

## Passion Or Pressure? A Closer Look At How Gen Z Relates To Their Work

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***Abstract.** Gen Z is widely portrayed as a generation that seeks meaning and personal fulfillment in their work. But does this truly stem from genuine passion—or from internal and social pressures? This study investigated Gen Z’s work motivation by comparing two forms of work passion: harmonious and obsessive. Using data from 422 Gen Z employees across Indonesia, collected via online surveys, a paired sample t-test revealed that respondents reported significantly higher levels of harmonious passion ( $M = 26.22$ ,  $SD = 4.80$ ) compared to obsessive passion ( $M = 21.45$ ,  $SD = 5.14$ ),  $t(421) = 22.77$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large effect size ( $d = 1.11$ ). These findings suggested that Gen Z was more likely to pursue work as a self-directed, meaningful endeavor rather than one driven by pressure or identity attachment. The study offers a timely reflection for Gen Z on the nature of their work engagement and provides organizations with practical insights into how to attract and retain passionate young talent. This research contributes to the broader discourse on generational work values and highlights the importance of fostering authentic motivation in the emerging workforce.*

***Keywords:** Gen Z, work passion, paired sample t-test.*

### Introduction

In recent years, Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) has emerged as a distinctive force in the workforce, characterized by their emphasis on purpose, authenticity, and personal fulfillment (Sanders, 2019). Widely portrayed as a generation that refuses to “just work for money,” Gen Z values passion as a central component of their career identity (Octavia & Sari, 2024). The urgency to understand this phenomenon has grown as employers increasingly face challenges in attracting and retaining Gen Z

talent—many of whom evaluate job offers not only based on salary but also on whether the work resonates with their personal values (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Despite the popularity of the “work with passion” narrative, little is known about the actual psychological dynamics behind Gen Z’s drive to work. From a scientific standpoint, this study responds to a growing need to examine passion not as a monolithic construct, but as a nuanced duality (Forest et al., 2011). According to Vallerand et al. (2014) work passion comprises two distinct forms: harmonious passion, which reflects an autonomous and integrative engagement with one’s work, and obsessive passion, which arises from internal pressure or external contingencies, often resulting in emotional conflict and rigidity.

While both forms can motivate effort, their psychological and behavioural consequences differ significantly (Philippe et al., 2009). However, empirical studies that compare these two types of passion within individuals—especially among Gen Z populations in non-Western contexts—remain scarce. This research aims to fill that gap by addressing the following question: Do Gen Z employees in Indonesia primarily exhibit harmonious passion or obsessive passion in their work lives? Based on existing literature, we hypothesized that Gen Z employees in Indonesia would exhibit significantly higher levels of harmonious passion than obsessive passion in their work.

This study contributes to the psychological literature by clarifying the motivational architecture of Gen Z employees—an area that remains underexplored, particularly in the Indonesian context (IDN Research Institute, 2024). Theoretically, it supports a differentiated view of work passion and helps expand the cross-cultural applicability of dualistic passion theory. By isolating the dominant type of work passion among Gen Z workers, this research provides a foundation for future studies on passion-related outcomes, such as engagement, well-being, or turnover intention (Kompas, 2021). The findings serve as a reflective tool for Gen Z individuals to better understand the nature

of their work motivation. For organizations, the insights offer a grounded basis for designing recruitment, onboarding, and engagement strategies that resonate with Gen Z's authentic values and motivational patterns.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine differences in work passion among Gen Z employees in Indonesia.

**Procedure:** Data collection was conducted over a two-month period, from February to March 2025, involving respondents from various regions across Indonesia. The online survey method allowed for wide geographical coverage and diverse participant backgrounds.

**Population and Sampling Technique:** The target population consisted of Indonesian employees from Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Participants were eligible if they (a) self-identified as Gen Z based on year of birth, and (b) had a minimum of one year of work experience. Year of birth and tenure were obtained via self-report items in the demographic section of the survey. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, focusing on accessibility and voluntary participation. The inclusion criteria focused on Gen Z employees with a minimum of one year of work experience, ensuring that participants had sufficient exposure to organizational dynamics and passion development within a professional context. In total, 422 respondents completed the survey.

**Research Variables:** The study focused on two psychological constructs: harmonious passion: the extent to which individuals engage in work voluntarily and in harmony with other aspects of life, and obsessive passion: the extent to which individuals feel compelled to engage in work due to internal pressure or external expectations.

**Data Source and Instrument:** Data were obtained through a self-report questionnaire

distributed online via SurveyMonkey and the JakPat app. The measurement of work passion was based on the scale developed by (Vallerand, 2008) which consists of 14 items, divided into two subscales: harmonious passion (7 items) and obsessive passion (7 items). Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item for harmonious passion is, *"This activity is in harmony with the other activities in my life,"* while a sample item for obsessive passion is, *"I have difficulty imagining my life without this activity."*

Before responding to the questionnaire, all participants were presented with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality assurances, and the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. Only those who agreed to the terms were allowed to proceed with the survey. This ethical procedure ensured that the study was conducted in accordance with standard psychological research ethics, including respect for autonomy and protection of participants' rights.

A pilot test was conducted prior to the main data collection to evaluate the instrument's psychometric properties. Results demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.939 for harmonious passion and 0.931 for obsessive passion, both exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. In addition, corrected item-total correlations (rit) for the harmonious passion subscale ranged from 0.820 to 0.879, while the obsessive passion subscale ranged from 0.753 to 0.892, all of which were well above the minimum criterion of 0.30. These results indicate that the instrument is both reliable and valid for use with Gen Z employees in the Indonesian context.

Data Analysis Procedure: A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of harmonious and obsessive passions within the same individuals. This statistical test was chosen to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two types of passion experienced by Gen Z employees. All analyses were

performed using JASP version 0.19.3, a free and open-source statistical software.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and normality tests were conducted for several demographic and background variables, including age, gender, education level, tenure, job position, industry type, and marital status. All variables had complete data (N = 422) with no missing responses. The average age of participants was 23.55 years (SD = 2.87), with a range from 18 to 28 years, indicating a predominantly young sample. Although a few respondents were 18 years old, their inclusion was retained for plausibility. Some Gen Z employees may have entered the workforce early—through vocational training, family business involvement, or freelance digital work, making it feasible for them to meet the one-year tenure requirement by age 18.

Gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female, with a mean of 1.536, suggesting a relatively balanced gender distribution. Education level showed a mean of 1.77 (SD = 0.96), implying that most participants were likely in undergraduate education. Tenure, or length of work experience, had a mean of 2.33 years (SD = 1.67) but displayed high positive skewness (2.166), indicating that most respondents had relatively short tenure. Shapiro–Wilk tests for all variables yielded statistically significant p-values ( $p < .001$ ), indicating non-normal distributions.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test Results for Demographic Variables**

	AGE	GENDER	EDU	TENURE	POSITION	INDUSTRY	MAR
Valid	422	422	422	422	422	422	422
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	23.547	1.536	1.768	2.325	1.140	4.806	1.187
Std. Deviation	2.870	0.499	0.962	1.669	0.694	3.064	0.403
Skewness	-0.122	-0.143	0.608	2.166	1.305	0.471	1.827
Std. Error of Skewness	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119
Shapiro-Wilk	0.953	0.635	0.670	0.749	0.718	0.957	0.480
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Minimum	18.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	1.000
Maximum	28.000	2.000	5.000	12.000	4.000	12.000	3.000

Descriptive statistics and normality tests were conducted for the two main constructs: harmonious passion and obsessive passion, each measured across 422 valid responses. As shown in the table, the mean score for harmonious passion was 26.22 (SD = 4.80), indicating a generally high level of harmonious passion among participants. In comparison, the mean score for obsessive passion was lower at 21.45 (SD = 5.14), suggesting that obsessive passion was present to a lesser extent.

The skewness values for both variables were within acceptable ranges (harmonious passion = -0.138; obsessive passion = 0.415), indicating relatively normal distribution shapes. In addition to skewness, kurtosis values for both variables fell within acceptable limits (not exceeding  $\pm 2$ ), further supporting the assumption of approximate normality. Visual inspection of boxplots and histograms revealed no extreme outliers that would violate assumptions of the t-test.

Specifically, harmonious passion exhibited a nearly symmetrical distribution, while obsessive passion showed a slight positive skew, implying a tendency toward lower obsessive passion scores among respondents. However, the Shapiro–Wilk test results for both variables were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting a deviation from normality. Nevertheless, given the large sample size ( $N = 422$ ), even minor deviations from normality can yield significant p-values.

**Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test Results for Harmonious Passion and Obsessive Passion**

	HP	OP
Valid	422	422
Missing	0	0
Mean	26.220	21.448
Std. Deviation	4.801	5.139
Skewness	-0.138	0.415
Std. Error of Skewness	0.119	0.119
Shapiro-Wilk	0.980	0.982
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	< .001	< .001
Minimum	7.000	7.000
Maximum	35.000	35.000

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare levels of harmonious passion and obsessive passion among participants. Results revealed a significant difference between the two types of passion ( $t(421) = 22.77, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = 1.11$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the effect size ranged from 0.99 to 1.23, indicating a large and precise difference between the two forms of work passion.

**Table 3. Results of Paired-Sample t-Test and Effect Size (Cohen's d) for Harmonious vs. Obsessive Passion**

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d	95% CI for Cohen's d	
							Lower	Upper
HP	- OP	22.768	421	< .001	1.108	0.053	0.987	1.229

Note. Student's t-test.

The mean score for harmonious passion ( $M = 26.22, SD = 4.80$ ) was significantly higher than that of obsessive passion ( $M = 21.45, SD = 5.14$ ), suggesting that participants experienced more harmonious than obsessive passion in their work contexts.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Harmonious and Obsessive Passion**

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
HP	422	26.220	4.801	0.234	0.183
OP	422	21.448	5.139	0.250	0.240

Although the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated a statistically significant deviation from normality ( $W = 0.987, p < .001$ ), the large sample size ( $N = 422$ ) and reasonably symmetric distributions (skewness within  $\pm 1$ ) justify the use of the t-test. The effect size (Cohen’s  $d = 1.11$ ) indicates a meaningful difference between the two constructs.

**Table 5. Normality Test for Paired Difference Between Harmonious and Obsessive Passion**

			W	p
HP	-	OP	0.987	< .001

*Note.* Significant results suggest a deviation from normality.

The findings indicate a statistically significant difference between harmonious and obsessive passion among participants, with harmonious passion ( $M = 26.22, SD = 4.80$ ) being significantly higher than obsessive passion ( $M = 21.45, SD = 5.14$ ),  $t(421) = 22.77, p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = 1.11$ . This large effect size suggests that participants are more likely to internalize their passion in a balanced and self-determined manner, rather than feeling controlled or compelled by it. These results support the notion that harmonious passion may be more prevalent—and potentially more adaptive—in the current work or life context of the respondents.

## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

The present study aimed to examine whether there is a significant difference between harmonious passion and obsessive passion among participants. The findings revealed that harmonious passion was significantly higher than obsessive passion, with a large

effect size. This suggests that, within the current sample, individuals tend to engage in work or activities out of genuine interest and internalized values, rather than being driven by uncontrollable urges or external pressure. Such a tendency reflects a more adaptive form of passion, which is known to be associated with greater psychological well-being, sustained motivation, and healthier work engagement patterns (Curran et al., 2015; Vallerand et al., 2014)

The finding that harmonious passion was significantly higher than obsessive passion among Indonesian Gen Z employees suggests that even in cultures characterized by high power distance and strong social norms (Hofstede, 2001), autonomous motivation can still emerge as the dominant driver of work engagement. This challenges assumptions that collectivist contexts necessarily suppress self-endorsed values in favor of external expectations. This finding aligns with the core proposition of self-determination theory that the need for autonomy is universal, suggesting that harmonious passion—despite emerging in a collectivist, high power distance culture—reflects the cross-cultural validity of autonomous motivation as a fundamental human drive (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### **Practical Implications**

From a practical standpoint, the dominance of harmonious passion over obsessive passion in the current sample has important ramifications for talent management in Indonesia. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (2024), youth aged 15–24 comprise more than 17% of Indonesia’s labor force, with a significant portion working in freelance, hybrid, or informal employment settings. This underscores the urgency for organizations to design work environments that resonate with Gen Z’s intrinsic values.

These results are consistent with the dualistic model of passion, which distinguishes between harmonious passion—where individuals freely choose to engage in an

activity—and obsessive passion, where the activity controls the person. The dominance of harmonious passion in this sample may reflect a context that supports autonomy and personal growth, such as a supportive organizational or academic environment. Practically, this highlights the importance for leaders, educators, and organizations to create conditions that foster harmonious passion, such as encouraging intrinsic motivation, providing autonomy support, and promoting a sense of meaningful purpose in one's work or studies.

Employers, educators, and policy-makers should foster structures that support autonomy, personal growth, and internalized motivation. These may include flexible work arrangements, purpose-driven onboarding, recognition of individual strengths, and meaningful feedback mechanisms. Importantly, minimizing excessive performance pressure and rigid hierarchical control can help prevent the development of obsessive passion, which is associated with psychological distress and burnout.

In educational settings, especially universities and vocational training centers, these findings advocate for learning environments that encourage self-directed learning, value exploration, and career adaptability—thus preparing students for careers aligned with their authentic passions rather than externally imposed paths.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes that there is a significant and substantial difference between harmonious and obsessive passion among participants, with harmonious passion emerging as the more dominant form. The results suggest that individuals are more likely to engage in their work or meaningful activities with a sense of autonomy, enjoyment, and internalized value, rather than out of compulsion or external pressure. This finding reinforces the adaptive nature of harmonious passion as proposed in the dualistic model of passion and highlights its potential role in promoting psychological well-being and sustained motivation.

Given the positive implications of harmonious passion, organizations, educational institutions, and leaders are encouraged to cultivate environments that support autonomy, personal growth, and meaningful engagement. Practical strategies may include providing employees and students with greater flexibility, recognizing individual strengths, and aligning tasks with personal values. Furthermore, reducing excessive performance pressure and rigid external demands may help prevent the development of obsessive passion. Future research could extend these findings by examining the predictors and outcomes of both types of passion across different work contexts, generations, or cultural settings.

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