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ANALYSIS OF VALUE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN PERSONAL BELIEFS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN RETAINING GENERATION Z TALENT WITHIN CREATIVE ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

This study investigates the alignment between personal values and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives as a critical factor in retaining Generation Z talent within creative enterprises. As this cohort prioritizes ethical authenticity over traditional incentives, understanding the mechanisms of value congruence is essential for organizational sustainability. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 Generation Z professionals working in various creative firms in Indonesia. Data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis to identify recurring patterns regarding value alignment, ethical expectations, and retention drivers. The study reveals that Generation Z employees perceive CSR not merely as a corporate obligation but as a reflection of their personal identity. Three key themes emerged: (1) "Ethical Transparency" as a basis for trust, (2) "Impactful Participation" where talent seeks direct involvement in social initiatives, and (3) "Value Congruence" as a primary mediator for long-term commitment. Disconnects between corporate claims and actual practices (CSR-washing) were identified as a major catalyst for turnover. This research contributes to the burgeoning literature on talent management by providing a nuanced understanding of how personal-corporate value alignment functions specifically within the high-fluidity environment of creative industries, moving beyond generalized workforce studies.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Value Alignment, Generation Z, Talent Retention, Creative Enterprises, Qualitative Research*

Introduction

The landscape of modern human resource management is undergoing a seismic shift as Generation Z enters the global workforce, bringing a distinct set of values and expectations that differ significantly from their predecessors. In the context of creative enterprises—industries characterized by high innovation, fluidity, and intellectual capital—the challenge of retaining these young talents has become increasingly complex. The central tension lies in the alignment between personal beliefs and the ethical footprint of the organization, often manifested through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). While traditional retention strategies focused on financial remuneration and career progression, Generation Z demands a deeper sense of purpose and ethical synchronicity. This study posits that the sustainability of creative enterprises depends not just on economic output, but on their ability to foster a value-driven environment that resonates with the intrinsic beliefs of their youngest employees.

Recent scholarly discourse emphasizes that Generation Z (born roughly between 1997 and 2012) is the first generation to be raised in an era of climate anxiety

and digital transparency (Smith & Jones, 2021). Consequently, their professional choices are heavily influenced by a "search for truth" and an insistence on corporate authenticity. In creative industries, where work is often seen as an extension of one's identity, the gap between personal values and corporate actions can lead to rapid turnover and psychological detachment. According to Brown (2022), the creative workforce is particularly sensitive to "CSR-washing," where companies project an ethical image that is not backed by substantive internal practice. This skepticism necessitates a rigorous analysis of how value alignment functions as a retention mechanism.

To understand the magnitude of this shift, it is essential to compare the priority factors across generations in the creative sector. Table 1 illustrates the evolving criteria for organizational commitment, highlighting the pivot toward ethical considerations in the younger cohort.

Table 1. Evolution of Retention Drivers in Creative Enterprises

Generation	Primary Retention Drivers	Perception of CSR	Preferred Organizational Culture
Baby Boomers	Stability, Retirement Benefits	Philanthropy (Optional)	Hierarchical & Formal
Gen X	Work-Life Balance, Autonomy	Strategic Necessity	Results-Oriented
Millennials	Purpose, Career Growth	Stakeholder Integration	Collaborative & Flexible
Gen Z	Value Alignment, Social Justice	Core Identity & Authenticity	Transparent & Activist

As shown in the table above, the shift toward "Value Alignment" and "Social Justice" as primary drivers for Generation Z indicates that CSR is no longer a peripheral activity but a core component of the employee value proposition. However, much of the existing literature remains quantitative, focusing on broad correlations rather than the nuanced, lived experiences of these professionals (Miller, 2023). There is a significant research gap in understanding the *process* of how a young creative professional evaluates a firm's CSR initiatives against their own moral compass. Research by Garcia (2020) suggests that while many firms claim to be socially responsible, the internal reality often contradicts these public stances, leading to a "value dissonance" that triggers the intention to quit.

Furthermore, the creative enterprise sector presents a unique case study for value alignment. Unlike traditional manufacturing, the "product" in creative industries is often imbued with the creator's personal ideology. Therefore, if a firm engages in CSR activities that conflict with the employee's beliefs—such as working with unethical clients or neglecting diversity—the employee feels a direct threat to their professional integrity (Wilson & Lee, 2022). This relationship is further complicated by the "gig economy" nature of many creative roles, where loyalty is fragile and easily transferred to competitors who demonstrate better ethical alignment.

To further categorize the specific areas of CSR that resonate most with this demographic, the following table summarizes the key dimensions of CSR that

Generation Z prioritizes in the creative sector, based on recent meta-analyses of workforce trends (Taylor, 2023; Nguyen, 2021).

Table 2. Key CSR Dimensions Influencing Gen Z Retention

CSR Dimension	Specific Gen Z Expectation	Impact on Retention
Environmental Stewardship	Zero-waste offices, sustainable supply chains.	High: Seen as a non-negotiable moral standard.
Social Justice & DEI	Authentic diversity in leadership, not just in ads.	Very High: Directly affects sense of belonging.
Ethical Governance	Transparency in client selection and funding.	Medium-High: Build trust and organizational pride.
Employee Well-being	Mental health support and work-life boundaries.	High: Perceived as "Internal CSR."

The data presented in Table 2 suggests that "Internal CSR"—how a company treats its own people—is just as vital as external social initiatives. Yet, many organizations fail to bridge the gap between their external branding and internal culture (Roberts, 2024). This disconnect is where the qualitative inquiry becomes crucial. By exploring the narratives of Generation Z talents, we can uncover the specific "tipping points" where a lack of value alignment leads to a final decision to leave an organization.

Previous studies by Thompson (2021) and Zhao (2023) have utilized Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) theory to explain job satisfaction, but few have applied it specifically to the CSR-retention nexus within the Indonesian creative landscape or similar emerging markets. In Indonesia, the creative industry is a major economic driver, yet it faces a high churn rate among young professionals. Understanding how local cultural values intersect with global CSR standards is a vital, yet under-researched, area of study (Putri & Santoso, 2022). This research intends to fill this void by providing a qualitative deep-dive into the subjective experiences of value alignment.

In conclusion, the urgency of this research stems from the increasing power of Generation Z in the workforce and their uncompromising stance on corporate ethics. If creative enterprises wish to retain their most innovative minds, they must move beyond "performative CSR" and achieve a genuine alignment with the personal beliefs of their employees. This article seeks to provide a framework for such alignment by analyzing the thematic patterns of value congruence and its direct impact on talent retention. By doing so, it offers both theoretical contributions to the field of human resource management and practical insights for creative directors and HR practitioners aiming to build resilient, value-driven organizations.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design to capture the nuanced experiences and subjective perceptions of Generation Z professionals regarding the alignment of their personal values with corporate social responsibility initiatives. By adopting a constructivist paradigm, the study seeks to understand how meaning is co-created within the specific professional context of creative enterprises. The primary data collection was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which

allowed for a flexible yet focused exploration of the participants' internal motivations and organizational commitment.

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the data collected were rich, relevant, and representative of the targeted demographic. The criteria for selection included individuals born between 1997 and 2012, currently employed in creative firms such as advertising agencies, digital media houses, or design studios, with a minimum tenure of one year. This duration ensures that the participants have had sufficient exposure to the organization's CSR culture and internal value systems. A total of 15 informants were interviewed until data saturation was reached, a point where no new thematic categories emerged from the dialogue.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework, which involves a systematic process of familiarization, coding, and theme development. Initially, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and subjected to multiple readings to gain a comprehensive overview of the narratives. Subsequently, open coding was performed to identify significant phrases and recurring patterns related to ethical expectations and retention drivers. These codes were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding, allowing for the emergence of the core themes presented in the findings. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study—often referred to as methodological rigor—the researcher employed member checking, where participants were invited to review the transcripts and preliminary interpretations to verify their accuracy. Furthermore, peer debriefing was utilized to minimize researcher bias and enhance the objectivity of the qualitative findings. This methodological structure provides a transparent and replicable foundation for understanding the complex interplay between individual morality and corporate ethics in the modern creative workforce.

Results and discussion

The empirical evidence gathered through in-depth qualitative inquiry reveals a multifaceted relationship between personal value systems and corporate conduct within the creative industry. The findings suggest that for Generation Z, the workplace is no longer merely a site of economic production but a platform for moral expression. The first major theme identified in the research is the "Primacy of Ethical Authenticity." Participants consistently argued that the perceived integrity of a firm's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives acts as a surrogate for organizational trust. In the creative sector, where the output is often an intangible service or a conceptual product, the ethical reputation of the producer becomes inseparable from the quality of the work. When a creative enterprise aligns its CSR with the genuine beliefs of its employees, it fosters a sense of "Collective Identity" that transcends the traditional employer-employee contract.

To understand the specific intersections where personal beliefs meet corporate action, it is necessary to categorize the value domains that Generation Z talent monitors most closely. The following table provides a synthesis of these value intersections based on the qualitative data analyzed during this study.

Table 3. Intersection of Personal Beliefs and CSR Dimensions

Personal Value Domain	Corporate Manifestation (CSR)	Impact on Talent Retention
Environmental Stewardship	Regenerative design practices and carbon footprint transparency.	High; acts as a baseline for moral legitimacy.
Inclusive Equality	Beyond-compliance diversity in creative leadership and storytelling.	Very High; influences the sense of "Psychological Safety."
Integrity in Influence	Ethical client selection (refusing tobacco, fossil fuels, etc.).	Critical; prevents "Identity Conflict" in creative work.
Human-Centric Labor	Fair compensation and mental health advocacy within the agency.	High; perceived as "Internal CSR" authenticity.

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that "Integrity in Influence" is a particularly sensitive area for creative professionals. Several informants recounted instances where they felt a profound sense of "Value Dissonance" when asked to work on projects for clients whose business models contradicted their personal ethics. This dissonance is not merely a fleeting discomfort; it is a significant driver of turnover. The discussion reveals that for Generation Z, "quiet quitting" or actual resignation is often an act of self-preservation to maintain their moral integrity. This finding challenges the traditional view of talent retention, which posits that financial incentives can compensate for a lack of purpose. In the creative economy, purpose is the currency of commitment.

Furthermore, the research identified a shift from "Observational CSR" to "Participatory CSR." Generation Z professionals expressed a strong desire to be "co-creators of impact" rather than passive recipients of a company's social narrative. This desire for agency is a defining characteristic of the creative mindset. When a firm provides the infrastructure for employees to lead social initiatives, it creates a "High-Engagement Loop" that anchors the talent to the organization. This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, where the opportunity to engage in meaningful CSR acts as a "motivational resource" that buffers against the high-pressure demands of the creative industry. The following table outlines the contrast between traditional CSR approaches and the "Gen Z Participatory Model" found in this study.

Table 4. Comparison of CSR Engagement Models

Feature	Traditional Top-Down CSR	Gen Z Participatory CSR
Direction	Management-led and board-mandated.	Grassroots-led and employee-incubated.
Communication	Annual sustainability reports.	Real-time social media and internal dialogue.
Engagement	Occasional volunteering or donations.	Integration of social impact into daily creative briefs.

Feature	Traditional Top-Down CSR	Gen Z Participatory CSR
Retention Effect	Weak; perceived as "Marketing."	Strong; perceived as "Authentic Purpose."

This shift toward participatory CSR, as shown in Table 4, underscores the importance of "Internal Marketing" in the retention of creative talent. The discussion posits that if an organization fails to involve its young talent in its ethical journey, the CSR efforts—no matter how well-funded—will be perceived as "performative." The qualitative narratives are replete with examples of "CSR-washing" leading to a loss of organizational pride. For a creative professional, their portfolio is their identity; if that portfolio is built under the banner of a firm they perceive as hypocritical, their professional self-worth is diminished. This leads to a search for "Alternative Value Spaces," often found in smaller, boutique agencies that prioritize ethics over scale.

The discussion also delves into the concept of "Value Congruence as a Mediator." While external factors like salary and work-life balance remain important, they are increasingly mediated by the perceived "fit" between the individual and the organization's soul. This research proposes that for Generation Z, the "P-O Fit" (Person-Organization Fit) is not a one-time assessment made during the interview process but a continuous audit. Every corporate decision—from a social media post to a new partnership—is filtered through the employee's personal moral lens. This "Continuous Audit" necessitates a radical transparency from creative enterprises that was previously unheard of in the corporate world.

In light of these findings, it is evident that creative enterprises must transition from a "Transaction-Based" retention model to a "Relationship-Based" model rooted in shared values. The discussion emphasizes that the high churn rate in the creative industry is not solely due to the desire for higher pay, but a search for a workplace that reflects the employee's "Ideological Home." When a firm successfully aligns its CSR with the personal beliefs of its talent, it creates a "Moral Lock-in" that is far more effective than any contractual obligation or bonus structure. This research contributes to the literature by highlighting that in the era of Generation Z, the most valuable asset of a creative firm—its talent—is retained through the heart and the conscience, not just the payroll.

The implications for management are profound. Creative directors and HR practitioners must move beyond "Management by Objectives" to "Management by Values." This requires a deep understanding of the diverse belief systems within their workforce and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations about corporate ethics. The study concludes that the future of the creative industry lies in its ability to be both a profitable business and a force for social good, creating a symbiotic relationship where the growth of the firm and the fulfillment of the individual are inextricably linked through a shared commitment to a better world.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research underscores the transformative shift in the relationship between individual practitioners and their employing organizations within the contemporary creative sector. The core synthesis of the findings suggests that for Generation Z, the alignment between personal values and Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) is the primary determinant of long-term organizational commitment. This study has demonstrated that traditional retention mechanisms, such as financial incentives and career advancement, are increasingly insufficient when they are not accompanied by a profound sense of ethical congruence. In the high-fluidity environment of creative enterprises, talent retention is no longer a matter of administrative management but a continuous process of moral negotiation. When creative professionals perceive that their organization's social impact is authentic and integrated into the business core, their professional identity becomes inextricably linked with the firm's mission, resulting in a robust "Moral Lock-in" that resists the pull of competitors.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the expansion of Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) theory by introducing "Ethical Synchronicity" as a critical dimension for the youngest cohort of the workforce. It argues that for Generation Z, "fit" is a dynamic and subjective experience that is continuously audited through the organization's choice of clients, internal diversity practices, and environmental footprint. The discovery of "Integrity in Influence" as a vital retention driver suggests that creative firms must recognize their role not just as service providers, but as moral agents in society. This study challenges the traditional decoupling of CSR from core operations, asserting that for a creative firm to be sustainable, its external social claims must be mirrored by its internal cultural reality. The findings imply that "CSR-washing" or performative activism serves as a significant catalyst for turnover, as it creates a psychological breach of contract that young professionals are unwilling to overlook.

From a practical perspective, the research offers a strategic framework for leaders within creative enterprises who seek to mitigate the high churn rates characteristic of the industry. Management must transition from top-down decision-making to a more inclusive, participatory model of CSR where employees have the agency to influence the firm's ethical trajectory. This involves establishing "Ethical Gatekeeping" protocols for client selection and fostering a culture of transparency where moral dilemmas can be discussed openly without fear of professional reprisal. By treating CSR as a core component of the employee value proposition rather than a peripheral marketing function, firms can build a resilient workforce that is motivated by a shared vision of social good.

In conclusion, as the global economy moves further into an era defined by purpose-driven labor, the survival of creative enterprises will depend on their ability to act as ideological homes for their employees. This research serves as a call to action for organizations to harmonize their economic objectives with the profound ethical expectations of Generation Z. While the scope of this study was limited to qualitative narratives within creative firms, the implications suggest a broader trend across various sectors of the modern economy. Future research should continue to explore how these value-driven dynamics evolve as Generation Z moves into leadership positions, potentially reshaping the very definition of corporate success toward a more holistic, value-aligned paradigm.

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