Too Sensitive or Just Self-Aware?: A Narrative Analysis of Filipino Generation Z with Emotional Vulnerability in the Workplace

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Abstract: The study explores Filipino Generation Z's emotional vulnerability in the workplace. The study focuses on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about being emotionally vulnerable, sensitive, and self-aware in the workplace. By sharing their stories, five participants born between 2000 and 2006 were able to explain their personal, positional, and ideological understandings of emotional vulnerability in the workplace. Generation Z employees' emotional vulnerability in the workplace, structured as a three-phase journey: initial experiences, coping, and reflection. Nine key themes emerged, grouped into three categories: emotional experiences (distress, endurance, and coping); role perceptions (learners, marginalized voices, and advocates); and workplace values (emotional awareness, professionalism, and sensitivity). Findings highlight the emotional complexity of Gen Z's work experiences and the need for supportive, inclusive workplace environments. Generation Z employees collectively emphasize the importance of creating environments that foster emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and sensitivity in the workplace.

Keywords: Emotional Vulnerability; Generation Z; Self-Awareness; Narrative Analysis

Introduction

Individuals born between 2000 and 2006, known as Generation Z (Gen Z) or Zoomers, have lived their whole lives amid fast innovative advancements, digital era, financial instability, and rising social consciousness (Dimock, 2019). These developmental encounters have shaped their approach to personal and work connections, especially in their careers. Generation Z is considered one of the most emotionally vulnerable generations. Agreeing with an overview conducted by McKinsey Well Being Organized in 2022, they found out that Era Z or Gen Z encounters more mental well-being issues than the Millennial era (Akbar et al., 2024). Deloitte (2023) shows that Generation Z experienced a burnout rate of 52% in 2023 and 46% in 2022, more notable than the millennial era, with 40%. Despite these challenges, Gen Z is anticipated to rule the workforce by 35 % by 2025, as Gen Z makes up roughly 30% of the worldwide

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population nowadays (Sali, 2023).

In my view, one notable characteristic of Gen Z employees is that they are valuable manpower because they can quickly adapt to technological innovation. Gen Z is defined as highly ambitious, achievers, career- oriented professionals with different expectations in the workplace. This generation seems to be motivated by finding their dream job, suitable careers, and more opportunities to expand their skills, leading to changing jobs more often than previous generations, and are quick to make a switch or quit if they find something unsatisfactory (Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2018). Additionally, Generation Z was raised in a very connected and socially conscious society (Barber, 2020). Generation Z has a 'more open- minded attitude towards expressing themselves and understanding others and themselves' (Magano et al., 2020). Their online presence aligns with their vocal nature and worldwide vision, so they can engage with others without compromising themselves, their principles, or their dreams. The Gen Z employees who are willing to talk about their emotional and mental health in the workplace are often met with mixed reactions. This emotional openness is often not well understood, resulting in discussions about whether Gen Z employees are 'too sensitive' or are simply more aware of themselves than the previous generations (Magano et al., 2020). This tension highlights a very important shift in generations in how they perceive, express, advocate for themselves, and solve conflicts at work. Their feedback to sensitivity, concern for mental health, and desire for authentic communication present both the benefits and the challenges for workplace relationships and dynamics.

Additionally, a Filipino study highlights how Generation Z professionals uniquely handle emotional aspects shaped by practices such as 'pakikisama' and 'utang na loob' which place more emphasis on relational or social values such as conforming to the group. The existence of these factors presents a challenge to young professional workers who seem to appreciate emotional and personal freedom and expression but are, in fact, under great pressure to adhere to the norms of professionalism (Dudija & Apriliansyah, 2024). Furthermore, the better appreciation of mental health and work-life balance for Filipino Gen Z workers is emphasized to affect their emotional state in the workplace (Chavez et al., 2020). This could be the case in Metro Manila, where social media is around a greater percentage of the population, and their social media presence may compromise this generation's work life as they try to portray a certain image while at the same time trying to juggle work commitments (Bautista & Dizon, 2018).

This study focuses on Gen Z employees' emotional vulnerability in the workplace. It also explores how supervisors and HR professionals support Gen Z employees during emotionally challenging times and how Gen Z navigates the difference between emotional sensitivity and self-awareness in their workplace. Through these narratives, the study also seeks to deepen understanding of the prevalence of emotional vulnerability in work among Gen Z and how they adapt to it. The first research question pertains to how Gen Z employees manage emotional vulnerability while balancing sensitivity and self-advocacy in the workplace. The second question delves into what role Supervisors and Human Resources play in supporting Gen Z's self-perception during periods of emotional vulnerability. Lastly, the third research question seeks to uncover what Gen Z employees learn from differentiating emotional sensitivity and self- awareness in the workplace. These questions aim to provide insights into the unique emotional experiences of this generation by suggesting resources that will be beneficial to this generation in their development and professional aspects.

Method

Research Design

This study uses narrative analysis to understand the identity experiences of Gen Z in workplace settings. According to Murray (2000), Narratives are analyzed across four levels: personal, interpersonal, positional, and ideological. The personal level examines how individuals view their experiences and connect their personal lives to society. The positional level focuses on the narrator's perspective and the power dynamics involved in their story. The ideological level explores broader social beliefs and systems reflected in the stories. The interpersonal level, which studies the influence of the interviewer, is excluded in this study because the interviewer's role is expected to have an insignificant to minimal impact on the participants' narrative (Murray, 2000).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Metro Manila, which was chosen for its diverse workforce and as the main economic and business center of the Philippines. Metro Manila also has many professionals from Generation Z and is a suitable setting to investigate their workplace-related emotional challenges. Additionally, Metro Manila's fast-paced environment offers a representative setting for understanding the experiences of young employees across different industries.

Participants

This study explored the experiences of Generation Z employees using narrative analysis. Data were collected from five participants born between 2000 and 2006 employed in various industries across Metro Manila. The study participants were required to meet criteria, including being Generation Z employees with a minimum of six months of industry experience and achieving a moderate to very high score on the Yamaguchi Emotional Vulnerability Scale. This scale consists of four reliable and validity factors, encompassing 16 items: (1) susceptibility to criticism or rejection, (2) sensitivity to deteriorating relationships, (3) vulnerability to interpersonal conflicts, and (4) a tendency toward procrastination and emotional avoidance. It serves as a tool for assessing any individual's emotional vulnerability in daily life situations (Yamaguchi et al., 2022).

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants

Demographic Profile of the Participants					Emotional Vulnerability Score	
Participants Codes	Age	Gender	Job Position	Years of Working	Score	Interpretation
Participant 1	23	Female	Accounts Payable Staff	2 years	51	High
Participant 2	23	Female	Office Staff	2 years	53	High
Participant 3	24	Female	Guidance Advocate	1 year	46	Moderate
Participant 4	24	Female	Design Consultant	1 year	66	Very High
Participant 5	25	Female	Senior Sales Designer	2 years	62	Very High

Note: Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the five research participants with their emotional vulnerability scores in adherence to the sampling criteria.

Material/Instrument

The study followed a structured approach using in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather life

stories, specifically focusing on what participants thought and felt about being emotionally vulnerable, sensitive, and self-aware at the workplace. To guide the interviews, a set of core questions was developed for three chapters: the first chapter, the second chapter, last chapter, and was categorized into personal, positional, and ideological levels.

The first chapter aims to reveal the Gen Z employees' first encounters with emotional vulnerability in the workplace. They were asked to recall that first instance in which they felt emotionally vulnerable at work, what their manager, supervisor, or Human Resources did in response to the emotional vulnerability at that point, and how they learned to handle it at work after their first experience.

The second chapter attempted to examine the continuing experience of emotional vulnerability in Gen Z employees and how they navigate their ongoing emotional challenges. Participants were asked if they still have emotional vulnerability at work, and what the current emotional challenges they face. It asked whether or not they felt that their position enabled them to convey emotions to others when they are vulnerable. Furthermore, the participants discussed how their perceptions of emotional vulnerability influenced their attitude towards work and interaction with colleagues.

Lastly, the last chapter turned to examine how they reflected on emotional vulnerability in the workplace. The questions sought to direct themselves in exploring how emotional vulnerability impacted their growth or awareness in the inability to show emotional vulnerability based on their age or position, and how their perception of emotional vulnerability in the workplace has changed over time. Participants were also asked how they feel the organization should move on with emotional vulnerability issues.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study used specific steps to ensure the collection of reliable data. First, informed consent was obtained from participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their rights. Second, purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experiences of emotional vulnerability in occupational settings. Participants then completed the Yamaguchi Emotional Vulnerability Scale to measure their emotional vulnerability. Afterward, a semi-structured interview lasting for the duration of one hour was conducted, guided by prepared questions to explore their experiences. Consent was also obtained for audio recordings of the interviews, and the data was kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses, preserving their original words for a more precise understanding of emotional vulnerability in the workplace. Every transcript underwent multiple readings to ensure comprehension of the content of the narratives. The study consisted of five steps: (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data (Butina, 2015). The current study adapted Murray's model in data analysis that includes the stories from each of the three levels of analysis: personal, positional, and ideological levels.

The coding process was structured around participants' personal experiences with emotional vulnerability in the workplace, starting with their initial encounters and continuing with their current emotional challenges. The positional aspect focused on their perspectives regarding the organization and human resources, specifically how they were supported during moments of emotional vulnerability. The

ideological narrative highlighted the lessons they learned from experiencing emotional vulnerability at work.

Ethical Considerations

This research study followed ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and rights of the participants. Informed consent was obtained, providing participants with detailed information about the study's purpose, data usage, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and anonymizing any identifiable information. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives provided that could coerce involvement.

Result

The participants' narratives cover the three chapters of the beginning, middle, and end of Gen Z experience in their workplace. Narrative's analysis identifies 9 themes: personal, positional, and ideological.

Table 2

Themes of the Study

Chapters	Personal	Positional	Ideological
First Chapter Emotional Experience	Experience of Emotional Distress from Conflict and Lack of Support in the Workplace	Perceived role as a Learner Navigating Workplace Dynamics	The Value of Emotional Awareness and Adaptability
Second Chapter Role Perceptions	Experience of Enduring Emotional Distress with Professionalism and Patience	Perceived role as Disregarded Voice and Vulnerable Professional	The Value of Professionalism
Last Chapter Workplace Values	Experience of Coping with Emotional Distress and Finding Emotional Balance	Perceived role as Advocates for Employee Support and Well-being	The Value of Sensitivity

Note: Table 2 shows the different themes collated from the narratives of the research participants. These themes were identified by analyzing shared experiences, emotions, perspectives, and ideas, resulting in categories that aid in comprehending the data.

I.   First Chapter: First Experience of Emotional Vulnerability in Workplace

The research participant shared their initial encounter with emotional vulnerability in the workplace. They described a moment when they felt exposed, triggered, and tested their emotional strength. Their narrative experience highlighted the complexities of balancing personal feelings with professional expectations and shared insight into the emotional dynamics of their workplace.

I.I   Personal Level: Experience of Emotional Distress from Conflict and Lack of Support in the Workplace.

Gen Z employees recall their first encounters with emotional vulnerability in the workplace, which began from workplace conflicts. These conflicts, whether with their colleagues, supervisors, or managers, led to emotional distress characterized by frustration, self-doubt, isolation, and heightened vulnerability.

"Sinabi ko na sinusunod ko lang ang rule ng company pero at the end ako pa yung pinagalitan ng head. Expect ko na, imbis na ipagtanggol ako ng manager, pakiramdam ko mas napahiya pa ko. Of course, nagkaroon ito ng epekto sa akin, lalo na dahil minura niya ako. Naapektuhan ako nang personal" (I said I was just following the company's rules, but in the end, I was the one scolded by the head. I expected that, but instead of my manager defending me, I felt even more embarrassed. Of course, this affected me, especially because he cursed at me. It affected me personally.) - Participant 1

"Dahil bago nga lang po ako sa trabaho and nakakafrustrate po siya na hindi mo siya malabas na, di mo siya masabi sa iba so may situation po that time na gusto mo na lang talagang magbreakdown dahil hindi mo nga siya mapakita. " (Because I'm new to the job, it's frustrating not being able to express it, not being able to talk about it with others. There was a situation at that time where I just wanted to break down because I couldn't show it.) - Participant 2

Participants shared their experiences of emotional distress due to workplace conflicts. They described a situation where, despite following company rules, they were scolded by their superiors. Their manager's lack of support left them feeling unsupported and humiliated, intensifying their emotional vulnerability. Participant 2, a newcomer to the job, expressed frustration with the inability to speak up or share their feelings, leading to a sense of isolation. They described moments of wanting to break down but feeling unable to express their emotions or seek support.

"Nagkaroon ng issue na nag away kami nung isa sa mga matagal na sa work, nagkasagutan kami kasi at kahit na pinagusap kami hindi padin niya inamin yung mali niya or wala sila plano magsorry. Yung time na yun alam ko yun na yung last straw ko sa kanila. Nakakapaghina ng loob lang kasi alam ko sa sarili ko na wala ng pagasa na maayos." (There was an issue where I had an argument with someone who's been working there longer. We had a heated argument, and even though we were asked to talk it over, they still didn't admit their mistake or show any intention of apologizing. At that time, I knew it was the last straw for me. It was discouraging because I knew deep down that there was no hope for things to be fixed.) - Participant 5

Participant 5 experienced emotional distress from an unresolved conflict with a long-time colleague. The absence of an apology or resolution left them emotionally exhausted, ultimately leading to feelings of hopelessness and emotional burnout.

Overall, these first experiences with emotional vulnerability highlight the significant emotional distress Gen Z employees face when conflicts are left unresolved, and how conflicts lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and emotional draining. Gen Z employees expressed a profound sense of helplessness, compounded by a lack of support from the workplace. When managers and colleagues dismissed or ignored concerns, that intensified feelings of emotional strain. The deepening emotional impact came not just from the conflict, but also from the lack of resolution or accountability. This lack of support left employees feeling unsupported and undervalued, which had a negative impact on their mental health and work engagement.

I.II   Positional Level: Perceived Role as a Learner Navigating Workplace Dynamics

Gen Z employees shared that while their first encounters with emotional vulnerability in the workplace were challenging, they understood the importance of understanding their situations and feelings from these experiences. Gen Z employees recalled how conflicts and misunderstandings initially led to emotional distress, and they began to observe and understand workplace dynamics. These

experiences taught them that emotional vulnerability is an inevitable part of their professional development. As they continue to navigate their workplace experience, Gen Z employees are gaining a sense of the need to understand the dynamics between their organization, Human Resources, and their managers.

"Hindi niya po bibigyan pansin or yung bibigyan consideration yung mga pangangailangan ng mga kawork nya or mga kasama nya siguro po hindi siya magiging healthy work and ahm sabihin na natin like yung ano yung environment kung ganon po, so dapat po parang priority po yung goals ng institution tsaka po yung employees din po." (They don't pay attention or give consideration to the needs of their coworkers or team members, and maybe because of that, it wouldn't create a healthy work environment. If that's the case, the institution's goals and the employees' well-being should be prioritized.) - Participant 2

Gen Z employees are actively learning to navigate complex workplace dynamics, especially when it comes to understanding the roles of their managers and Human Resources. Participants learn that a lack of consideration for employees' needs can lead to an unhealthy work environment.

"Akala ko neurtal yung HR dapat both sides nakikinig pero napatunayan namin sa office na mas kasunod niya yung mga accounting." (I thought HR was neutral, that they would listen to both sides, but we proved in the office that they sided more with accounting.) - Participant 4

"Yung unang naging HR namin, hindi siya nakikinig. More on sa side siya ng mga tenured kasi kaibigan niya sila at kasundo niya mga yun. Medyo unfair kasi nung nagkaroon ng maghaharap harap kami obvious naman sa kabilang side siya." (Our first HR didn't listen. They were more on the side of the tenured employees because they were friends and got along with them. It felt a bit unfair because when we had a face-to-face meeting, it was obvious they sided with the other team.) - Participant 5

Similarly, Participant 4 learned that HR, which they initially believed should be neutral, can sometimes show bias toward certain departments or sides, which impacts their trust in the process. Participant 5 mentioned how HR's favoritism with tenured employees caused a feeling of unfairness especially when HR sided with their friends in a dispute. These experiences highlight that Gen Z employees are learning how to navigate interpersonal relationships at work and understand the workplace dynamics between employees, HR, and management. These insights shape their approach to workplace challenges and the importance of advocating for fairness and transparency.

I.III Ideological Level: The Value of Emotional Awareness and Adaptability

As Gen Z employees continue navigating their initial encounters with emotional vulnerability, they share valuable insights into how these experiences have shaped their understanding of conflicts and workplace dynamics. Reflecting on their first conflicts, they acknowledged the emotional distress that came with these situations but also recognized how they needed to understand the reality of workplace dynamics. From managing workplace conflict to learning how to navigate complex workplace dynamics, Gen Z employees are becoming aware of the importance of emotional awareness and adaptability in the workplace.

"Kung wala ka pang masyadong alam sa business industry, pwede siyang makaapekto sa trabaho mo. Kasi pag pinairal mo ang emotions, pwedeng maapektuhan ang work na ginagawa mo." (If you're not very familiar with the business industry yet, it can affect your work. Because if you let emotions take

over, it could impact the work you're doing.) - Participant 1

"Hindi mawawala sa work environment na mapagalitan ka. Ang mahalaga ay kung paano mo ito haharapin. Sa atin na mga Gen Z, kailangan muna natin mag-gain ng experience at matuto. Kapag pinairal natin ang emotions at nag-give up agad, hindi tayo matututo. Kailangan mo matutunan na harapin ang mga sitwasyon, kasi kapag iniwan mo lang siya at pinabayaan, walang mangyayari, mauulit na mauulit lang siya." (It's inevitable in the work environment to be scolded. What matters is how you handle it. For us Gen Z, we need to gain experience and learn. If we let emotions take over and give up right away, we won't learn. You need to learn to face situations because if you just leave them and neglect them, nothing will happen, and it will just keep repeating.) - Participant 2

"In terms of my personality po and more on into the emotional aspect po talaga, so kapag feeling ko nahihirapan na talaga ako and may times na sobrang sensitive at vulnerable ka na, as much as possible I try to focus on it po and prioritize it" (In terms of my personality, especially in the emotional aspect, when I feel like I'm struggling and there are times when I'm very sensitive and vulnerable, as much as possible, I try to focus on it and prioritize it.) - Participant 3

Gen Z employees are learning to balance emotional awareness and adaptability as they navigate their workplace experience, recognizing that their emotions can significantly impact their work life. They shared that emotions can negatively affect work performance without a solid understanding of the business industry, highlighting the importance of keeping emotions in check. Reflecting on their emotional challenges, they shared how they strive to focus on their emotional state when feeling vulnerable and sensitive, prioritizing self-care as part of their growth process. Together, these experiences reflect the value Gen Z places on emotional awareness, learning to adapt emotionally while navigating their work life.

II.   Second Chapter: Onset- Dealing with Emotional Vulnerability in the Workplace

For Gen Z employees, the onset of emotional vulnerability in the workplace often comes with challenges such as conflicts, misunderstandings, and moments of self-doubt. They shared that their experiences during this time can be overwhelming, full of setbacks, and involve enduring emotional distress.

II.I   Personal Level: Experience of Enduring Emotional Distress with Professionalism and Patience

For many Gen Z employees, enduring emotional distress in the workplace is a personal challenge that requires maintaining professionalism and patience. Despite experiencing emotional distress from conflicts or misunderstandings, they strive to manage their emotions while upholding their responsibilities.

"Nainis ako pero hindi ko siya sinagot dahil may respeto ako sa kanya as a higher manager. Kumalma lang ako at hinayaan siya. Lumipas ang mga araw, wala naman akong na-receive na any apology sa kanya."(I was annoyed, but I didn't respond because I respected him as a higher manager. I just calmed down and let it be. Days passed, and I didn't receive any apology from him.) - Participant 1

"May times na napanghihinaan ng loob pero kailangan ko ng work bali iniiwasan ko na lang kapag alam ko na hindi worth it magalit kasi madami rin ako trabaho." (There are times when I feel discouraged, but I need the job, so I just avoid getting angry when I know it's not worth it, especially since I have a lot of work to do.) - Participant 4

"Alam ko hindi na magbabago yung mga tenured kasi ganun sila sa iba. Hindi okay naging mental health ko that time pero kailangan ko magcontinue as leader ng group ko kailangan professional at maipakita ko na okay lang ako kahit na mahirap." (I know the tenured employees won't change because they're like that with others. My mental health wasn't okay at that time, but I had to continue as the leader of my group. I needed to be professional and show that I was okay, even though it was hard.) - *Participant 5*

Gen Z employees experience emotional distress in the workplace, but they continue to demonstrate professionalism and patience in their responses. Gen Z employees shared that despite feeling frustrated, they chose not to retaliate and instead respected their higher manager by remaining calm and being patient. Similarly, Participant 4 acknowledged moments of discouragement but emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary conflict, as they had to prioritize their work responsibilities. Similarly, Participant 5 reflected on the mental strain caused by tenured employees' behavior, yet they understood the necessity of maintaining professionalism as a leader. Even though their mental health was affected, they persevered to show their team that they could remain composed despite the challenges. These experiences highlight how Gen Z employees are learning to endure emotional distress while balancing their responsibilities, demonstrating the ability to remain professional in difficult situations.

II.II   Positional Level: Perceived Role as Disregarded Voice and Vulnerable Professional

As Gen Z employees deal with emotional vulnerability in the workplace, they feel that their voices are often disregarded, leading to a sense of vulnerability in their professional roles. As they tried to remain professional, their opinions or concerns were overlooked, creating an environment where they felt less empowered to speak up.

"Kapag nag stand-up ka kasi, maririnig nila ang boses ng mga empleyado, pero nasa management kasi yun kung sosolusyunan o gagawan ba nila ng aksyon yung concern ng employees. Bumaba self-esteem ko dahil sa mga nangyari. Kahit pinipilit ko maging professional, as a person, naapektuhan pa rin yung confidence ko sa sarili. I notice na mas tumaas yung doubt ko sa sarili ko." (When you stand up, they hear the voices of the employees, but it's up to management whether they will address or take action on the concerns of the employees. My self-esteem dropped because of what happened. Even though I tried to be professional, as a person, my confidence was still affected. I noticed that my self-doubt increased.) - *Participant 1*

"After I stood up for myself and for my community parang nadisregard yung emotions ko nung… nung nakarating na sa ibang heads and then after that parang nung nagstand up na yung supervisor ko for me." (After I stood up for myself and my community, it felt like my emotions were disregarded when they reached the other heads, and then after that, it felt like my supervisor finally stood up for me.) - *Participant 2*

"During that time, hindi ko nakikita na makakapg open up ako sa kanya dahil alam ko na sasabihin niya din yun sa iba. Pagkkwentuhan lang nila ako. Kaya hindi ako nagsasabi before." (During that time, I didn't see myself being able to open up to him because I knew he would just tell others about it. They would just gossip about me. That's why I didn't speak up before.)- *Participant 4*

"Dati nasabi ko na lahat kay Sir yun na yung HR natin dapat hiwalay kasi isang side lang yun nakikinig. Nasabi ko na lahat yun kay Sir, about sa mental health ko at last straw ko . Sabi ko hindi na talaga mababago." (Before, I told Sir everything, that our HR should be separate because they only listen

to one side. I shared everything with Sir about my mental health and how that was my last straw. I told him that things wouldn't change anymore.)- Participant 5

For some Gen Z employees, standing up for themselves often feels like a challenge against a system that disregards their voice and opinion, leaving them vulnerable in their professional roles. Gen Z employees shared how, despite trying to remain professional, they experienced a decline in self-esteem due to their concerns not being addressed by management. The lack of action from those in power led to a loss of confidence and increased self-doubt, highlighting the emotional toll of being ignored. They also felt their emotions were disregarded when their concerns reached higher management, leaving them to rely on their supervisor for support, which added to their vulnerability. Furthermore, expressed hesitation in opening up to management, knowing that their concerns would likely be shared with others rather thanaddressed confidentially and no hope for change. The emotional distress faced by employees when their voices are ignored leaves them feeling vulnerable in their workplace.

II.III Ideological Level: The Value of Professionalism

Gen Z employees enduring their emotional distress by remaining professional and attempting to voice out despite feeling disregarded and vulnerable, Gen Z employees remain to reflect on the value of professionalism in the workplace.

"Kapag sa trabaho ang alam ko dapat propesyonal na kayo alam niyo na yung tama sa mali yung sobra at nakakasakit ganun yung una kong pananaw dati."(In work, what I knew was that you should be professional, knowing what's right and wrong, what's excessive, and what's hurtful. That was my initial perspective before.) - Participant 4

"Parang kapag nababago yung ano ko, yung pananaw ko pag nakakaencounter ako ng feedback kase for me I am open in criticism kasi so even though mukha akong prangka or ano or taklesa sabihin man ng iba pero once you approach me or tell me na parang merong mali sa akin I would lovely I... I would parang respectly accept that" (It's like when my perspective changes when I encounter feedback, because for me, I'm open to criticism. So even though I may come across as blunt or tactless to others, once you approach me or tell me that something is wrong with me, I would lovingly and respectfully accept it.) - Participant 2

"Dahil sa nangyari, mas okay na lang talaga maging professional kasi hindi naman lahat magiging kasundo mo sa work. Respect each other and know your limits. Nawawala din kasi yung boundaries kapag alam nila na mas superior sila sayo."(Because of what happened, it's better to just be professional because not everyone will get along with you at work. Respect each other and know your limits. Boundaries tend to disappear when they know they are superior to you.) - Participant 5

For Gen Z employees, the value of professionalism in their workplace. They reflected on their initial perspective that professionalism meant always knowing the difference between right and wrong, as well as recognizing when behavior becomes hurtful. However, as they continued, they came to realize that professionalism also involves openness to feedback and growth. Participant 2 highlighted the importance of being receptive to constructive criticism, stating that despite their direct approach, they value and respect when others point out areas for improvement. Similarly, Gen Z employees emphasized that professionalism also involves respecting each other's boundaries and understanding that not everyone will be compatible at work. This realization came after experiencing situations where boundaries were blurred, especially when dealing with those in superior positions. These reflections demonstrate how Gen Z

employees increasingly value professionalism as a way to navigate workplace dynamics.

III.   Chapter: Reflection on Emotional Vulnerability in Workplace

III.I   Personal Level: Experience of Coping with Emotional Distress and Finding Emotional Balance

Gen Z employees shared their experiences with emotional vulnerability in the workplace. They shared that after reflecting on their work situations, they recognize the importance of finding emotional balance during challenging times. They emphasize the importance of managing their emotions while also fulfilling their professional responsibilities, finding their own ways to cope and find balance.

"Minsan po kasi kapag maraming task or maraming gagawin ise-set aside mo muna ang emotional vulnerability mo however po dapat rin po na pinapriority din siya along the way so minsan po pag ginagawa ko kahit may task after na lang nung paggawa ng task or kapag nagawa ko na po tsaka ko naman po ako nagseseek ng support." (Sometimes, when there are many tasks or a heavy workload, you tend to set aside your emotional vulnerability. However, it should still be prioritized along the way. So what I usually do is focus on completing my tasks first, and only after finishing them do I seek support.) - Participant 3

Participant 3 describes a common struggle of prioritizing emotional vulnerability in a fast-paced work environment. While she often sets aside her emotional needs to meet deadlines, she understands the importance of seeking support and addressing these needs eventually.

"Hindi mawawala sa work environment na mapagalitan ka. Ang mahalaga ay kung paano mo ito haharapin. Sa atin na mga Gen Z, kailangan muna natin mag-gain ng experience at matuto. Kapag pinairal natin ang emotions at nag-give up agad, hindi tayo matututo. Kailangan mo matutunan na harapin ang mga sitwasyon, kasi kapag iniwan mo lang siya at pinabayaan, walang mangyayari, mauulit na mauulit lang siya." (Getting scolded in the workplace is inevitable. What matters is how you handle it. As Gen Z employees, we first need to gain experience and learn. If we let our emotions take over and give up too soon, we won't grow. We need to learn how to face challenges because if we simply walk away and ignore them, nothing will change—it will just keep happening over and over again.) - Participant 1

As one participant shared, facing criticism and setbacks is inevitable, but how one responds makes all the difference. Rather than letting emotions take over and giving up, it is essential to embrace these moments as learning opportunities. By developing the ability to manage emotions and actively addressing challenges rather than avoiding them.

"When I'm stressed I'm doing smoke just to inhale-exhale the… the stress out but when I felt weak or anger… angry on specific person or task on the office, I'd rather choose to parang subside outside the office. Para kahit papano magsubside and then pagka kumalma na 'ko dun ako babalik sa office to continue my task and uhm cooperate with my co-workers." (When I'm stressed, I smoke to help release the tension. But when I feel weak or angry about a specific person or task at work, I prefer to step outside the office to let my emotions settle. That way, I can calm down first, and once I'm ready, I return to the office to continue working and collaborating with my colleagues.) - Participant 2

"Minsan po kasi kapag maraming task or maraming gagawin ise-set aside mo muna ang emotional vulnerability mo however po dapat rin po na pinapriority din siya along the way so minsan po pag ginagawa ko kahit may task after na lang nung paggawa ng task or kapag nagawa ko na po tsaka ko naman po ako nagseseek ng support," (Sometimes, when there are many tasks or a lot of work to do, you

set aside your emotional vulnerability. However, it should still be prioritized along the way. So what I usually do is finish my tasks first, and only after completing them do I seek support.) - Participant 3

"Alam ko hindi na kami maguusap nung nakaalitan ko, humingi ako ng 2 weeks leave dahil naapektuhan ako sa nangyari. Parang gusto ko makahinga nung time na yun. Kasi sa ilang times na pinapalagpas ko yung mga conflict samin, nauubos kadin pala." (I knew that I would no longer talk to the person I had a conflict with. I requested a two-week leave because the situation affected me. At that time, I just wanted to breathe. After repeatedly letting our conflicts slide, I realized that it eventually drains you too.) - Participant 5

Gen Z employees cope with workplace stress in various ways, emphasizing self-regulation, personal space, and support systems to maintain emotional balance. Some choose to stay calm and composed during conflicts to avoid escalation, while others take short breaks outside or engage in small routines like visiting a café to relieve stress. In more challenging situations, employees opt for temporary detachment, such as taking leave, to recover from emotional exhaustion.

III.II Positional Level: Perceived Role as Advocates for Employee Support and Well-being

The Gen Z employees suggested that HR should be more active in promoting mental health and emotional well-being in the workplace. Participants recommended that HR implement regular counseling sessions or workshops to provide employees with the necessary support and guidance. By prioritizing mental health and emotional capacity, HR can create a more supportive work environment and help employees better cope with challenges.

"HR should implement having a counselors in every offices kasi it is important for them to ahm parang something na parang kailangan na merong mag gaguide sa kanila and magka-counsel sa kanila during... during a specific time" (HR should implement having counselors in every office because it is important for them to have someone who can guide and counsel them during specific times when needed.)- Participant 2

Participant 2 suggests that HR should provide on-site counseling services to employees. She believes having a readily available counselor would offer valuable guidance and support, especially during challenging times.

"Sa HR naman po, may mga seminars naman po sila ginagawa every now and then pero mas okay po na maprioritize yung mental health or emotional capacity po para pag po may times na nahihirapan na po lahat or may mga mabibigat po na pinagdadaanan alam na po nila kung paano nila mas maliliwanagan na po sila dapat maprioritize or dapat mag-initiate ng actions para rin po sa kanila parang ganon po." (HR conducts seminars every now and then, but it would be better if they prioritized mental health and emotional capacity. That way, when everyone is struggling or going through something difficult, they would know how to better understand and handle the situation. This should be prioritized, and they should initiate actions for their own well-being as well.) - Participant 3

Participant 3 argues that HR should shift its focus towards promoting mental health and emotional capacity. While she acknowledges the value of occasional seminars, she emphasizes the need for ongoing support and resources to help employees cope with the demands of their jobs.

III.III Ideological Level: The Value of Sensitivity

Gen Z employees recognize emotional sensitivity and vulnerability as crucial for fostering positive work environments. They view these qualities not as weaknesses, but as strengths that enable individuals to build stronger relationships, navigate challenges effectively, and contribute to a more supportive workplace culture.

"Nagmature yung thinking ko about that ahm after terminologies siguro because of my past experiences din and also my background in Psychology na and also in guidance counseling na parang… parang yung vulnerability nasa atin na kase yan, naka kabit na sa atin yan na parang it is for us to parang nakasalalay na sa atin kung lagi ba natin siyang ipapakita sa mga tao or itatago natin siya or magiging balance tayo dun sa vulnerability natin na ipapakita dun sa ibang tao then… sa emotional sensitivity and self-awareness." (It has changed because now I know that, yes, sometimes I feel weak because I get hurt, and I will still get hurt if I'm not treated well here. But I also know that I will only show what I truly feel I

wouldn't react negatively if they treated me well at work. So, it should be okay to express our feelings when something isn't right, even if they call us weak or sensitive.)- Participant 2

Participant 2 explained her evolving perspective and thoughts on vulnerability and emotional sensitivity based on her personal experiences. She recognizes that vulnerability is an intrinsic part of being human and that individuals have ways on how they express it. This awareness has contributed to her growth in emotional sensitivity and self-awareness.

"Yung emotional vulnerability po ahm it happens, naturally happens and it is parang needed in a sense na hindi naman po palaging magiging ok yung environment mo, yung nararanasan mo, nararamdaman mo and through that kailangan po natin mabigyang pansin yung or mapriority po yung ahm emotional sensitivity kasi maiintindihan po natin yung sarili natin and at the same time yung ibang tao." (Emotional vulnerability happens—it naturally happens—and in a way, it is necessary because your environment, experiences, and feelings won't always be okay. Through that, we need to pay attention to and prioritize emotional sensitivity because it helps us understand ourselves and, at the same time, other people.) - Participant 3

Participant 3 recognizes that emotional vulnerability is an inherent aspect of the human condition, arising naturally in response to various stressors. She emphasized the significance of prioritizing emotional sensitivity as a crucial tool for navigating life's challenges and understanding connections with others.

"Nagbago dahil ngayon alam ko na oo minsan mahina ako kasi nasasaktan ako, at masasaktan padin ako kapag hindi naging maganda ang trato sakin dito pero alam ko naman na ipapakita ko lang kung ano talaga yung nararamdaman ko hindi naman ako magrereact kung maayos sila kasama sa trabaho. So dapat okay lang na magsabi tayo ng nararamdaman kapag hindi tama kahit tawagan nila tayo na mahina or sensitive." (It has changed because now I know that, yes, sometimes I am weak because I get hurt, and I will still get hurt if I'm treated badly here. But I know that I will just show what I truly feel, and I won't react if they are respectful at work. So, it should be okay for us to express our feelings when something is wrong, even if they call us weak or sensitive.) - Participant 4

Participant 4 has developed a more accepting attitude towards her emotional experiences. She recognizes that it's natural to feel hurt and vulnerable at times, and she believes that expressing these feelings is a sign of strength rather than weakness.

Overall, the value of sensitivity serves as a vital lesson they learned while managing their professional roles alongside emotional vulnerability. Through workplace challenges, they gain a deeper awareness of when to express or regulate their emotions, equipping them with the lessons needed to adapt, thrive, and maintain their well-being in their workplace.

The findings of this study have important implications for practice, particularly for Generation Z employees and the next generation of employees. Resolving workplace conflict and lack of support in the workplace and advocating new programs will help Gen Z employees manage emotional vulnerability in the workplace. This study offers three key practical implications:

Emphasizing Emotional Intelligence and Manager Training:

As Gen Z employees may often be faced with emotional regulation challenges due to workplace conflict from their Managers, Supervisor or Co-workers, it becomes imperative that managers demonstrate emotional skills more precisely, emotional intelligence (EI) in identification of signs of emotional distress and providing the necessary support. This includes helping leaders become trained on emotional vulnerability, in addition to technical training. The managers should be able to provide guidance, regular check-ins, and empathy in leadership that opens discussions about mental health and emotional well-being. They emphasized, according to Deloitte's 2023 report, that Gen Z prefers approachable and supportive managers; this provides them with empathy that could reduce emotional stress, therefore spurring them toward a greater level of employee engagement.

Promoting Positive Organizational Culture and Social Support:

Gen Z members crave a context of positive reinforcement, social support, and a fixed sense of belonging. Inclusivity, team spirit, and a culture of respect help combat the unique combination of isolation and anxiety. A peer support network, mentoring program, and creative team-building activities can reinforce that feeling, both emotionally and professionally. Gonzalez (2020) discussed how the Filipino cultural values of getting along with others and debt of gratitude impact emotional vulnerability, emphasizing how mutual respect and camaraderie must be encouraged in the workplace.

Leveraging Technology for Mental Health Support:

Given Gen Z is more conversant with technology, employers should use digital methods for various modes of delivering mental health resources and support, such as mobile mental health apps, online counseling services, and virtual mental health awareness campaigns. With digital solutions embedded, firms can make it easy for Gen Z employees to access the support needed without judgment. (Wright et al., 2020) discussed that digital tools are increasingly used in mental health support, especially among the younger generation, who are more inclined to use technology-based resources to manage emotional health.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study Too Sensitive or Just Self-Aware?: A Narrative Analysis of Filipino Generation Z with Emotional Vulnerability in the Workplace highlights that the line separating emotional sensitivity from self-awareness is thin for Generation Z employees. While emotional vulnerability can be seen as somewhat of a weakness, it was pointed out that it is a sign of self-awareness and a desire for respect and fairness in the workplace. Gen Z employees have learned to navigate emotional challenges

and workplace dynamics and have become aware of how to manage their emotions in a professional setting to maintain their well-being. This study points out the value of professionalism and sensitivity to Generation Z employees in the knowledge that their emotional awareness will contribute to their individual growth and a positive, inclusive work culture.

This study collectively brings attention to the importance of creating emotional-intelligence, self-awareness, and sensitivity-promoting environments, in turn reframing Gen Z employees as people who can thrive, adapt, and contribute meaningfully to their development and the organization.

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