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## Well-Being in Gen Y Employee Retention: A Critically Appraised Topic

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#### EDITORIAL NOTE

This critically appraised topic examines the scholarly literature that offers social scientific evidence that attention to well-being helps Gen-Y employee retention. Including a well-being component in a total rewards employee package raises measurement issues in identifying the distinct value of each of the components (such as financial compensation). So, like other critically appraised topics, the author seeks out, analyzes, and reports the best available empirical evidence on the practice. Gen-Y is singled out because low attention to well-being is suspected in their turnover rates. The results of the analysis indicate that organizations with Gen-Y employees will benefit by increasing their attention to the well-being component of a total rewards employee package.

## Well-being in Gen Y employee retention: A critically appraised topic

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#### ABSTRACT

Retention continues to be a top business concern. Retention is the ability to keep employees from voluntarily leaving. Without a workforce, companies cannot execute their mission, which results in a loss of revenue. Companies focused on the retention of their workforce use the total rewards package to retain employees. One component of the rewards package is well-being. Well-being comprises multiple components, some of which have been identified as reasons for the wave of recent resignations. Well-being is when employees “have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge” (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). My systematic review of the topic relies on scientific literature to assess whether well-being can influence the retention of Gen Y, the largest percentage of the workforce, and offers recommendations. My review of the literature found six articles that identify four components of well-being that are important to Gen Y. These components include work-life, work environment, job content, and altruism.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Does including employee well-being in the total rewards package improve workplace retention of Gen Y?

Table 1. PICO

<b>Problem</b>	Businesses are challenged to retain Gen Y employees, the largest percentage of the global workforce, to execute their mission. Businesses use their total rewards package to retain their workforce and want to know which components of the total rewards package can be used to retain their employees.
<b>Intervention</b>	Ferguson and Hoover (2023) reported multiple well-being components as reasons for resignations during the period dubbed the "Great Resignation." Understanding and implementing well-being components of the total rewards package to aid in the retention of Gen Y.
<b>Comparison</b>	The comparison is not to assess and understand if the well-being component can enhance the retention of Gen Y.
<b>Outcome</b>	Enhance the retention of Gen Y by identifying and implementing well-being components valued by Gen Y.

## BACKGROUND

Human, financial, intellectual, and physical resources are key to business success, and as reported by Klepić (2019), human resources affect business performance more than other key resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic years, which have been recognized as 2020 through 2023, a record-setting period of resignations occurred, and this period has been referred to as the "Great Resignation" (Ferguson & Hoover, 2023). Some of the top reasons identified for the resignations during this period include improved work-life balance and flexibility, a longing for improved company culture, and more money.

Gen Y is the focus group of this research because this generation represents the largest percentage (23 percent) of the worldwide population (Weforum.org, 2021). Asian countries have the largest Gen Y population and percentage, at 1.1 billion and 24 percent, respectively. Gen Y is also the largest percentage of the North American population (21 percent). This generation was born between 1981 and 2000 (Bussin, Mohamed-Padayachee, & Serumaga-Zake, 2019). Gen Y is also known as "Millennials"

and "GenMe" (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

Karl Mannheim introduced the idea of generations via the Theory of Generations (Fobian & Maloa, 2020). A generation comprises individuals of the same age range with similar ideas, problems, attitudes, and experiences, creating common value systems (Twenge et al., 2010). Generations' values are formulated in their formative childhood years and remain consistent throughout their lives (Twenge et al., 2010).

Parents of Gen Y children generally provided excessive oversight during their children's formative years (resulting in the term "helicopter parents"), which has carried over into the professional lives of Gen Y members. An unfavorable outcome of having helicopter parents is a false sense of self-confidence, which researchers have associated with being awarded participation trophies without achievement (Utami, Triady, & Suci, 2018). Some researchers suggest that the inflation of the ego of Gen Y members has produced a generation of narcissists (Twenge et al., 2010). Positive work values among Gen Y members include being

optimistic and social (Luscombe, Lewis, & Biggs, 2013; Twenge et al., 2010).

Recruitment and retention continue to be a top business concern (Luscombe et al., 2013; Marr, 2022). Replacing an employee is very expensive. The Society of Human Resource Management estimates that replacing an employee costs three to four times the person's salary (Navarra, 2022). To counteract the costly and time-consuming task of recruiting employees, some businesses focus on retention. Some studies suggest that a reward package aligned with an employee's preferences is a top retention strategy (Alhmond & Rjoub, 2020). The total rewards package (TRP) encapsulates what employees value and gain from an employer and is used to attract, motivate and retain employees (Smit, Stanz, & Bussin, 2015). Components of the total rewards package include: 1) benefits, 2) compensation, 3) development, 4) performance management and recognition, and 5) well-being (Bussin et al., 2019).

Compensation is a well-documented reward package component and is valued by Gen Y (Fobian & Maloa, 2020). Business

leaders want to identify additional components of the rewards package that can be used to retain Gen Y. Multiple well-being components were identified as reasons for resignation during the “Great Resignation.” Therefore, this review focuses on assessing well-being components that can be exploited to retain Gen Y. Well-being is when employees “have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge” (Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders, 2012: 230). A company that incorporates well-being components into its rewards package may assist with its employees’ ability to cope with life stresses and improve retention.

### SEARCH STRATEGY, METHOD, AND EVIDENCE SELECTION

I chose business databases for this review based on the nature of the problem and conducted a building-block search of ABI/INFORM and OneSearch databases. I also selected search words relevant to the review question. Thus, the search of ABI/INFORM database words included gen\* Y, retention, retain, recruit, and motivation, as well as iterations of the word multigeneration. Inclusion criteria were English, peer-reviewed, and scholarly journals published after 2009. Studies after 2009 roughly represent the mid-range for when Gen Y entered the workforce. The articles included in my review had to discuss well-being topics affecting Gen Y. I did not include geographic restrictions in the search because retention of Gen Y is a worldwide issue. After excluding duplicates, the search yielded 185 articles.

I used the same search string used for ABI/Inform to search OneSearch, which produced 2,051 articles. To reduce the results set’s size, I modified the search string to include gen\* Y, retention, retain, recruit, motivation, and rewards. I used the same inclusion criteria that I had used for ABI/Inform. In addition, OneSearch’s subject was limited to millennials and Generation Y. This search of OneSearch and the analysis using my inclusion criteria resulted in 16 additional

articles. The search results and terms can be found in Table 2.

A total of 201 articles were identified via the database searches. I identified two additional articles through snowballing. The search flow is shown in Figure 1. After I removed seven duplicates from the consolidated search results, 196 articles remained. I then carefully reviewed each

of the remaining 196 articles’ abstracts and titles for relevance to the review question and in light of the inclusion criteria. After this step, 21 articles remained. Following a full-text review of the remaining 21 articles, I eliminated 15 articles from the full-text reviews for three reasons: They were not empirical, were of poor quality, or were off topic. The six articles selected for the review are listed in Table 3.

**Table 2. Search Terms**

Database	Search String	Number of Articles Returned
ABI/INFORM Collection	(GEN* Y OR multi-generation* OR multigeneration* OR intergeneration* or generat*) AND (retent* OR retain* OR recruit* OR motivat*) AND rewards	185
Onesearch first search	(GEN* Y OR multi-generation* OR multigeneration* OR intergeneration* or generat*) AND (retent* OR retain* OR recruit* OR motivat*) AND rewards	2051
Onesearch revised search	(GEN* Y) AND (retent* OR retain* OR recruit* OR motivat*) AND rewards	16

**Figure 1. Search Flowchart**

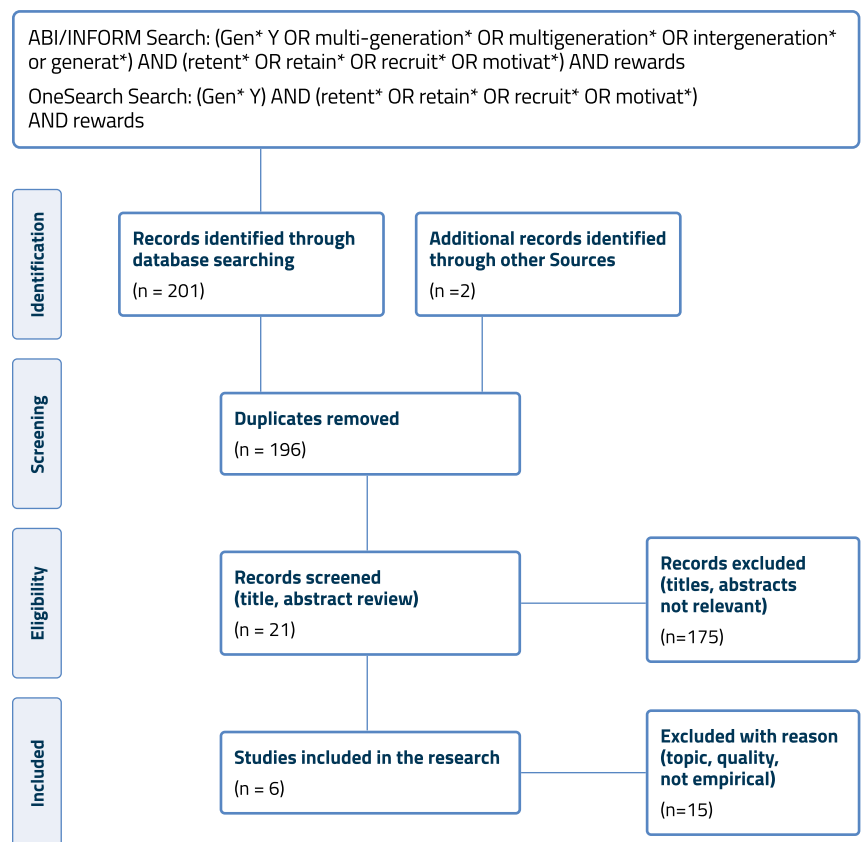


Table 4 documents my evaluation of the articles selected for this review. I examined each article's research approach, empirical basis, analysis method, and overall validity. Each of the articles included in my review received a high validity score. Five studies used a cross-sectional design, and one used a longitudinal design. For generational studies, a longitudinal design is preferred to observe the same participants over a period of time. Cross-sectional design studies observe participants for one point in time. Studies included in the review are primarily quantitative and cross-sectional studies. The samples were primarily from the United States (2) and South Africa (2). South Africa has a high unemployment rate (Reuters, 2022). All of the studies were published after 2010.

**Table 3. Articles Selected for Review**

1	Bussin, M. H. R., Mohamed-Padayachee, K., & Serumaga-Zake, P. 2019. A total rewards framework for the attraction of Generation Y employees born 1981–2000 in South Africa. <i>South African Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 17(1): 1–14.
2	Cogin, J. 2012. Are generational differences in work values fact or fiction? Multi-country evidence and implications. <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 23(11): 2268–2294.
3	Fobian, D. & Maloa, F. 2020. Exploration of the reward preferences of generational groups in a fast-moving consumer goods organisation. <i>South African Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 18(1): 1–11.
4	Luscombe, J., Lewis, I., & Biggs, H. C.. 2013. Essential elements for recruitment and retention: Generation Y. <i>Education &amp; Training</i> , 55(3): 272–290.
5	Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., Hoffman, B. J., & Lance, C. E. 2010. Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing. <i>Journal of Management</i> , 36(5): 1117–1142.
6	Utami, A. f., Triady, M. S., & Suci, R. P. N. 2018. Working values preferences among Gen-X, Y and Baby Boomers in Indonesia. <i>Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences &amp; Humanities</i> , 26: 95–105.

**Table 4. Evaluation of Overall Validity**

Authors/Research Approach	Empirical Basis	Analysis Method	Overall Validity
Bussin et al. (2019). A sequential mixed-method approach. A quantitative survey preceded qualitative interviews of 11 students.	276 college students from South Africa participated in the convenience sample, representing a 61.3% response rate. 11 participants were interviewed.	Statistical inference. Kruskal–Wallis and chi-square tests were conducted to test two research questions.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researchers' bias.
Cogin (2012). Quantitative descriptive survey.	1,000 questionnaires were mailed to all personnel of a multinational company (U.S., Australia, China, Singapore and Germany). 40.7% response rate. Gen Y's largest number of respondents (28 out of 90) were from the U.S.	Statistical inference. Means, standard deviations, analysis of covariance, multivariate analysis of covariance, and Scheffe adjustments were conducted.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researcher bias.
Fobian and Maloa (2020). Quantitative online descriptive survey.	Large consumer goods organization in South Africa. Participants were identified through convenience non-probability sampling. Of 1,994 employees, researchers used 605 responses (30.3% use rate).	Statistical inference. Internal consistency and scale reliability, various measures for factor analysis, and a general linear model involving a multivariate analysis of variance were calculated.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researchers' bias.
Luscombe et al. (2013). Quantitative online survey.	398 subjects were identified from Brisbane, Australia. The participants were selected from a large public sector organization and a large university.	Statistical inference. Principal components analysis, t-tests, and Pearson's product-moment correlation were calculated.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researcher bias.
Twenge et al. (2010). Quantitative longitudinal study.	This study examined the work values of a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school seniors in 1976. The researchers followed up with the participants in 1991 and 2006 (N = 16,507).	Statistical inference. Confirmatory factor analysis, multigroup measurement invariance, comparative fit index, invariant latent means model, and confidence intervals were calculated.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researchers bias. The longitudinal design is optimal for generational research.
Utami et al. (2018). Quantitative online survey.	429 Indonesian people were recruited for this study based on Slovin's formula of a 95% confidence level.	Statistical inference. The analysis of variance and Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference tests were calculated.	High validity. The conclusion is drawn from primary data. The study revealed no agenda or researchers bias.

## RESULTS

In this section, I summarize each article's findings pertinent to the review question. Study 1 included Gen Y South Africans employed in private and public organizations, as well as college and university students (Bussin et al., 2019). The researchers followed a mixed-method approach using quantitative and qualitative methods. An online questionnaire resulted in 276 responses, (61.3% response rate) after which 11 participants were interviewed to validate quantitative findings. Findings relevant to my review question are Gen Y values: 1) leadership and environment; 2) a safe, secure working environment; and 3) work-life balance and resources. Members of Gen Y work well alone but work better together.

Study 2 included Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y employees working for a multinational company with offices in the United States, Australia, China, Singapore, and Germany (Cogin, 2012). For this quantitative study, the researcher mailed questionnaires to all personnel for a total of 1,000. Five hundred sixty-nine questionnaires were returned (56.9% response rate). After discarding participants' questionnaires who were on the generational cusps, the author used and analyzed 407 questionnaires, resulting in a 40.7% use rate. Gen Y's largest number of respondents (28 of 90) were from the United States. Well-being findings relevant to Gen Y include 1) work environments that include supervisor feedback, 2) leisure time, 3) work-life balance, which includes flexibility, 4) a collaborative work environment with the opportunity to work independently, and 5) asceticism (i.e., living in the moment).

Study 3 included Baby Boomer, Gen X, and Gen Y employees in a large, fast-moving consumer goods organization in South Africa for this quantitative study (Fobian & Maloa, 2020). Non-union participants were identified through convenience non-probability sampling. Of the 1,994 employees, 608 (30.5%) responded to an electronic survey questionnaire. Of the 608, 3 respondents no longer wanted to participate, resulting

in a final sample of 605 (30.3%). Well-being findings relevant to Gen Y include 1) a work environment allowing them to work independently, 2) job content (challenging work), and 3) work-life balance.

Study 4 included 398 Gen Y participants from Brisbane, Australia, who participated in an online survey (Luscombe et al., 2013). The participants for this quantitative study were selected from a large public sector organization and a large university. Gen Y respondents appreciated a collaborative work environment that allows for creativity, and they valued fair and equitable companies that honor their promises. Technically up-to-date settings with open and positive managers were essential to employees' well-being. Job content (challenging and meaningful roles), work-life balance, and altruism are additional well-being attributes that increase employee satisfaction. Altruistic organizations support Gen Y's being socially aware and supporting charitable contributions.

Study 5 included Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y representatives. This longitudinal study examines the work values of 16,507 people (Twenge et al., 2010). The population is a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school seniors who were surveyed in 1976, 1991, and 2006. The most important findings from this review included the following characteristics of Gen Y members:

1) highly value their leisure time, 2) value work-life balance, 3) strive to have easy jobs with high pay, and 4) appreciate altruism on par with other generations in the study.

Study 6 included 429 Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y Indonesians who were recruited to participate via an online survey (Utami et al., 2018). The participants for this quantitative study were selected from a large public sector organization and a large university. They valued work-life balance, which includes a flexible job. The opportunity for vacation or free time, in general, was significant. Gen Y members tended to value easy jobs with high pay. They also wanted to have a challenging and interesting job that positively affected their organizations. They value altruism, seeking out companies that contribute positively to the environment and their communities.

The findings are summarized in Table 5. All articles supported the findings that work-life balance and work environment are important to Gen Y employees. Job content and altruism were identified in four and three of the articles, respectively.

In summary, the six articles contributed to answering the question, "Does including employee well-being in the total rewards package improve workplace retention of Gen Y?" The studies identified four factors of well-being: 1) work-life balance,

**Table 5. Findings Summary of Gen Y Factors**

Number	Authors	Work life	Work Environment	Job Content	Altruism
1	Bussin et al. (2019)	X	X		
2	Cogin (2012)	X	X		
3	Fobian & Maloa (2020)	X	X	X	
4	Luscombe et al. (2013)	X	X	X	X
5	Twenge et al. (2010)	X	X	X	X
6	Utami et al. (2018)	X	X	X	X
	Studies Supporting the Finding	6	6	4	3

2) work environment, 3) job content, and 4) altruism. Including these well-being components in the TRP provides options for helping employees cope with life stresses, for supporting self-esteem and motivation, and for fostering inclusivity that buttresses retention efforts.

### **Finding 1: Work-Life Balance**

All studies found work-life balance to be an essential motivation for Gen Y members. They value freedom and do not view work as the most critical part of their lives. In contrast to generations whose work was central to their lives (i.e., who lived to work), Gen Y members work to live. They value the option of working flexible hours to achieve their goals.

In terms of career advancement, people in Gen Y have an interest in several options. They would advance their careers through options that are internal to their employers, such as lateral job moves, job rotations, and mentorships. They also would look to external advancement options, such as using formal college courses and informal opportunities (e.g., mentoring and team building). Gen Y members want the flexibility to manage their busy lives. They tend to have purchased homes with their partners, who most likely have full-time jobs and families.

Balancing work and life includes allotting time for leisure and taking time away from work. This time away from work might include vacations or time to complete a formal college course. Work-life balance helps Gen Y to deal with life stresses, which increases the likelihood that they will remain with their employer. Gen Y members prefer to use their leisure time socializing with their friends instead of their co-workers.

### **Finding 2: Work Environment**

All of the studies identified the work environment as an essential factor for Gen Y members. The “right” work environment was described as fun, fair, positive, supportive, and technologically current. They appreciate frequent, small doses of communication, which has been associated with the strong parental oversight of their formative

years. Parents providing immediate feedback identified which actions they approved and which ones needed modification. Supervisors who support their staff provide a sense of belonging, respect, empowerment, and satisfaction, which affects retention.

A fair workplace for Gen Y members is one in which people feel respected and that supports trustworthiness and better teamwork. Gen Y values emphasize working collaboratively toward a common goal with a group. Gen Y members also appreciate being allowed to complete their assignments autonomously. Supervisors must be very careful not to micromanage Gen Y employees and enable them to complete tasks independently. A supportive work environment helps to reduce turnover and increase employee satisfaction.

### **Finding 3: Job Content**

Job content was identified in four of the studies as important to members of Gen Y for unrelated reasons. Two studies (3 and 4) described Gen Y as satisfied with challenging and meaningful work. Interesting and challenging assignments improve their skill sets, preparing them for future opportunities. This finding is consistent with career development as a key motivator for Gen Y members. However, Studies 5 and 6 concluded that members of Gen Y want an easy job with high pay. This perspective is corroborated in studies that identify Gen Yers as overconfident and as having a sense of entitlement.

### **Finding 4: Altruism**

Three studies (4, 5, and 6) identified altruism as an important factor. Gen Y people care about corporate social responsibility initiatives, including charitable or philanthropic responsibility. Companies supporting altruism help Gen Y employees feel good about themselves and their corporations, which supports their positive connection and loyalty to their employer.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This systematic search and review of the literature included six articles. Expanding the parameters to include more studies might identify additional or alternative well-being components that Gen Y members would value in a TRP. For example, a more extensive set of studies might have included job security and socializing opportunities among well-being components that could affect Gen Y job satisfaction and, thus, retention.

A second limitation of this review is that the studies reviewed tended to treat Gen Y monolithically. A third limitation is in the study design. Except for one study included, the study designs were cross-sectional – that is, they were representative of one point in time, were inexpensive to conduct, and could be executed quickly. However, cross-sectional studies also might confound or confuse age and generation assumptions (Twenge et al., 2010). Longitudinal studies are the converse of cross-sectional studies: They occur over time and can be difficult and costly to execute (Lindenmayer et al., 2011). Actual generational differences are more likely to be identified by studying groups of different generations over time, which is achieved through longitudinal studies (Twenge et al., 2010).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Businesses use TRPs, which include well-being components, to motivate and retain employees (Alhmod & Rjoub, 2020; Smit et al., 2015). Balancing the TRP is a strategic decision. Paying attention to the TRPs of industry competitors can help to ensure that employers achieve an effective balance. In addition, human resource management applications exist that can help employers decide which TRP offerings to include and how much expense to allot to them.

The focus of this research is “well-being.” The following recommendations may help to enhance the retention efforts of Gen Y employees. Note that these recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive, and they may be equally helpful in retaining other valued employees.

- *Work-life balance.* One outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic is that corporations have realized that remote work arrangements are feasible. However, this new work environment has complicated work-life balance because work hours are blurred. Communication and flexibility are crucial to assuring Gen Y employees that employers care. Communication could include sharing mental health phone numbers and providing information on childcare support assistance programs. At the same time, flexibility is indicated by establishing core working hours around which employees can build the flexible schedule they need (Kentz et al., 2020).
- *Work environment.* A few initiatives that could establish a positive work environment include setting clear department goals, promoting the organization’s long-term goals, and supporting diversity and inclusivity. Micromanaging of valued Gen Y employees is to be avoided, while a team orientation can offer them satisfying experiences as they complete assignments (The McCormick Group, n.d.).

- *Job content.* Job rotations can help Gen Y members achieve their goal of having interesting and challenging jobs (Hirsch, 2023). Such variation might also serve their career development motivations and enhance their loyalty to their organization.
- *Altruism.* Employers should support community volunteering activities (Twenge et al., 2010), perhaps by setting aside a day each year or each quarter for the entire organization to work together in a volunteer capacity to give back to the community.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

With retention ranked as a top management issue, executives and managers need to review their company’s retention strategies regularly. This topic review points to several research opportunities for further study of retention. First, future retention studies could determine whether the well-being components most valued by members of Gen Y differ based on a variety of variables, including country, culture, religion, and sexual orientation. Second, further research could also include the same review question for other generational groups, including Gen Z – the newest generation entering the workforce. Third, expanding the research into recruitment could examine the effects of branding, social media, and word-of-mouth on recruitment and retention. Fourth, another research question might focus on which leadership styles in an organization affect retention in different generational groups. Fifth, COVID’s effect on Gen Y employee retention is another area for review. A mass resignation occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world has entered the endemic stage, what is the effect on companies’ retention initiatives?

## CONCLUSION AND COMMENTS

The answer to the research question is that including employee well-being in the TRP does improve workplace retention of Gen Y employees. Compensation continues to be a key component of the TRP used for retention. The evidence from this review indicates that Gen Y employees also value the well-being component of the TRP, which can aid in their retention. Gen Y members value the well-being component for three reasons: to help with coping with life’s stresses, to support self-esteem and motivation, and to nurture belonging. Work is less central to the lives and identities of Gen Y members than it was to older generations. Work-life balance and leisure time allow them to pursue their interests. Although Gen Yers seek challenging and interesting jobs that can enhance their career development, the paradox in the studies’ findings for employers is that Gen Y employees also want easy jobs with high pay. Not surprisingly, a positive and supportive work environment builds trust. Although Gen Y employees work well alone, they work better in a group. And an employer’s charitable opportunities can be used to retain Gen Y employees.

Despite the generalizations in the studies’ findings, employers should not assume that all Gen Y employees want the same well-being components. These components should be offered as part of a comprehensive TRP that supports retention strategies for all employees.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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