

Modern Organisational Injustice Affecting Counterproductive Work Behaviour Among Generation Z: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) involves intentional employee actions that harm organizations and their members. In today work environment, workplaces in Malaysia face rising issues like "quiet quitting" and low engagement among Generation Z employees. Thus, it is important to understand how specific workplace factors cause these negative reactions. Based on the reviews past and current literature on CWB, appearance-based discrimination, strict bureaucracy, lack of resources, and generational differences in values are factor influencing CWB. Social Exchange Theory is used as the underpinning theory, where perceived injustices and workplace constraints drain psychological resources and breach reciprocal trust. The review identifies three distinct workplace factors acting as modern injustice antecedents to CWB. Firstly, lookism as individual factor, secondly rigid rules as organisational factor and organisational constraints as situational factor. It proposes that these unfair conditions cause job stress, which then pushes employees to engage in deviant behavior as a coping mechanism. A conceptual framework is developed to map the direct effects of these three injustice factors on CWB, alongside the mediating role of job stress. The paper concludes that Malaysian organisations must modernize HR policies, prioritize mental well-being, and address unregulated biases to restore engagement. This conceptual paper aims to explain CWB among Gen Z employees by examining modern forms of organizational injustice which are lookism, rigid rules, and organizational constraints, along with the role of job stress as mediating factor. Future research should empirically test this framework to validate these modern behavioural dynamics.

Keywords: Counterproductive work behaviour, organizational injustice, lookism, organizational constraint, rigid rule

INTRODUCTION

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) remains a critical challenge for organizations worldwide, and Malaysia is no exception. Recent studies highlight a rising trend of workplace misconduct in Malaysia, severely impacting organizational productivity, efficiency, and employee morale (Veeriah et al., 2023). In academic literature, workplace deviance and counterproductive work behavior are often used interchangeably to describe these detrimental actions. In the post-pandemic era, Malaysia has witnessed a sharp rise in the "quiet quitting" phenomena. A passive-aggressive form of disengagement where employees do only the bare minimum required to avoid termination (Goh & Lee, 2023).

Recent statistics highlight the significant prevalence and economic impact of deviant workplace behavior in Malaysia, which reportedly costs organizations billions annually (Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024). Key issues driving the impact of CWB include workplace bullying and harassment where nearly 6 in 10 Malaysians have witnessed or experienced bullying, with the workplace being the second most common setting (Wang & Chen, 2024). Secondly, workplace discrimination is where discrimination is heavily present in the professional sector, with many individuals experiencing bias while looking for jobs and facing active discrimination while at work (Sharma & Singh, 2021). Finally, general cultural impact. Despite some broader cultural shifts noted by the

Department of Statistics Malaysia, workplace misconduct remains a critical structural issue that requires immediate attention (Rahman & Alias, 2024).

The modern workplace is undergoing a profound and rapid transformation, driven largely by a major demographic shift. Despite paying standard market salaries, many companies in Malaysia are currently facing unexplained productivity losses and high turnover rates among their youngest professionals. Management is often left wondered as to why their young employees are underperforming or actively disengaging. Generation Z refers to those born between 1997 and 2012 is now entering the workforce in large numbers, bringing with them a unique set of values, expectations, and communication styles. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z highly values workplace autonomy, flexibility, transparency, and purpose. However, a significant generational clash is occurring, particularly in Malaysia, where many organizations still operate on highly traditional, hierarchical, and rigid management models (Jamaludin et al., 2024). This mismatch in values serves as the foundational backdrop for this study. When young employees step into work environments that heavily contradict their core values, they often experience a psychological breach of trust. They begin to perceive the workplace as unfair, a phenomenon academically recognized as organisational injustice. When Gen Z employees feel they are treated unfairly through these avenues and realize they lack the structural power to change the system, they often resort to retaliation. This retaliation rarely looks like aggressive outbursts, instead, it manifests as counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). As a coping mechanism to regain a sense of control, employees may engage in quiet quitting, cyberloafing (stealing company time to surf the internet), or intentionally slowing down their work output (Teng et al., 2022).

To fully understand the mechanisms driving these deviant actions, it is essential to examine a multi-dimensional framework encompassing individual, organizational, and situational factors (Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024). First, at the individual level, lookism or appearance-based discrimination plays a significant but often overlooked role. The growing demand for "aesthetic labor" and digital lookism in hiring and daily operations creates a biased environment (Wang & Chen, 2024). Employees facing marginalization due to subjective appearance bias often experience psychological distress, which serves as a catalyst for counterproductive actions. Secondly, organizational factors, specifically organizational constraints and workplace stress, heavily influence CWB. High job demands, lack of resources, and systemic stress create environments where employees feel unsupported. In the Malaysian context, experiencing financial pressures and structural constraints are among the stressors consistently trigger frustration and aggressive workplace behaviors (Neupane et al., 2024). Finally, situational factors such as rigid rules worsen the problem. When organizations enforce arbitrary or highly inflexible policies without offering autonomy, employees may engage in production deviance, absenteeism, or sabotage as a functional coping mechanism to rebel against perceived unfairness (Becton et al., 2023).

This conceptual paper addresses this problem by examining the comprehensive angle of factors that influencing CWB among Gen Z in Malaysia. There is a deep misunderstanding between older generations of management, who view rigid rules and strict oversight as necessary for business, and Gen Z employees, who view them as toxic and unjust (Becton et al., 2023). Furthermore, biases like lookism remain entirely unregulated in most Malaysian corporate codes of conduct, leaving employees vulnerable to a toxic work culture without any formal protection (Sharma & Singh, 2021). By proving that lookism, rigid rules, and organisational constraints lead directly to retaliatory behaviors, this study seeks to solve these hidden workplace issues, providing employers with the insights needed to bridge the expectation gap and restore employee engagement. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how modern manifestations of organisational injustice specifically lookism, rigid rules, and organisational constraint influence counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) among Generation Z employees in Malaysia. Furthermore, this study intends to investigate the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between these organisational injustice factors and CWB.

METHODOLOGY

Social Exchange Theory was used as the main theory to conceptualise the model in this study. In addition, to construct a robust theoretical foundation and develop the conceptual framework, this study adopted a structured literature review approach. The proposed conceptual framework was developed based on a literature review wherein the search prioritized publications between 2019 and 2026. This timeframe was selected to account for

the massive influx of Generation Z into the workforce and the profound post-pandemic shifts in workplace behaviour, such as quiet quitting and cyberloafing.

To comprehensively understand the concept of CWB, a search was conducted using leading academic databases, specifically Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), EBSCOhost (Business Source Complete), and Google Scholar. The literature search utilized a combination of Boolean operators (AND, OR) to connect key constructs. The primary search strings included: ("Counterproductive Work Behaviour" OR "CWB" OR "workplace deviance") AND ("Organisational Injustice" OR "Lookism" OR "appearance bias" OR "Rigid Rules" OR "red tape" OR "Organisational Constraints") AND ("Job Stress" OR "burnout" OR "emotional exhaustion") AND ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z" OR "young professionals").

The inclusion criteria for the literature selection included peer-reviewed journal articles, verified academic conference proceedings, research focusing on organizational contexts, and studies that discussed the conceptual or empirical relationships between the variables. Conversely, this study excluded non-academic sources, such as blogs, popular magazine articles, and unverified opinion pieces, as well as studies focusing on clinical psychology without an organizational context.

The selection of relevant literature followed a structured screening process. First, the initial database search yielded an aggregated pool of articles, from which duplicates were removed. Second, a title and abstract screening was conducted to eliminate studies that did not align with the core variables of this study, namely CWB, lookism, organisational constraints, rigid rules, and job stress. Finally, a full-text review was performed on the remaining articles to extract key arguments, empirical findings, and theoretical gaps. The findings from these selected articles were then used to justify the proposed relationships and construct the conceptual framework for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) is explained as volitional acts by an employee that harm, or intend to harm, organizations and/or its stakeholders. Past studies categorize it into CWB-O which refers as harming the organization such as time theft and CWB-I, refers as harming individuals such as workplace discourtesy. Past research have vastly argued the conceptualisation of CWB in workplace. The definition of CWB encompasses several core elements such as voluntary action where CWB defined as voluntary or discretionary behaviors committed by employees, distinguishing it from accidental mistakes or a lack of skill (Shao et al., 2022; Spain, 2019). Another element of CWB is the violation of norms describe the behaviors that actively go against and disregard established organizational and social norms. CWB too can be defined as harmful intent or effect which actions are destructive and run counter to the organization's legitimate interests, threatening its overall effectiveness and causing harm (Shao et al., 2022; Spain, 2019; Ülbeği & İplik, 2025). Finally, CWB can be explained by unethical conduct and often involves unethical actions that yield detrimental effects on both the organization as a whole and the individuals within it.

In addition, the recent conceptualization view CWB as quiet quitting that response to burnout. Quiet quitting is a form of counterproductive behavior. It concludes that these trends are not merely signs of laziness, but rather functional coping mechanisms responding to toxic cultures, structural constraints, and emotional exhaustion (Karamath Basha & Pathania, 2025). A major shift in recent research is viewing counterproductive behavior not simply as malicious deviance, but as a psychological tool employees used to regulate negative emotions, handle burnout, or restore autonomy. As argued by Sackett and DeVore (2005) from an organizational perspective, CWB refers as actions that go against an organization's legitimate interests. On the other hand, Spector and Fox (2005) adopted an employee perspective, stating that CWB consists of behaviors that harm or aim to harm others or organizations. Despite differing terminology, researchers agree that such behaviors are harmful and voluntary (Penney & Spector, 2002). To modernize this concept, Teng et al. (2022) criticize older frameworks for failing to capture digitally enabled deviance. This study overcomes this weakness by defining CWB through the lens of post-pandemic Gen Z behaviors, such as quiet quitting and cyberloafing (Goh & Lee, 2023).

Organisational Injustice

Organisational injustice occurs when employees perceive unfair treatment or systemic inequities within their workplace, which frequently triggers negative interpersonal interactions and retaliatory behaviors (Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024). Contemporary organizational behavior literature defines this construct not merely as distributive inequality such as unequal pay or benefits but as a multidimensional breach of workplace fairness (Rahman & Alias, 2024). This encompasses procedural injustice, which involves inflexible organizational policies like rigid rules, and interactional injustice, which relates to discriminatory interpersonal treatment.

The concept of interactional injustice has recently expanded to capture emerging workplace biases. Sharma and Singh (2021) conceptualize lookism as a severe and deeply ingrained form of interactional injustice, where subjective aesthetic judgments unfairly overshadow an employee's actual competence and skills. Wang and Chen (2024) support this by asserting that appearance-based bias fosters a toxic climate of workplace incivility, systematically marginalizing victims and stunting their career progression.

Recent studies emphasize that modern workforce, particularly Generation Z, are highly sensitive to these multidimensional breaches of trust. Regarding procedural injustice, Becton et al. (2023) highlight that overly rigid structures and excessive micromanagement are no longer accepted as standard organizational discipline. Instead, young employees view them as a profound procedural injustice that violates their fundamental need for professional autonomy. When policies are perceived as arbitrarily strict or lacking in transparency, employees feel structurally disempowered, which often triggers passive-aggressive retaliation such as digital withdrawal or cyberloafing (Teng et al., 2022).

Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, when these distributive, procedural, and interactional injustices compound, the psychological contract between the employer and employee is fundamentally shattered. Ibrahim et al. (2023) note that the resulting affective strain, frustration, and job stress push employees to engage in counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). In these unjust environments, retaliatory actions such as "quiet quitting," intentional slowdowns, or withholding knowledge are utilized by employees not out of malice, but as a functional coping mechanism to restore a sense of equity and control (Goh & Lee, 2023; Lim & Chen, 2025).

While foundational theories categorize organisational injustice into three broad dimensions distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Colquitt, 2001), this study does not measure "organisational injustice" as a single, multi-dimensional construct. Instead, lookism, rigid rules, and organisational constraints are conceptualized and tested as separate, distinct antecedents. However, they are theoretically anchored in the injustice framework as modern. Specifically, lookism serves as a contemporary antecedent of interactional injustice (how people are treated), rigid rules act as an antecedent of procedural injustice (how policies are enforced), and organisational constraints represent a systemic stressor that breaches the psychological contract of fair workplace support. By treating them as separate antecedents, this model allows for a precise examination of which specific structural or social stressor has the strongest impact on CWB.

Lookism

Lookism is analytically defined as an implicit or explicit bias where physical attractiveness dictates professional opportunities, performance evaluations, and daily workplace interactions, creating an unmerited hierarchy based on aesthetics rather than competence. It is viewed as a form of organizational injustice due to several justifications. Labelling an act as "lookism" identifies it as a form of wrongful discrimination, operating similarly to sexism or racism within the workplace (Sharma & Singh, 2021). Consequently, it causes unfair treatment by systematically marginalizing individuals based simply on their physical appearance.

Recent literature highlights that the rise of digital visibility and "aesthetic labor" in modern corporate culture has severely amplified this bias. Wang and Chen (2024) found that lookism acts as a hidden leak in the career pipeline, where employees who do not conform to subjective attractiveness standards are frequently excluded from mentorship and promotional opportunities. This elimination creates a toxic environment of workplace marginalization. Moreover, lookism often manifests as cultural taboos silence victims and make it difficult for them to articulate or report the discrimination they experience (Sharma & Singh, 2021).

In the context of the post-pandemic workforce, this unregulated form of workplace inequality significantly deteriorates employee well-being. Rosalina and Jusoh (2024) emphasize that when young employees perceive appearance-based injustice, they experience a psychological breach of trust that rapidly drains their emotional resources. Empirical findings reveal that such aesthetic demands create profound psychological distress and emotional exhaustion. For Generation Z, a cohort highly attuned to fairness, authenticity, and inclusivity, this distress acts as a primary catalyst for deviance (Lim & Chen, 2025). When formal channels fail to address this silent bias, marginalized employees display a greater propensity to engage in interpersonal Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) such as withholding effort, gossiping, or quiet quitting as a defensive coping mechanism to retaliate against the discriminatory culture (Wang & Chen, 2024). Based on the integration of Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that employees retaliate when the psychological contract of fairness is breached, and recent empirical evidence linking aesthetic discrimination to employee deviance, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Perceived lookism has a significant positive influence on Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) among Generation Z employees in Malaysia.

Organisational Constraints

Organisational constraints are defined as situational factors present in the work environment that inhibit employees from translating their ability and effort into high performance (e.g., poor technology, inadequate training, or contradictory management directives). Past research consistently finds that situational barriers evoke the "frustration-aggression hypothesis". Employees frustrated by systemic hurdles often redirect their anger toward the organization via sabotage, time theft, or reduced effort (Neupane et al., 2024). In the recent literature highlights that organizational constraints are robust predictors of negative workplace outcomes. When systemic obstacles continuously block performance, they trigger severe psychological strain and organizational distrust.

Within the contemporary Malaysian context, these structural constraints heavily impact Generation Z employees, who possess distinct workplace expectations regarding digital integration, autonomy, and competence. Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z exhibits a notably low tolerance for systemic inefficiencies and unsupportive organizational environments. Local empirical studies reveal that when their needs for competence and autonomy are obstructed by a lack of resources or inadequate management, Gen Z employees in Malaysia show elevated levels of job hopping and turnover intention (Goh & Lee, 2023; Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024). For example, perceived autonomy and adequate working conditions significantly mediate employee retention among Gen Z in Malaysian SMEs, demonstrating that supportive policies fail if employees remain constrained by poor systems.

When confronted with persistent systemic hurdles, young employees often utilize passive-aggressive deviance such as time theft, reduced effort, and withdrawal as a functional coping mechanism to manage psychological stress and regain a sense of autonomy within a restrictive environment. Gen Z shows a higher vulnerability to work-related psychological distress and burnout than previous generations when dealing with extreme work cultures and job insecurity. Instead of overt physical aggression, chronic frustration stemming from these barriers predominantly manifests as concealed CWB. Drawing from the frustration-aggression hypothesis and recent literature indicating that systemic workplace barriers deplete psychological resources and provoke retaliatory coping mechanisms, therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Organisational constraints have a significant positive influence on Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) among Generation Z employees in Malaysia.

Rigid Rules

Rigid rules are explained in past literature as "organizational red tape" or formalized procedures that prioritize absolute compliance over efficiency, effectively stripping employees of job autonomy. Studies indicate that high bureaucracy combined with low autonomy severely diminishes intrinsic motivation. Asian organizational literature viewed strict hierarchy and rigid rules as culturally accepted norms associated with high power distance (Rahman & Alias, 2024). However, Becton et al. (2023) note that modern youth expect Westernized levels of

autonomy and view rigid structural control as a profound procedural injustice. This perceived procedural injustice acts as a direct catalyst for negative workplace behaviors.

In the modern Malaysian corporate view, this generational paradigm shift is causing significant issue. Jamaludin and Hashim (2025) observe that Generation Z enters the workforce prioritizing flexibility, outcome-based evaluations, and self-direction. When subjected to extreme micromanagement, strict clock-in policies, or inflexible bureaucratic hierarchies, these young professionals do not interpret such measures as standard organizational discipline. Instead, they perceive them as a fundamental breach of trust and a systemic unfairness (Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024). This perception firmly positions rigid rules as a form of procedural organizational injustice, wherein the policies governing daily operations are deemed fundamentally inequitable and disconnected from actual work output.

Lacking the structural authority to reform these entrenched organizational policies, Gen Z workers in Malaysia frequently retaliate through covert CWB. According to Ibrahim et al. (2023), when employees feel suffocated by rigid rules, it induces high levels of affective strain, frustration, and job stress. Rather than engaging in overt rebellion or physical sabotage, Gen Z utilizes digital and passive deviance as a functional coping mechanism. Teng et al. (2022) and Goh and Lee (2023) highlight that behaviors such as cyberloafing, digital unresponsiveness, extended breaks, and "quiet quitting" are actively used by young employees to reclaim their lost autonomy and silently protest ranting about organizational red tape. Based on Social Exchange Theory, which posits that employees will reciprocate perceived procedural unfairness with negative organizational behaviors, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Rigid rules have a significant positive influence on Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) among Generation Z employees in Malaysia.

Job Stress

In contemporary organizational behavior literature, the relationship between workplace adversity and employee deviance is rarely instantaneous; rather, it is mediated by the psychological and emotional toll placed on the employee. Job stress is defined as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (Lim & Chen, 2025). Within the context of Generation Z employees in Malaysia, job stress acts as a critical affective mechanism that bridges the gap between perceiving organizational injustice and enacting CWB.

The mediating role of job stress is explained in Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET posits that the employer-employee relationship relies on a reciprocal psychological contract built on mutual trust and fairness. When an organization violates this contract through systemic injustices such as appearance-based bias (lookism), stifling red tape (rigid rules), or structural barriers (organisational constraints), it disrupts the balance of the social exchange. This disruption does not immediately translate into bad behavior. Instead, the perception of being treated unfairly creates a profound emotional and cognitive burden, resulting in chronic job stress (Rosalina & Jusoh, 2024).

When employees face appearance-based discrimination, it generates a toxic climate of marginalization. Wang and Chen (2024) found that lookism acts as an intense social stressor, leading to imposter syndrome, lower self-worth, and high emotional exhaustion. This psychological distress directly predicts interpersonal CWB, as stressed employees withdraw from their colleagues to protect themselves from further aesthetic judgment. In addition, organisational constraints is a systemic barrier that continuously prevent an employee's ability to achieve their goals. When Gen Z employees, who highly value competence, are consistently blocked by outdated technology or conflicting directives, it induces the "frustration-aggression" mechanism (Teng et al., 2022). This structural frustration elevates job stress levels, which in turn acts as the direct catalyst for organizational deviance like time theft. Finally, excessive bureaucracy and micromanagement strip young employees of their autonomy. Jamaludin et al. (2024) highlight that when Gen Z workers are subjected to rigid procedural injustices, it creates a high-demand, low-control environment. This imbalance is a primary driver of occupational stress, which pushes exhausted employees to engage in passive-aggressive CWBs to subtly reclaim their autonomy.

Employees experience stress because their expectation of a fair, supportive work environment is fundamentally denied, draining their psychological resources. Ibrahim et al. (2023) emphasize that when this stress exceeds an employee's coping capacity, the reciprocal relationship turns negative. Subsequently, alleviate their emotional exhaustion, or restore a sense of equity, young employees engage in CWB such as cyberloafing, reduced effort, or quiet quitting as a defensive coping mechanism (Teng et al., 2022). Thus, stress is the vital psychological strain that transforms perceived injustice into retaliatory action. Based on Social Exchange Theory, which rationalizes that the breach of fairness (injustice) induces psychological strain (stress) that prompts reciprocal retaliation (CWB), the following hypothesis proposed:

H4: Job stress significantly mediates the relationship between lookism, rigid rules, and organisational constraints and Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB).

- **H4a:** Job stress mediates the relationship between perceived lookism and CWB.
- **H4b:** Job stress mediates the relationship between rigid rules and CWB.
- **H4c:** Job stress mediates the relationship between organisational constraints and CWB.

Theory And Conceptual Framework

This study is theoretically anchored in the organizational behavior model of Social Exchange Theory (SET) Model. SET posits that the employee-employer relationship is built on reciprocal exchanges. When employees perceive they are treated fairly, they reciprocate with positive work behaviors. Conversely, when they experience organizational injustice, the psychological contract is breached. Gen Z employees reciprocate negatively to "even the score," manifesting as CWB.

This framework improves past models by explaining the mechanism of frustration and stress (Lim & Chen, 2025) rather than just the behavioral outcome, bridging the gap between global generational theories and localized Malaysian corporate realities (Jamaludin et al., 2024).

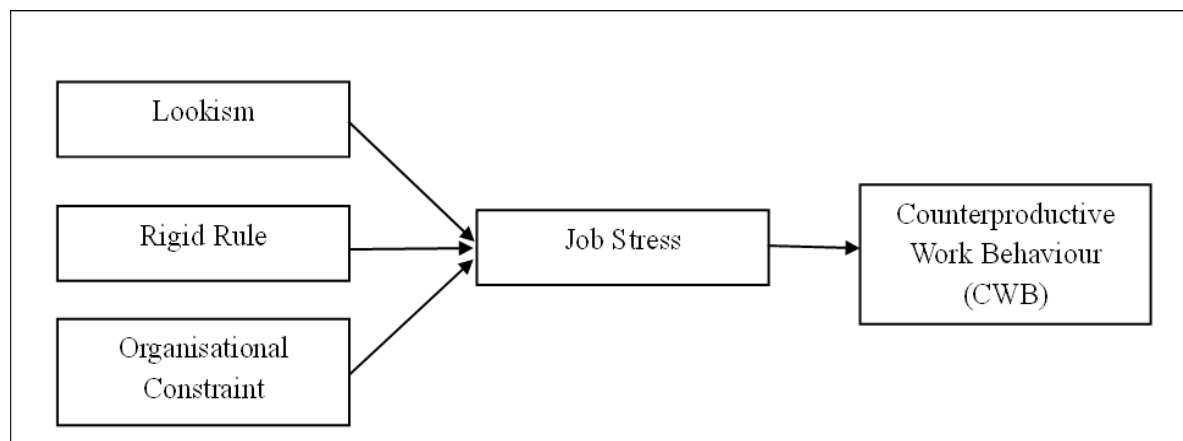


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework illustrating three factors of CWB and the mediating role of job stress.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The modern Malaysian workplace is currently navigating a complex transitional period characterized by a profound generational shift and evolving post-pandemic work expectations. This conceptual study highlights four critical variables lookism, rigid rules, organizational constraints, and job stress that are increasingly trending as potential catalysts for CWB among Generation Z employees. Despite their growing prevalence, there remains a significant lack of localized studies and regulatory discourse surrounding these specific variables in Malaysia. This study addresses the rising phenomenon of CWB among Generation Z professionals in Malaysia by redefining it as a theorized retaliatory response to modern organizational injustice. In addition, this study might

contribute to a further understanding of the recent conceptualisation of CWB for Gen Z, such as "quiet quitting." It highlights theoretical explanations for the passive disengagement and high turnover currently plaguing the Malaysian job market, exploring the underlying drivers behind Gen Z's workplace behavior. Recognizing the factors associated with CWB is a vital step toward prioritizing mental health and healthier workplaces.

The proposed conceptual framework posits that lookism, rigid rules, and organizational constraints may act as workplace factors that fundamentally breach the psychological contract between young employees and their employers. It is theorized that these injustices systematically drain employees' emotional resources, potentially contributing to chronic job stress, which is anticipated to manifest in deviant coping behaviors such as cyberloafing, reduced effort, and passive withdrawal.

Recognizing and mitigating these specific variables is no longer a secondary HR concern, it is a strategic imperative. If organizations fail to address appearance-based biases, dismantle stifling bureaucracy, and resolve structural barriers, they risk continued exposure to unexplained productivity losses and toxic workplace cultures. Therefore, proactively alleviating these perceived injustices and managing job stress is suggested as an essential approach to bridge the generational expectation gap, restore mutual trust, and ultimately support long-term employee retention and optimal organizational performance in Malaysia.

Moreover, it is highly recommended that future research empirically tests this proposed conceptual framework across various industries in Malaysia. Practically, organizations are advised to urgently modernize their HR policies. This includes implementing clear guidelines that explicitly protect against lookism, exploring transitions from rigid micromanagement to flexible, outcome-based evaluations, and actively removing structural constraints to alleviate unnecessary job stress. For Malaysian companies to remain globally competitive and retain top young talent, they must evolve by modernizing HR policies to suit younger generations. While this conceptual research provides the theoretical groundwork required to justify exploring a shift away from archaic, rigid rules toward more flexible, trust-based, and outcome-oriented management styles, the researcher emphasizes that the conceptual framework must be tested empirically to validate these proposed relationships and better understand the magnitude of the issue.

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