impact. Second, more research needs to be done on the impact of gender, culture, nationality, education and so on that underlie work values and demands in order to discover the entire range of diversity within this generation. Future research should continue to explore the needs-supplies fit to enhance our understanding and application of effective onboarding practices. An additional layer for interpretation could be achieved when combining the quantitative measuring of needs-supply fit and work values with qualitative methods to benefit of increased background reasoning.

Regardless of the limitations of this study, findings helped in shedding a light on the benefits of an increased person-organization fit through the individualization of onboarding and mark a starting point for further investigation.

Conclusion

This research found two key areas for improvement in onboarding practices and therefore mainly pursued the primary objective of providing practical implications for organizations. The two points for attention “integration” and “work-life balance” were found to summarize multiple overlapping demands and prominent work values of Gen Z while simultaneously considering the status quo of the needs-supplies fit. The suggested balance of the dual-sided approach with a consistent yet tailored informal onboarding experience ensures that it meets the diverse needs of the Gen Z workforce and simultaneously takes the necessities of formal organizational entrance into consideration. The assigned supervisor is one of the first points of contact and accompanies them along every step of the way during the onboarding phase at the new workplace, thus being a crucially influential actor for the new hire to turn to. Returning to the question that guided this research “How can organizations adapt their onboarding programs to ensure a better person-organization fit with Gen Z workers?”, findings can be reduced to a simpler answer. Previously provided suggestions for organizations and discussions can be summarized into the general need to consider the individual personalities of Gen Z employees, supporting the dual-sided approach with a focus on individuality and transformational leadership qualities. Despite the diversity within the Gen Z workforce, this will allow for a satisfying onboarding program where differences and preferences are addressed and acknowledged.

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Appendix A

Survey Items Measuring Demands and Supplies

DEMANDS	SUPPLIES (ONBOARDING)
<i>How important do you consider the following aspects about a job? (1-not at all important / 5-extremely important)</i>	<i>To what extent did you experience the following practices <u>during your onboarding/welcoming?</u> (1-non / 5-greater extent)</i>
Resources	Resources
Financial	Financial
1. Receive benefits or monetary bonuses besides a fixed monthly income	1. I received helpful and complete information about benefits and bonuses
Physical	Physical
2. Have good working equipment	2. I had good working equipment
3. Work from home	3. I had the opportunity to work from home
4. Quick integration into a team through a supervisor	4. A supervisor quickly integrated me into the team
5. To have everything I need to work or at least know where to get it	5. On my first day, I had everything I needed to start working (or knew where to get it)
Psychological	Psychological
6. Do a stimulating job	6. The onboarding program was stimulating
7. Be treated with honesty and respect	7. I was treated with honesty and respect from the start
8. Work in a positive atmosphere	8. I worked in a positive atmosphere
Opportunities	Opportunities
Task-related	Task-related
9. Follow training courses to extend my skills	9. I followed training courses to extend my skills
10. Be versatile	10. I had the chance to be versatile
11. Be autonomous	11. I had the chance to be autonomous
12. Have an assigned mentor	12. I was welcomed by a buddy/mentor
Interpersonal	Interpersonal
13. Be recognized by my superiors	13. I felt recognized by my superiors
14. Receive on-going feedback about my performance from my supervisor	14. I received on-going feedback about my performance from my supervisor

15. Regular check-ins with my supervisor to answer any questions I may have

16. Balance my private life and my professional life

17. Have working hours that allow me to manage my private life

15. My supervisor checked in with me regularly to answer any questions I may have

16. I was able to balance my private life and my professional life

17. Working hours allowed me to manage my private life

Appendix B

Survey Items for the Q-Sort to Rank Work Values

(Work-life balance)

1. I expect to have the possibility of flexible organization of weekly working hours
(flextime)
2. I expect to have the possibility to work from home
3. I expect to receive benefits like vacation, sick leave, pension, insurance
4. I expect to not be overworked to exhaustion
5. I expect to have a job that is personally very interesting to me

(Career & Development)

6. I expect regular training opportunities that are relevant to my career
7. I expect to be guided by a fair supervisor
8. I expect feedback about my work
9. I expect opportunities for advancements and promotion
10. I expect recognition/appreciation from management

(Work environment)

11. I expect to work for an innovative employer (novel work practices / forward-thinking)
12. I expect positive relationships with my colleagues
13. I expect comfortable, clean, and modern work conditions
14. I expect to be provided with all necessary and up-to-date equipment
15. I expect to be accepted as a member and trusted accordingly

(extra item – financial reward)

16. I expect a high competitive salary