

# **Retention and Employee Engagement of Generation Z in the Dutch Hospitality Industry**

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<p>Employee retention and engagement have become one of the most important issues for hospitality industry in most of the western countries as the industry is known for its high turnover and younger generations are characterized as disloyal. Organizations have recognized the need for more and deeper insights in engagement and retention for future practices. This thesis has been written to study and better understand the conceptions of HR professionals and experiences and expectations of graduate hotel school students on engagement and retention in the Dutch hospitality industry.</p> <p>The main objective of the thesis was to study and understand the context and conceptions of both HR professionals and Generation Z around engaging and retaining Generation Z in the Dutch hospitality industry. To meet the objective, three research questions were formulated to guide the research. What are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry on their organization's present actions on employee retention &amp; engagement and generation theory? What are the expectations and experiences of graduate hotel school students in The Netherlands on retention and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry? What recommendations can be made to organizations in the Dutch hospitality industry regarding engaging and retaining Generation Z? The research has been limited to a specific industry and country to better understand the complexity of the subject.</p> <p>After the literature review, qualitative research methods were chosen to get insights from both, future employees and HR professionals. Data was generated by conducting semi-structured interviews for 5 graduate students and 4 HR professionals from the Dutch hospitality industry. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the gathered data.</p> <p>The results of this thesis conclude that organizations are right to focus their attention on training courses as Generation Z is looking for development, growth and opportunities. Training courses in the hotels interviewed are either accessible to all or specialized for certain groups next to the mandatory training. Professionals emphasized the importance of freedom at their job and to make sure actions fit the generations wants and needs.</p> <p>The students interviewed had limited experience with actions regarding engagement and retention and were prone to job hop. Their need for growth both personally and professionally was clear as well as a need for freedom/flexibility, collaborative approach with HR and want for a desirable atmosphere.</p> <p>Recommendations made in this paper are to conduct in-depth research on wants and needs of younger employees, implementing more advanced technology, increasing the focus of organizations on engagement and awareness around it and to have a collaborative approach between the HR department and young employees.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b>	
Human resource management, talent management, retention, engagement, Generation Y, Generation Z	

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# 1 Introduction

It is a well-known fact to everyone that has knowledge of the hospitality industry that the industry is known for its high turnover. Employees are quick to move on to other hotels or different industries because of the low quality of the work circumstances, one can think of low pay and odd working hours. Add that to the rise of the disruptive qualities of the Millennial generation and suddenly all eyes are looking at the HR department to “handle” these new employees.

Over the past few years, it's become more apparent that the cost of this high turnover is not sustainable and that things need to be put into place to retain employees, especially focusing on those that have just entered the workforce as we quickly came to realize their tendency to “job hop”, which (Guerry, 2016) defines as frequently making voluntary inter-organizational transitions. This also plays into the highly discussed generation theory, where groups of people that are shaped by the same experiences display similar characteristics and patterns. This generational theory is praised by some and disputed by others, which is why the author decided to include it in her research to find out what HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry think of it. In addition to this, the author also decided to focus her thesis on the topic of engagement as she wanted to understand the effect it had on retention.

The main objective of this thesis is to study and understand the context and conceptions of both HR professionals and Generation Z around engaging and retaining Generation Z in the Dutch hospitality industry. The author of this thesis has created three research questions to help with the understanding of this complex situation.

1. What are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry on their organization's present actions to retain and engage Generation Z?
2. What are the expectations and experiences of graduate hotel school students in The Netherlands on retention and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry?
3. What recommendations can be made to organizations in the Dutch hospitality industry regarding engaging and retaining Generation Z?

The author has limited her research to the Dutch hospitality industry because Sparrow, et al. (2014) claim that in order to understand something, context is of importance and that further research needs to be specific to a country and an industry. The author then decided to focus the attention of the literature review on the two newest generations on the work floor, Millennials and Generation Z. This is because of the similarities between these generations, the disruption the Millennial generation brought to the industry and the lack of research on Generation Z.

While writing the literature review, the author found several calls for additional research that address hospitality talent management practices in the context of the generational gap. The literature review is necessary to create a clear view of what has been researched and discovered and what still needs to be explored. The second part of this research consists of semi-structured interviews with HR experts from the hospitality industry and graduate hotel school students from The Netherlands. Qualitative methods were chosen because of the people-centric nature of the industry which would help to create a better insight into the conceptions of HR professionals and hotel school students.

This thesis will follow a traditional report structure, first exploring the topics and research that precede this paper, followed by qualitative research methods, the results, main findings, a conclusion and lastly recommendations and future research. It is important to note that Harvard referencing methods were used throughout this thesis. After the literature review is completed, experts from the industry as well as graduate hotel school students will be interviewed in a semi-structured interview on their conceptions of the industry, retention, engagement, and for the HR professionals, generational theory.

## **2 Engagement and Retention in the Hospitality Industry**

In this chapter, the topics of talent management, employee retention, employee engagement, the generation gap, Generation Y and Generation Z are defined and discussed. The importance of this literature review is to find out what research has been done on the before mentioned topics and which conclusions have been made based on their research. This is necessary in order to find where any gaps lie that still need to be researched and for the author to get a better understanding of these topics that form the foundation of this research paper.

### **2.1 Talent Management**

Human Resource Management can be defined as “a contemporary, umbrella term used to describe the management and development of employees in an organization” (Human Resources Edu, 2020). And previous research on the topic has argued that investment in and retention of human capital creates sustainable competitive advantage for businesses (Lub, et al., 2012). With birthrates dropping and the labor pool shrinking, it is key that companies use HR concepts to survive.

“As younger generations are demonstrating lower commitment and higher turnover intention whilst their numbers in the workforce are on the rise, hospitality managers should act upon generational differences and the expectation that different generations may hold of their employers” (Lub, et al., 2012, p. 566). According to Cismaru and Iunius (2019), human resource management is necessary to bridge the present generational gap within the hospitality industry. They claim that “at present, the entire approach of talent and talent management has to be more inclusive, collaborative and generative, focusing on a wider range of employees” (p. 2).

For this research, talent refers to the given and acquired aptitudes and skills of a person. In the original sense of the word, talent refers to gifts; the natural aptitudes and skills a person is born with (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019). However, as also stated by the previously mentioned authors, people develop and acquire new skills and aptitudes during the span of their life, which is why the author has decided on this definition of talent.

Talent management revolves around cultivating and activating gifts for the benefit of the company. Silzer and Dowell (2010) refer to talent as “an individual’s skills and abilities (talents) and what the person is capable of doing or contributing to the organization” (p.13).

Cismaru and Iunius (2019) stated that in many organizations, due to the inappropriate, un-fitting organizational environment, talents are inactive. It is therefore the responsibility of companies to activate talents and/or gifts into their employees.

However, talent is defined by what the company wants to achieve with its strategy. Jooss (2018) and Alziari (2017) argue that talent is never generic – and varies depending on the organization and context. Cismaru and Iunius (2019) claim that based on rigorous research, many talent management specialists have concluded that the political, socio-cultural and economic context has major importance in the correct understanding and defining of talent management. Examples such as mobility, business transformations, technology progress, sustainability concerns, globalization, or demographics were given.

Sparrow, et al. (2014) state that identification of talent, attracting talent to the company, supporting engagement of talented employees, retention of talented employees, developing talent and career management of talented employees are all talent management practices. And makes a distinct separation between people and talents in the same paper by stating that the people approach considers that talent management is the management of talented people and the practices approach refers to the practices employed to develop talent.

Cismaru and Iunius (2019) write “In the present generational context, due to the qualitative evolution of talent management, practices which cultivate, develop and activate gifts in employees became more important. Such talent management practices are mentoring, coaching, feedback, networking, reflection, individual development plans, deliberate practice, learning from experience, job rotation, training, psycho-social support and sponsorship” (p. 10).

## **2.2 Employee Retention**

Employee retention can be defined as the percentage of employees remaining in the organization (Phillips & Connell, 2003). When used in the context of human resources, retention is the act of continual use of talents and or gifts of personnel. To be able to continue using these talents and gifts, companies need to ensure employees stay committed.

As stated by Lub, et al., (2011) commitment is a psychological state that characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991) distinguish three types of commitment: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Lub, et al.,

(2011) states that affective commitment is defined as “the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization” (p. 557), normative commitment refers to “a feeling of obligation with the organization” (p. 557) and continuance commitment is defined as “an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization” (p. 557).

It is important that companies create clear, transparent and inspiring enthusiastic pre-employment experiences to make sure employees stay committed. These actions will make sure companies can uphold the psychological contract. The psychological contract is defined by Lub, et al. (2011) as “an employee’s beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between that employee and his or her organization, where these obligations are based on perceived promises and not necessarily recognized by agents or the organization” (p. 557). Rousseau (2001) suggests that antecedents of psychological contracts are activated to a large extent through pre-employment experiences such as social events and by creating such experiences companies can ensure that they can meet the expectations set by the employee in the psychological contract. It’s important to note that inspiring enthusiasm is found to be important in retention strategies in the Netherlands by Hughes and Rog (2008).

Lub, et al. (2012) conclude that there are indeed generational differences in the psychological contract that employees hold with their organization. Different generations hold different expectations and value different aspects of their job. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) draw attention to the fact that “organizations need to address and understand the deeper needs of employees in order to retain them and keep them motivated”.

### **2.3 Employee Engagement**

Regarding HR, two types of engagement are important; work engagement and employee engagement. Paek, et al. (2015) mention “Work engagement was first conceptualized by Kahn (1990) and then operationalized by Maslach and Leiter (1997). Schaufeli, et al. (2002) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) then adjusted the concept, which is now characterized as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)” (p. 12). Work or job engagement is defined by Andrew and Sofian (2012) as the level of employee’s commitment and dedication to his or her job role. This relates to the specific tasks an employee does to complete his or her job. Employee engagement is defined by the same authors as the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards his or her organization and its values. Examples of this could be colleagues, managers,



culture and company values. Both types of engagement are important when it comes to retention.

Hughes and Rog (2008) claim that employee engagement has been associated with several important organizational outcomes, many of which are directly related to talent management such as ease of recruitment, retention, and employee turnover. They also state that other important organizational outcomes such as higher employee productivity and customer engagement levels, as well as revenue growth and higher operating and profit margins, are associated with increased levels of employee engagement. This has also been discovered by Looi, et al. in 2004 when they found that as levels of employee engagement increased, so too did indicators of financial performance.

“Organizations that can more fully engage their employees through an effective talent management strategy will clearly have a competitive advantage” (Hughes & Rog, 2008, p. 750). According to Gibbons (2006), a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that in turn influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work is engagement. Similarly, Looi, et al. (2004) define engagement as the level of the energy and passion that employees have for their organizations. Employees who take action to improve business results for their organizations are engaged individuals. They are committed to the organization, strive to deliver exceptional work and say positive things about their workplace. Gibbons (2006) found that smaller companies, those with less than 5000 employees, more frequently found that employees were proud of their employers, felt satisfied with their work, perceived career growth opportunities, believed their senior managers have integrity and agreed that “this is the best company to work for”.

Paek, et al. (2015) refer to Kahn (1990) when stating that work engagement shapes the process of how staff chooses to be present and absent during task performance. Which is why Gibbons (2006) top drivers of engagement are so important. They include trust and integrity, because the extent to which the organization’s leadership is perceived to care about their employees is important, as well as listening and responding to employees’ opinions, being trustworthy and “walking the talk”. The second driver is the nature of the job, which is the extent of employee participation and autonomy. The third driver is the connection between individual and company performance. It is of importance that employees understand the company’s objectives, current level of performance and how to best contribute to them. The next driver is career growth opportunities, employees need to have opportunities for career growth and promotions or have a clearly defined career

path. The fifth driver is company pride and how employees derive self-esteem from their work. Gibbons also mentions co-workers and their attitudes and perspectives on their jobs and the company. The second to last driver is employee development, next to career growth employees value efforts made towards the development of their skills. The last driver is personal relationships with one's manager and the value the employee gives it.

Fairlie (2011) states that one way that HRD professionals could address engagement is to promote human development in addition to "human resource" development. He continues that work could be more than job-specific knowledge, skills and abilities and satisfy the fundamental developmental needs of employees. Kuchinke (2010) argues that HR professionals have an ethical and moral imperative to develop their employees personally and professionally. Which is why Fairlie (2011) states that "HRD professionals are becoming more aware that levels of engagement can be both actively and passively increased by developing talent" (p. 509).

## **2.4 Generation Gap**

The generational gap is caused by the different values and qualities of the older generations, Baby Boomers and Generation X, and the younger generations, Millennials and Generation Z. According to Cismaru and Iunius (2019), the hospitality industry is greatly affected by this and can be considered as an example, because it is an industry based on the core values of the generations which preceded the millennial generation, such as hierarchy, formalism and loyalty. Shared experiences shape the generational profile and Cismaru and Iunius (2019) conclude that generations are not defined by age but the context; social, economic and political in which they grew up.

Surveys from Intergenerational Resource Tensions in the Workplace and Beyond show that over 50% of workplaces report intergenerational conflict, with both older and younger generations dismissing the other generations' abilities. Cismaru and Iunius (2019) explain how there is little research on how members of different generations can be supported by human resources on adapting to people with different characteristics at work, which would reduce inequity tension and would be beneficial to all parties involved.

One of these benefits would be the better nurturement of talents in an open and penetrable environment (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019). One of the issues that arise with the generational gap is Millennials feeling disrespected and discriminated by older employees.

According to the previously mentioned authors, it is increasingly important to implement innovative, collaborative and inclusive talent management solutions considering the present generational context. They suggest, among others, to change the perception of their own and other employees' inputs and outputs to dismantle negative stereotypes.

It is important to note that even though generations are usually people born between a specific period, "individuals born a year on the other side of the generational divide would not be expected to display entirely different characteristics from a person born a year before" (Goh & Lee, 2018, p. 21). Opening up the discussion between researchers where to end the Millennial generation and where to start Generation Z.

## **2.5 Generation Y (Millennials)**

As mentioned above, with newer generations it is hard to say where the generation ends because it is too recent. We find this issue with Generation Y, also called the Millennials. Researchers are debating whether this generation started somewhere between 1979 and 1982 and ended in 1992, as older research would suggest, or not until we had reached the 2000s. Dimock (2019) concluded that Generation Y started in 1981 and ended in 1996. They based this conclusion on the several factors that shaped this generation such as 9/11, the recession and some American examples are the Iraq and Afghanistan war and the 2008 election vote that elected the first black president. However, some researchers claim that there is a difference between older and younger millennials as well.

Characteristics often associated with Generation Y are impatient, craving prestige and status in their jobs, and expectance of immediate rewards in promotion and pay (Rani & Samuel, 2016). Millennials expect open and unconventional communication styles at work (too) and need speed in everything (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019). If it were up to them, they would get instant rewards, instant feedback, instant access to information, instant respect, instant impact of their words (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019). According to Lub, et al. (2011) Generation Y is described as very comfortable with change as well as value personal development and enjoys challenging work. They are the first work-life integrators.

In addition, Cismaru and Iunius (2019) state that the Millennial generation is the most socially conscious generation of employees and are sustainability implementors; they value the sustainability-oriented behavior of companies and they have high expectations of their employers to act responsibly and ethically in Bridging the Generational Gap in the Hospitality Industry: Reverse Mentoring—An Innovative Talent Management Practice for Present and Future Generations of Employees. This was also found by Goh, et al. (2017)

when they stated that Generation Y was found to be more inclined to work in a green and sustainable hotel environment.

However, Twenge, et al. (2010) found that Generation Y is less committed to their organization and more likely to leave if not satisfied. This is also the case when Millennials face inequity tension on the work floor (Cismaru & Lunius, 2019). This new generation is the first digital native, as their predecessors are digital immigrants, and are more likely to extend the use of technology with other members of the organization (Chaudhuri and Ghosh, 2012). "Sharing is in their DNA, they love to share resources and expect their employers to share theirs as well" (Cismaru & Lunius, 2019, p. 7).

Besides that, Millennials also embrace diversity and multiculturalism (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). "They have developed a greater awareness of the world around them through the Internet and global communications, which has given them the tolerance, appreciation, and sensitivity to work with diverse people from different ethnic backgrounds" (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012, p. 60). Generation Y has been encouraged to form close relationships with people they look up while growing up and expect this pattern to continue at work with their superiors (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). As Cismaru and Lunius (2019) put it "Millennials are committed only to meaningful relationships that they develop with their colleagues and supervisors; they are no longer committed to organizations. Therefore, companies should concentrate on activating talents within their employees through such meaningful relationships" (p. 27).

Cismaru and Lunius (2019) urge organizations to keep up and implement creative, generative, and cooperative solutions to activate talents because, in the new generational context, increasingly traditional, standard and competitive solutions are no longer appropriate. If they fail to do so, they run the risk of losing their Millennial workers. This is, the authors claim because millennial employees perceive risks significantly different compared to previous generations. They have very high stress tolerance and most types of social interactions are appealing to them, with insignificant risks attached. This high stress resistance makes them the most disloyal employees, with no stress attached to repetitively leaving their jobs in search of new and more challenging ones (Cismaru & Lunius, 2019). However, their high stress resistance in combination with the innovation in their DNA makes them, what some call, Millennoventors (Cismaru & Lunius, 2019).

## 2.6 Generation Z

Based on the conclusion from the Pew Research Center by Dimock (2019), Generation Z begins in 1997 and ends in 2012. This generation is shaped by its “always on” technology environment. Generation Z is, like the Millennials, a digital native and is the first generation to have not experienced a world without the internet. Because of their lifelong exposure, they are not only highly familiar with it but also depend on it (Goh & Lee, 2018).

Gen Z also shares most of its disruptive core values and elements of Generation Y (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019) and will in a few years represent about 20% of the workforce. Goh & Lee (2018) note that it is important to remember that if expectations are not met, this generation will leave the hospitality industry. This goes hand in hand with findings from Lub et al. where they claim that Generation Z will have low commitment to their organizations and high turnover rates. With that in mind, employers should take into consideration the following statements by Schawbel (2016). He states that this generation is fond of corporate offices and embraces flexibility at work. Second, they favor face to face communication in favor of online communication and do expect their companies to adapt to social media. Third, that this new generation intends to work in multiple countries during their career and lastly, that they prefer regular feedback over an annual performance review. This generation is also described by Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) as embracing team spirit, portraying self-confidence, seeking happiness at the workplace, requiring assurance for their future and desiring independence over authority.

Another similarity between Millennials and Generation Z is their work hard mentality and need for speed and instant rewards (Deloitte, 2017). They expect to move quickly on the career ladder and appreciate honesty and integrity from their supervisors even when lacking certain skills. However, not all research concludes the same on this younger generation, as Goh and Lee (2018) find that this generation is concerned with their ability to perform on the job and deal with customers in a live environment, which goes against previous findings where Gen Z was reported as self-confident.

This paper also concluded that Gen Z is significantly influenced by family and friends when deciding to choose a career in the hospitality industry and is not as motivated by salary as previous generations but by job satisfaction and career prospects. This is why Goh and Lee (2018) state that “it is very important to engage in discussions about their career pathway and planning for their long term success such as management training opportunities like the Graduate Management Traineeship program and professional development Courses” (p. 26) to be able to move up the career ladder.

Unfortunately, despite being aware of the issue of high workforce turnover, hotel managers are still not doing enough to keep new staff, especially hospitality graduates motivated to remain in the industry because of a lack of career planning and progression opportunities (Goh & Lee, 2018). In addition to this, the student's perception of career barriers is also playing a role in the rejection of certain career choices (Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005) as well as the generational gap.

Goh and Lee (2018) concluded that Generation Z had an overall positive attitude towards the hospitality industry, calling it exciting and a people's industry with travel opportunities. Other words to describe it were interesting, fulfilling, unpredictable, dynamic, stable career choice, cultural divers and glamorous. Students interviewed also mentioned challenges such as dealing with people, long/odd hours and potential workplace health and safety issues. Negative attitudes were among others, mentally and emotionally exhausting, rigid and low paying. The biggest challenge mentioned in the hospitality industry was working with people. This was followed by long/odd hours, health and safety issues, discriminations, language proficiencies, unable to keep up with industry trends, emotional labor, being away from loved ones, pressure to perform and low pay (Goh & Lee, 2018).

Some recommendations mentioned in the same paper are offering cross training and give the opportunity to work in different departments as motivators, to be transparent about the realities of the job to create a realistic psychological contract, to coach Gen Z in how to deal with people, to offer training to provide clarity on job roles to reduce job ambiguity and reduce turnover and lastly, use mentors as a way to enhance service performance and reduce some of the stressors around emotional labor (Goh & Lee, 2018).

### **3 Qualitative Research Methodology**

Chapter three discusses the research questions to support the objective as well as what research methods were chosen and why, who were chosen to be interviewed and why for both HR professionals as graduate students, the interview questions and lastly, how the results that came out of the interviews are going to be analyzed.

This thesis is research-based, and the main objective was to study and understand the context and conceptions of both HR professionals and generation Z around engaging and retaining generation Z in the Dutch hospitality industry. To make this more specific, three research questions were formed.

1. What are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry on their organization's present actions to retain and engage Generation Z?
2. What are the expectations and experiences of graduate hotel school students in The Netherlands on retention and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry?
3. What recommendations can be made to organizations in the Dutch hospitality industry regarding engaging and retaining Generation Z?

The nature of this research is qualitative as the main focus is to gather and analyses data in order to create a better understanding of the concepts. The author decided to start with a literature review to have a clear understanding of what research was out there and what issues were found in this specific area of HR management. While doing this, she discovered a knowledge gap around Generation Z. The author noticed that many sources were dated a few years back, some even close to two decades ago and felt that however credible the source, the topic might have had evolved and questioned the reliability of these papers to today's society. Overall, only sources which the author found to still be relevant were included.

#### **3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Following the literature review, the author started on the empirical part of her research. The author has chosen to do qualitative research because of the people centric nature of the hospitality industry. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because there was a need for a better understanding of the conceptions of HR professionals and graduate students of Dutch hotel schools on retention, employee engagement and the hospitality industry. Other qualitative research methods such as observation and surveys with open ended questions were considered during the outline process, however, because of the short time frame the author could not go with observations and preferred semi-structured

interviews over surveys because the author can obtain richer data by having the opportunity to ask follow up questions and ask for clarifications when necessary. This creates a deeper understanding of the conceptions of the participants. Table 1 shows an overview of the participants.

Table 1. Information interviewees

<b>Interviewee number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>
1	Human Resources Advisor	Large international chain
2	Talent Development Specialist	Large international chain (focus on Europe)
3	Human Resources Coordinator	Private owned Dutch hotel in Amsterdam
4	Recruitment Advisor	Large international chain
5	Graduate student	6 years of experience in the hospitality industry: restaurants and hotel
6	Graduate student	6 years of experience in the hospitality industry: restaurant and hotel
7	Graduate student	6 years of experience in the hospitality industry: hotel
8	Graduate student	7 years of experience in the hospitality industry: restaurants and hotel
9	Graduate student	5 years of experience in the hospitality industry: restaurants and hotel

“Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation, with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering” (Warren, 2011). In this same paper, Warren (2011) describes this technique as “aiming to understand the meaning of respondents’ experiences and life worlds” (p. 83). A form of qualitative interviewing is a semi-structured interview, which can be defined as “a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important” (Clifford, et al., 2005, p. 103).

Through connections, the author found three HR professionals from different hotels, in different positions based in The Netherlands. A fourth professional was recommended by the second interviewee as she had worked with interviewee 4 in the past and was aware of his interest in the topics of this thesis. Interviewees 1, 2 and 3 were approached via mutual connections, asking them if it was okay to share their contact information with the author of this thesis. After agreeing to that, communication was direct with the author and via



email. Interviews were set up for the following week and an invitation for a Microsoft Teams meeting was send out as meeting in person was not possible due to the Corona pandemic. Contact with interviewee 4, after the recommendation, was made through linked-in and all further communication went via email.

Interviewee 1 is a Human Resource Advisor for a hotel chain based in The Netherlands and Belgium. Interviewee 2 is a Talent Development Specialists for an international hotel chain focusing on the Dutch industry. Interviewee 3 is an HR coordinator for a privately owned hotel in Amsterdam. Lastly, interviewee 4 is a Recruitment Advisor for a chain hotel focusing on the UK and The Netherlands. As all communication went through email, the author noticed after the interviews that all HR professionals could be categorized as Millennials.

Before the interviews were held, 10 interview questions were made to help answer the research questions and support the semi-structured interviews. These questions are based on the theoretical framework and help understand the conceptions of HR professionals. These questions can be found in appendix 1. Question one asked about personal information regarding generation, position at their respective hotels and time in the industry to establish their expertise. Questions two and three were regarding the characteristics of employees in the Dutch hospitality industry and the well know characteristic, high turnover. Question four and five asked about efforts made by organizations regarding engagement and retention (Q4) and talent development and guidance (Q5). The following question asked about what the most important actions or programs were to enhance retention and engagement. Question 7 asked about the difficulty of measuring intangible concepts. Question 8 asked if the companies had taken any action to keep and engage younger employees. And the follow up question to that was what needed to be changed in the organization or industry to retain future employees. The last question was to determine their views on the future of HR in the Dutch hospitality industry. While holding these interviews, the topic of the current pandemic was brought up in two interviews and interviewees discussed how it had changed their approach. Interviews were held in Dutch and lasted on average 30 minutes.

The 5 graduate hotel school students were picked on availability and met the criteria of having experience in the Dutch hospitality industry. All students were found through student networking platforms and volunteered to participate in this research. All communication before the interviews was via WhatsApp. Interviews were set up for the next week and an invitation for a Microsoft Teams meeting was send out as meeting in person was

not possible due to the Corona pandemic. Interviewees 5, 6 and 7 were interviewed on the same day and the following two days interviewees 8 and 9 were interviewed. All students met the requirements to be interviewed as all students needed to be in their final year of a hotel or hospitality management study and had work experience in the Dutch hospitality industry. All participants belong to Generation Z.

Before the interviews were held, 10 interview questions were made to help answer the research questions and support the semi-structured interview. Questions were made to help understand the experiences and expectations of graduate students and are based on the theoretical framework. These questions can be found in appendix 2. As with the HR professionals, the first question was in regards personal information to establish that the interviewees belonged to Generation Z. The second question asked about their personal experiences in the Dutch hospitality industry, where they have worked and for how long. Often in the interviews, the interviewer would jump to questions 5 and 6 about the presence of programs regarding retention and/or engagement and if there was a lack of, if and what they would've liked to see. Question 3 asked if they saw a future in the hospitality industry and if there were enough opportunities. Q4 was similar to a question of the HR professionals, as it concerned the high turnover of the Dutch hospitality industry. In addition to this, interviewees were also asked if they were prone to switching jobs/job hopping. Question 7 was in regards to the opinions of the interviewees if engagement had an affect on retention. The following questions 8 and 9 asked participants about their view on HR policies if they found it important to focus on engagement and retention and what they expected from an HR department at their current or future jobs. The last questions asked them to share their views on the future of HR in the hospitality industry. Interviews were held in English and lasted on average 30 minutes.

### **3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is a research method used for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data by use of systematic classification also known as coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). "A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). Downe-Wamboldt (1992) said that the goal of content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 314). The author chose to use qualitative content analysis in the form of transcribing the interviews held and comparing the data given by participants per question. The transcribing was done with help from AmberScripts, which is an online tool where video and audio can be uploaded to be transcribed. The author

chose to go for the quicker option, which was to have it transcribed by a computer program instead of a person and to check it after that to be sure the transcription was correct and to be able to filter out the mistakes the program had made. This allowed the author an opportunity to go over the information given in the interviews bit by bit and properly process what the interviewees had to say. In total, 8,5 hours of interviews were transcribed which totals to 44 number of pages.

After the transcription process was done, the author started comparing the answers given by participants per question systematically. The distinction between HR professionals and graduate students was again taken into consideration as the two groups answer different research questions. However, both groups were needed to answer the last research questions. It was of importance to keep the three research questions in mind, the literature review and the interview questions to make sure no questions were missed during the interviews. The data collected during the interviews was added to a table in the form of key points and for each question, differences and similarities were found as personal opinions differed. The similarities that were found are listed as themes, as some participants worded their views differently but were still in line with the opinion of one or more participants. A table was made for the data collected during interviews with HR professionals and a table was made for the data collected during interviews with graduate students. The former can be found in appendix 3 and the latter in appendix 4. The tables give a clear overview of what data was found during the interviews and the theme's found from it that form the foundation of the conclusion and recommendations.

To summarize, the methodology part of this thesis concluded of four parts. The first two parts consisted of creating two sets of interview questions, each 10 questions long, asked by the author of this thesis to 4 HR professionals from different hotels with different job titles and 5 graduate hotel school students. The last two parts consisted of transcribing the interviews with the use of the online tool AmberScript and creating two tables to create an overview of the data and to be able to pull theme's from the often varied answers.

## **4 Conceptions of HR Professionals and Graduate Students**

The chapter discusses the results of qualitative data generated by interviewing HR professionals and graduate hotel school students. The first subchapter will discuss the conceptions of HR professionals. The second subchapter elaborates on the experiences and expectations of Dutch hotel school graduates and subchapter three compares the conceptions and expectations of both groups as well as summarizes the findings.

### **4.1 HR Professionals' Conceptions**

The interview started by asking the participants if they could introduce themselves, so the author was familiar with their age, position and time in the industry. Then they were asked about the typical characteristics of the workforce in the hospitality industry these days. One of the interviewees described young employees as ambitious, competitive, having trouble with the traditional hierarchy and eager to learn with a specific purpose in mind. Another pointed out that what she was about to say was generalized and that in her hotel there is a big focus on individuality, however, she had noticed that young people want to have a say in the matter and feel like their work is serving a purpose. She also mentioned that she believed young employees want flexibility, in work hours, the ability to work from home and to be flexible in how the day is spent. A third participant noticed a difference in different age groups but felt that the people in the hospitality industry were generally passionate about their job and hardworking people. And the last interviewee noted that there is a difference between hotels in big cities and smaller cities. Hotels in bigger cities having a bigger variety between nationalities. The dynamic environment and flexibility also came to mind.

Then participants were asked about what they believed to be the reasons behind the high turnover in the industry. One participant did not give any reasons and simply stated that they have a high turnover rate. Another mentioned that there was a difference between countries and regions as, for example, Amsterdam has a high turnover rate and a southern province such as Limburg has a significantly lower percentage. She believed the difference comes from the vast number of hotels in Amsterdam, the employment of temporary residents and students that only work in the hospitality as a side job and lastly because young employees feel a need to grow quickly and can't always do that at the hotel they are working at. One of the HR professionals who works at a hotel in Amsterdam confirmed that the high turnover for their hotel is because of the fierce competition between hotels and the lack of career opportunities as it is not part of a chain and employees sometimes can't grow any further in their hotel. The other participant talked about the lack

of qualified employees in our industry, which results in the hiring of unqualified people that organizations ultimately have to let go of.

When asked about efforts made by the organizations to retain employees' answers varied, as can be expected. One of the interviewees mentioned company culture, appreciation and acknowledgments in the form of team member of the year and training courses. Another interviewee mentioned the little things that, in her eyes, make employees stay such as birthday cards and one-on-one contact to check in. One mentioned their efforts to train their own employees to further their careers. And a participant explained their personal approach to sit down with the employee one-on-one to see how they could help them, as well as having training courses available for all and fringe benefits.

When asked about what kind of talent development programs each of these hotels are implementing, two interviewees mentioned personal plans for employees, one of them having different programs for trainees, training courses for different levels for employees and offering masterclasses for a select few that last 1,5 to 2 years. Another mentioned that all training courses were accessible to everyone employed at the hotel and that courses could be asked for by employees or created for one after assessment and performance reviews. One even mentioned they have two programs for students, apprenticeships, training courses for employees from every level and a management development program.

Answers given by the participants when asked what the most important thing was when it comes to engaging and retaining employees included training courses and talent programs as well as freedom, additional benefits such as gym membership, company culture, bike taxes plan and a Christmas bonus for every employee. One of the professionals mentioned how she felt that the training of your own staff was important as well as including the staff in the decision making process. And another explained how they have staff parties that are also informative and how 4 times a year they send out an employee satisfaction survey with 4 questions to make sure they get a response from every employee, even the ones that don't stay for a year.

This also answers the question of how intangible concepts like engagement are being measured for that particular interviewee. As expected, all (other) hotels send out a survey on a yearly basis. Three of the hotels did this internally and one outsourced this to protect the anonymity and because of their knowledge on surveys and analysis data. They also mentioned the one-on-one conversations between management and employees.

The next question focused on younger employees that belong to Generation Y and Z and the efforts made by the hotels to engage and retain them as well as the generational theory. A participant mentioned that the programs aren't different for different generations but noticed that employees who have been employed for a longer period of time, 20+ years, did not feel the need to grow and "make steps" and were happy in the position they were in when younger employees did, in fact, want to make these steps and grow. Another mentions how they do pay attention to the generational theory, but are not actively implementing it in their programs or efforts and act on the need of this generation for freedom and flexibility as well as have an exchange program where employees can move to another country for 3 months to do their job in one of their hotels abroad. One professional explained how they do their own research on the different generations and even give training on the topic. They look at what you should offer different generations and how to match their efforts to the target group. And a fourth answer mentioned was the subconscious focus on the differences between generations as younger employees are sometimes sent text instead of emails but that they mostly focus on the employee persona's that were created a few years back.

When participants were asked what needed to be done or changed in the organization or industry to retain future employees, one of the professionals talked about how she felt that we need to get rid of the stuffy image the hospitality industry has and create better working circumstances as pay is low right now. She also mentioned that Generation Z wants to have a purpose and they need to be given opportunities to grow and need to be stimulated with training courses. Another professional talked about how we need to think with them and have a one-on-one approach. She mentioned that younger generations want freedom, flexibility and to have a say in the matter. Unfortunately, this question was not asked to one of the participants, but luckily after the interview, she had sent her thesis which covered retention and job satisfaction written one year ago for the hotel she works at and so the author was able to find out that for the employees of this particular company one of the recommendations made was to better fit the training courses to employees to make sure the right employee attends the right training and every training adds value to the competences of the employee. Another answer mentioned was focusing on the needs of younger generations.

The last question asked what they thought was going to happen in the future of HR. Answers included the hope for an improved CAO, the Dutch collective work agreement, and being more forward with technology as the hospitality industry tends to stay behind when it comes to technology. Also mentioned was the want for more exchanges and looking into

giving the end of the year bonus in something else than money, perhaps time off work and a hope to be able to be more flexible with scheduling work hours. Hope to see more schooled personnel to fill the many openings was also mentioned by one of the participants and another mentioned he believed that HR will become simpler and more systemized as well as it becoming more dependent on technology and specialized in smaller areas such as recruitment and training, that might even be outsourced.

## **4.2 Students' Conceptions**

After a brief introduction from each of the interviewees, the author of this thesis could start with the more important questions. When asked about the length of experience students had in the hospitality industry, naturally, the answers varied. However, most of the participants had worked for a significant amount of time, 3 years or more, at the same company before they started job hopping and were employed for shorter amount of times. This might be because of the change in lifestyle, moving out of their parents' homes in their first years of college and because of the mandatory 6-month long placement.

When asked to describe the hospitality workforce and if they saw themselves working in the industry in the future, most participants described the workforce in ways that are in line with the literature found by the author. Describing hospitality staff as hardworking, ambitious, having a passion for their work and prone to job hopping. Younger generations were also labeled as feeling the need to explore and travel to fulfill their need for adventure. When asked if they saw a future in the hospitality industry for themselves, two participants said yes as one described it as her passion and explained her fondness of working with people and the other explained how, to her, the hospitality industry was more than just hotels and restaurants and could be better described as an experience industry and how she would always be part of that. Both saw limited opportunities because of the pandemic and limited positions in HR respectively. Another said that he believed to stay in the industry because working with people is what hospitality is about and not "just" working in hotels and restaurants. He explained that even though he was unsure of the number of opportunities in the industry, he saw himself branch out because of his other interests. The other two interviewees were not sure if they would stay in the hospitality industry in the long run, they said they might move on to other industries. One mentioned that she valued growth and that she needed to stay challenged by her work and the other mentioned wanting a higher [managerial] position or perhaps start her own B&B.

The next question asked interviewees why they thought the turnover in the industry was high, as this is a well-known fact and if they themselves were prone to job hopping. One of

the participants believed that the high turnover was a result of a lack of opportunity to grow for employees. Another mentioned the poor working environment, giving the example of hard work and low pay and, as well as another interviewee, mentioned the lack of opportunity to grow. Reasons for these participants, either personal or more general, to job hop were a need to learn more and new things, employers not being flexible enough or having no opportunities to grow, needing more of a challenge or wanting to explore and needing to grow (and not being able to).

When asked about their experiences with engagement and retention programs at previous jobs, two of the interviewees couldn't think of any examples they've had in the Dutch hospitality industry. One of them did mention the presence of a few training courses for some department but that that was the extent of the effort made by the company. The other three students did notice efforts made by the company. One of them said that even though she did not think her employer was actively trying to engage and retain their employees, she did appreciate the small gestures as birthday cards and genuine interest shown by management on how the employees were doing. Two others, who both are currently doing internships at chain hotels as HR support and marketing trainee, were very aware of the programs available for them. One of them, a marketing trainee, knew about the career and loyalty programs in place for regular employees and the career path program in place for trainees that she was taking. The other, working in HR support, was impressed by the actions of her hotel celebration employee jubilees with bonuses and letters of gratitude. She also mentioned efforts made by a previous employer, creating competition between waitresses and a yearly get together but expressed that this approach did not work for her.

This question was followed up by asking the participants what would make you stay at a company and what would keep you engaged? One of the interviewees, who only noticed some training courses for other departments, wanted training for herself to help her do her job correctly but also to be able to bond with other employees. This, in her mind, would also create a more open atmosphere where questions were allowed to be asked and mistakes could be made. In addition to this, she also mentioned that the event organized in the beginning weeks of her placement helped her bond with colleagues and that she valued this opportunity. Another participant said that she valued flexibility, in working hours and work, wanting to feel trusted, needed to have career development and growth and that she appreciated the benefits that can come with a job. These reasons would help her both stay engaged and keep working at the company. Also mentioned was the desire to



have been given more responsibility in his job as this would increase his employee engagement and another interviewee mentioned twice how she valued open communication and appreciates the small gestures that she mentioned happen at her hotel and a need to be comfortable. One participant said that next to the things she mentioned that were right at the hotel she currently works at, she also needs opportunities to grow in order to stay engaged and to keep working for the company.

Participants were asked if they felt there was a connection between engagement and retention or if they viewed this as separate concepts. Two of the interviewees did not see this link. One of them mentioned that even though engagement could help with retention, he did not believe it could prevent someone from leaving the company if they wanted and the other did not see the link as she described different things for herself that would keep her engaged and what would make her stay. However, when asked which of these concepts was more important this interviewee said that both were important as they were linked. She then clarified that, because she does not see herself as fully in the industry (no full-time job), her reasons for engagement and to stay might be different but that in the bigger picture this indeed was linked. One participant did see a connection, however, she saw connections between training and engagement and training and retention as training helped with career development and with bonding between colleagues. The two other participants saw the connection between engagement and retention as they themselves gave the same reasons for what would make them engaged and what would make them stay.

As quickly mentioned above, this question was followed by asking the interviewees if they thought it was important for HR departments to focus on engagement and retention. Again, one interviewee did say she found it important. Two participants mention the high cost of employees and the importance of human capital and that by focusing on engagement and retention, companies could be more efficient. Another interviewee said that if she felt like a company was trying to retain her it would make her feel appreciated and it would help her stay. And the last participant, after being explained a point of view of one of the HR professionals: how in this pandemic it was not important to focus on retention but engagement, was asked if she agreed with the statement. She agreed and continued on that by explaining how this younger generation (Generation Z) does not want to work for the same company for a longer period of time and that they would leave after two years. And so, it was not as important for companies to focus on retention.

When participants were asked what their expectations were from HR departments on engagement and retention, often this question turned into what would you expect from HR in

an ideal world. One interviewee expects active research from HR departments on what employees want and how to keep them happy. In addition to that, she would like to see HR in an advisory role and focus on recruiting the right people. Another also expected an active approach where both sides come together to find solutions. He also mentioned that general guidelines were okay but that in the end customized approaches were best. One of the participants expected quarterly or yearly meetings with the HR department to check in with each other and see what needed to be done. She also mentioned that she expects HR to be open and approachable. And another expects a more passive role from HR, letting employees come to them as they can't know what they need unless they're being told. After that, a solution can be found together as it needs to be balanced and come from both sides. Also mentioned was the expectation of organizations creating a welcoming learning environment with opportunities to bond with colleagues.

The last question asked participants how they viewed the future of HR in the Dutch hospitality industry. Answers were varied, one believes that HR departments will focus more on engagement and training courses for Millennials so they can grow within their jobs. Another believes there is going to be more attention on job hopping and how to prevent it. Thinking that recruitment will change as companies will look at overlapping values and company fit rather than experience and documents was also mentioned among the answers. He also expressed his hope for HR departments to focus on helping employees grow, both career wise as personal development. One participant believes it will change but doesn't know how, as her research for her own thesis on gender equality showed that things have already changed. When asked if the difference between generations had something to do about it, she continued that newer generations are more caring about each other's opinions and inclusion. Also, that new technology will play a role. The last answer given by an interviewee was that she believes that HR departments will become smaller as tasks are automated and perhaps even outsourced.

#### **4.3 Comparison and Summary**

To answer research question one, what are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry on their organization's present actions to retain and engage Generation Z? the following themes found in the interviews need to be taken into consideration. Typical characteristics given by the professionals to the workforce is a want and need for flexibility and passionate/eager. When asked about the high turnover, themes that emerged were labor shortage/high competition, lots of side jobs and the desire of young employees to grow which is not always possible at the hotel. Efforts made towards

retention were training courses and extra's such as fringe benefits and attention policy. Efforts towards talent management were specialized training programs for groups and training courses available for all. The most important actions for engagement and retention were freedom, choosing how to work and inclusion in the decisions making process. Engagement was measured via yearly surveys and although not always applied, generation theory was generally accepted and actions from the organizations were shaped around the characteristics given by the participants. For future employees, professionals emphasized the importance of fitting and adjusting actions toward the needs of younger employees and some saw more implementation of advanced technology in the future.

To answer research question two, what are the expectations and experiences of graduate hotel school students in The Netherlands on retention and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry? the following themes found in the interviews need to be taken into consideration. Students mentioned their need for growth and developments, both personally and professionally when the topic of turnover and job hopping was discussed as reasons for them to leave an organization. Many have significant experience at job hopping in the past 5 years. When asked to describe their future and if hospitality had any role in it, students answered that the hospitality industry is more than just hotels and restaurants and that they need growth and opportunities to stay in the industry. Previous employers have sparsely acted upon engagement and retention according to participants. When asked about their needs, students emphasized their want for freedom/flexibility, need for opportunities and hopes for a desirable atmosphere. Some believed that engagement affects retention and most believed that it's important for organizations to focus on these topics and that it helps lower costs. Expectations of these students are a collaborative approach with HR departments and opportunities to grow and expect advanced technology to help systemize HR practices.

To get a better understanding of the conceptions of both groups on the future of HR, the author compared the answers given by the participants. HR professionals were more focused on global aspects as they mentioned improving the CAO, more advanced technology, more exchanges between hotels, change of the end of year bonus expressed in something other than money, hope for more school personnel and a simple and more systemized HR that could create specialized groups or even companies. Students were more focused on things that would affect them personally such as a focus on engagement, focus on the prevention of job hopping and focusing on company fit and values instead of traditional recruitment strategies. Things also mentioned were a hope for more training courses to facilitate growth, implementation of advanced technology and HR becoming

automized or outsourced. Both groups seem to believe the future of HR in the hospitality industry included the implementation of advanced technology and the improvement of the CAO and prevention of job hopping go hand in hand. Appendix 8 and 9 show the systematic analysis of the interviews and the themes concluded from the answers for both HR professionals and graduate hotel school students.

## **5 Discussion and Conclusions**

In chapter 5 the author will discuss her findings compared to the literature review and share her conclusions based on these findings. This is followed by the recommendations made in this paper after conducting the research and concludes with an evaluation of the thesis and the learning process of the author. The main objective of this thesis was to study and understand the context and conceptions of both HR professionals and Generation Z around engaging and retaining Generation Z in the Dutch hospitality industry. The author of this thesis created three research questions to help with the understanding of this complex situation.

1. What are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality industry on their organization's present actions to retain and engage Generation Z?
2. What are the expectations and experiences of graduate hotel school students in The Netherlands on retention and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry?
3. What recommendations can be made to organizations in the Dutch hospitality industry regarding engaging and retaining Generation Z?

### **5.1 Main Findings**

A lot of the things mentioned by HR professionals regarding the wants and needs of younger generations are in line with the responses given by the graduate students. Examples of this are wanting organizations to be flexible, desire for training courses and growth opportunities, freedom and more advanced technology in the future. Also mentioned by students is the need for a desirable atmosphere and a collaborative approach with HR. These were not mentioned by the professionals among the needs of younger generations. Fringe benefits and the little things were mentioned by HR professionals as important factors in regards to engagement and retention of younger generations, however, this was only mentioned by one of the students.

An important find was that 4 of the 5 students interviewed mentioned training courses, opportunities and/or growth when talking about engagement and retention and it was the main theme of the student interviews. While only half of the HR professionals talked about training courses and opportunities when questions were asked around engaging and retention of younger generations. Luckily all hotels did mention the presence of training courses for employees.

Another thing that stood out when interviewing graduate students is that only 1 of the participants could think of an example for engagement and retention actions and/or programs

from a Dutch restaurant and that it wasn't particularly effective for this her. All other examples given for any actions and/or programs were from hotels in the Dutch hospitality industry.

A few other findings from the conducted research are that some of the students saw the hospitality industry as more than the typical organizations and viewed it as a service or experience industry. Another finding was that the generational theory is generally accepted by the hotels interviewed but is hardly applied when it came to efforts made by the organizations regarding engagement and retention.

Based on the data, student participants have mentioned wanting and expecting a collaborative approach from HR. Cismaru and Lunius (2019) point out that the entire approach of talent management has to be more inclusive, collaborative and generative at present and is in line with the findings of this research. Young generations wanting their work to be generative was also mentioned by one of the HR professionals.

One of the biggest findings was the desire for growth and opportunities from the students. One of the ways HR departments can help with this is by providing more training courses. Which is a talent management practice mentioned by Cismaru and Lunius (2019). It is also in with the fourth driver of engagement by Gibbons (2006) career growth opportunities, where he explains that employees need to have opportunities for career growth and promotions or have a clearly defined career path.

Development, either personal or professional is mentioned throughout the student interviews as all have a desire to develop themselves as a person and as a professional. HR professionals have also recognized this trait in the young workforce, characterizing young employees as passionate and eager. Development is another driver for engagement by Gibbons (2006) and Kuchinke (2010) agrees as he argues that HR professionals have an ethical and moral imperative to develop their employees personally and professionally. The eagerness students displayed is also found in studies by Rani and Samuel (2016), who state that Generation Y is often associated with being impatient, showing the shared values and traits between the two younger generations, and Deloitte (2017) who mentions how they want to climb the career ladder fast.

Most students saw a future in the hospitality industry, whether that was with traditional hospitality organizations such as hotels and restaurants or expanding the definition to people or experience industries. However, reasons to job hop either within the industry or

to leave the branch was often because of the lack of opportunities and growth. Goh and Lee (2018) emphasized the importance of engaging in discussions about employee career pathways and planning for long term success. They recommend cross training to help deal with this issue. The same authors mention in their research that if expectations of younger generations are not met, they will leave the hospitality industry. When asked for reasons for “job hop”, the students that were interviewed for this thesis answers included organizations not being flexible, need for exploring and needing a challenge besides the overall consensus of needing opportunities and growth.

Inspiring enthusiasm was not mentioned by any of the participants when asked about retention or engagement, which contradicts the finding by Hughes and Rog (2008) who conducted a study on what is talent management, why is it important and which critical factors can be identified for effective implementation and concluded that inspiring enthusiasm was an important factor for The Netherlands. Something else that did not come back in the field research conducted was the value Millennials lay on sustainability-oriented behavior of companies and their high expectations of employers to act ethically and responsibly. This was neither mentioned by HR professionals as a characteristic of the workforce these days or as a value mentioned by the Generation Z students that share many (disruptive) values with their predecessor.

A theme that emerged from the interviews was a need to fit the efforts of organizations to the needs of younger generations. Most of the hotels interviewed used a yearly survey to create an understanding of their employees' wants and needs. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) emphasized the importance of this by saying that organizations need to address and understand the deeper needs of employees in order to retain and motivate them. Two of the hotels interviewed took it a step further by doing more in-depth research on the characteristics of either their employees or generations.

Both groups mentioned things regarding the company culture while on the topic of engagement and retention. For HR professionals this can be seen by the mentioning of the flexibility of a company and extra efforts made such as fringe benefits and attention policy. Students mentioned parts of company culture as well, such as open communication and bonding with colleagues which is mentioned in this paper as wanting a desirable atmosphere. The importance of colleagues can be found in the literature review as it's another one of Gibbons's (2006) drivers of engagement. The importance of company culture is emphasized by Andrew and Sofian (2012) when they defined employee engagement as

the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards his or her organization and its values. It is the last part of this statement, values, where the importance of company culture is shown. Schawbel (2016) found that Generation Z is fond of flexibility at work.

Some things discovered while doing the literature review did come back in the interviews, however, they were not mentioned enough to be mentioned as a theme. Having trust in and from an organization was only mentioned by one of the student interviewees as a reason to stay engaged and not leave. This relates to Gibbons's (2006) second driver of engagement. Another thing found in the literature and only mentioned by one HR professional during the interviews was the struggle younger generations have with traditional hierarchy. Cismaru and Iunius (2019) found that the hospitality industry is based on core values of older generations such as traditional hierarchy and that this led to an even higher turnover in the industry.

Another thing mentioned once was wanting open communication and valuing it to such an extent that lack thereof would be a reason to leave. Cismaru and Iunius (2019) emphasize Millennials' expectations for open and unconventional communication. This author recognizes that this conclusion is in consideration of Millennials and not Generation Z, which the students interviewed belong to, and made this assumption based on several pieces of researches showing the similar traits and characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z.

The last two things mentioned by a participant but could not be concluded as a theme is the preference and expectation of one-on-one meetings with HR departments for quarterly or yearly meetings and the desire to work in multiple countries which is mentioned by an HR professional and a student. Both are found to be common traits of Generation Z by Schawbel (2016).

## **5.2 Conclusions and Recommendations for the Industry**

To conclude, most conceptions and expectations of HR professionals and graduate hotel school students were compatible. The professionals were aware of the characteristics of the younger generations and have shown to put effort into researching what their employees want such as freedom/flexibility and recognizing their desire to move up the career ladder faster than the generations before them. However, the topic had a lot of varied answers as people have different opinions on what matters are more important and different wants and needs. This made it harder for the author to find themes in the interviews and



be able to make conclusions on that. Especially the last questions, asking both HR professionals and graduate students how they saw the future of HR had a variety of answers as it is always difficult to predict the future. The current state of the world also had a massive impact on the uncertainty of the future as professionals and students have seen firsthand how quickly something can change and how big of an impact it can make. Some did take the pandemic into account when talking about their hopes, desires and expectations for the future and others did not, still looking at the future as they would have before the pandemic.

Based on the research conducted for this thesis, four recommendations can be made. This will also answer research question 3, what recommendations can be made to organizations in the Dutch hospitality industry regarding engaging and retaining Generation Z? The first recommendation is for the hotels to conduct deeper employee research as the typical yearly survey will not provide enough information for a true understanding of the wants and needs of the employees. This can be done by one-on-one conversations with open communication between the organization and the employee where the focus lies on how the organization can best support the employees. This way, efforts made by the hotels are shaped around the wants and needs of their employees, creating a better fit, and are not based on assumptions made by the managers and higher-ups on how to support their staff. The second recommendation is to implement more advanced technology in the hotels as this was both a desire from HR professionals and graduate students. This will help with employee satisfaction, both front of house and back of house and can improve communication. The third recommendation is to improve HR communication to increase awareness or organization's actions to retain and engage employees as many of the students interviewed could not recall any efforts made by their previous employers. The last recommendation that can be made based on the research is to have a collaborative approach between HR departments and (younger) employees to create a clear understanding of their wants and needs and how to best support their goals of growth by creating opportunities and offering training courses.

The author recommends further research to be conducted on how advanced technology can support HR practices and communication around engagement and retention, as well as researching how implementing a collaborative approach between HR and young employees can help organizations fulfill the needs and goals of young employees.

### 5.3 Evaluation of Thesis

It is important to keep in mind when doing qualitative research that conclusions drawn on data from a microenvironment cannot be applied to the macro environment. To be able to make assumptions, find evidence or connections on such as big scale a quantitative study is needed. The results of this research provide an interesting perspective and a deeper insight into a contemporary topic as the objective was to understand the conceptions of HR professionals and experiences and expectations of graduating hotel school students. Important in any study is the subjectivity of the author. As hard as we try, unconscious or not, pre-assumptions of the author can shape and influence the research. Because of personal interest, the first half of this research was influenced by the generation theory, as the author wanted to have a closer look at Generation Z. Before starting the literature review, the author felt there might be a connection between engagement and retention as she had seen this at her placement in New Zealand where she researched the generation theory, using the hotel as a case company. This has influenced the literature review as the topic of generational theory was inserted as a factor for engagement and retention efforts as well as the topic of talent management. In the future, the author will use tables and charts to keep track of the found literature to make sure that the topics relate to each other and are not introduced because of personal believes or preferences.

The literature review started with a deeper look into human resource management, focusing on talent management and its practices. After that, the author of this thesis started looking for research on engagement and retention in the hospitality industry, preferably in The Netherlands or a comparable country. To strengthen the literature review, only credible sources found on Google Scholar were used. The subjectivity of an author also influences the trustworthiness of a research paper as it affects the confirmability of the research. Confirmability is one of the 4 criteria of Guba's constructs for trustworthy qualitative research which is used in this paper to examine the trustworthiness of this research as Anney (2015) and other researchers before him researched how in qualitative research, researchers often employ the quantitative trustworthiness criteria of reliability and validity instead of qualitative criteria such as Guba's constructs.

Guba's construct consists of 4 criteria for trustworthy qualitative research. Number one is credibility, is a true picture depicted? This research interviews 4 HR professionals that were chosen without previous knowledge of the author of their opinions and actions taken by the organization on engagement and retention. The graduate hotel school students have been selected based on criteria and voluntary participation. Given the like-mindedness of students who share their interest in the hospitality industry, their views might differ

from those who did not enjoy a similar study and their perspectives and expectations might change because of that. Also, the author recognizes that 9 interviewees only provide an insight into a small group that is part of a much bigger industry and recommends future researchers to expand the number of interviewees.

The second criterion is transferability, the author should give enough detail for the reader to decide if this situation is transferable to a situation they are familiar with. The author of this thesis has provided all the information she was allowed to share as some participants wanted to stay anonymous. She did give a description of the organizations in regard to size, the position of HR professionals and the length of experiences of the hotel school students. The third criterion is dependability. For this, the author of this paper asks future researchers to repeat this study on a larger scale to confirm the dependability of this paper as data was collected from a small pool of participants. The last criterion is confirmability, is the conclusion derived from the data and not the personal opinion of the researcher? As mentioned earlier, the first part of this thesis was influenced by the subjectivity of the author. To avoid doing this in the second part of her research, the author used qualitative content analysis to not influence the confirmability. A table was created during the qualitative content analysis process that made it a lot easier as anyone reading this paper can see the theme's concluded from the answers given by participants and the conclusions and recommendations of this paper are based on this foundation.

Due to the novel Coronavirus that has taken over the world, meetings with the thesis supervisor and interviews had to be held online instead of face to face. This proved to be challenging as the WIFI connections are not always as reliable because people are not used to having to work from home. Interviewing via Microsoft Teams had both positives and negatives as it proved to be less time consuming when you can interview from the comfort of your own home, but it was harder to interpret the body language of participants. One of the interviewees even choose to not activate her camera, making it impossible for the author to have non-verbal communication. This decreased the interaction and the author had to work harder to make sure the interviewee felt comfortable sharing their opinions. Another negative of online interviewing is the get-to-the-point mentality interviewees had as there was less need for pleasantries and formalities before the interview and answers might have been shortened due to the format and other obligations participants had while working from home. The direct approach did help with getting clearer answers and made it easier to ask follow up questions. Having the interviews online also made it easier to stay professional when interviewing students that the author knew either personally or through mutual connections.

The research questions influenced the interview question to focus on talent management and development besides engagement and retention. The author tried not to influence the answers given by participants by not mentioning talent management before discussing the efforts made by organizations on engagement and retention, but because of the semi-structure of the interviews, this was not always the case.

Ethical issues typically found in qualitative research stem from the personal involvement of the researchers (Sanjari, et al., 2014). They need to both observe and interpret the collected data. Briefly mentioned above, the anonymity of participants had to be protected as not all interviewees wanted their personal information shared. Confidentiality was also of the issue as one interviewee did share information on their organization's efforts but did not want the company to be recognizable. When interviewing online, the opportunity arose for the author to record the video chat and from an ethical viewpoint made sure to ask for the participants' consent before starting the recording. Interviewees were assured that no one other than the author would see these recordings, as the only purpose of the recording was to help transcribe the interview. The last ethical issue, which has been mentioned before, is the potential impact the author and participants can have on each other and steer the interview or research a particular way.

When reflecting on this thesis, the author recognizes that by expanding the number of interviewees, the data collected would be deeper and richer as every additional opinion enriches the research. Another thing that would have strengthened this process was a better understanding of the objective of this research. Because of the tight schedule, the author was forced to continue to the next step of the research, while it would have benefitted the author to take more time for understanding the objective. For future research, the author will continue using Google Scholar as her main search engine as it provided this research with credible sources. The qualitative content analysis is also a strength to this paper and will be remembered by the author as a qualitative and useful way to analyze qualitative content, as it leaves no room for subjectivity during this stage of the research.

#### **5.4 Evaluation of One's Own Learning**

Due to questionable time management of her study load in this final school year, the process of writing this thesis started with a lack of time and the author felt unsure if she could deliver a quality research paper and have something to look back on and feel proud of. But with the encouragement of her coach and an eagerness to complete one of the last

tasks before graduating, the author of this thesis started to work. It has proven to be challenging at times when motivation was low and time pressure high, but the author pushed herself to continue with her research.

The first meeting with her supervisor was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, having handed in her thesis outline two weeks before. It was clear to both parties that if the author wanted to finish this thesis before the end of the year, a lot of dedication and hard work was needed. With the first notes and an eagerness to complete this final paper, the author started to work. With a tight schedule and great project management skills, the author met every deadline given to her by her supervisor. The entire writing process of this thesis took just over a month. While the author would not recommend anyone to work with such high time pressure, she used her strength of time management to complete this work and meet her final deadline.

As it had been two years since the author last interviewed someone for a research paper, she had to freshen up her knowledge of this research technique. And even with the approval from her coach, after the interviews, the author realized how important it is to make sure the interview questions answer the research question and learned that it is important to make sure that every question is asked in a semi-structured interview as it is easy to miss one. The author learned that in order to ask the right questions in an interview, the objective and research questions need to be clear and specific in order to obtain data that is useful and can be analyzed. Not rushing the end of an interview and taking more detailed notes can help future interviews as the author will have time to make sure all questions are asked and if the answers that are given, answer said questions as people tend to drift off to other topics while telling a story and sometimes ramble on about other things. For future interviews, the author will make sure to have a clear understanding of the objectives in addition to memorizing the interview questions as it will help with making sure all questions are asked.

After the interview process was complete, the author started to analyze the data. The transcribing process was time consuming, yet relatively easy. It was when the data needed to be analyzed, that the author realized she did not know how as this was a skill not often practiced during the past four years. A suggestion from her supervisor to compare answers per question was helpful but concluding the data proved to be otherwise. Not knowing how to interpret the data as answers varied a lot, the thesis supervisor suggested creating a table to help conclude theme's from the interviews to help with the conclusion. This was a tremendous help and forms the base of the analysis and conclusion. For future

analysis, the author will use this method when doing qualitative research as it proved to be an relatively easy and systematic way of analyzing the data.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions for HR Professionals

What are the conceptions of HR professionals in the Dutch hospitality on retention, turnover and engagement now and in the nearby future?

1. Personal info: name, gender, age, position at company, time in industry
2. What are some typical characteristics for the Dutch hospitality workforce these days?
3. Why do you think we have a high turnover rate and what are the consequences?
4. What kind of efforts your organization is doing to keep your employees? Do you have any policies or programs?
5. What kind of talent (development) programs do you have at [hotel]?
6. Which are the most important actions/ programs to enhance retention and engagement?
7. What intangible things do you measure like engagement and how?
8. How do you see contemporary discussion on different generations? Do you see differences between generations? Has your organization taken any actions to retain and engage younger employees/ Generations Y and Z?
9. In your opinion, what needs to be done or changed in your organization/industry to attract/keep the future employees
10. What do you see happening in the future of HR? Any final thoughts?

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Hospitality Students**

What are the conceptions of graduating hospitality students in The Netherlands on retention, turnover and engagement in the Dutch hospitality industry in the nearby future?

1. Personal info: name, gender, age, length of experience
2. Do you have any experience in the hospitality industry, if so where? Specifically the Dutch industry?
3. Do you see yourself working in the hospitality industry in the future? Are there enough opportunities?
4. Why do you think there is a high turnover in our industry? Are you prone to switching jobs?
5. Did they [the Dutch company you have worked for] have any special programs or took any actions regarding retention and/or engagement? And if so, please elaborate on how it worked.
6. What kind of programs, policies or actions would make you stay? What kind of programs, policies or actions would keep you engaged? Why are these things so important to you? Tell me more about that, give me an example?
7. Do you think engagement affects retention?
8. Do you think it's important for companies to focus on retention and engagement and why?
9. What do you expect from a HR department in the hospitality industry regarding retention and engagement?
10. What do you see happening in the future of HR? Any final thoughts?

### Appendix 3: Analysis of HR Professionals' Answers

Question	Theme	Answers
Personal information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 28F, Human resources advisor, chain in 13 countries with +160 hotels</li> <li>- 30F, Talent development specialist, international chain with +400 hotels</li> <li>- 22F, Human resources employee, stand-alone hotel in Amsterdam</li> <li>- 25M, Recruitment advisor, operate in 5 countries with 45 hotels</li> </ul>
Typical characteristics these days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want and need for flexibility</li> <li>• Passionate / eager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young employees are ambitious, competitive, have issues with traditional hierarchy, eager to learn</li> <li>- Young employees want to have a say in the matter, purpose and flexibility</li> <li>- Differs per age group, passionate and hardworking</li> <li>- Dynamic, flexible, difference between large and small cities, larger cities diverse nationalities</li> </ul>
High turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor shortage / high competition</li> <li>• Lot of side jobs</li> <li>• Young employees desire growth and not always possible at hotel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is high and are busy looking into why</li> <li>- Differs per country/region, Amsterdam high because high competition, temporary citizen, side jobs and young employees job hop for growth</li> <li>- Not having the ability to move up anymore as you could in a chain, high competition</li> <li>- Lack of employees → not qualified employees get hired, side jobs</li> </ul>
Efforts made towards retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training courses</li> <li>• Extra's such as fringe benefits and attention policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training and developing own employees</li> <li>- Training courses open for everyone, fringe benefits, end of year bonus for all</li> <li>- Personal attention / checking in; be visible, HR in advising role, little things/attention policy</li> <li>- Company culture</li> </ul>
Efforts made towards talent management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized training programs for groups</li> <li>• Some training courses for all available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning academy for all, special program for trainees and masterclasses</li> <li>- 1 on 1 approach because lack of SOP's, 2 talent programs for select groups</li> <li>- Training courses available for all and on request</li> <li>- Special programs for different groups and some training courses for all</li> </ul>

Most important actions for engagement and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom; way of work or decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training courses and including staff in decisions</li> <li>- Having freedom to do it their own way</li> <li>- Checking in 4 times a year and acting on it</li> <li>- Company culture, with pandemic online "events"</li> </ul>
Measuring the intangible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yearly survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yearly survey</li> <li>- Conversations with superiors and yearly survey</li> <li>- 4 surveys a year with 4 questions</li> <li>- Yearly survey</li> </ul>
Generations theory, actions towards younger employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gen theory is generally accepted but not always actively acted upon</li> <li>Actions are shaped around characteristics given by interviewees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Looked at but not categorized by generation, young employees more ambitions</li> <li>- Yes but no implementation, being flexible and giving freedom</li> <li>- Persona's not generation, conversations and communication with employees adjusted to these common traits</li> <li>- Researched and give training in generational differences, look at wants and needs</li> </ul>
Change needed to retain future employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fit or adjust actions towards needs of younger employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update stuffy image of industry, better working circumstances (pay), focus on development and training</li> <li>- Thinking with young employees on how to move forward and giving freedom to explore, being flexible, exchange program</li> <li>- <i>From thesis</i> better fit of training courses, better recruiting and onboarding program</li> <li>- Fit programs towards needs of younger employees</li> </ul>
How will the future look like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More implementation of technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More tech forward, improved CAO</li> <li>- More exchange, more flexibility in scheduling, ability to give bonus in time not money</li> <li>- Wish for more schooled employees</li> <li>- Centralized HR, systemized and specialized</li> </ul>

#### Appendix 4: Analysis of Students' Answers

Question	Theme	Answers
Personal information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 22, female, graduate student</li> <li>- 20, male, graduate student</li> <li>- 23, female</li> <li>- 22, female</li> <li>- 21, female</li> </ul>
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant experience at job hopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 jobs of different lengths</li> <li>- 3 jobs, first one 5 years after that short employment</li> <li>- 5 years of experience at different jobs</li> <li>- 6 years of experience</li> <li>- Different jobs, all short employment</li> </ul>
Describe hospitality workforce and your future career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality is more than hotels and restaurants</li> <li>• Need for growth / opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Passionate, hospitality is more than restaurants and hotels so I will stay [in industry] in HR or Sales, enough opportunities but not right after Corona</li> <li>- Younger generations like exploring, travel, adventure and job hopping, might not stay in the industry because of other interests, hospitality is the people</li> <li>- People are hardworking, not sure if she sees a future in the industry</li> <li>- Sees a future in the industry for self, given there is enough room for growth</li> <li>- Yes, this is her passion with limited opportunities in HR, people are ambitious</li> </ul>
High turnover & job hopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to be able to grow and develop personally and career wise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young employees switch because they want new things and want to learn</li> <li>- Job hop when there are no more opportunities or organization is not flexible</li> <li>- High turnover because people want a challenge or want to explore, job hopping when no room to grow</li> <li>- Switch because poor working conditions; busy, low pay or no room for growth</li> <li>- High turnover because people want a challenge, would job hop to grow</li> </ul>
Previous employers actions towards engagement and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotels seem more engaged with actions than restaurants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nothing, just a few training courses at hotel for housekeeping etc.</li> <li>- Career paths and career &amp; loyalty programs (current job; hotel)</li> <li>- No examples</li> <li>- No active approach but small things (hotel)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employee jubilee (+ money and letter), relaxed and freedom (current job; hotel), winner actions and events (restaurant),</li> </ul>
What actions would keep you engaged and stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want for freedom / flexibility</li> <li>• Opportunities for growth</li> <li>• Desirable atmosphere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training for bonding and open atmosphere, events</li> <li>- Flexibility in trust and working hours, career development and personal growth, fringe benefits</li> <li>- Responsibilities</li> <li>- Open communication, small gestures, being comfortable</li> <li>- Jubilee, relaxed atmosphere, freedom and enough opportunities</li> </ul>
Do you see a connection?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement affects retention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connection between training and engagement and training and retention</li> <li>- Yes because flexibility, trust and opportunities to grow would make me stay</li> <li>- No, engagement can help but not prevent leaving a job</li> <li>- Not personally but generally there is a connection</li> <li>- Yes</li> </ul>
Do you think these actions/efforts are important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important and can help organizations to lower costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Retention not important for young employees</li> <li>- Yes because it can help reduce high turnover costs, human capital is important</li> <li>- Yes</li> <li>- Yes</li> <li>- Organizations need to be efficient and focus on retention</li> </ul>
What do you expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative approach</li> <li>• Opportunities to grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities to bond with colleagues, create learning environment open to questions</li> <li>- Active research from HR on wants and needs, advisory role, focus on recruiting the right people</li> <li>- Active approach, collaborative, general guidelines but personalized approach</li> <li>- Yearly or quarterly meetings, 1 on 1 approach, HR is approachable</li> <li>- Collaborative, jubilee and enough opportunities</li> </ul>
How do you see the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced technology to systemize HR practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on engagement, more training courses for millennials to grow within the company</li> <li>- Focus on lowering the high turnover and job hopping</li> <li>- Different recruitment strategy, focus on the fit between company and employee</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- It will change, new generations are more caring and including, more technology advance</li><li>- Smaller, systemized and maybe out-sourced</li></ul>
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