



The Influence of Work Values and Resignation Intention among Generation Z Employees: The Roles of Job Satisfaction and External Employability in Sichuan, China

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Abstract

Background: In the context of industrial upgrading, it is increasingly important to understand the impact of the work values of Generation Z employees on their resignation intention. This group values growth and work-life balance, and their high mobility poses a challenge to traditional management. This study focuses on Sichuan Province and explores the influence of regional culture on their workplace behavior. **Objective:** To reveal the mechanism by which the work values of Generation Z employees in Sichuan affect their intention to resign. The core is to verify the mediating role of job satisfaction and the moderating effect of perceived external employability on the "satisfaction → resignation intention" path. **Methods:** A questionnaire survey was conducted to sample 363 Generation Z employees in Sichuan Province. Use mature scales to measure variables, and use correlation analysis, regression analysis, and Bootstrap method to test the mediating and moderating effects. **Results:** Work values can directly and indirectly reduce resignation intention by increasing job satisfaction (partially mediated). Perceived external employability plays a moderating role: when it is high, the inhibitory effect of job satisfaction on resignation intention will weaken. **Conclusion:** The resignation decision of Generation Z employees in Sichuan is a rational balance of internal and external factors. Enterprises need to balance both internal and external aspects: internally, they can enhance satisfaction by meeting their values, while externally, they can strengthen their compensation and development competitiveness to cope with the attractiveness of the external talent market.

Keywords: Generation Z Employees; Job Satisfaction; Perceive External Employability; Resignation Intention

Introduction

Against the backdrop of China's economic restructuring, understanding the work values of Generation Z employees (born 1995-2009) is a core issue for management (Chardonnens, 2025). Work values, as enduring beliefs about work, are key drivers of workplace behavior (Busque-Carrier *et al.*, 2022). Generation Z, shaped by China's digital growth, highly values personal growth, work-life balance, autonomy, and social purpose (Rachmad, 2025). These values challenge traditional management and are linked to higher mobility. Resignation tendency, a direct psychological precursor to resignation, is crucial for controlling talent loss (Park *et al.*, 2024). Existing research lacks focus on specific regional contexts in China (Lu, 2022). This study focuses on Sichuan Province. Its unique local culture ("Bashu"),

industrial structure, and lifestyle may shape workplace values differing from eastern regions (Fan, 2025), offering insights for localized management.

The influence of work values on resignation tendency is not direct but mediated through psychological mechanisms. Job satisfaction is a key mediator (Hartika *et al.*, 2023). When work aligns with intrinsic values, satisfaction increases, reducing resignation intention (Aloisio *et al.*, 2021). Verifying this mediation is necessary. This path is constrained by boundary conditions. Perceived external employability – employees' assessment of external job alternatives – is an important moderator (Silva *et al.*, 2023). According to resource conservation theory, high employability provides "alternative job resources," which may strengthen the effect of low job satisfaction on resignation intention. When dissatisfied employees are confident in finding alternatives, their resignation intention will be stronger. Examining this moderation reveals the context-dependent nature of Generation Z's resignation decisions.

Literature Review

Resignation Intention

Resignation intention refers to the psychological precursor to an employee's desire and thought to leave their current organization. It is the most direct and effective key indicator for predicting actual resignation behavior (He *et al.*, 2024). In organizational research, resignation intention has received much attention due to the significant costs it incurs for organizations. These costs include the direct expenses of recruiting, selecting, and training new employees, as well as the implicit costs such as decreased team cohesion, organizational knowledge gaps, and impaired organizational effectiveness caused by talent loss (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). Scholars have explored the formation mechanism of resignation intention from different theoretical perspectives. For example, Price-Mueller's resignation model points out that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job-seeking behavior are key intermediate variables influencing resignation decisions. Resource conservation theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that when employees perceive that their valuable resources (such as time, energy, and emotions) are excessively consumed at work and not adequately compensated, they experience stress and dissatisfaction, thereby stimulating their intention to leave (Berkovich, 2023).

Generation Z Employees

Generation Z employees, typically those born between 1995 and 2009, are becoming the main force in the global labor market. Compared to Millennials, Generation Z are true digital natives, having grown up with the explosive development of internet technology, social media, and mobile devices, which has profoundly shaped their unique values, communication styles, and career expectations (Benítez-Márquez *et al.*, 2022).

Research shows that Generation Z employees generally possess the following characteristics: a high regard for personal growth and learning opportunities, a pursuit of clear work-life boundaries and a high-quality balance, a desire for work autonomy and flexibility, an expectation of immediate feedback and recognition, and a particular emphasis on the social significance and ethical value of work (Shorey *et al.*, 2021). These characteristics make them less patient with traditional, rigid management models, resulting in higher career mobility and a higher tendency to resign (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). In China, Generation Z employees are also deeply influenced by macroeconomic factors such as the one-child policy, rapid economic growth, and increased national cultural confidence, exhibiting distinct local characteristics in their workplace behavior, which warrants in-depth research (Deng & Chen, 2023).

The Relationship between Work Values and Resignation Intention

Work values are an individual's persistent beliefs and preferences regarding work-related outcomes, guiding their job choices, effort levels, and willingness to stay (Li *et al.*, 2022). When the organizational environment, job content, and management practices align with an employee's intrinsic values, the employee feels a psychological fit, thereby increasing their commitment to the organization and

reducing their resignation intention; conversely, value conflict arises, leading to dissatisfaction and increased resignation intention (Ramírez *et al.*, 2022).

Numerous empirical studies support the significant impact of work values on resignation intention. For example, Wei *et al.* (2021) found that satisfaction of intrinsic work values (such as personal growth and a sense of accomplishment) significantly negatively predicted resignation intention. Similarly, the research of Kashfitanto and Febriansyah (2023) on the new generation of employees showed that unmet strong demands for work-life balance directly led to a higher likelihood of resignation.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

The influence of work values on resignation intention is often not direct but rather operates through a series of mediating variables. Among these, job satisfaction – the positive affective state resulting from an individual's evaluation of various aspects of their work (Locke *et al.*, 1976) – is considered one of the most crucial mediating mechanisms. The theoretical basis for this mediating path lies in value-cognitive theory, which posits that values form the foundation of attitudes (Li *et al.*, 2023). Specifically, when work arrangements, compensation and benefits, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture meet the values cherished by Generation Z employees (such as autonomy, growth, and social contribution), they experience higher levels of job satisfaction; this positive emotional experience strengthens their attachment to the organization, thereby reducing the likelihood of them considering leaving (Gan & Voon, 2021). Many studies have validated this mediating role. For example, Ali and Anwar (2021) found that work values completely mediate resignation intention through job satisfaction. In China, a study by Busque-Carrier *et al.* (2022) also showed that the work values of the new generation of employees indirectly affect resignation intention by influencing their affective commitment and job satisfaction.

The Moderating Role of Perceived External Employability

The link from job dissatisfaction to resignation is not universal; an individual's resources and external conditions play a moderating role. Perceived external employability – a person's subjective assessment of external job opportunities (Tee *et al.*, 2021) – is a key moderator. According to resource conservation theory, high employability provides a valuable personal resource ("alternative job options"), boosting psychological security and bargaining power (Houben *et al.*, 2021). For highly employable employees, dissatisfaction lowers the perceived cost and risk of leaving, increasing the likelihood that dissatisfaction translates into resignation intention. Conversely, employees with low perceived external employability may suppress resignation intention even if very dissatisfied due to fear of not finding a better job (Martin *et al.*, 2021). Thus, high perceived external employability strengthens the negative relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention, as also shown in another research (Deng *et al.*, 2022).

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study explains how work values influence resignation intention among Generation Z employees. From a self-determination perspective, work values reflect employees' expectations regarding psychological need fulfillment, which enhances job satisfaction when aligned with organizational practices. From a social exchange perspective, job satisfaction represents employees' evaluation of exchange quality with the organization, while perceived external employability serves as a boundary condition shaping whether satisfaction can effectively reduce resignation intention.

This study proposes a moderated mediation model in which perceived external employability moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention, such that the negative effect of job satisfaction on resignation intention is stronger among Generation Z employees with higher perceived external employability. The model explains how work values influence resignation intention through job satisfaction, while identifying perceived external employability as a key boundary condition in this process. To test this model, the following core hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The work values of Generation Z employees have a significant impact on their resignation intention.

H2: The work values of Generation Z employees have a significant impact on job satisfaction.

H3: Job satisfaction plays a significant mediating role between the work values and resignation intentions of Generation Z employees.

H4: Perceived external employability has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention.

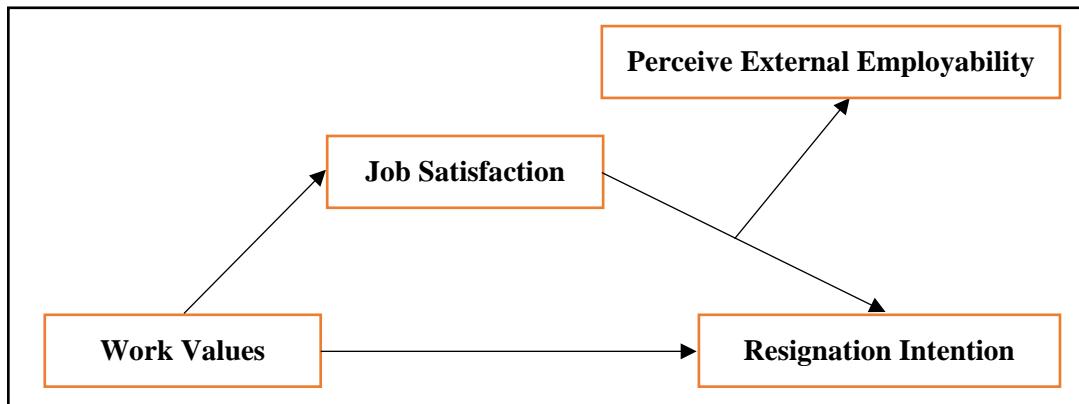


Figure 1: Research Model

Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional design, using a questionnaire survey to collect data from Generation Z employees in Sichuan Province, China. Following the recommendation of Ahmed (2024), a minimum sample of 350 is targeted; 380 questionnaires are distributed to account for no-response bias and ensure sufficient valid responses for statistical analysis.

The structured questionnaire uses established international scales. Core variables – work values, job satisfaction, perceived external employability, and resignation intention – are measured with items adapted from Super (1970), Judge *et al.* (2017), Berntson and Marklund (2007), and Tett and Meyer (1993), respectively, all rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Demographic information is collected via a nominal scale.

Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS or similar software. First, descriptive statistics will summarize sample characteristics. Next, Cronbach's α will assess scale reliability, with all constructs required to exceed 0.70 (Jarupunphol *et al.*, 2024). Normality will be examined via skewness and kurtosis indices to ensure parametric test assumptions are met (Tsagris & Pandis, 2021). Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis will preliminarily examine variable relationships (Roustaei, 2024). Finally, multiple linear regression and the Bootstrap method (using the Process macro) will test the mediating effect of job satisfaction and the moderating effect of perceived external employability.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Normality, and Reliability Analysis

Variable	Mean (SD)	Skewness/Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
1. Work Values	3.85 (0.62)	-0.42/0.85	(0.89)			
2. Job Satisfaction	3.60 (0.75)	-0.55/0.73	0.52**	(0.91)		
3. Perceived External Employability	3.92 (0.68)	-0.38/0.61	0.18**	0.21**	(0.88)	
4. Resignation Intention	2.40 (0.81)	0.48/0.92	-0.45**	-0.68**	0.08	(0.90)

Notes: The values in the diagonal brackets are the Cronbach's α coefficients for each variable; ** $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 1, the descriptive statistics indicate that the mean values of all variables fall within an acceptable range, with standard deviations suggesting adequate variability. Skewness and kurtosis values for all constructs are within commonly accepted thresholds, supporting the assumption of approximate normality and the use of parametric analytical techniques. The internal consistency of the measurement scales is satisfactory, with Cronbach's α coefficients ranging from 0.88 to 0.91.

Correlation analysis reveals that all variables are significantly related in theoretically expected directions. Work values and job satisfaction are negatively associated with resignation intention, while work values are positively associated with job satisfaction and perceived external employability. Although perceived external employability exhibits relatively modest correlations with the other variables, these relationships are statistically significant, indicating that they represent a conceptually distinct construct and is appropriate for inclusion as a moderating variable in subsequent analyses.

Table 2: Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	189	52.07%
	Female	174	47.93%
Marital Status	Unmarried	323	89.43%
	Married	40	10.57%
Education Level	High School or Below	47	12.95%
	Bachelor's Degree	211	58.13%
	Master's Degree	91	25.07%
	Doctoral Degree	14	3.86%
Tenure	Within 1 Year	69	19.01%
	1 to 3 Years	142	39.12%
	3 to 5 Years	80	22.04%
	5 to 8 Years	62	17.08%
	More than 8 Years	10	2.75%

According to the data in Table 2, a total of 380 questionnaires were distributed, and 363 valid responses were collected, yielding an effective response rate of 95.53%. The sample was slightly male dominated (52.07%) and predominantly unmarried (89.43%), which is consistent with the demographic characteristics of Generation Z employees. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (58.13%) or a master's degree (25.07%). In terms of tenure, employees with three years of work experience or less accounted for 58.13% of the sample, while only 19.83% reported more than five years of experience, indicating that the sample largely represents early-career Generation Z employees in Sichuan Province.

Table 3: Direct Effects on Resignation intention

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	5.82***	5.75***
Work Values		-0.45***
Job Satisfaction	-0.68***	-0.52***
R ²	0.462	0.501
Adjusted R ²	0.460	0.498
F-value	342.15***	250.33***

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$ (Highly Significant)

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses examining the direct effects of work values and job satisfaction on resignation intention. In Model 1, job satisfaction shows a significant negative effect on resignation intention ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with lower resignation intention. In Model 2, when work values are introduced into the model, both work values ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$) remain significant negative predictors of resignation intention.

The inclusion of work values increases the explained variance in resignation intention from 46.2% to 50.1%, as reflected by the increase in R², suggesting that work values provide additional explanatory power beyond job satisfaction. Overall, the results indicate that both work values and job satisfaction independently and directly contribute to reducing resignation intention among Generation Z employees.

Table 4: Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction

Effect Path	Effect	SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Total Effect	-0.61	0.06	-0.72	-0.49
Direct Effect	-0.45	0.07	-0.58	-0.32
Indirect Effect	-0.16	0.03	-0.22	-0.11

Notes: Boot LLCI = Bootstrap Lower-Level Confidence Interval; Boot ULCI = Bootstrap Upper-Level Confidence Interval

Table 4 reports the results of the Bootstrap mediation analysis examining the indirect effect of work values on resignation intention through job satisfaction. The results indicate that the total effect of work values on resignation intention is significantly negative ($\beta = -0.61$), suggesting that stronger work values are associated with lower resignation intention overall. When job satisfaction is included in the model, the direct effect of work values remains significant ($\beta = -0.45$), indicating that work values continue to exert an independent influence on resignation intention.

The indirect effect of work values on resignation intention via job satisfaction is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.16$), with the 95% Bootstrap confidence interval ($-0.22, -0.11$) excluding zero. These findings demonstrate that job satisfaction serves as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between work values and resignation intention, supporting the proposed mediating mechanism whereby work values influence resignation intention both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction.

Table 5: Moderating Effect of Perceived External Employability

Variable	Coeff.	SE	t	p
Constant	5.80	0.18	32.22	0.000
(A) Job Satisfaction	-0.65	0.05	-13.00	0.000
(B) PEE	0.10	0.05	2.00	0.046
(AxB) Interaction	0.12	0.04	3.00	0.003
R ²		0.480		
ΔR ²		0.015		
F for ΔR ²		9.00**		

Table 5 presents the results of the moderation analysis examining the role of perceived external employability in the relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention. The results indicate that job satisfaction has a significant negative effect on resignation intention ($\beta = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$), while perceived external employability has a significant positive effect on resignation intention ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.046$).

Importantly, the interaction term between job satisfaction and perceived external employability is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that perceived external employability significantly moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention. The inclusion of the interaction term results in a significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.015$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, when perceived external employability is high, the negative relationship between job satisfaction and resignation intention is weakened, whereas this negative relationship is stronger when perceived external employability is low. These findings suggest that favorable perceptions of external job opportunities attenuate the retention effect of job satisfaction.

Discussion

This study, through a survey of Generation Z employees in Sichuan Province, verified the mechanism by which work values influence resignation intention. Analysis shows that both work values and job satisfaction directly and negatively predict resignation intention; that is, meeting employees' value needs and maintaining their job satisfaction directly enhances their willingness to stay (Mayowan *et al.*, 2025). The study found that job satisfaction plays a partial mediating role. This reveals the intrinsic

psychological path of "value alignment → increased satisfaction → enhanced willingness to stay," suggesting that managers need to effectively translate value alignment into positive employee experiences (Kashfitanto & Febriansyah, 2023). By integrating self-determination and social exchange perspectives, this study demonstrates that the impact of job satisfaction on resignation intention is conditional rather than absolute, depending on employees' perceived external employability.

This study provides a new theoretical explanation for employee resignation behavior by integrating self-determination theory and social exchange theory. The study finds that work values are not only a background factor influencing attitudes, but also a key antecedent activating core psychological needs such as individual autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, they influence resignation intention through job satisfaction, enriching the application boundaries of self-determination theory in organizational contexts. Simultaneously, this study reveals that job satisfaction does not have a constant inhibitory effect on resignation; its retention effect is significantly constrained by perceived external employability. This finding expands social exchange theory, indicating that when employees perceive strong external alternative opportunities, the binding force of internal exchange relationships on retention behavior weakens significantly, especially among Generation Z employees.

Perceived external employability was confirmed as a key moderating variable. Higher levels of perceived external employability significantly weaken the inhibitory effect of job satisfaction on resignation intention; conversely, lower levels strengthen this effect. This reflects that Generation Z employees rationally weigh internal work experience against external employment opportunities when making resignation decisions (Sabrina, 2023). The theoretical model constructed in this study, as shown in the figure below, clearly illustrates the relationships between the above variables.

Based on these research findings, companies need to adopt a comprehensive "internal and external" strategy to effectively retain Generation Z talent (Naimova, 2025). Internally, they should translate employee value alignment into high job satisfaction through job redesign, flexible management, and clear career development paths (Djurayeva, 2025). Externally, they must build a protective system that includes competitive compensation, deep emotional connections, and continuous skills investment to reduce the attractiveness of external employment opportunities to high-potential employees (Boyda, 2022), thereby dynamically responding to their resignation decisions based on "rational calculations."

Conclusion

This study, based on a sample of Generation Z employees in Sichuan Province, constructed and validated a resignation intention model incorporating mediation and moderating mechanisms. The study found that work values can directly influence resignation intention and indirectly play a role in improving job satisfaction. Furthermore, perceived external employability significantly moderates the impact of job satisfaction on resignation intention, indicating that Generation Z employees' resignation decisions are the result of a comprehensive trade-off between internal work experience and the external employment environment.

In terms of research significance, this study deepens the explanation of the mechanism by which work values influence resignation intention from the perspectives of self-determination theory and social exchange theory. Specifically, the research shows that work values are not only a background factor in employee attitudes but also an important antecedent for activating core psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and the need for relationship, thus influencing resignation intention through job satisfaction. This expands the application of self-determination theory in organizational behavior and the context of Generation Z employees. Simultaneously, based on social exchange theory, this study reveals that the retention effect of job satisfaction has a significant situational dependence: when employees perceive strong external employment opportunities, the constraining effect of internal exchange relationships on resignation intention weakens. This finding enriches the explanation of employee mobility behavior by social exchange theory, emphasizing the crucial role of external labor market factors in exchange relationships. Furthermore, the study's use of the central and western regions of China supplements regional evidence for research on Generation Z employees, contributing to the explanatory power of related theories across different cultural and economic environments.

At the practical level, this study provides a basis for organizations to develop differentiated retention strategies, emphasizing that managers not only need to meet the core value demands of Generation Z employees and improve their job satisfaction through job design and management practices, but should also acknowledge the impact of the external labor market on the mobility intentions of high-potential employees, adopting a comprehensive management strategy that balances internal incentives and external competitiveness.

Future research could employ longitudinal or longitudinal study designs to examine the dynamic changes and causal directions of variable relationships; simultaneously, contextual variables such as leadership style and perceived organizational support could be introduced to further expand the model's boundaries. In addition, comparative studies of samples from different regions and industries will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the resignation behavior of Generation Z employees.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicting objectives.

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