
Gen Z Legal Talent, How Indonesian Law Firm Can Effectively Retain This Generation in The Firm

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Abstract

The research examines the perceived and real engagement of Gen Z lawyers at a small boutique law firm in Jakarta. To assess both perceived and real engagement of the Gen Z lawyers at a small boutique law firm in Jakarta, the writer is conducting a research by using a mixed-methods approach of structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews to measure the seven dimensions of engagement framework – Pride to the Company, Positive Criticism, Proactive Attitude, Energy, Resilience, Action to Promote the Company, and Intention to Stay. The research exposed that although the questionnaire shows a moderate to high level engagement, the interview presents facts that are indicating lower behavioral engagement in most key indicators. The discrepancies (as measured through the gap score) suggest that the Gen Z lawyers may in theory express their engagement but still facing a real challenge in practicing the same, as may be triggered by lack of psychological safety, superficial emotional connection, low initiative taking behavior, and fatigue. However, the research also uncovers positive facts of hidden strength in both resilience and intention to stay, which suggest the Gen Z lawyers potential for long-term commitment to the firm, if it is nurtured correctly. To enhance the retention, law firm must bridge the engagement gaps and accommodate Gen Z generational needs of psychological safety, purposeful work, empowerment, career development, wellbeing, and social connections.

Keywords: Gen Z, Legal Talent, Employee Engagement, Retention Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

As more than quarter of Indonesian population is dominated by Gen Z, the employment landscape is forced to cater the needs of this generation, including needs that are not sparks as important engagement factors by the previous generation, such as social impact, work- life balance, and mental health factor (Bloomberg Law, 2023).

Although this generation mostly put their strong interest on the creative or technology savvy profession, by looking at the number of new law students in Indonesia each year (*Sekretariat Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi*, 2020), apparently the prestigious image offered by conservative profession such as lawyer still catch the attention this young generation.

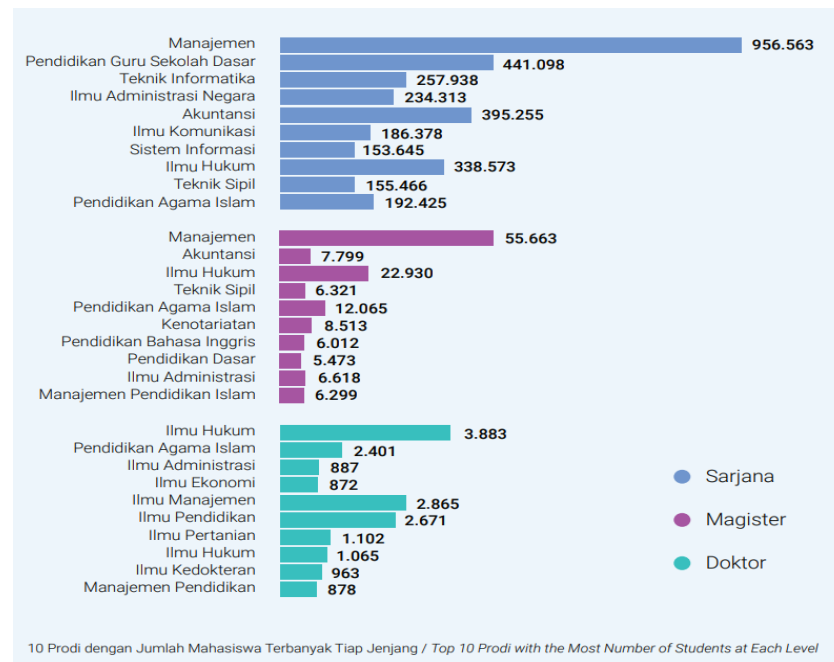


Figure 1. Top 10 academic program based on the number of students in each program level
(source: (Education, 2020))

Conservative professions such as lawyers are often strongly associated with a profit-oriented image, where the pursuit of revenue is commonly achieved by tipping the scale of work-life balance and glorifying a high-performance culture that equates long hours with dedication. This negative practice is primarily driven by a singular performance metric: billable hours, which measures the number of hours an attorney can charge clients (Chaudhury, 2021; Brooks, 2016; Wallace & Kay, 2020; Organ, 2014; Roussy & Tiedtke, 2022). The pressure to meet billable targets often leads to burnout, mental fatigue, and dissatisfaction, particularly among junior associates. Scholars have long criticized the use of billable hours as a metric that rewards quantity over quality, fostering a toxic environment where overwork is normalized (Wallace & Kay, 2020; Organ, 2014). Despite these critiques, the structure remains firmly entrenched, largely because of its simplicity and profitability for the firm's leadership (Brooks, 2016).

Strong resistance to this culture has historically never come from senior generations—such as baby boomers, Gen X, or older millennials—who now occupy leadership positions within law firms (Côté et al., 2022; Wilkins & Ferrer, 2017; Gorman, 2020; Vivian Chen, 2023; Deloitte, 2023). These cohorts have internalized the profession's rigid hierarchy and performance metrics, often replicating the same systems under which they were trained. However, Generation Z is now entering the legal workforce with radically different expectations, values, and goals. This generation places greater emphasis on mental health, purpose-driven work, inclusivity, and flexible work models (Deloitte, 2025; Mercer, 2025). Their growing resistance is not merely passive but actively challenges the foundational assumptions of traditional legal practice (Chen, 2023).

As institution that consists of legal professionals, law firm's growth is highly correlates with the number of fee earners in the firm, and lawyers, as a profession that attached to individual expertise requires significant time to excel. The firm's inability to retain its young lawyers makes it is not possible to sufficiently dispersed the firm's expertise and experience to the younger generation of lawyers, who one day will take over the top management position.

By using a research sample of one small size law firm in Jakarta with the total number of 25 to 30 lawyers, in 2023 alone the firm has written off almost 48,47% of this young lawyers' total working hours just for the purpose of learning (Tanaka & Sullivan, 2023; Prasetya, 2022; IBM Institute, 2020; Deloitte, 2023; Wilkins & Ferrer, 2017).

In Jakarta, this generational tension is manifesting in real, structural challenges for law firms. As institutions built upon legal expertise and mentorship, law firms rely heavily on the long-term retention of young talent to ensure knowledge transfer and organizational continuity (Susskind, 2021; Bohorquez et al., 2021; Chan, 2020; Gallup (2021); Prasetya, 2022). However, many firms are struggling to retain their Gen Z lawyers, whose turnover has become increasingly frequent. The inability to retain young lawyers not only creates gaps in succession planning but also hampers the firm's capacity to build institutional memory and sustainable client relationships (Susskind, 2021; Bohorquez et al., 2021). If this pattern continues, firms may face stagnation or collapse in leadership pipelines (Chan, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to assess the level of engagement among Gen Z lawyers at a small law firm in Jakarta and identify key factors that could influence their decision to stay in the firm. By understanding these factors, the research aims to help the firm develop strategies to retain Gen Z lawyers, ensuring a more sustainable and engaged workforce. The findings will provide valuable insights for law firms in managing generational differences, promoting a culture that meets the needs of younger employees, and creating an environment where Gen Z lawyers can thrive and remain long-term. This study's implications could guide other law firms in Indonesia and globally in addressing the evolving expectations of younger legal professionals.

RESEARCH METHOD

The author chooses to use qualitative research approach to focus on the Gen Z lawyers in a law firm. For the research, data collection in the first stage will be conducted via structured questioner to the Gen Z lawyers in the law firm and will be followed with interviews of the 15 (fifteen) Gen Z lawyers. The data collected from the questioner and interview will be evaluated to map out the issues. The information obtained from interviews is expected to provide an in-depth perspective of the respondents towards the firm. Thematic analysis and content analysis will be used to identify and analyse the pattern or themes from interview. Both analysis types is used to ensure the researcher can effectively extract the information provided by the respondent in their responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generation Z Characteristic in a Workplace

Generalization of Gen Z has constructed a common pre-conception of their character in a workplace, such as not being care about stability and change their workplace easily. However,

the result made in Poland in 2017 by Anna Dolot on 1,162 respondents show a different conclusion, that this generation is willing to work in the same company their entire life if the job were attractive (Dolot, 2018).

By taking the specific geographical limit of Indonesia, the study made by Dwidienawati & Gandasari (2014) confirms the similar result, that stability serves as important factors for Gen Z in Indonesia when entering the workplace. Important factors such as money will serves as a motivation that push this generation to work hard and put up with the idea of relocation for a better opportunity. When they are working in workplace, they expect to be able to have an open communication with their superior (Limited, 2023).

Setting off from the three important models that have been developed and considered as celebrated research in measuring employee engagement (i.e., Aon-Hewitt Model, Gallup Q12, and Deloitte Model), the research made by Febriansyah & Ginting (2021) using the specific samples of Indonesian companies have developed a holistic coverage of employee engagement dimensions that fits the culture and environment of Indonesia. The theory is measuring employee engagement level based on the seven indicators (i) Energy, (ii) Pride to the Company, (iii) Intention to Stay, (iv) Proactive Attitude, (v) Positive Criticism, (vi) Resilience, and (vii) Action to Promote the Company.

Level of Gen Z lawyers engagement of young lawyers

To measure the Gen Z lawyers engagement of young lawyers, the writer has conducted qualitative research to 15 (fifteen) lawyers who work in a small law firm in Jakarta. At the first layer, the research is conducted by using questionnaire comprising of twenty-eight questions that are carefully crafted to brought up the respondent's immediate inner comprehension towards the firm as an institution. Further, to dive deeper into the issue of young lawyers' engagement, the author is using one-on-one interview to each of the respondent, allowing a deeper analysis and ability to compile qualitative data that will be used to measure the level of each indicator in the working theory (i.e., 7 (seven) dimensions of employee engagement).

To enable creating a standardized analysis, the writer uses the following range of average score across both methods:

Table 1. Range of Average Score

	Score Range	
	Questionnaire (Max ~ 20)	Interview (Max ~15)
High Engagement	Same or higher than 16	above 9
Mid-Level Engagement	14.00 until 15.99	6.00 – 8.99
Low Engagement	14	below 6

Source: Data processed

By using a simple average method, the following are result of both questionnaire and interview of the respondents:

Table 2. Questionnaire and Interview Results

Dimension	Average Score			
	Questionnaire	Category	Interview	Category
Pride to the Company	16.73	High	5.73	Low
Positive Criticism	16.60	High	4.93	Low
Proactive Attitude	15.73	Mid	5.33	Low
Energy	15.20	Mid	5.47	Low
Resilience	15.13	Mid	9.53	High
Action to Promote the Company	14.87	Mid	5.20	Low
Intention to Stay	9.33	Low	9.80	High

Source: Data processed

The comparison of questionnaire and interview result of the respondents essentially showing clear pattern that on paper the respondents' reception generally positive and leaning toward moderate to high engagement. However, due to the impact of the respondents' low emotional and behavioural engagement (as reflected in the interview), the overall engagement level will appear stay at the moderate level (or lower).

To support the idea, the author has quantified the results using a straightforward point value of High = 3; Mid = 2; Low = 1

Table 3. Straightforward Point Value

	High	Mid	Low	Total score (max 21)
Questionnaire	2 x 3	4 x 2	1 x 1	15/21
Interview	2 x 3	0 x 2	5 x 1	11/21

Source: Data processed

Average score = $(15 + 11) : 2 / 21 = 13/21$ or equivalent to 62%, which is in line with the moderate range of engagement.

What Needs to be Aware to Increase the Engagement?

The writers believe to increase the engagement, it is necessary for the firm to start with dimensions that show significant gaps between perceived engagement (questionnaire) and the expressed sentiment (interviews).

Essentially the gap score highlighting the difference between Gen Z's perceived engagement and expressed behaviour, which further reveals hidden misalignments dimensions where Gen Z lawyers' engagement can be considered as superficial or even showing disengagement.

Based on the perimeter where the highest questionnaire score of 16.73-point scale and the interview is 9.80-point scale, the interview result will be standardized by scaling up the questionnaire.

Table 4. Interview Result

Dimension	Questionnaire Score	Interview Score	Interview Standardized Score	Gap Score
Positive Criticism	16.6	4.93	8.42	8.18
Pride to the Company	16.73	5.73	9.78	6.95
Proactive Attitude	15.73	5.33	9.10	6.63
Action to Promote the Company	14.87	5.2	8.88	5.99
Energy	15.2	5.47	9.34	5.86
Resilience	15.13	9.53	16.27	-1.14
Intention to Stay	9.33	9.80	16.73	-7.40

Source: Data processed

Based on the gap analysis between questionnaire and interview result, the writers find that several dimensions are critical for improvement. The highest score found in Positive Criticism, which signify lack of psychological safety among the Gen Z lawyers in the firm. Furthermore, similar significant gap in Pride to the Company and Proactive Attitude showing (i) the Gen Z lawyers' emotional connection to the firm maybe more 'aspirational' than genuine, and (ii) hesitation to take initiative. As for the last two concerning identifier, high gap in Action to Promote the Company and Energy showing the respondents' low internal motivation to promote the firm and fatigue.

Positive discrepancy appears in two dimensions of resilience and Intention to Stay, which demonstrating the respondents' coping ability with the pressure in the firm and stronger loyalty, which both can be considered as the firm's hidden assets.

In conclusion, it is best for the firm to start to improve top three dimensions that have significant gap score (high risks), such as positive criticism, pride to the company, and proactive attitude. Following improvement of said to three dimensions, the improvement can be expanded to cover dimension with the mid-risks such as action to promote the company and energy (Company, 2022).

What Needs to do by the Firm?

Different with the previous generation, Gen Z expects to be heard, trusted and have a meaningful involvement to their workplace (Gallup, 2021; Edmonson, 1999). When they decided to stay in a workplace, the organization often offers values that are align with their social or personal values, nurture an open feedback culture, and provide a visible growth pathway (Deloitte, 2023). As burnout and rigid structures are often reason of their early leave, work-life balance and mental health issue becoming a critical concern of this generation (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Further, a sense of belonging and community also important consideration to strengthens this generation retention in a workplace (IBM, 2020). Recent

research made by Deloitte, 2025 and Mercer, 2025, reinforces the findings as it is highlighting this generation pursuit of purpose, well-being, working flexibility, and work culture that moved by value (Value, 2020).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that essentially, Gen Z intention to stay is driven by psychological safety, purposeful work, empowerment, career development, wellbeing, and social connection.

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To retain the Gen Z lawyers in the firm, the writes believe that it is necessary for the firm's strategy to address both the critical engagement gaps and Gen Z retention drives. The following are a table of strategy proposal to cater both factors:

Table 5. Strategy Proposal Results

Dimensions	Aligned Gen Z Retention Drivers	Law Firm's Strategy
Positive Criticism	Psychological safety	• Train management (partners) to listen. • Create safe channel for Gen Z lawyers to give critics. • In the long run, build an open feedback culture
Pride to the Company	Purposeful work	• Reinforce the firm's values. • Involve Gen Z lawyers in pro bono projects. • Share client feedback and end result in lawyers' meeting, to provide visible value and appreciation for the Gen Z lawyers.
Proactive Attitude	Empowerment, Career Development	• Increase the gen Z lawyers responsibility in the project, such as liaising with clients in a non-sensitive matter or managing timelines. • Let Gen Z lawyers to lead or plan non-billable projects such as internal meetings, career fair, or mentoring events. • Provide a clear development tracks.
Action to Promote the Company	Social Connection	• Increase peer engagement by way of mentorship for career development (senior with junior lawyer) and funding internal social events for Gen Z lawyers small gathering. • Create an internal networking event for the Gen Z lawyers to meet partners and listen to their personal career stories. • Encourage personal promotion of the firm by the Gen Z lawyers among other through content co-creatin program where the firm let young lawyers to actively provide content in the firm's social media.

Dimensions	Aligned Gen Z Retention Drivers	Law Firm's Strategy
Energy	Wellbeing, Career Development	• Monitor the Gen Z lawyers workloads. • More flexible working hours. • Allocate time in a week where the Gen Z lawyers can use the free time for their career development. • Provide funding and free time to develop peer wellbeing with the activity that is proposed by Gen Z lawyers.
Resilience	Wellbeing	• Highlight the Gen Z lawyers resilience in any lawyers meeting to recognize their endurance.
Intention to Stay	Career Development, Purposeful Work	• Conduct a stay interview to regularly get insight on the Gen Z situation. • Involve the Gen Z lawyers in firm initiatives that gives contribution to legal awareness, such as policy drafting.

Source: Data processed

Through the implementation of the abovementioned strategies, the firm can respond not only the generational shifts but also secure the firm's talent. Catering to Gen z needs means the firm must be ready to structure a modern type of benefits that fits to the Gen z expectations such as ecosystem of growth, trust, and purpose of existence. Through the significant reformation, in the long run the firm will be able to sustain its excellence while cultivating the best young talents.

CONCLUSION

Using the dual method of questionnaire and interview the research has provided understanding on the perspective and engagement level of Gen Z lawyers in the conservative working environment of Indonesian law firm. Significant difference between perceived engagement as gathered through the questionnaire and expressed engagement as revealed in the in-depth interviews revealing lacuna crated due to generational preferences, industry expectation, and law firm conservative working environment. By using the gap analysis score, the writer is able to identify 5 (five) critical areas where the difference between perceived and actual engagement is very defined, while only Resilience and Intention to Stay appear as dimensions that have strong behavioral outcomes compared to the questionnaire outcomes.

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