International Review of Management and Marketing

ISSN: 2146-4405

available at http: www.econjournals.com

International Review of Management and Marketing, 2027, 17(1), 518-529.

Motivational Environments, Organizational Commitment, and Generation Z Retention in Service-Sector Firms: A Mediated Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling Framework

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Received: 27 May 2026 **Accepted:** 13 September 2026 **DOI:** https://doi.org/10.32479/irmm.24541

ABSTRACT

Retaining Generation Z (born 1995-2010) workers represents one of the most pressing human resource management challenges of the current decade, yet the motivational and psychological mechanisms that explain their propensity to remain in service-sector organizations remain undertheorized. Grounded in the integration of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Meyer and Allen's three-component model of organizational commitment, and Mitchell et al.'s Job Embeddedness Theory, this study tests a mediated structural model in which motivational factors (recognition, training and development, working conditions) predict employee retention both directly and through the mediating role of organizational commitment. A cross-sectional, quantitative survey was administered to 384 Generation Z workers employed in service-sector firms in Chimbote, Peru—a high-informality urban economy that constitutes a critical but underexplored research context. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS. Results confirm that motivational factors exert significant positive effects on both organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.355$, $P < 0.001$) and employee retention ($\beta = 0.282$, $P < 0.001$), while organizational commitment significantly predicts retention ($\beta = 0.211$, $P = 0.011$). Critically, organizational commitment partially mediates the motivational factors–retention relationship (indirect $\beta = 0.075$, $P = 0.023$), revealing a dual-pathway mechanism not previously documented for Generation Z in emerging economy service contexts. These findings extend established theories to a new generational boundary condition, provide validated psychometric instruments for the target population, and offer evidence-based guidance for human resource practitioners operating under conditions of labour informality.

Keywords: Generation Z, Employee Retention, Organizational Commitment, Motivational Factors, Service Sector, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling, Emerging Economies
JEL Classifications: M12, M54, J63, J24

1. INTRODUCTION

The global labour market is undergoing a generational inflection. For the 1st time in organisational history, five cohorts share the same workplace, and Generation Z—broadly defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2010—is entering the workforce as the fastest-growing segment (Surugiu et al., 2025). Yet precisely when organisations most need to build stable human capital pipelines, Gen Z workers demonstrate the highest voluntary turnover propensity of any cohort: Median employment tenure at first jobs stands at approximately 1.1 years, substantially below their Millennial predecessors (Randstad, 2025). This pattern is not merely attitudinal; it is structurally embedded in how this cohort evaluates the work environment. Unlike earlier generations for whom compensation was the primary retention anchor, Gen Z calibrates organisational attachment around recognition authenticity, continuous learning, flexible working conditions, and psychological safety (Deloitte, 2025; Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024). These shifts render classic

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unidimensional retention frameworks insufficient and demand theoretically integrated models that capture the motivational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, and behavioural outcomes that together determine whether a young worker stays or leaves. This need for more integrated explanations is consistent with recent bibliometric evidence showing that employee retention research has increasingly expanded toward interconnected themes such as engagement, leadership, work-life balance, organizational culture, employee well-being, and flexible work arrangements (Joshi et al., 2025).

The challenge is particularly acute in emerging economies, where structural labour market conditions compound the retention problem. In Latin America, 26.2% of individuals aged 15-29 are classified as neither employed nor in education or training, and over 55% of youth employment is informal (CEPAL and OIT, 2023; ILO, 2022). In Peru, labour-market vulnerability among young workers remains particularly pronounced. INEI data indicate that informal employment affects more than 85% of workers under 25 (INEI, 2023), while more recent figures show that youth employment declined by 3.9% in 2024—equivalent to approximately 100,000 fewer employed young people—with informality reaching 85.6% among workers aged 14–24 (Sánchez, 2025). This combination of high informality and employment instability may weaken the perceived costs of exit and the structural embeddedness mechanisms that sustain retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). In Chimbote, an intermediate service-sector economy that mirrors many Andean cities, the labour informality rate reaches 68.1% (INEI, 2025), creating a setting where Gen Z workers have low organisational tenure expectations and high mobility rates—making retention simultaneously more critical and more difficult.

Despite this urgency, the theoretical and empirical literature contains at least three significant gaps that the present study addresses. First, no published study has tested a fully specified, PLS-SEM-based mediated model that positions organisational commitment as the mechanism through which motivational environments translate into Gen Z retention outcomes. Existing research either examines motivation and retention as isolated bivariates (Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024; Ayu Asria et al., 2025; Ndiango et al., 2024) or explores commitment and retention without reference to motivational antecedents (Crayenstein et al., 2025; Ochis, 2024). The dual-pathway model—direct and mediated—remains untested for this population. Second, the motivational factor dimensions most salient for Gen Z (recognition, training and development, working conditions) have rarely been operationalised jointly within a single validated instrument and tested against both commitment and retention simultaneously, particularly in the service sector. Third, the theoretical intersection of Herzberg's two-factor theory, Meyer and Allen's three-component model, and Mitchell et al.'s Job Embeddedness Theory has been articulated conceptually but not empirically validated as an integrated framework for explaining Gen Z retention dynamics. This study fills all three gaps by providing the first PLS-SEM test of this tri-theoretical model in a high-informality, emerging economy service context.

Specifically, this study pursues four objectives: (1) to examine the relationship between motivational factors and organisational commitment in Generation Z service workers; (2) to analyse the relationship between organisational commitment and employee retention; (3) to evaluate the direct relationship between motivational factors and employee retention; and (4) to assess the mediating role of organisational commitment. The corresponding hypotheses are: H_1: Motivational factors are positively and significantly associated with organisational commitment in Generation Z. H_2: Organisational commitment is positively and significantly associated with employee retention. H_3: Motivational factors are positively and significantly directly associated with employee retention. H_4: Organisational commitment significantly mediates the relationship between motivational factors and employee retention.

The study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it provides the first empirical validation of the tri-theoretical integration for Gen Z, establishing high-informality labour markets as a boundary condition that modulates the magnitude—but not the direction or significance—of all three theoretical pathways. Methodologically, it contributes three validated, short-form psychometric instruments (nine items each) specifically normed for Gen Z service workers in Latin American contexts, enabling replication and comparative research. Practically, it provides service-sector HRM professionals with evidence-based intervention priorities ordered by structural path magnitude, enabling resource-efficient talent retention strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Motivational Factors and the Two-Factor Legacy

Herzberg et al.'s (1959) Two-Factor Theory remains the most enduring framework for decomposing the motivational environment into two functionally distinct categories: Hygiene factors—salary, physical conditions, job security—whose presence prevents dissatisfaction but does not generate satisfaction; and motivators—achievement, recognition, personal growth—whose presence produces intrinsic satisfaction and elevated effort. Although developed in the mid-twentieth century, the framework retains robust explanatory power because subsequent research continues to identify multiple organizational and job-related factors as relevant to employee motivation and work outcomes (Aguenza and Som, 2012; Ghodrati and Ghaffari Tabar, 2013; Muthuswamy and Sharma, 2023; Karaferis et al., 2022).

For Generation Z, this asymmetry acquires heightened relevance because this cohort has been socialized in a digital environment that makes recognition and development immediately visible and constantly benchmarked against alternatives. Evidence from the tourism sector similarly indicates that the employment permanence of Millennials and Generation Z depends on a combination of economic incentives and non-monetary or "emotional salary" practices, reinforcing the relevance of motivational conditions for retaining younger workers (Torrealba Tinoco et al., 2022). Surugiu et al. (2025) demonstrate that Gen Z workers prioritize authentic, individualised recognition and personalised learning trajectories over traditional extrinsic incentives, a pattern consistent with Herzberg's prediction that motivators—not

hygiene factors—generate the psychological surplus that sustains engagement. Kgarimetsa and Naidoo (2024) provide direct empirical support in a Gen Z mining services sample, showing that employee recognition ($\beta = 0.514$, $P < 0.001$) and flexible working arrangements ($\beta = 0.327$, $P = 0.002$)—a working conditions dimension—each independently predict retention. Complementary evidence from Rohayati et al. (2023) shows that job satisfaction and a positive organizational culture are significantly associated with lower turnover intention among Generation Z employees, whereas meaningful work does not show a significant negative effect, further suggesting that the relevance of specific motivational and contextual factors is not uniform across retention outcomes. Importantly, their finding that professional development did not predict retention ($\beta = 0.081$, $P = 0.318$) in that sample suggests that the relative weight of motivational dimensions may be moderated by sector context, a nuance that justifies testing all three dimensions simultaneously.

Three dimensions of motivational factors are theorized and measured in this study: Recognition (formal and informal valorisation of performance contributions), training and development (access to skill-building, career pathing, and competency growth opportunities), and working conditions (physical environment, organisational climate, and work-life balance). The first two align with Herzberg's motivators; the third represents the hygiene dimension. This operationalisation bridges Herzberg's theory with self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), as recognition satisfies relatedness and competence needs, development satisfies competence and autonomy needs, and adequate working conditions maintain the contextual baseline within which intrinsic motivation can operate (Suen et al., 2022; Xuecheng et al., 2022).

2.2. Organisational Commitment: Mechanism and Generational Boundary

Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three-Component Model conceptualises organisational commitment (OC) as a multidimensional psychological state comprising three analytically distinct forms of attachment: Affective commitment (emotional identification with and desire to remain in the organisation), continuance commitment (perceived costs and lack of alternatives that make leaving unattractive), and normative commitment (a sense of moral obligation to reciprocate organisational investment). The model has accumulated four decades of meta-analytic support linking all three dimensions to reduced turnover intention and actual attrition, with affective commitment showing the strongest and most consistent associations (Tett and Meyer, 1993; Hom et al., 2017). Consistent with this multidimensional perspective, Coronado-Guzmán et al. (2020) identify a broad set of organizational and individual antecedents and consequences of organizational commitment. In the Peruvian context, Olórtegui Alcalde et al. (2024) further examine employer branding in relation to organizational commitment, providing locally grounded evidence on the organizational factors associated with employee attachment. Evidence from another emerging-economy context further shows that participation in decision-making and perceived organizational support are positively associated with affective commitment, indicating that employees' perceptions of organizational involvement and support can strengthen emotional attachment to the organization (Nguyen et al. 2020).

Yet a generational boundary condition increasingly complicates this picture. Ochis (2024) documents that Gen Z workers experience systematic commitment erosion between the seventh and 8th month of employment—a pattern labelled "quiet quitting"—triggered by inadequate recognition and low perceived organisational support. Scheibe et al. (2021) show that lifespan-developmental factors, particularly the emphasis on identity exploration and career experimentation characteristic of early adulthood in this cohort, systematically compress affective commitment trajectories relative to older generations. Stark et al. (2025) further document that commitment profile membership—which component dominates—has distinct implications for wellbeing and turnover that vary by occupational context.

Ampofo et al. (2022) further extend embeddedness research to hospitality services by examining organizational embeddedness alongside work engagement and life satisfaction among frontline employees of star-rated hotels in Ghana.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the motivational antecedents that build Gen Z commitment, and the commitment dimensions that then sustain retention, operate within a tighter window than prior cohort research implies—making the MF → OC link both theoretically necessary and practically urgent to examine.

Normative and continuance commitment assume particular contextual significance in high-informality labour markets. Where contracts are informal and social security entitlements absent, continuance commitment is structurally weakened because the perceived sacrifice of leaving—in terms of benefits, pension rights, and contractual protections—is minimal (Mitchell et al., 2001). Conversely, normative commitment may be elevated when employers visibly invest in training or recognition in contexts where such practices are rare, generating perceived reciprocity obligations that strengthen attachment (Herrera and De Las Heras-Rosas, 2020; Nishanthi and Kailasapathy, 2018). This context-dependence of the motivational antecedents of different commitment components motivates the present study's focus on high-informality Chimbote as a theoretically meaningful, not merely convenient, sampling context.

2.3. Employee Retention and Job Embeddedness

Employee retention—defined as the organisational capacity to sustain employee membership over time by minimising voluntary attrition—has been conceptualised through multiple lenses, from economic exchange models to psychological contract theory (Hom et al., 2017; Saks, 2022). The most complete contemporary framework, however, is Mitchell et al.'s (2001) Job Embeddedness Theory (JET), which explains retention as a function of the accumulated web of connections, compatibilities, and invested stakes that make leaving costly without requiring high commitment or satisfaction. JET proposes three retention mechanisms: links, fit, and sacrifice.

JET has attracted substantial meta-analytic support as a predictor of voluntary turnover beyond commitment and satisfaction,

particularly because it captures the structural stickiness of employment that commitment-based models do not (Jiang et al., 2012; Alshaabani et al., 2021). For Generation Z, the JET dimensions interact with motivational factors in distinctive ways. Tanoto and Go (2024) show in an Indonesian Gen Z sample that work-life balance conditions—a working conditions dimension—enhance embeddedness, which in turn strengthens retention. Salem (2025) demonstrates that flexible work type preference, mediated by perceived autonomy, shapes retention intention ($\beta = 0.357$, $P < 0.01$) among Malaysian Gen Z SME workers. Lim et al. (2022) document that both on- and off-the-job embeddedness dimensions significantly predict retention in higher education service contexts. Ampofo et al. (2022) further extend embeddedness research to hospitality services by examining organizational embeddedness alongside work engagement and life satisfaction among frontline employees of star-rated hotels in Ghana. Nguyen et al. (2023) further demonstrate, among public-sector employees in Vietnam, that job embeddedness is negatively associated with turnover intention through the mediating role of life satisfaction, while ethical leadership moderates the embeddedness–turnover relationship. Collectively, these studies establish that the motivational environment directly influences the JET dimensions—particularly fit and sacrifice—providing a theoretical basis for the direct path from motivational factors to retention that operates independently of commitment.

2.4. Tri-Theoretical Integration and Conceptual Model

The present study argues that the fullest explanation of Gen Z retention in service contexts requires the joint theorisation of Herzberg's two-factor theory, Meyer and Allen's three-component model, and job embeddedness theory, because each framework captures a distinct layer of the retention mechanism that the others do not. Herzberg specifies the content dimensions of the motivational environment that initiate the process. Meyer and Allen provide the psychological mechanism—commitment—through which motivational environments become affective, normative, and calculative bonds that sustain membership. Mitchell et al. specify the structural mechanism—embeddedness—through which both motivational environments and commitment translate into actual retention decisions by creating links, fit, and sacrifice that make departure costly.

Conceptually, the model predicts four paths. First, motivational factors strengthen OC (H_1) because recognition and development opportunities satisfy Herzberg's motivators, generating affective identification and normative reciprocity, while adequate working conditions ensure that hygiene-factor dissatisfaction does not erode normative and continuance attachment. Second, OC increases ER (H_2) through the affective and normative commitment mechanisms that deepen links and fit perceptions and heighten perceived sacrifice—directly engaging JET's retention architecture. Third, motivational factors directly influence ER (H_3) by independently enhancing fit perceptions (recognition and development signal value alignment) and sacrifice perceptions (development investments create growth assets that would be forfeited upon exit), thereby strengthening embeddedness without requiring commitment as an intermediary. Fourth, OC partially mediates the MF → ER relationship (H_4), reflecting the dual-pathway structure in which motivational environments operate simultaneously through psychological (commitment) and structural (embeddedness) channels to produce retention outcomes.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, non-experimental design with explanatory scope. Cross-sectional designs are standard in PLS-SEM-based organisational commitment and retention research and are particularly appropriate when the objective is to map structural relationships among latent variables at a defined point in time (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical strategy because: (a) the study is prediction- and explanation-oriented rather than theory-confirmatory; (b) the model contains reflective constructs with a moderate number of indicators; (c) PLS-SEM is robust to non-normality; and (d) its analytical framework is suitable for estimating structural relationships involving latent constructs and mediation (Hair et al., 2019, 2022). SmartPLS 4.0 was used for all structural analyses; IBM SPSS Statistics 27 was used for descriptive statistics and pilot reliability analysis.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The target population was generation Z workers (born 1995-2010) employed in service-sector firms in Chimbote, Peru, during 2025. In the absence of a complete sampling frame, the population was treated as theoretically infinite, and the minimum sample size was calculated using the formula for unknown proportions at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error, yielding $n = 384$. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was employed, with the following inclusion criterion: Active labour contract with at least 6 months of organisational tenure in the current firm. Workers from other generational cohorts and those with fewer than 6 months' tenure were excluded. The final sample of $n = 384$ was distributed across multiple service subsectors in Chimbote, including retail and commerce, hospitality and food service, financial services, healthcare support, and professional and technical services, ensuring breadth of motivational factor variation.

Six months' tenure was set as the minimum threshold because prior research shows that Gen Z commitment formation and quiet quitting onset are concentrated in the first 12 months (Ochis, 2024); shorter-tenure workers would not have had adequate exposure to the organisational motivational environment to form stable attitudinal states.

3.3. Measurement Instruments

Three structured questionnaires were developed *de novo* for this study, each comprising nine items across three dimensions (three items per dimension), rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree). The motivational factors questionnaire (MFQ) covered recognition (performance valorisation, formal and informal acknowledgment, sense of pride and belonging), training and development (access to training programmes, promotion and career planning, competency acquisition), and working conditions (physical infrastructure,

organisational climate and interpersonal relations, work-life balance). The organisational commitment scale (OCS) adapted Meyer and Allen's (1991) framework, covering affective (organisational identification, emotional attachment, satisfaction), continuance (perceived exit costs, limited alternatives, economic dependence), and normative commitment (moral obligation, social norms, reciprocity). The employee retention scale (ERS) operationalised JET through links (work relationships, team integration, organisational connection), fit (organisational compatibility, job adequacy, environmental satisfaction), and sacrifice (perceived loss of benefits, relationships, opportunities).

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through a panel of three HRM academics and practitioners who evaluated item clarity, pertinence, and theoretical relevance, providing written endorsement upon approval. The use of multiple sources of psychometric evidence is consistent with contemporary instrument-validation research, which emphasises the joint assessment of construct validity and internal consistency before interpreting substantive results (Rivera Custodio & Martínez Valdés, 2025). A pilot study with 14 target-population participants yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.936 (MFQ), 0.880 (OCS), and 0.874 (ERS), all indicating excellent internal consistency (George and Mallery, 2003). Full psychometric validation followed the two-stage PLS-SEM procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2019): Measurement model assessment (reliability, convergent validity via AVE, discriminant validity via HTMT) prior to structural model evaluation.

3.5. Analytical Procedure

Stage 1 (measurement model) assessed: Internal consistency reliability via Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability (CR; threshold >0.70); convergent validity via average variance extracted (AVE; threshold ≥0.50); and discriminant validity via the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT; conservative threshold <0.85; Henseler et al., 2015). Stage 2 (structural model) assessed path coefficients and their significance via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals; effect sizes (f^2; Cohen, 1988: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large); predictive relevance (Q^2, Stone-Geisser criterion; $Q^2 > 0$ = predictive relevance); and global model fit (SRMR; criterion <0.08). Mediation (H_4) was assessed via bootstrapping of the indirect effect following Preacher and Hayes' (2008) recommendations.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to internationally recognised principles of research ethics, including voluntary informed consent, anonymisation of individual-level data, confidential storage, and use of data exclusively for academic purposes. All participants were informed of the study's objectives before completing the survey. No identifying information was collected or stored. Participation was entirely voluntary and withdrawable at any time without consequence.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

Table 1 reports the internal consistency and convergent validity statistics for the three constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranged from

Table 1: Measurement model: Internal consistency and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	CR	AVE
MF	0.893	0.898	0.913	0.538
OC	0.867	0.885	0.894	0.486
ER	0.885	0.893	0.907	0.521

Cronbach's α, rho_A, and CR >0.70 confirm internal consistency reliability. AVE ≥0.50 indicates convergent validity. For OC, CR: 0.894 compensates for borderline AVE. MF: Motivational factors, OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 2: Indicator factor loadings (λ)

Item	Construct	Loading	Item	Construct	Loading
P1	MF	0.738	P15	OC	0.771
P2	MF	0.688	P16	OC	0.706
P3	MF	0.781	P17	OC	0.569
P4	MF	0.785	P18	OC	0.763
P5	MF	0.749	P19	ER	0.770
P6	MF	0.658	P20	ER	0.703
P7	MF	0.745	P21	ER	0.679
P8	MF	0.690	P22	ER	0.719
P9	MF	0.758	P23	ER	0.709
P10	OC	0.602	P24	ER	0.638
P11	OC	0.780	P25	ER	0.816
P12	OC	0.669	P26	ER	0.755
P13	OC	0.641	P27	ER	0.692
P14	OC	0.741			

P1-P9: Motivational factors, P10-P18: Organisational commitment, P19-P27: Employee retention. Loadings >0.70 indicate strong indicator representativeness. Moderate loadings (0.569-0.690) retained for content validity

Table 3: Discriminant validity: Heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT)

Construct pair	HTMT
OC-MF	0.378
ER-MF	0.373
ER-OC	0.337

HTMT <0.85 indicates adequate discriminant validity. Values substantially below the threshold confirm construct independence. MF: Motivational factors, OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 4: Coefficients of determination (R^2)

Endogenous construct	R^2	Level
OC	0.126	Weak
ER	0.166	Weak

R^2 benchmarks: ≥0.75: Substantial, ≥0.50: Moderate, ≥0.25: Weak (Hair et al., 2019). Low R^2 in an explanatory PLS-SEM model is expected and does not invalidate significant path coefficients (Chin, 1998). OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 5: Predictive relevance (Q^2)

Construct	Q^2
OC	0.114
ER	0.132

$Q^2 > 0$ confirms predictive relevance beyond a naïve mean-based benchmark (Stone-Geisser criterion). OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 6: Effect sizes (f^2)

Structural path	f^2	Interpretation
MF→OC	0.144	Small
OC→ER	0.047	Small
MF→ER	0.083	Small

f^2 benchmarks: 0.02: Small, 0.15: Medium, 0.35: Large (Cohen, 1988). MF: Motivational factors, OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 7: Structural model: Path coefficients and hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	P-value	Decision
H_1	MF→OC	0.355	5.038	<0.001	Supported
H_2	OC→ER	0.211	2.584	0.011	Supported
H_3	MF→ER	0.282	3.640	<0.001	Supported
H_4 (indirect)	MF→OC→ER	0.075	2.295	0.023	Supported (partial mediation)

Bootstrapping: 5,000 resamples, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, one-tailed t-tests. Significance threshold: P<0.05. MF: Motivational factors, OC: Organisational commitment, ER: Employee retention

Table 8: Global model fit

Index	Value	Criterion
SRMR	0.066	≤0.08

SRMR <0.08 indicates acceptable global fit (Henseler et al., 2015). The value of 0.066 reflects good agreement between observed and estimated covariance matrices

0.867 to 0.893, rho_A from 0.885 to 0.898, and composite reliability (CR) from 0.894 to 0.913, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold, confirming adequate internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). AVE values were 0.538 for motivational factors (MF) and 0.521 for employee retention (ER), satisfying the ≥0.50 convergent validity criterion. For organisational commitment (OC), AVE = 0.486, marginally below the recommended threshold. However, the CR of 0.894 (>0.80) indicates that the shared variance among items substantially exceeds measurement error, and the HTMT values (Table 3) confirm adequate discriminant validity; accordingly, OC was retained as psychometrically acceptable within the PLS-SEM explanatory framework (Hair et al., 2019; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 reports factor loadings for all 27 indicators. The majority exceeded the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019), with the highest loadings observed for P25 (ER, λ = 0.816), P4 (MF, λ = 0.785), P3 (MF, λ = 0.781), and P11 (OC, λ = 0.780). Six indicators showed moderate loadings (0.569-0.690); these were retained because their omission did not meaningfully improve AVE while reducing content representation.

Table 3 presents HTMT ratios for discriminant validity. All values were well below the conservative 0.85 threshold (OC-MF = 0.378; ER-MF = 0.373; ER-OC = 0.337), confirming that the three constructs are empirically distinct (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.2. Structural Model: Variance Explained and Predictive Relevance

Table 4 presents R^2 values. MF explained 12.6% of OC variance ($R^2 = 0.126$); MF and OC jointly explained 16.6% of ER variance ($R^2 = 0.166$). These values are classified as weak by Hair et al.'s (2019) benchmarks, which is theoretically expected for parsimonious three-construct models of inherently multicausal organisational phenomena. Critically, the study's purpose is explanatory (testing specific hypothesised paths) rather than exhaustive predictive modelling; under PLS-SEM theory, statistical significance of path coefficients—not R^2 magnitude—is the criterion for hypothesis evaluation (Chin, 1998; Shmueli et al., 2016). The positive Q^2 values (OC = 0.114; ER = 0.132; Table 5) confirm out-of-sample predictive relevance for both endogenous constructs beyond a naïve baseline, and the SRMR of 0.066 (Table 8) confirms acceptable global model fit.

Table 6 presents the effect sizes (f^2) for the structural paths. All three effects were classified as small according to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, with MF → OC showing the largest effect ($f^2 = 0.144$), followed by MF → ER ($f^2 = 0.083$) and OC → ER ($f^2 = 0.047$).

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Table 7 presents the bootstrapped path coefficients and hypothesis decisions. All four hypotheses were statistically supported (P < 0.05). The MF → OC path yielded the strongest coefficient (β = 0.355, t = 5.038, P < 0.001), confirming H_1. OC significantly predicted ER (β = 0.211, t = 2.584, P = 0.011), confirming H_2. The direct MF → ER path was significant (β = 0.282, t = 3.640, P < 0.001), confirming H_3. The indirect MF → OC → ER path was significant (indirect β = 0.075, t = 2.295, P = 0.023), with the coexistence of a significant direct path confirming partial mediation, as predicted by H_4.

Global model fit (Table 8) was adequate: SRMR = 0.066, below the 0.08 criterion (Henseler et al., 2015), confirming that the model-implied covariance structure closely approximates the empirical data.

As shown in Figure 1, motivational factors exert a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational commitment (β = 0.355, P < 0.001) and on employee retention among Generation Z workers (β = 0.282, P < 0.001). Organizational commitment also has a significant positive effect on employee retention (β = 0.211, P = 0.011). In addition, the indirect effect of motivational factors on employee retention through organizational commitment is statistically significant (β = 0.075, P = 0.023). Because both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the findings confirm the presence of partial mediation.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to test a tri-theoretical, mediated PLS-SEM model linking motivational factors to Gen Z employee retention through organisational commitment in a high-informality service economy. All four hypotheses were supported, and the pattern of results yields four substantive theoretical insights that extend beyond the Chimbote context.

5.1. Motivational Factors as the Primary Commitment Engine (H_1)

The MF → OC path (β = 0.355, $f^2 = 0.144$) constitutes the strongest structural relationship in the model and the central finding of the study. Its theoretical significance lies in what it confirms at the generational boundary: Herzberg's motivators and hygiene factors remain potent organisational commitment drivers even for

Figure 1: Mediated structural model of motivational factors, organizational commitment, and generation Z employee retention



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the PLS-SEM results. Standardized path coefficients estimated using PLS-SEM are presented. MF: Motivational factors, OC: Organizational commitment, ER: Employee retention, PLS-SEM: Partial least squares structural equation modelling. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance explained in the endogenous constructs. ***P < 0.001; *P < 0.05

a cohort widely described as commitment-resistant (Ochis, 2024; Scheibe et al., 2021). When Gen Z workers in Chimbote experience meaningful recognition, access to development, and adequate working conditions, they develop the affective identification and normative reciprocity that Meyer and Allen (1991) theorise as the psychological architecture of commitment. The f^2 of 0.144, approaching the lower boundary of a medium effect, suggests that the motivational environment is not merely a weak statistical predictor but a substantively meaningful antecedent of commitment formation in this population.

This finding extends and refines prior evidence. Herrera and De Las Heras-Rosas (2020) show that the psychological contract—which operationally overlaps with the motivational environment—is a key antecedent of OC generally, but they do not differentiate by generation. Within Peru, Rodríguez Alegre (2024) also reports a significant relationship between organizational commitment and work motivation among employees of a Lima-based firm, although the study specifies commitment as the predictor of motivation rather than the directional pathway tested here. Mensah (2019) further demonstrates that talent management practices are positively associated with psychological-contract fulfilment and affective commitment, with psychological-contract fulfilment acting as a mechanism through which HR practices influence employee outcomes. Stark et al. (2025) document that commitment profiles have distinct wellbeing correlates across occupational contexts but do not test motivational antecedents. The present study's contribution is to establish, through a validated instrument and PLS-SEM analysis, that the three-dimensional motivational environment (recognition, development, working conditions) explains 12.6% of Gen Z OC variance in a high-informality context—a non-trivial proportion given the structural barriers to commitment formation documented in this setting (Ochis, 2024; INEI, 2025).

An important nuance concerns the differentiated theoretical pathways to commitment components. Recognition most directly feeds affective commitment by satisfying the need for belonging and value validation (Montani et al., 2020). Training and development foster normative commitment by creating perceived reciprocity obligations (Nishanthi and Kailasapathy, 2018; Cesário and Chambel, 2017). Working conditions stabilise continuance commitment by increasing the perceived sacrifice of departure through formalized employment conditions. This differentiated mechanism is consistent with Santhanam et al.'s (2023) finding that HRM practice bundles have component-specific effects on Gen Z retention, suggesting that targeted motivational investments may be more efficient than broad-spectrum interventions.

5.2. Organisational Commitment as a Conditional Retention Driver (H_2)

The OC → ER path (β = 0.211, f^2 = 0.047) confirms that organisational commitment significantly predicts retention, consistent with four decades of meta-analytic evidence (Tett and Meyer, 1993; Hom et al., 2017). However, the effect size is small, and this modesty is theoretically informative rather than methodologically problematic. In high-informality labour markets, continuance commitment—the component most directly linked to retention through perceived sacrifice—is structurally weakened because informal contracts carry no social security entitlements, no pension accruals, and no severance protections (Mitchell et al., 2001; INEI, 2025). When the structural costs of exit are low, the commitment-to-retention transmission mechanism operates under constraint, producing the modest beta observed here.

This result aligns with Crayenstein et al.'s (2025) finding in South African high-risk occupations that organisational support and commitment predict retention in demanding contexts, but the effect is moderated by sector conditions. It also resonates with Ochis's (2024) longitudinal-qualitative finding that Gen Z commitment erosion begins within months of hire in environments where working conditions and recognition are deficient—suggesting that the OC → ER path has a temporal dimension that cross-sectional designs cannot fully capture. Future longitudinal research should examine whether the OC → ER path strengthens as tenure accumulates and perceived sacrifice increases through relationship investment and skill accumulation.

5.3. Motivational Factors as a Direct Embeddedness-Based Retention Driver (H_3)

The direct MF → ER path (β = 0.282, f^2 = 0.083) is the model's largest structural effect on retention and operates independently of organisational commitment. This finding is theoretically significant because it confirms the JET prediction that motivational environments shape embeddedness directly—without requiring commitment as an intermediary—by enhancing fit perceptions (when employees experience recognition and development as evidence that the organisation values them and their growth) and sacrifice perceptions (when training investments create growth assets, relational capital, and reputational gains that would be forfeited upon departure; Mitchell et al., 2001; Jiang et al., 2012).

Internationally, comparable direct effects have been documented across diverse service and semi-professional contexts. Kgarimetsa and Naidoo (2024) report recognition (β = 0.514) and flexible working conditions (β = 0.327) as the dominant Gen Z

retention predictors in South African mining services. Ayu Asria et al. (2025) show rewards and career development positively predict Gen Z retention in Indonesian hospitality. Salem (2025) demonstrates that working condition flexibility enhances Gen Z retention via perceived autonomy (β = 0.357). The consistency across Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America—three structurally distinct but informality-shaped labour markets—suggests that the MF → ER direct path is not a local artefact but reflects a generationally robust mechanism: Gen Z workers translate their motivational environment directly into retention decisions by evaluating fit and sacrifice in ways that bypass the slower-forming commitment mechanism.

The relative dominance of the direct path (β = 0.282) over the indirect path (β = 0.075) in the present model has a practical implication that extends existing theory: In high-informality, short-tenure Gen Z service contexts, organisations cannot rely on accumulated commitment as the primary retention buffer. They must invest in motivational environments that generate immediate embeddedness—particularly through recognition that signals value alignment (fit) and development opportunities that create walk-away costs (sacrifice)—rather than waiting for commitment to compound over time.

5.4. Organisational Commitment as a Partial Mediator

The significant indirect effect (β = 0.075, P = 0.023) confirms partial mediation and reveals a dual-pathway retention architecture that has not previously been documented for Gen Z in emerging economy service contexts. The dual-pathway structure—in which motivational factors simultaneously influence retention directly (β = 0.282) and through commitment (β = 0.075)—is theoretically interpretable as the operation of two distinct mechanisms at different temporal and psychological scales. The direct path operates through immediate embeddedness processes: Fit and sacrifice perceptions update in response to day-to-day motivational experiences. The mediated path operates through a slower psychological process in which accumulated positive motivational experiences crystallize into affective and normative commitment bonds that then sustain retention through organisational identification.

The modest magnitude of the indirect effect in this context is theoretically explained by the structural attenuation of continuance commitment under informality (as discussed in 5.2) and by the short-tenure profile of the sample (minimum 6 months). Ayu Asria et al. (2025) provide the closest empirical analogue, demonstrating that job satisfaction—a construct that partially overlaps with the motivational environment's psychological effects—fully mediates the rewards-to-retention path in their Indonesian Gen Z sample; the present study's partial mediation (rather than full mediation) suggests that the direct embeddedness pathway is proportionally stronger in the Chimbote context, likely because high informality compresses commitment strength while motivational factors still directly shape sacrifice perceptions. This cross-study comparison highlights informality as a theoretically important boundary condition for the relative salience of commitment-mediated versus embeddedness-direct retention pathways.

5.5. R^2 Values, Model Parsimony, and the PLS-SEM Explanatory Logic

The R^2 values of 0.126 (OC) and 0.166 (ER) require careful contextualisation. These values are classified as weak by Hair et al.'s (2019) benchmarks, but this classification is designed for exhaustive predictive models. The present model is explicitly parsimonious: It tests three theoretically-specified constructs with four hypothesised paths, deliberately excluding potential confounders to isolate the focal pathways. In PLS-SEM explanatory research, the criterion for hypothesis evaluation is path coefficient significance and theoretical coherence, not R^2 magnitude (Chin, 1998; Shmueli et al., 2016; Pérez-Sánchez and García-Machado, 2022). The positive Q^2 values for both endogenous constructs confirm that the model's predictions are better than a naïve baseline—the minimum criterion for predictive relevance in PLS. The SRMR of 0.066 confirms that the model structure is globally well-specified. Together, these statistics establish that the model is valid, structurally coherent, and predictively relevant, even as the R^2 values correctly signal the existence of additional unmeasured antecedents that future research should incorporate.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides the first PLS-SEM empirical test of a tri-theoretical, mediated model linking motivational factors to Generation Z employee retention through organisational commitment in a high-informality service economy. Using a sample of 384 Gen Z service workers in Chimbote, Peru, four principal conclusions emerge with both theoretical and practical significance.

First, motivational factors—operationalised through recognition, training and development, and working conditions—constitute a significant positive antecedent of organisational commitment (β = 0.355, P < 0.001). This extends Herzberg's two-factor theory to a generational boundary condition, confirming that motivators and hygiene factors retain their commitment-building function for Gen Z even in contexts of labour informality. The finding establishes motivational factor investment as the primary lever available to service-sector managers for building Gen Z commitment.

Second, organisational commitment significantly predicts employee retention (β = 0.211, P = 0.011), supporting Meyer and Allen's (1991). Three-component model and Mitchell et al.'s (2001) JET in this population. However, the modest effect size in the high-informality Chimbote context suggests that labour formalisation is a prerequisite for commitment to function as an effective retention mechanism; without formalised employment conditions, continuance commitment remains structurally weak.

Third, motivational factors exert the largest direct effect on retention in the model (β = 0.282, P < 0.001), confirming that recognition, development, and working condition investments enhance the fit and sacrifice dimensions of job embeddedness directly, independently of commitment. This finding challenges the implicit assumption in much retention management practice that building commitment is sufficient for retention; in Gen Z service

contexts, motivational environments must simultaneously build commitment and strengthen embeddedness.

Fourth, organisational commitment partially mediates the motivational factors–retention relationship (indirect β = 0.075, P = 0.023), establishing a dual-pathway retention architecture. The coexistence of direct and mediated pathways reveals that motivational environments operate at two temporal scales: An immediate embeddedness-enhancing scale (fit and sacrifice updating) and a slower commitment-crystallisation scale. This dual-pathway structure has not previously been documented for Generation Z in emerging economy service contexts and constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the study.

6.1. Practical Implications

The model's path hierarchy—MF → OC (β = 0.355) > MF → ER (β = 0.282) > OC → ER (β = 0.211)—provides service-sector HRM professionals with a clear resource-allocation priority: Investment in motivational environments delivers the highest structural return. This managerial interpretation is consistent with the broader HRM literature, which conceptualises investment in human resource management practices as an important bridge between people management and firm performance (Cascio, 2022). Four concrete implementation strategies are supported by the evidence.

6.1.1. Formalise recognition as a systematic HR practice

Recognition programmes should be institutionalised with written criteria, a defined frequency (e.g., monthly team meetings, quarterly performance review cycles), and mixed modalities—public verbal acknowledgment, internal communication features, development-linked rewards (priority training access, project leadership opportunities). The implementation should include: (a) A recognition audit to identify current gaps; (b) manager training on non-monetary recognition delivery; (c) peer recognition platforms that make valorisation visible and frequent. Ndiango et al. (2024) show that recognition significance for retention is mediated by job satisfaction, suggesting that recognition programmes are most effective when they simultaneously improve the motivational environment (Kgarimetsa and Naidoo, 2024; Montani et al., 2020).

6.1.2. Build structured, time-bound development pathways

Training and development should be designed as visible career trajectories with milestones rather than ad hoc programmes. Concrete steps: (a) Map competency requirements for each role level; (b) offer internal rotations every 6-12 months; (c) establish subsidised partnerships with technical or higher education institutions for credentials that increase the sacrifice of departure; (d) document and communicate individual development progress quarterly. Santhanam et al. (2023) show that HRM practice visibility is as important as practice quality for Gen Z retention, because this cohort evaluates the motivational environment continuously against alternatives. Deloitte (2025) reports that organisations with structured development programmes show 15-30% higher Gen Z retention rates.

6.1.3. Prioritise labour formalisation as a retention investment

In Chimbote, where 68.1% of workers are informal (INEI, 2025), formalisation of employment relationships—through formal contracts, social security enrolment, and pension contributions—directly increases continuance commitment by elevating the perceived sacrifice of departure. Managers should model the financial case for formalisation: Reduced turnover costs (estimated at 50-200% of annual salary per departure; Hom et al., 2017), retention of firm-specific knowledge, and reduced quality risk in service delivery. Where full formalisation is cost-constrained, partial steps—formal role descriptions, written grievance procedures, documented training commitments—signal organisational investment and can strengthen normative commitment through reciprocity (Herrera and De Las Heras-Rosas, 2020).

6.1.4. Implement flexible working condition policies

Work-life balance and schedule flexibility are working condition dimensions with documented direct effects on Gen Z retention (Salem, 2025; Tanoto and Go, 2024). At a broader labour-market level, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) similarly highlights inadequate working conditions, irregular working hours, limited access to training, and insufficient social protection among key workers, noting that poor working conditions can exacerbate employee turnover and labour shortages. Actionable steps: (a) Audit current scheduling rigidity and identify roles amenable to flexible hours or hybrid arrangements; (b) implement regular wellbeing check-ins to detect early burnout signals—UKG (2024) found 83% of Gen Z frontline workers report elevated burnout, with 36% considering resignation as a result; (c) establish clear overload management protocols including workload caps and mandatory rest intervals. Flexible conditions simultaneously improve working conditions (hygiene factor) and enhance the fit dimension of job embeddedness by signaling value alignment between the organisation and Gen Z's life-integration priorities.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

6.2.1. Limitations

Five limitations require acknowledgment. First, the cross-sectional design establishes co-variation among constructs but cannot determine temporal precedence or causal direction. The model's hypothesised causal ordering—MF → OC → ER—is theoretically grounded and consistent with prior longitudinal evidence (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Hom et al., 2017), but the design cannot rule out reverse causation (e.g., higher embeddedness leading workers to perceive their motivational environment more positively).

Second, non-probabilistic convenience sampling limits statistical generalisability. While the sample size (n = 384) exceeds PLS-SEM requirements and the sampling strategy is standard practice in contexts without accessible sampling frames, findings may not be representative of all Gen Z service workers in Chimbote, Peru, or Latin America more broadly.

Third, the model's R^2 values (OC = 0.126; ER = 0.166) indicate substantial unexplained variance, signalling the presence of omitted theoretically relevant constructs. The deliberate parsimony of the model is methodologically justified (Section 5.5), but it

means the model is better interpreted as a partial specification than a complete explanation of Gen Z retention.

Fourth, all three constructs were measured via self-report, introducing common method bias risk. Although the HTMT values indicate adequate discriminant validity, future studies should incorporate objective tenure data, peer-rated commitment assessments, or longitudinal retention tracking to reduce mono-source bias.

Fifth, the organisational commitment construct's borderline AVE (0.486) suggests that the three-item continuance and normative subscales may not fully capture the breadth of Meyer and Allen's (1991) components in the Gen Z population, whose commitment profile and its measurement equivalence with older cohort norms have not been established.

6.2.2. Future research directions

Six theoretically-motivated research agendas emerge from the present findings. First, longitudinal panel designs tracking MF, OC, and ER at 3-month intervals over the first 2 years of employment are needed to examine the temporal dynamics of commitment formation and quiet quitting onset documented by Ochis (2024). Such designs would enable growth-curve modelling of the MF → OC path strength as a function of tenure.

Second, multi-country comparative studies across Latin American economies with varying informality rates (e.g., comparing Chimbote, Peru with Santiago, Chile and Bogotá, Colombia) would allow treatment of informality as a continuous moderator of the OC → ER path, providing direct evidence for the boundary condition hypothesised in this study.

Third, future models should extend the present framework by incorporating theoretically proximal constructs that emerged as candidate mediators or moderators in the discussion: Perceived organisational support (Crayenstein et al., 2025; Alshaabani et al., 2021), perceived autonomy (Salem, 2025), leader-member exchange quality, and psychological safety—each of which provides distinct theoretical channels from motivational environments to retention.

Fourth, the generational boundary condition itself requires investigation through multi-generational comparative designs that test whether the same tri-theoretical model produces different path magnitudes for Millennials versus Gen Z workers in the same organisational context. Scheibe et al.'s (2021) framework predicts that commitment functions more strongly as a retention mechanism for Millennials than for Gen Z, a hypothesis that the present single-cohort design cannot test.

Fifth, instrument refinement using confirmatory factor analysis in a separate sample should establish measurement invariance across Gen Z workers in different service subsectors and cultural contexts, enabling cross-study comparability of the construct scores.

Sixth, the practical implications of the dual-pathway finding—particularly the relative return on investment of recognition programmes (direct and mediated pathways) versus development programmes (primarily mediated via normative commitment)—warrant quasi-experimental field study designs that evaluate HRM intervention bundles and track retention outcomes longitudinally.

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