

## National College of Ireland Project Submission Sheet

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**Project Title:** ... Exploration into the Attraction and Retention of Younger Generation Talent, in the Irish Food and Produce Industry: A Qualitative Study.  
.....

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Additional Evidence:

Exploration into the Attraction and Retention of Younger Generation Talent, in  
the Irish Food and Produce Industry: A Qualitative Study.

By Una McCoy

MA in Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2024



## Abstract

Research has shown that younger generation (YG) talent are only remaining in roles for a short period of time, leaving their current employment in search of better opportunities and benefits offered by other organisations. This has caused increased competition among organisations to ensure they attract and retain the most skilled talent for their workforce. Limited research has explored challenges in the attraction and retention of YG talent from the perspective of the employer, particularly within Ireland. Minimal research has focused on attraction and retention issues within specific sectors of Irish and Northern Irish business. This study aimed to qualitatively explore the challenges associated with attracting and retaining YG talent within the Irish food and produce industry. Six HR personnel and management from Irish and Northern Irish food and produce companies were interviewed via Microsoft Teams. A semi-structured interview schedule and prompts were followed throughout. Transcripts were analysed through thematic analysis (TA), which enabled a thorough examination of the participant's individual experiences. Five key themes were identified from the analysis of data. These were the unattractive nature of the industry, the value of flexible work, the influential role of management, the value of career advancement opportunities and the importance of the employer-brand (EB). Overall, the unattractive nature of the food and produce industry, inadequate management and poor brand awareness were found to have a negative impact on the attraction and retention of YG talent, whereas flexible working and career opportunities were positively associated with the attraction and retention of this cohort. Findings from this research were employed to propose an improved Talent Management (TM) strategy for organisations within the Irish food and produce sector, regarding the attraction and retention of YG talent. Limitations of the research and suggestions for further research were discussed.

## Submission Form

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National College of Ireland  
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**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** MA in Human Resource Management

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## Acknowledgements

I wish to give my greatest thanks to my supervisor Dr. Amanda Kracen for her support and guidance throughout the research and writing process of my project. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and support.

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## Abbreviations

Younger generation (YG)

Thematic analysis (TA)

Talent management (TM)

Employer value proposition (EVP)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Employer-brand (EB)

Work-life balance (WLB)

Learning and development (L&D)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *1.1 Talent and Organisational Success*

Organisational talent is a multifaceted combination of employee potential, knowledge, skills and cognitive capabilities. It is based on exceptional achievements and is evaluated within the framework of inherent potential for success (Simonton, 2011). Superior capabilities allow organisations to maintain competitiveness and generate added value and function at high levels (Maurya and Agarwal, 2018).

Talent Management (TM) refers to the activities and procedures involved in the systematic recruitment, recognition, development, engagement, retention and allocation of talent that is valuable to an organisation, to achieve strategic and long-term success (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). TM has become crucial to modern organisational success. Talent-based theory suggests that an organisation's ability to acquire and sustain competitive edge depends solely on its workforce (Rabbi et al., 2015). Moreover, an organisation's capacity to attract and retain high-quality talent is essential to its competitiveness (Ulrich, 1993).

### *1.2 Younger Generation Talent*

Younger Generation (YG) talent refers to talented individuals in the workforce, who are aged between 20 to 35. YG talent has been defined in this context as the older cohort of Generation Z (20 to 27) and the younger cohort of Millennials (28 to 35) (Twenge, 2023). It has been projected that by 2030, more than half of the Irish workforce will be made up of these cohorts (CSO, 2018).

YG talent greatly important to the functioning of modern organisations. This demographic have grown up within the age of digitalisation, therefore have an inherent aptitude for technology and have the capacity to learn new systems and to innovate themselves (Ganguli et al., 2022). This distinguishes them from older generations who have less technological know-how. This technological comprehension is extremely valuable to today's organisations, who operate within a digital world (Otieno and Nyambegera, 2019).

YG have a pragmatic mindset and prefer real-time, digital and collaborative communication, as opposed to older generations of the workforce, who value face-to-face communication

(Otieno and Nyambegera, 2019). Such attributes are critical for long-term organisational success and agility and will assist in creating a more versatile organisational environment (Dwivedula and Singh, 2020).

### *1.3 Research Problem*

The attraction and retention of YG talent has become a significant challenge for organisations globally (Deloitte, 2022). The current employee driven labour market has led to reduced unemployment and thus greater competition among organisations in the search to attract talent (Tessema et al., 2022). YG talent are only remaining in roles for a short period of time, leaving their current employment in search for better opportunities and benefits offered by competing organisations (Kuzior et al., 2022). Research shows that within the Irish workforce 56% of Generation Z and 40% of Millennials planning on leaving their roles in the next year (Kelleher, 2024).

Additionally, there is pressure on organisations to retain their YG talent in preparation for impending retirement of the older generation of the workforce. YG talent will be required to fill vacant roles to ensure organisational performance is maintained after the older generation leave employment (Ballaro et al., 2021). Therefore, the current issues associated with the attraction and retention of this cohort demands action by Irish organisations, to ensure the functionality is maintained and performance thrives.

### *1.4 Research Gap*

Much research has investigated the challenges of attraction and retention of this cohort by examining the expectations of YG employees, but limited research has explored these challenges from the perspective of the employer, particularly within Ireland. Minimal research has focused on attraction and retention issues within specific sectors of Irish business. The Irish health and hospitality sector has been the focus of majority of findings regarding Irish YG attraction and retention issues.

The following research focused on bridging this gap in literature by examining the challenges associated with attraction and retention of YG talent within the Irish food and produce sector. Qualitative research methods were conducted on a sample of six HR personnel and managers,

to establish the challenges associated with the attraction and retention of YG from an employer's perspective. The key themes established center on unattractive the nature of the industry, the value of flexible work, the influential role of management, the value of career advancement opportunities and the influential role of EB. These will be discussed further and strategic recommendations to overcome such issues will be presented.

### *1.5 Project Overview*

**Chapter one:** This chapter provides an introduction into the study's research topic of the issues experienced by modern businesses in the attraction and retention of younger talent. It highlights the context of this issue and identifies the gap within current research literature. The objectives of the research are outlined.

**Chapter two:** The literature review chapter provides analysis of contemporary research literature and support that pertains to the area of attraction and retention of YG talent and its associated challenges. It reviews theoretical frameworks associated with attraction and retention and compares and contrasts various theories and literature.

**Chapter three:** This chapter outlines the study's research question and defines the objectives and aims of the project.

**Chapter four:** The methodology chapter discusses the qualitative methods employed to investigate the research problem. It outlines the procedure adopted to collect qualitative data, information regarding the participant sample, the method of data analysis and rationale for utilising this method.

**Chapter five:** This chapter provides an overview of the primary research's key findings, and the analysis of these findings are conducted.

**Chapter six:** The discussion chapter provides a more thorough explanation of the study's findings and the literature presented within chapter two. Recommendations are presented for companies within the food and produce industry in Ireland to review their attraction and retention practices and strategies, with the aim of improving attraction and retention of YG talent.

**Chapter seven:** The study is concluded in this chapter. Limitations of the study and future research possibilities are discussed.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following section will examine relevant empirical research regarding the attraction and retention of YG employees. It will review various theoretical concepts associated with this topic, as well as examining studies that have discussed the challenges associated with the attraction and retention of YG from the perspective of the employer. It highlights the importance of the Irish food and produce industry, and the need for investigation into the attraction and retention of YG within this industry.

### *2.1 Attraction and Retention*

Attraction refers to the proactive search, identification and interaction of individuals who have potential to fill roles within an organisation. The focus is on building a competent and qualified talent pool of candidates by developing strategies and enticing talented individuals (Hussain, 2021). This ensures that the maximum number of candidates apply to the organisation, which facilitates the process of selecting the most suitable applicants for roles (Kepha, 2014). Organisations who do not attract talent with the correct skills set, risk the cost of experiencing a skills mismatch. This occurs when an individual is employed whose abilities do not match the requirements of a role (Kepha, 2014). This may affect organisational performance.

Retention is the process of sustaining talented individuals within an organisation for extended periods of time. Organisations that have high levels of talent turnover face severe consequences, including decreased productivity, increased expenses associated with attracting and recruiting new personnel and decreased time and transition efficiency (Rabbi et al., 2015). Additionally losing talented employees can harm an organisation's reputation and thus can have a negative effect on the future attraction of talent (Hongal and Kinange, 2020).

### *2.2 Theoretical Frameworks*

An important theoretical model within attraction and retention is the Employee Value Proposition (EVP). EVP refers to a combination of connections and benefits that an organisation offers employees in exchange for their knowledge, skills and work experiences



(Minchington, 2006). The intense competition for talent has driven organisations to differentiate themselves as the most desirable place to work, through distinctive advantages and values, known as their EVP (Kuchеров and Zavyalova, 2012). Such benefits include monetary and non-monetary factors.

Employees assess the entirety of employer benefits and based on their own subjective assessment and decide if the organisation's worth equals or surpasses the cost of employment (Rounak and Misra, 2020). EVP is effective and will result in retention of employees, if the advantages of working for an organisation outweigh the social, psychological and physical expense of employment. Contrary, if the cost of employment surpasses the benefits, employee's intention to quit will increase (Rounak and Misra, 2020).

This concept is associated with self-determination theory (SDT), which stipulates that human motivation, growth and wellbeing are based on three basic psychological requirements, relatedness, autonomy and competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985). It has been suggested that if organisations support these three criteria needs, they will also contribute to increase engagement and thus greater retention (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Various 'fit' theories have been established as predictors of retention (Lockwood & Ansari, 1999). Person-Organisation (P-O) fit theory is interpreted as value alignment between an employee's values and an organisation (Kristoff, 1996). This occurs when an employee's needs and expectations are fulfilled by an organisation. Research suggests that P-O is considered more crucial from the point of admission to long-term employment (Boon and Biron, 2016).

To maintain the relationship between organisation and employee, it is important that both the employer and employee have a desired exchange. The basis of this exchange can be explained through the social exchange theory (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019). This states that individuals exert effort and demonstrate commitment to reciprocate and repay those who have benefited them (Blau, 1964). It addresses the two potential exchanges that transpires between the employer and employee, that is social and economic transactions, which are understood as elements of EVP (Binu-Raj, 2021).

Furthermore, the psychological contract refers to an individual's perspective regarding the conditions of the exchange agreement between an employer and employee (Rousseau, 1989). There are two forms of psychological contract. A transactional, contract is based on economic value and is founded on principles driven by outside, material benefits, exchanged over a

short period of time (Rousseau, 1989). Relational contracts are exchanged over a long period of time and are based on positive interactions between the employer and employee.

A concisely presented EVP serves as a means for promoting the employer-brand (EB) and assists in attraction and retention of talent. EB is a collection of features and qualities, frequently immaterial, that distinguishes an organisation, offers a specific type of professional experience and draws individuals who will flourish and perform effectively within its culture (CIPD, 2023). It is the means in which organisations set themselves apart from competitors in the labour market, possessing the ability to attract, hire and retain ideal candidates. The EB must be compatible with the organisation's values and permeate every aspect of its people management strategy (Armstrong, 2006).

EB can contribute to employer attractiveness (Dassler et al. 2022). Employer attractiveness is characterised as the qualities that applicants consider when selecting an employer (Kalinska-Kula and Staniec, 2021). Berthon et al. (2005) proposed the most widely recognised conceptualisation of employer attractiveness, which is most commonly applied in empirical research (Reis et al., 2017). It consists of five value categories and includes a scale to determine the amount of value an organisation provides compared to what a potential applicant expects (Berthon et al., 2005).

Interest value measures value to an organisation that utilises innovative work methods and an engaging work environment to foster employee creativity. Social value bases value on an organisation that fosters a positive work culture, strong relationships and teamwork. Economic value measures attraction to an organisation that offers greater than average wages and job security. Development value is the measure of how much an individual is drawn to an organisation that offers recognition, development and experience that can advance their career and personal growth. Lastly, application value measures value based on the employer's capacity to offer employees the ability to utilise their expertise and mentor others in a compassionate and customer-orientated setting (Berthon et al., 2005).

Preuss et al. (2009) argues that although organisations are recognising that current and prospective employees, are significant stakeholders and contributors to EB and will determine their future economic viability and operational conductivity, they are failing to adopt a strategic approach to the issues associated with implementing EB. Therefore, they are often ignoring sustainable and ethical responsibility within their HR practices (Preuss et al., 2009).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that the theoretical concept of the psychological contract is also founded within the framework of EB theory. Traditionally, the theory commonly postulated that the employee-employer relationship involved the exchange of loyalty to the organisation with job security (Baruch, 2004). However, recently a novel form of psychological contract has been applied by employers, due to the current movement towards outsourcing and flexibility. As a result of such changes, organisations use EB to strategically to promote the benefits they offer, including training, career advancement and employee development (Mishra and Sharma, 2021). However, research has shown that often organisations fail to fulfil these promises to their employees (Tumasjan et al., 2020).

Further, EB are externally marketed to position an organisation as an employer of choice, which will contribute to luring in top talent. It is assumed that the brand's uniqueness enables the organisation to hire unique resources. Additionally, once hired, new employees will form assumptions about their employment in the organisation, which they will maintain into the future. Therefore, supporting the organisation's principles and strengthening their loyalty to the organisation (Mathushan and Gamage, 2021).

### *2.3 Attraction and Retention of YG Talent*

Much research has been carried out regarding the expectations of YG talent and what attracts and retains them to an organisation. Salary and desire for financial reward is described as important to YG talent (Dutta and Mishra, 2021; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018; Csiszarik-Kocsir and Garia-Fodor, 2018; Ružić and Benazić, 2023). According to research, salary is considered important in terms of providing YG with the ability to live comfortably and be financially secure, whilst satisfying the desire to overcome economic challenges (Mostafa, 2022).

While many studies found salary to be the most influential factor for attraction and retention, it was not considered the most important factor for all (Pandita, 2022.). Orrheim and Thunvall (2018) found that experience, development opportunities and strong organisation image were considered more attractive than salary when determining an employer or whether to remain within employment. However, these findings also stated that salary would encourage YG to leave their current employer and they would expect their current employer to meet or better competitive salary offers (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

EB and employer image are found to have a great impact on employer attractiveness (Dutta and Mishra, 2021; Ružić and Benazić, 2023; Chitu, 2020; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). One study found a younger talent pool requires an employer with integrity, openness, spontaneity and a well-defined purpose (Chitu, 2020). Therefore, organisations must consider how to project an EB that appeals to these requirements, should they wish to attract YG talent.

EB was found to correspond with how YG want to be perceived, therefore they will choose an organisation based on this (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). They associate high value to modern and innovative organisations, who have a reputation of caring for their employees. The most common practice of spreading knowledge on EB is through word of mouth from current employees (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). However, other findings suggest a preference in the use of social media among this cohort to communicate EB (Chitu, 2020). This corresponds with view that this generation are technologically savvy due to being raised in the age of digitisation, thus giving them strong technological skills (Glass, 2007).

Additionally, culture and P-O Fit is significant in attraction and retention, with gen z and millennials in agreement with the importance of working for an organisation that personally fits in with their values and ethos (Dutta and Mishra, 2021). However, it was found that P-O fit has greater importance among millennials than Gen Z. A more supportive organisational culture is a preference for YG, as they desire a workplace that provides a community of support day-to-day (Ngotngamwong, 2020). A social work environment is favoured among this cohort, with high value placed on internal and external social interactions (Dutta and Mishra, 2021). A social environment was more favourable than salary according to findings (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Research also showed a strong desire among YG cohort for flexibility and work-life balance (WLB), as well as a strong distain for nine to five workdays (Pandita, 2022; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Syal et al., 2024). YG place strong value on a WLB due to their independent nature (Walczak, 2018). WLB is a major factor in YG intention to stay within an organisation and minimises possibility of leaving (Suganda, 2022; Sismawati, and Lataruva, 2020).

According to findings, YG desire a work environment where hybrid working is as acceptable as working in the office, with the consensus that they should not need to specify a purpose for working out of the office (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Although both gen z and millennials possessed a preference for work-life balance, gen z exhibited a more pronounced appreciation for a WLB (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Desire to have healthy communication with management were common among YG (Dutta and Mishra, 2021; Acheampong, 2021). Continuous and frequent feedback was considered vital, with informal and prompt feedback preferred (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Studies suggest that monthly evaluations were the most popular in terms of receiving feedback, with weekly assessments also welcomed (Waworuntu et al., 2022). However, certain researchers criticized these findings suggesting that YG are unable to receive negative or constructive feedback and often react in a negative manner to critical feedback (Böhlich and Axmann, 2020).

Lack of stimulating work tasks was a strong factor associated with the leaving employment, with variation in daily tasks a large pull factor among this cohort (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018; Walczak, 2018). Studies suggested YG require work tasks that are challenging, significant and diverse and thus provide job satisfaction (Acheampong, 2021). Furthermore, there is a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and retention (Redondo et al., 2021). Unstimulating work tasks cause negative and unfavorable attitudes of employees which leads to job dissatisfaction and thus reduces commitment towards the employer, causing issues regarding retention (Nguyen and Duong, 2020).

Learning and development (L&D) is a significant factor in attraction and retention. This is profound in majority of research (Fodor and Jaeckel, 2018; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Pandita, 2022). Mostafa (2022) found a significant association between development-interest and employer attractiveness. It is suggested that this cohort's desire for development and upskilling is due to their internal motivation to learn, with self-development regarded as a key work value (Fodor and Jaeckel, 2018; Walczak, 2018.). Utilising EB techniques to communicate potential development possibilities and making career paths apparent was an important factor in decision making to begin or leave a role (Ružić and Benazić, 2023). This is in agreement with Berthon et al. (2005) development value category of the five-core value theoretical framework.

Furthermore, Zahari et al. (2023) emphasised the importance of providing career advancement and a clear career path within an organisation, to promote employee loyalty and thus ensure retention of talent. This is because professional growth is considered a motivator that enhances employee satisfaction (Zahari et al., 2023). Much research states that YG hold high expectations in terms of career advancement and progression, and lack of a clear career path is a key reason for this cohort leaving their employment (Marozva, 2024).

However, findings imply that this cohort, particularly gen z, tend to only remain within roles for a short period of time. Various studies report that there is a common view held among YG that moving organisations is beneficial for acquiring experience and skills (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Negative opinions are often associated with holding a position for longer than two years in one organisation (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Moreover, findings have also suggested that there may be dissonance between the realities of the workplace and YG expectations, such as that regarding career progression (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). Research suggests that employers feel those YG transitioning to the workplace are often ill-prepared and hold unrealistic expectations and aspirations for employment (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022).

Additionally, majority of research regarding attraction and retention among YG talent separates this cohort by generation z and millennial participants (Dutta and Mishra, 2021; Marozva, 2024; Acheampong, 2021; Ngotngamwong, 2020). They analyse data provided by generation z and millennial samples independently, rather than as a collective cohort, contrary to the current study which focused on attraction and retention challenges of both cohorts conjointly. Moreover, there are issues of generalisability associated with the discussed studies, as various research has been carried out within specific regions (Acheampong, 2021; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018; Zahari and Puteh, 2023). Thus, raising questions regarding the validity of these findings for other contexts and settings (Noble and Smith, 2015).

## *2.4 External Challenges*

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote and virtual work models have become more conventional, and employees have discovered that they have more freedom and options when it comes to their career (Tessema et al., 2022). Consequentially, this triggered what is described as ‘The Great Resignation’, where a large level of the workforce are resigning from their roles in pursuit of greater career prospects and WLB (Formica and Sfodera, 2022). However, some argue that the great resignation trend has concluded, with resignations returning to pre-pandemic levels (Morgan, 2023).

Despite this, the ‘great resignation’ is common among YG employees in Ireland, with research suggesting the driving force among this cohort to be reduced stress, seeking hybrid/remote working options and better career prospects (Deloitte, 2022). As a result, YG

employees in workplaces are not remaining in roles for a substantial amount of time, quickly moving on to the next opportunity (Kuzior et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the current employee-driven, tight labour market, has led to low unemployment and a high demand for talent among organisations, but a limited supply within the labour market (Tessema et al., 2022). This has led to the continuation of ‘War for Talent’, where organisations compete to attract and retain talented individuals (Bayyoud and Sayyad, 2015). Such trends cause implications for organisations, as there is a risk of losing valuable talent to competitors if the organisation is unable to offer what the employee is seeking (Gowan et al., 2022). 81% of Irish employers state that they have difficulty in finding valuable talent, with some suggesting that the Irish labour market is experiencing the ‘worst talent shortage on record’ (Howard, 2023).

Additionally, the current housing and cost of living crisis in Ireland, has led to many skilled YG employees migrating for better opportunities and living conditions. This has led to a skill leakage of talent young people and thus minimizing the already competitive talent pool (Staines, 2022). Statistics show that at the end of April 2023, 19,900 young Irish people had emigrated (Hennessy, 2024). Another report stated that 41% of individuals aged between 18-34 were either actively considering or intending to emigrate abroad (O’Cearbhaill, 2024).

There is also the impending issue of the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation of the workforce. This demographic makes up a relatively large proportion of the Irish workforce, with a 61% employment rate for individuals aged 60-64 in 2023 (CSO, 2023). The skills and knowledge gathered by this generation’s talent is important. Once this generation retires their skills and knowledge will leave with them, thus leaving a skills gap (Ballaro et al., 2021). It is therefore important that YG talent are in place to learn these vital skills, and that planning is in place for the succession into these roles to bridge this gap (Gibaldi, 2013).

## *2.5 Challenges from an Employer’s Perspective*

Few studies have utilised qualitative methods to examine the challenges associated with attracting and retaining YG talent, from an employer’s perspective. Alongside their investigation into the YG expectations regarding attraction and retention, Orrheim and Thunvall (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with HR personnel of two white collar

organisations, to gain a personal insight into the challenges of attracting and retaining YG talent.

Both organisations acknowledged the importance of utilising their EB in the attraction and retention of YG. Findings showed organisations who promoted sustainability, organisational values, diversity and inclusion, employee wellbeing and job security within their EB, to be more attractive and have higher retention (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Flexibility was recognised as the most important factor to attract and retain YG talent according to employers, with both organisations recognising that YG desire the option to work from home to have a better WLB (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Organisational culture was considered another key factor. Promotion of a multi-cultural and open work culture, where employees feel comfortable to be themselves and could contact team leaders easily, was found to be fundamental from the perspective of the employer in attracting and retaining YG. Feedback was also seen as an essential factor, with organisations admitting that their current formal feedback processes were not in line with the expectations or needs of YG, who show preference for informal, continuous feedback (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Developmental opportunities were considered essential for retention, as both organisations stated the importance of providing educational and developmental opportunities for YG, so that they felt appreciated and supported (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Both organisations provide employees opportunities to attend educational courses, such as leadership, or role specific courses to further their expertise and knowledge, should they request it. They also state that managers are required to support employees in personal growth and education in related areas to their role. However, employers hold that the employee should be responsible for their own professional growth (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Further, a common view is held that in order to keep YG interested and satisfied in their work, work must be fast paced and interesting (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Both organisations believe that personal development and a social, interactive work environment are more important to YG than salary, thus keeping in line with previously discussed research (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Similarly, Pandita (2022) conducted a qualitative investigation into the use of EB in attracting gen z talent. Numerous semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR personnel and managers within various Indian organisations. In agreement with Orrheim and Thunvall's



(2018) findings, Pandita (2022) also found that flexibility and autonomy in tasks were found to be important by the employer, in terms of attracting and retaining YG.

Diversity and inclusion within the workplace and how the company approaches this were also found to be fundamental, as with Orrheim and Thunvall (2018). However, Pandita (2022) further elaborates on this point, detailing that it is not just diversity and inclusion regarding race and gender that is important, but also identity and orientation. In consonance with previous research, employers believe YG seek and favour a supportive and friendly work community (Pandita, 2022). Additionally, the reoccurring finding that YG are more interested in opportunities of development than they are with monetary rewards, was also established in Pandita's (2022) study.

Although providing valuable empirical findings regarding an employer's perspective of the challenges of attraction and retention of YG, there are various issues regarding both studies. Pandita's (2022) study focuses specifically on the area of EB, and though an important concept within the area of attraction and retention, it is clear from the findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018) that there are other organisational factors that affect the attraction and retention of this cohort.

## *2.6 The Food and Produce Industry*

Globally, there is limited research investigating attraction and retention within the food and produce industry. This industry is unique from others in terms of its nature of work. Job roles vary considerably in terms of physicality and skills required, with various roles requiring an extensive niche knowledge on areas of the sector such as growing and sustainability (Andrei et al., 2022; Chanda et al., 2021).

Lowe (2023) qualitatively examined the impact of semi-automation on attraction and retention within the New Zealand's fruit industry. Various semi-structured interviews were conducted with on-orchard employees and managers of varying levels within the organisation. Lowe (2023) highlights various challenges specific to this industry that cause challenges in the attraction and retention of employees.

The presence of different generational cohorts within the labour force has produced challenges regarding attraction and retention. Findings suggest that to appeal to and retain

employees within this industry, the employer must understand the different expectations and characteristics that are present among the workforce and recognise this difference (Lowe, 2023). Seasonality is a major challenge in attraction and retention. Walker et al. (2020) states that organisations that depends on seasonal labour understand that keeping skilled, experienced employees throughout the season and having them return each year are essential for business.

Weather-related problems are a significant issue for this industry as a whole, as poor weather frequently makes it challenging to complete duties on orchards, crops etc., which can lead to irregular work schedules (Walker et al., 2020). Additionally, it can be challenging to keep seasonal workers employed each year, because of the transient nature of the employment and inability of employers to ensure work is available (Walker et al., 2020). Lowe (2023) suggests that it is necessary to promote this industry as a career choice, and to maintain the development of formal and informal educational paths.

Lowe (2021) suggests perception has caused an issue in attracting employees and retaining them long-term. Finding local and national labourers who are interested in working in the sector is difficult (Tougeron and Hance, 2021). Similar to findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018), Meyer et al. (2016) found that within the produce and growing industry, public perception and image was one of the main challenges associated with poor attraction in the sector. Lowe (2021) denotes that organisations within the fruit industry must increase their public visibility as a place to work and a prospective career to sustain industrial attraction for upcoming generations and more importantly to maintain a stream of students to pursue higher education and advance within the field.

Lastly, the labour intense nature of the industry proves an obstacle to attraction and retention. Large amounts of employees are absent due to exhaustion and physical pain according to findings. Additionally, work tasks within this sector can be hazardous in nature and lead to injuries which is seen as unappealing to many applicants (Lowe, 2021). Gao et al. (2022) found an increasing trend in mental and physical fatigue among employees within the fruit industry. The industry's nature of work is seen as unattractive for new entrants, in terms of the physical manual labour and unpredictable hours of work according to Meyer et al. (2016).

Contrary to the following study, Lowe (2023) focused their research on on-orchard employees, whereas the researcher for this study has not focused on one specific area of the food and produce industry. However, much of Lowe (2021) findings may be applicable to

attraction and retention within the Irish food and produce industry, due to the similarity in the nature of work and challenges such as industry perception and adverse weather conditions.

## *2.7 The Irish Food and Produce Industry*

Limited qualitative research has been conducted regarding attraction and retention issues within Irish industries, with none in the Irish food and produce industry. Industries such as hospitality and health have been the center of research regarding this topic in Ireland. Davern (2021) found a positive EB is significantly important in the attraction and retention of staff within the Irish hospitality sector. Davda et al. (2021) found that migration has caused a significant issue for the retention of doctors within the Irish health sector. Walker et al. (2019) found that a supportive work environment, application of skills during work tasks, sustainability, career progression, training and improved work hours were associated with improved retention among Irish medical students.

This food and produce industry is a vital part of Ireland's contemporary economy, as it contributes approximately 8% of GDP and roughly 160,000 jobs of all Irish employment (BoardBia, 2024). This industry has faced various organisational challenges in 2023, such as adverse weather conditions affecting yield and outputs. Additionally, 53% of Irish food and produce companies have stated that their competitive advantage is at risk due to changes in energy prices, inflation and labour costs during 2023 (BoardBia, 2024). These issues combined with the YG attraction and retention issues, calls for such organisations to take action.

## Chapter 3: Research Questions and Objectives

This research explored the challenges associated with attracting and retaining YG talent, in the Irish food and produce sector. It investigated the current attraction and retention strategies utilised by employers and highlighted the challenges associated with the attraction and retention of YG talent within the sector. Findings were examined and utilised to present recommendations to help resolve issues associated with attracting and retaining YG talent within the Irish food and produce industry.

Key research questions:

1. What challenges are Irish food and produce organisations facing in relation to the attraction of YG talent?
2. What challenges are Irish food and produce organisations facing in relation to the retention of YG talent?
3. What are the current attraction and retention processes/strategies in place within companies within the Irish food and produce industry?
4. Are the attraction and retention processes adopted by these companies working?
5. Can any changes be made to these companies TM processes to improve attraction and retention of YG talent?

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### *4.1 Design*

Qualitative research methods were used in this study. Qualitative data was collected using six semi-structured individual interviews, that were conducted via Microsoft Teams. The interview schedule was structured as open-ended questions (see Appendix A). This allowed the researcher the ability to apply prompts and follow up questions throughout, to help guide participants to provide more in-depth information. The use of individual interviews enabled participants to openly discuss their views and share detailed information regarding their personal experiences with the attraction and retention of YG talent.

### *4.2 Methodological Rationale*

Each interview transcript was analysed through qualitative analysis technique Thematic Analysis (TA). TA is a process for methodically locating, classifying and providing insights for meaningful patterns, known as themes, within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This technique allowed the researcher to perceive and interpret shared or collective meanings and experiences from the data. TA is not restricted to any one theoretical or epistemological stance, making it an accessible and flexible analytic technique (Clarke and Braun, 2017). This enabled the researcher to investigate new topics and due to its flexibility, it provided detailed yet intricate explanations of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It was crucial that for TA to be reliable, each theme had multiple extracts with no overlap between any theme (Squires, 2023).

The aim of employing a qualitative approach was to gain full comprehension of the challenges in attracting and retaining YG talent. The researcher chose a qualitative study to gain more detailed and extensive responses. This would not have been feasible if quantitative questioning techniques had been applied to the research. The utilisation of TA allowed the researcher to obtain further insights into the challenges associated with attracting and retaining YG talent from an employer's perspective.

### *4.3 Participants*

Approximately twenty participants, both men and women were recruited, and six participants took part in interviews. All participants were employed in companies within the Irish food

and produce industry. This included companies in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. All participants that were recruited held a HR or management role within their company and had a length of service of at least five years. Table 1.0 displays the attribute of the six participants of the study.

**Table 1.0** *Participant Attributes*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
P1	Woman	HR Manager
P2	Woman	HR Director
P3	Woman	Senior Manager
P4	Man	HR Manager
P5	Woman	HR Manager
P6	Woman	HR Director

#### *4.4 Materials*

A laptop computer was used to conduct all interviews, via the Microsoft Teams application. Notes were taken throughout the study to aid with the analysis of data. To support the researcher and to ensure all research questions were asked and answered, a prepared interview schedule and set of prompts (see Appendix A) were utilised throughout the semi-structured interviews.

Through the examination of previous empirical research regarding attraction and retention, the researcher took inspiration from these findings to develop the study's interview schedule. The researcher was informed by other qualitative research, which provided a framework from which the researcher was able to expand on the research aims and objectives of this study to develop a set of semi-structured interview questions.

A participant information sheet (see Appendix B) and written consent form (see Appendix C) were given to all individuals prior to the interview. This ensured that participants were fully

informed of the purpose and procedure of the study and provided confirmation that participants consented to partaking in the research. A digital debrief sheet (see Appendix D) was sent to participants after the interview. This included information on the participant's right to withdraw from the study and provided various support links that participants could access should they require further support. It was not anticipated that the study would be of any risk mentally or physically to the participants.

#### *4.5 Pilot Study*

A pilot study was conducted with a test participant with the same sample requirements as the sample of the main research study. The participant of the pilot study was a colleague of the researcher, who holds a HR role. A test interview was conducted with this participant through NCI student account, Microsoft Teams. The proposed interview questionnaire was utilised throughout the test interview. Following the pilot study, changes were made to the interview schedule, to include additional prompts. The data gathered during this pilot study was not included in the data set of the main research study.

#### *4.6 Procedure*

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowballing sampling approaches. This involved the researcher approaching colleagues, and individuals known to them or their colleagues, that match the research sample requirements. The participant information sheet and written consent form were sent digitally to each participant via email. Once a completed written consent form was completed and returned to the researcher, participants were contacted to organise a suitable date and time to conduct their interview.

The researcher began each interview call by greeting the participant and restating the study's aim and objectives. Participants were advised that the interview would be audio recorded for transcription purposes, but their anonymity would be maintained by utilising pre-assigned pseudonyms. Participants were not obligated to turn on their camera for the interview. Once the participant confirmed with the researcher that they were comfortable and ready, the researcher began the record and transcribe feature on the Teams application.

The participant was questioned by the researcher using a semi-structured interview schedule that was prepared in advance of the interview. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes.

To conclude the interview, the participant was asked if they had any questions. The researcher responded to any inquiries and upon participant satisfaction the recording and transcription was stopped. The teams call was ended by the researcher thanking the participant for their participation in the study. A digital copy of the participation debrief sheet, was sent to the participant via email.

#### *4.7 Data Analysis*

Each interview was transcribed using the transcription recording tool through the Microsoft Team's application. Each transcript was de-identified by the researcher through the implementation of pseudonyms. Data was analysed utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step framework for TA. The first step involved the researcher familiarising themselves with the data. The researcher thoroughly reviewed each transcript numerous times to ensure an understanding of each participant's experience was fully gained. The researcher had the ability to relisten to the recording of each interview to guarantee that accuracy and reliability of the transcription was ensured. Immersion of the researcher in the collected data was the ultimate goal of the familiarisation stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the researcher recorded on each transcript any noteworthy findings or contemplations concerning the information, to decipher the participants true intentions regarding their experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The systematic analysis of data began through the coding stage. Concise phrases or words were linked to data segments that encapsulated the primary message of the data, known as codes (Clarke and Braun, 2017). A combination of inductive and deductive approaches were utilised during coding, as analysis was driven by the contents of the data, but the researcher was also able to apply various preconceived theoretical concepts and knowledge to interpret and code the data (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

Open coding was adopted, as the researcher did not employ pre-determined codes, but constructed and altered codes as they completed the coding process. Data was then compiled into code-designated categories, which allowed for the summarisation of key ideas and reoccurring themes found throughout participant data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Codes were utilised to construct themes from the data. Commonality was discovered between constructed themes across various participant transcripts. Potential themes were then



reviewed in relation to the complete data set, to determine whether the proposed themes accurately represented the whole data set or just an aspect of the data. At this stage, various themes that lacked evidential support were discarded (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Five themes were then defined and named. It was important to ensure that themes had a singular focus, were related but did not overlap and appropriately addressed the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The final analytic stage involved producing the analysis report. Each theme was addressed extensively by highlighting its significance, frequency and prevalence in the data, as well as providing extracts from the data as supporting evidence.

#### *4.8 Reflexivity*

It is critical to acknowledge that the researcher's personal experiences and beliefs may have an impact on how they interpret the evidence they have gathered. As a result, it was crucial that the researcher carefully considered how their experiences, biases and opinions affected the research, making sure to maintain a balance between the generic and personal (Redi et al., 2018). Recognising possible biases was essential to reducing their effects (Redi et al., 2018).

The researcher's personal experiences employed as personnel within HR of their own organisation and having their own understanding of the challenges faced in attracting and retaining were acknowledged and evaluated thorough reflective analysis, along with the potential impact these experiences may have had on data collection and analysis of the study. The researcher self-reflected by noting during the analytic process how their interaction with the participants and presence inside the study affected the process to minimise bias when listening to participant interview recordings and reading transcripts.

The possible consequences of this were taken into account. While confirmation bias may have taken place, it is more probable that data analysis was not greatly impacted by it as analysis revealed numerous subthemes that the researcher had not anticipated to consider. It is also possible to argue that the researcher's individual experiences enhanced the process of analysis, giving them the ability to identify and take into account cryptic data that aided in the

#### *4.9 Ethical Considerations*

The participants rights and dignity were protected throughout the research process. All participants were informed in detail of the purpose and requirements of the study through the

use of a participant information sheet. Additionally, the participants were reminded throughout the duration of the study about their right to withdraw at any stage leading up to and one week after their interview.

As the study entails participants sharing sensitive information regarding their organisation, confidentiality was upheld throughout the study. To ensure anonymity, the use of pseudonyms was appointed to each participant and remained throughout the study. All transcripts were deidentified after transcription was completed. Each interview was recorded for the purpose of the transcribing stage of the study. All participants were asked to confirm their willingness to partake and be recorded through the use of a written consent form. Data collected during the study is stored securely on a password protected laptop, of which only the researcher has access to. All data collected during the research will be destroyed appropriately in line with NCI policy.

It is important to note that one of the participants was known to the researcher prior to the data collection process. The participant is a work colleagues of the researcher. There are various difficulties associated with the inclusion of colleagues in participant samples, such as the maintenance of boundaries (McDermid et al., 2014). Whilst there are advantages to pre-existing relationships when conducting qualitative research such as providing respect, familiarity and rapport, there is also an increased risk of boundaries becoming blurred (Manderson et al., 2006). There is therefore a difficult balance between peer responsibility and researcher credibility (McDermid et al., 2014).

There is also a risk that participants known to the researcher may unconsciously provide information during data collection that the researcher may choose to omit out of concern for possible repercussions, and thus give rise to conflict. This could potentially cause the loss of important insights, and thus raise issues for the validity of findings (Mercer, 2007).

Additionally, issues of power disparities can form through pre-existing relationships between the researcher and participants, causing further ethical concern (Trowler, 2011). Therefore, it was crucial that the researcher acknowledged these issues and attempted to reduce ethical risks by abiding by the beneficence ethical principle. This was accomplished by upholding professionalism through stringent guidelines that safeguarded the participant.

## Chapter 5: Findings & Analysis

Findings show five key themes that have been constructed from the thematic analysis of the data. These are (i) the unattractive nature of the industry, (ii) the value of flexible work, (iii) the influential role of management, (iv) the value of career advancement opportunities and (v) the importance of the employer-brand (EB). All sub-themes occur in at least 50% of the whole data sample. Participant data excerpts were identified utilising pseudonyms.

Table 2.0 displays the key themes constructed from participant data. It includes superordinate themes and sub-themes, which provides a clearer understanding of the contents of each superordinate theme.

**Table 2.0** *Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme
The Unattractive Nature of the Industry	Seasonality
	Nature of work tasks
	Work schedule
	Location
The Value of Flexible Work	WLB
	Hybrid working
	Dislike for 9-to-5
The Influential Role of Management	Communication

	Improving leadership
	Lack of resources
The Value of Career Advancement Opportunities	Career path
	L&D
	Succession planning
The Importance of the Employer-Brand (EB)	Brand awareness
	Recruitment
	P-O fit
	Wellbeing
	Sustainability
	Competitive Benefits

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### *5.1 The Unattractive Nature of the Industry*

The first theme, the unattractive nature of the industry examines the negative effects that the nature of the food and produce industry has had on the attraction and retention of YG talent according to employers. Four subthemes were uncovered within this theme.

Participants suggest that YG are wary of entering the sector due to the lack of job security that short-term, seasonal work offers, *“I think people are a little bit more wary now of coming into certain sectors especially with the seasonality of the business, it lacks that security.”* (P1). They believe YG desire more secure and longer-term employment as they place importance on their career aspirations, *“the business has seasonal aspects and that can last a*

*few weeks at a time, maybe a few months, but there's no reliability in terms of a career or long-term. For some people that works but some people want something more long term."*

(P3). They acknowledge the need to reexamine internal processes to attempt to retain valuable talent, *"We're constantly talking about how we can retain staff in terms of seasonal, how can we bring them back and is there any of them that we're able to hold, retain them because we found that they are a good worker, and we don't want to lose them necessarily."* (P4).

Poor attraction and retention have been connected to the unattractive nature of work tasks. Participants describe the work tasks within the food and produce industry as repetitive, boring and physically demanding, *"and I suppose the nature of the repetition of repetitiveness of the work itself."* (P4). Participants highlight the need to keep YG stimulated in their work to improve engagement and retention, *"We then have our work to do to keep their interests and make sure that that doesn't lag because the day-to-day can get on top of everybody."* (P6).

Half of the participants indicated that unattractive work schedules associated with operative roles in the industry minimise attraction and reduce retention of YG talent. Participants suggest that YG are not attracted to the irregular hours and shifts associated with these roles, *"They certainly don't want to get up at 1:00 AM and come and work in a in a market, so that's a real challenge, I think."* (P5). These hours act as a barrier to the social life this cohort, which further increases the unalluring nature of such roles, *"You can be working on Sunday night... you can be working on Friday night as well. So, it's that sort of thing where why on earth would you want to go into work when you can go and have a few drinks and you know?"* (P6). Competition from other organisations that provide more attractive work schedules heighten the challenges with attracting and maintaining this workforce, *"They're starting at 6:00 o'clock in the morning. And that's a tough one as well. If you can get another job elsewhere."* (P4).

Several participants felt the location of their organisation negatively impacted the attraction and retention of YG. Some organisations are in remote regions, small and have little activity and participants suggest that this is unattractive, *"The biggest challenge is our industry, a lot of it is regional, you know we've 15 regional sites. So, some of them can be quite small and quiet which isn't very attractive."* (P2). Non-local YG do not want to travel outside of where they are from therefore are not attracted to these roles, *"People don't travel on as soon as they hear... they don't want to go where they live outside it, you know?"* (P4). There is also competition from other organisations who are situated in more appealing locations, *"You*

*know young people will typically they'll see a job. It's close to home. It's paying a couple of grand more. They want to get out quick and get that job.” (P5).*

## *5.2 The Value of Flexible Work*

The superordinate theme of the value of flexible work investigates the importance of having a flexible work environment to attract and retain YG talent. Three subthemes were identified within this theme.

The presence of a flexible work environment was found to have a positive effect on the attraction and retention of YG talent. Participants suggest WLB is the most important incentive for the attraction of YG talent, *“The work life balance and the flexibility for us anyway, that's why I'm saying is that's the number one thing when we're ever recruiting.”* (P1). Flexibility allows YG to balance between their professional life and external personal interests which is implied as being fundamental to YG, *“Tying that into work life balance that and you know prior year's it was 9 to 5, but there has been increased flexibility. You know people can work that in and around themselves and their interests outside work.”* (P2). Participants indicate that attraction to a role is hindered if it does not offer flexibility, *“Flexible benefits and work-life balance don't really exist for us. So, there's no real incentive for them to come.”* (P4).

Several participants expressed that hybrid working is an essential component in the attraction and retention of YG to roles, *“We do work off a hybrid and we are very flexible; I feel that we have attracted like a really good amount from that.”* (P2, pg.2). They suggest YG desire the ability to work remotely during their work week if they wish, *“The big thing here is the hybrid working and the remote working. They want the option to work from home.”* (P1). However, various highlight that hybrid working is role dependent and that certain roles within the industry require in-person working *“the difficulty with this business is that there is a requirement for in person. So, we don't have that ability to say, yeah, you can work from home. So that's another stumbling block.”* (P4). Roles that do not offer hybrid working face challenges in attracting YG talent, *“If we haven't got flexibility, we're not going to attract anybody, but we're certainly not going to attract and early careers people, yeah.”* (P6).

Participants acknowledge that there is a strong dislike for working in a conventional 9-to-5 roles, *“But I think gone are the days where somebody comes in and does 5 days at the same*

*desk 9 till 5:30. No, it just doesn't work.*” (P6). Roles that require a 9-to-5 work schedule are viewed as unattractive to YG talent and thus causes issues in filling such roles with YG talent, according to participants, *“Our culture is kind of half eight to five, and people just don't work like that anymore, you know.”* (P5). One participant suggests that the pandemic has influenced the expectations surrounding flexible working among this cohort and thus implications on attraction and retention, *“A lot of this generation would have been through college, and their first job was post COVID, so they are in an environment where they never knew what pre COVID was, so they don't understand what it's like to work in an office nine to five, Monday to Friday again.”* (P1).

### *5.3 The Influential Role of Management*

The influential role of management was the third prominent theme found within participant data. Data suggests that the role of management is key in the retention of YG talent in the food and produce industry. Three subthemes were uncovered within this theme.

Participants revealed the importance of management understanding the expectations of YG and ensuring this is aligned with the organisation’s strategy, *“Having an understanding at a management level what the candidates want from the job or what they'd like, as well as obviously the company's strategy, you know it's trying to align the two. It's the company expectations and the employees to get alignment there.”* (P2). Communication between management and YG is important in the retention of talent, *“They want that little bit more of an arm around and you know a bit more communication, all of that is key in keeping these in keeping younger talent engaged.”* (P5).

Various participants expressed that they experience issues in keeping communication open once YG are employed, *“Once they're here, it's the difficulty of keeping the communication open.”* (P5). Several participants acknowledged the need to improve their management communication capabilities to enhance connections and engagement with YG talent, *“It's keeping that engagement and that's key. and that's only done through communication”* (P6). Various participants suggest frequent check-ins and appraisals to provide and gain feedback from YG talent, *“Then just doing your yearly appraisals, probation period, salary reviews, just general kind of chit chatting with them and just kind of get the feel for you know is there anything that we could be doing better that we're not doing. A lot of the time we would pick*

*up an awful lot from just doing at just a general chat.” (P3). Participants also highlight the need for leaver review processes to gain feedback and improve upon internal processes regarding retention, “Exit interviews because then when someone's going, and I always say to them don't hold back. It's very important that the business understands if there's an area that we need to improve on or that's not doing what it should be doing that we know that so that we can improve it.” (P6).*

Half of the participants expressed the need to improve leadership skills among management to improve engagement with YG talent, *“Locking in management and all management leadership qualifications. There's a lack of leadership. That's definitely what we're talking about recently and that's what we need to do.” (P4).* They suggest providing leadership training to promote structure in the management styles conducted by managers, *“Then you have one area where the management styles bit different, so it's not as good. So again, it flows throughout, ripple causes an effect. Each of our managers need core leadership trainings to make sure that every manager delivers in the same manner. So, everybody is linked, so it can't just be one person peddling everything.” (P6).* Participants indicate the need to better internal processes, which should be utilised to discuss and resolve issues regarding their YG workforce, to enhance satisfaction with YG roles and improve retention, *“We need fortnightly leadership meetings as well, and I suppose it's a kind of discussing various different things that constantly come up about staff and how we can retain staff in terms of how we deal with these issues.” (P3).*

Majority of participants acknowledge that lack of resources has caused challenges in attraction and retention of YG talent, *“we're not at that point where we've got set processes in place. We haven't got resources and tools we can tap into.” (P2).* They indicate that managers are limited in what they can offer YG, due to budgeting and time constraints associated with their daily roles, *“We could always become better, but then that you know that's down to what, what do we have in the business to be able to offer. So, it's down to and what budgets we have in place, so we can only work with what budgets we have.” (P1).* Participants acknowledge the need to support managers in their roles to improve manager-employee relationships and therefore assist retention issues, *“We would then develop more processes to probably support managers to support the young the younger generation, I think.” (P5).*



#### 5.4 The Value of Career Advancement Opportunities

Career advancement was the fourth theme found within the data set. This theme examines the effects of providing opportunities for career advancement on the attraction and retention of YG talent. Three subthemes were uncovered within this theme.

All participants indicated that providing a career path for YG employees to progress within an organisation is critical for attraction and retention, *“I think a lot of the time when some staff come in, they get a bit worried I don't want to sit here forever. I want to be able to move up and build that plan.”* (P6). Participants suggested that outlining a career path and plans for progression for a role within an organisation generates stability for YG employees and strengthens intention to remain in an organisation, *“I think it's just giving people that road map to have that stability to their career that they have the next step and where we see them and how we can put the work in to upskill them and getting them to that next step.”* (P1). Lack of a clear career progression has led to challenges in the retention of YG talent, for certain participants, *“If there isn't anything happening, you know, they can't see promotional within that regional site. Well, then they may look elsewhere.”* (P2).

Majority of participants believed that providing L&D opportunities for YG talent has positive effect on the attraction and retention of this cohort, *“Continuous learning is a big one.”* (P1). They acknowledged YG's pronounced desire for continuous learning and upskilling and express that there are challenges in meeting these expectations, which can have implications for attraction and retention, *“One of the biggest challenges is meeting the younger generations expectations around development and just trying to manage those and try and encourage them to stay and develop.”* (P2). Contrary to majority of participant data, two participants suggested that supplying L&D opportunities does not guarantee retention for YG, implying that often YG talent leave after upskilling, *“Sometimes that does happen. You know that you've kind of invested so much and getting them to where you need them development wise and then they go.”* (P3). Participants also argued that depending on the nature of the role, it can be difficult to provide L&D opportunities to YG talent, which causes challenges for retention and attraction, *“I don't think we are good at supporting the off the job training. Some pockets of our business will say absolutely not. I'm not letting them leave on our time.”* (P5).

Participants noted the importance of succession planning in attraction and retention processes, as it aids the identification and development of possible career paths for YG

employees, *“It's if X leaves. Who's that next person that's gonna succeed. So that succession planning and then having that conversation with people to say ok this is the progression plan that we have for you.”* (P1). The presence of a large ageing population in their workforce has caused challenges for various participants in their ability to form succession plans for specific roles, *“I suppose the aging the number of people we have, and we don't seem to have that generational gap bridged from succession planning, with budding talent coming behind. So, it's going to prove challenging in the years to come.”* (P2). Participants suggested that this has had a consequential effect on the attraction and retention of YG, as they are unable to see the possibility of progression due to roles being occupied by older generation employees, *“That is always a challenge because it's not always the case that when someone's ready for a position that the position is ready. In our line of work, it's about ensuring that when the position is available, that the candidate is ready, that the next successor is ready to fit in there.”* (P6).

### *5.5 The Importance of the EB*

The fifth superordinate theme found among all participant's data is the importance of the EB. This theme explores the effect that an organisation's EB has on the attraction and retention of YG talent. Six subthemes were uncovered within this theme.

Several participants indicated that a lack of brand awareness has caused implications for the attraction of YG to their food and produce organisation, *“We don't have a kind of a brand presence, which can be challenging in recruiting.”* (P1). They recognised the need to invest more resources to boost their brand presence in the current external labour market, to increase brand awareness among YG candidates and improve attraction among the cohort, *“...Being out in the market, building our brand. I think we should be doing more. We should be investing more time, more resources, a little bit of money to get out there and present ourselves as an employer.”* (P3). One participant granted their effective attraction processes with the fact that their organisation's brand is widely recognised within the Irish labour market, *“We're quite lucky because of the brand strength and that's down to the marketing of the brand and people have grown up with the brand here in Ireland. It's widely recognised. We get a lot of attraction form the brand name.”* (P6).

Participants highlighted the importance of utilising the EB in the recruitment of YG talent, through social media and organisation representatives. They implied that YG want to understand what it is like to work for an organisation from the word of mouth of other representatives that are not the recruitment team, *“They say, I don't want to hear from you that it's a great place because of course you're going to say that. Can you show me someone within the business that will tell me that?”* (P3). Participants suggested that using social media to gain a greater reach of YG. *“The key to unlocking attraction is way more social media presence on what the actual reality of day-to-day is, telling stories, people want to be told a story. That's the biggest thing for us now that we're focused on in trying to attract that younger people.”* (P6).

Several participants suggested that the attraction and retention of YG talent is dependent on whether organisation's values are aligned with the values of talent. *“I think it's more aligning ourselves to the values and the expectations of what they expect when they come in.”* (P3). They acknowledged the importance of looking at organisational values and culture and examining these regularly to ensure that they align with the expectations of YG talent, *“I think it's extremely important to make sure the company's objectives align to the younger generation's expectations. That's what they look for.”* (P2).

Majority of participants stated that the inclusion wellbeing initiatives in the EB is valuable in the attraction and retention of YG talent, *“From what I'm seeing here is a lot of people now value their mental health and they value wellbeing. So, they're looking for what programs can the company offer them in terms of either be it an EAP and Wellness days, mental health days now.”* (P1). Additionally, promoting sustainability within an organisation's EB is advantageous in the attraction and retention of YG talent, *“They want to know are you a reputable company. So that reputation and that demonstration that we are every day doing the right thing for the planet is one of the biggest things that is coming from them.”* (P6).

All participant's expressed that the existence of competitive benefits within the external labour market has caused implications in the attraction and retention of YG talent to organisations, *“The other challenge is, that that there's so many other choices available to candidates and what will make us shine above them.”* (P1). However, there were conflicting opinions regarding the importance of monetary benefits in attracting and retaining YG talent. Some participants argue that monetary benefits are more attractive to YG, *“They'll look at their friends that are working in a similar role elsewhere and compare salary. It just it always*

*just comes down to what we're paying young people.” (P5). Whereas other participants imply that YG look at benefits as a holistic package and show preference for non-monetary benefits, “What are the non-monetary benefits that we can offer. They see that as a whole value piece. It's not monetary, it's giving an overall holistic package that they want.” (P1). Competition of benefits has led to challenges in the long-term retention of YG talent, as employees leave after a short period of time for better offers from competing organisations, “They tend to only stay about two years and then the agencies are on trying to encourage them to move. The younger generation tend to move more than say the older generation. There's so much available now to them.” (P2).*

## Chapter 6: Discussion

This study investigated the issues associated with the attraction and retention of YG talent in the Irish food and produce industry, from the perspective of employers. Findings uncovered five key factors that have influenced attraction and retention of YG talent to the industry. These factors will be examined in connection to the empirical research discussed and further supporting research that has been found.

### *6.1 Factors Related to the Unattractive Nature of the Industry*

YG consider the food and produce industry unattractive, which negatively effects the attraction and retention of this cohort, according to employers. Similar to the findings of Lowe (2023), organisations that operate around a seasonal work schedule find that the lack of security that seasonal work offers acts as a barrier in the attraction of YG to these roles. The suggestion that YG desires job security is in support of the findings of Orrheim and Thurnvall (2018).

Seasonal employers admit that there are limited solutions to prevent the issues associated with seasonal work, as once the season ceases roles become unavailable. However, similar to the discussions of Walker et al. (2020), one participant suggested that internal discussions are required to look at creating longer-term roles for talented seasonal workers, so organisations can retain and utilise their valuable talents for other aspects of the business.

Findings were compatible to those of Meyer et al. (2016), as participants also unanimously agreed that the physical and repetitive nature of operative roles negatively affected the attraction and retention of YG employees. Participants suggested that YG need to be stimulated in their work tasks to ensure interest in daily roles are maintained to prevent YG leaving. This coincides with findings of Acheampong (2021) that providing stimulating work for YG employees will improve job satisfaction and therefore increase retention. Further, unstimulating work will lower job satisfaction and increase YG chances of leaving their role (Nguyen and Duong, 2020).

Furthermore, unattractive work schedules associated with operative roles were among the reasons for poor attraction and retention according to numerous participants. Findings correspond to those of Meyer et al. (2016) who found strong dislike for long unpredictable hours to correlate with challenges in retention. Participants also suggested that early starts,

late night shifts and weekend work, cause implications for the social life of YG, thus decreasing the value affiliated with these roles, and effect attraction and retention. This coincides with findings from Duta and Mishra (2021) who stated that YG place high value on external social interactions. Additionally, Arora et al. (2020) discovered social affiliation drives this cohort's interest in work and life choices.

The locations of food and produce organisations are believed to reduce the attractiveness of roles and weaken retention. Organisations within the industry operate at various locations, some of which are situated in remote, rural areas with little activity and small in size. This corresponds to the findings of Amarakoon and Colley (2023) who implied that the regional location of small and medium-sized organisations exacerbated the challenges associated with attraction and retention of employees. Such findings correlate to the concept that YG place high value on stimulation and socialization, which may be lacking at such locations (Walczak, 2018; Duta and Mishra, 2021).

It was suggested that poor retention and attraction is exacerbated by competition from other organisations that offer more attractive work schedules and tasks. This coincides with the findings from Gowan et al. (2022) who suggested that increased competition between organisations can cause implications for retaining valuable talent, as organisations fail to compete or match more attractive benefits offered by other organisations.

This can be linked to EVP theory. YG talent will assess the discussed disadvantages associated certain roles within the sector and may determine that the social, psychological and physical costs of these outweigh the possible benefits of being employed in the sector, and therefore reduce attraction and influence intentions to remain in roles (Rounak and Mishra, 2020). Limited research has been conducted on the effects of the nature of the food and produce industry on attraction and retention, therefore this may be a possible area of focus for future research.

## *6.2 Factors Related to the Value of Flexible Work*

Organisations that accommodate flexible work receive a positive response in relation to the attraction and preservation of YG talent. In accordance with previous findings (Pandita, 2022; Syal et al. 2024), results show WLB to be significantly important to this cohort, with various employers suggesting that a lack of flexibility has led to reduced attraction to roles and in some cases, talent have resigned from their roles. This correlates with the view of Suganda

(2022). In accordance with findings, Barhate et al. (2022) found that WLB to be a career expectation of YG employees, with YG exerting pressure on current organisations to provide flexibility. Failure to meet this expectation causes implications for retention.

Coinciding with findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018), results showed hybrid working as a critical factor when attracting YG employees. Such findings agree with those of Korkeela (2024) hybrid working to improve attraction and retention of YG, suggesting that benefits associated with hybrid working, such as self-management, WLB and enhanced flexibility, outweigh all implications. This relates to the psychological contract theory, where the employer-employee relationship involves supplying the employee with flexibility which increases feelings of loyalty towards the organisation and thus increases intention to stay (Rousseau, 1989).

Results uncovered that flexible work cannot be applicable for operative and physical roles within the industry. This causes implications for the attraction and retention of YG to these roles, as they place high importance on the ability to work from home, but operational needs cannot allow for flexibility. In support of findings, Allen (2023) reported that employees who worked on-site reported less job satisfaction than those in roles that allow hybrid working. As highlighted by Redondo et al. (2021), job satisfaction is positively correlated with retention. Relating to the concept of EVP, YG talent will assess the implications of in-person roles and according to findings, the costs of this often outweighs the benefits and thus reduced attraction and retention (Rounak and Misra, 2020).

Congruent to the findings of Syal et al. (2024), research showed that a strong dislike for conventional 9-to-5 roles has caused implications for the attraction and retention of YG of roles with limited flexibility and traditional work schedules. Further research supports these finding suggesting that the demand for flexible work schedules represents YG need to fulfil personal and professional needs (Maijka, 2024). Flexible work schedules are crucial to preserve productivity and job satisfaction among this cohort, thus, corresponding to findings relating high job satisfaction and retention (Redondo et al., 2021).

### *6.3 Factors Related to the Influential Role of Management*

Findings uncovered the importance of management understanding the expectations of YG to align these expectations with organisational processes and resolve retention challenges. It was suggested that communication is open and honest between the employee and their manager to

improve employee engagement. This is in line with previous research that has suggested that YG place high value on a supportive work culture and appreciate the ability to communicate effectively with their leaders (Ngotngamwong, 2020; Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018).

Additionally, Waworuntu et al. (2022) found open communication and support from the employer as paramount in proving job satisfaction among YG talent and thus enhancing intentions to stay.

The need to improve communication through frequent check-ins and feedback through appraisals, was highlighted in the findings to improve employee engagement and thus retention. This is supported by previous research which also acknowledged the need to improve feedback processes to keep in line with expectations of YG, who highly value informal and continuous feedback (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018). Further research discovered that engagement increase, as clear expectations are established through the encouragement of communication and thus providing employees with the ability to work autonomously, increasing feelings of loyalty to the employer (Lee et al., 2021).

Findings imply the requirement to review leaver processes such as exit interviews to gather critical feedback from YG leavers to gain insights into what future improvements can be made to TM processes. Employers can utilise feedback to develop upon the business strategy and improve retention in the long-term, thus corresponding to findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018). Other research has supported the use of exit interviews as beneficial in understanding job satisfaction and determining the reason for turnover, to heighten knowledge regarding retention (Eades, 2022).

Poor management's leadership skills were found to have a negative effect on the retention of YG talent. Disturbance in the work environment due to lack of leadership causes implications for job satisfaction and thus impact the retention of employees, according to findings. This is synonymous with other research that suggests lack of leadership is associated with poor retention of the YG as they hold high expectations and model novel concepts from the direction of leaders. Therefore, to retain YG strategic leadership needs to be maintained and developed (Younas and Waseem, 2020).

Limitations regarding resources and budgeting causes implications in relation to what management can do to improve attraction and retention processes for YG talent. Findings stipulate that managers are limited in their ability to accommodate the expectations of YG talent as they have their own roles to carry out day-to-day and are limited in the budgets that



they are assigned. Thus, supporting the suggestion that there is a disparity between YG expectations and workplace realities (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). Additional managerial support is required in the future to assist management in improving these issues, as specified by participants.

#### *6.4 Factors Related to the Value of Career Advancement Opportunities*

According to findings, YG talent desires stability through the development of a clear career path within an organisation, so that they can identify the next steps of their career. Desire for stability is in accordance with findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018). Lack of career progression is considered the main reason for YG resigning from roles, due to loss of commitment. Zahari et al. (2023) findings support these results by showing that the identification of clear career progression promoted employee loyalty and intentions to stay.

Minzlaff et al. (2024) found that YG talent autonomy and competence are positively correlated with their perception of a career path and the opportunities within an organisation, that relate to their personal aspirations. These employees are driven by basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and connection, as outlined in Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT. SDT suggests that if these needs are met by an organisation then increased engagement will ensue and thus retention (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Coinciding within findings of Mostafa (2022), the present study found that offering L&D opportunities is advantageous in attracting and retaining YG talent. Upskilling and continuous learning are considered part of YG expectations of their employer and when provided can promote loyalty towards an organisation, as explained by the theoretical concept of social exchange (Blau, 1964). Further, Nguyen (2020) provided empirical evidence to support the concept that development opportunities promote job satisfaction among YG employees thus extending a direct positive outcome on retention of this cohort.

However, contrary to previous findings (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018), results showed that not all employers believed that L&D provided advantages in attraction and retention. A small YG workforce population was explained as causing limited appetite for L&D opportunities in one organisation. Also, there is the implication that regardless of what investment employers put in their talent, they chose to leave employment due to the outweighing of other factors.

This is supported by research from Abdullah (2009) who found that one of the main obstacles to the supply of L&D is the high rate of labour mobility.

Findings suggested that the nature of work of certain physical labour roles make it difficult to provide and promote L&D opportunities. The demanding nature of operative on-the-floor roles requires a full labour force and thus by allowing a proportion of this labour force off for training can bring rise to further challenges regarding the completion of tasks. Limitations in providing L&D can affect attraction and retention to these roles for YG. Spar et al (2018) found that one of the largest challenges in employee engagement and retention was ensuring employees have the time to take part in L&D initiatives.

Succession planning was considered critical in the aid of identifying a clear progression path for YG to remain within organisations. A large older population in organisation's workforce has caused implications in the possibility of progression of YG to certain roles, as they are being occupied by older generation employees. This is causing subsequent implications for the attraction and retention of YG to these roles. Such findings are supported by Owolabi and Adeosun (2021) who found that ineffective succession planning has led to decreased commitment and increased employee turnover.

### *6.5 Factors Related to the Importance of the EB*

Majority of participants admitted that they are unsatisfied with the awareness of their EB in the labour market and must enhance their brand awareness to improve the recruitment of YG employees. As implied by Mathushan and Gamage (2021) the EB allows the organisation to differentiate themselves from other competing organisations as an employer of choice, to entice talent. One participant indicated that the prevalent awareness of their brand in the Irish labour market has contributed to the satisfactory attraction of YG talent to their organisation. This is supported by findings of Ruzic and Benazic (2023), that EB and a popular employer image has superior impact on attractiveness.

Poor social media presence and inadequate company representation in recruitment has hindered the attraction of YG to food and produce organisations. Corresponding with previous findings (Orrheim and Thunvall, 2018; Chitu, 2020), participants suggested that improvements in social media marketing and utilising organisational representatives to promote an organisation's reputation as an employer, will help increase brand awareness among YG talent during the recruitment process and thus attraction. Such findings are

compatible to those of Korzynski et al. (2020), who implied that the use of social media to spread word-of-mouth company-related content is significantly important to prospective employees, who utilise this as purportedly objective indicators of organisation attractiveness.

Organisations that do not align their company values and culture with the expectations of YG employees, face challenges in attracting and retaining this cohort. As explained through the P-O fit theory (Kristoff, 1996), YG will study the EB of an organisation to gain knowledge on their values and ethos. If YG needs or expectations do not align with those of an organisation, they will not continue in the recruitment process. Comparably, YG that are already employed but view their needs as misaligning with those of their organisation will leave, as supported by the findings of Boon and Biron (2016).

In support of the findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018), results showed that YG are attracted to the presence of employee wellbeing programmes. Further supporting research found that health-related employee benefits was positively correlated to retention (Gelencser et al., 2023). The positive association between wellbeing and YG retention corresponds to the theory of social exchange, where the organisation provides initiatives to take care of employee wellbeing and in exchange employees demonstrate commitment to the organisation (Blau, 1964).

Additionally, promoting sustainability in the EB was found to encourage YG attraction and retention. According to employers, YG are attracted to a brand and work culture that promotes sustainability and aligns with their values regarding the environment, thus supporting the findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018). Other research has shown that promoting an organisation's corporate social responsibility within their EB positively affects the ability to attract desired YG talent (Budhiraja and Yadav, 2020.). An environment conscious work culture fulfils the social value of Berthon et al.'s (2005) value categories of employer attractiveness, by proving a positive work culture for employees.

The prevalence of competitive benefits within the external labour market has caused implications in the attraction and retention of YG talent to food and produce organisations. As suggested by Gowan et al. (2022), organisations are struggling to compete with more attractive offers of other organisations. YG talent are examining the EVP of organisations and weighing not just the monetary benefits associated with employment, but also the physical,

social and psychological benefits each organisation offers and are attracted to the organisation with a more enticing EVP (Rounak and Misra, 2020).

Furthermore, results suggested that YG see benefits as a holistic package and show preference for non-monetary benefits, not just monetary rewards, as older generations did. This is consistent with the findings of Hu et al. (2022) who found benefits packages as an essential work value for YG and presenting benefits such as healthcare, pension and education grants as part of the EB was found to positively influence employment decisions.

In support of the findings of Orrheim and Thunvall (2018), findings suggested that YG talent remain in roles for a short period of time, due to the offer of more competitive benefits in the external labour market. There were conflicting results regarding the use of salary to entice YG talent in employment. Consistent with the findings of Mostafa (2022), some employers believed salary to be the most important factor in attraction and retention of YG, whereas others implied that bettering competitive salary offers did not make a difference to the attraction and retention of this cohort, corresponding to the research of Pandita (2022). Therefore, there was not a clear indication as to whether financial rewards are influential in YG employment decisions.

### *6.6 Recommendations*

It is important that Irish food and produce organisations implement various strategies to overcome the attraction and retention issues discussed in this research. Findings suggest the need to adopt or revise EB strategies to optimize organisation's brand awareness and to promote themselves as an employer of choice for YG talent. Radzevičienė and Sokolova (2020) suggest four steps in the development of an effective EB strategy. First organisations must discuss the role and significance of the EB within the organisation's overall business strategy, such as the marketing and HR strategy. It is advisable to concentrate on three to five initiatives linked to attracting and retaining YG talent. Secondly, the organisation must outline their EVP in terms of unique organisational resources that can be offered and key attributes that YG talent desire for employment. Thirdly, organisations should assign responsibilities to assume EB leadership roles and determine how the brand's mission and its execution will be coordinated. Lastly, the organisation's EVP should be communicated to YG talent through specific communication channels, which Radzevičienė and Sokolova (2020) recommend as social media and brand ambassadors, thus aligning with the findings of this research.

It is suggested to improve communication with YG talent, organisations should implement communication channels at universities and colleges, that offer courses specific to the areas of work involved in the food and produce industry. Additionally, company representatives from various sections of the business could attend events to speak to graduates about their roles and day-to-day responsibilities to build awareness regarding the varying roles within the industry. This will also give organisations the opportunity to present their EVP such as various benefits packages, healthcare, flexibility, wellbeing and sustainability to entice YG talent. Empirical support has been found in the utilisation of promoting external branding activities, such as events at universities and the utilisation of company ambassadors to positively impact the employer image and thus attraction of this cohort (Ahmad et al. 2020).

Food and produce organisations need to improve their social media presence to enhance engagement with YG talent and thus attraction. It is recommended that organisation's use social networks such as Instagram and TikTok to heighten presence (Chillakuri, 2020). Chitu (2020) suggests ensuring that organisations present strong visual content using frequent videos and online, to share information on the organisation. On social networks, organisations can share images and videos with departments and teams to present organisational culture.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to share videos with company ambassadors highlighting their role and day-to-day tasks on social media networks. Live videos utilising ambassadors highlights authenticity and transparency of the organisations which YG desire, as well as answering any questions YG hold regarding the roles that organisation's offer and the tasks associated with these roles. Research suggests organisations today are leveraging the social media application TikTok in the attraction of a YG by improving their brand's awareness. Findings have established that YG workforce view EB content on TikTok positively, valuing authenticity and gaining knowledge on organisational culture (Khalili and Mustaffa, 2023).

Furthermore, to aid the retention of YG talent, food and produce organisations must revise internal processes surrounding career advancement and succession planning. HR departments should restructure L&D strategies to include an extensive portfolio of job enriching and self-fulfilling training and career development programmes. L&D strategy should include plans regarding job rotation and secondments to ensure initiatives are accessible to all roles and organisational levels. Succession planning should be prioritised by HR managers working with senior management to establish a path for talent to succeed to roles and how that transition will be implemented. This will satisfy the security and career progression needs

associated with this cohort as they will be able to see the path their career within an organisation will take them.

Various training is required to enhance management skills with the focus of training and upskilling communication styles specifically for YG employees, to help improve employer-employee relationship and engagement. Also, internal conversations are required to ensure YG expectations are understood and acknowledged, so that they can be incorporated into and aligned with the overall business strategy of the organisation. Furthermore, internal conversations are required to discuss the designation of budgets and resources to help support managers in their roles and thus ensuring an open and supportive organisational culture is maintained.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### *7.1 Summary*

This study demonstrates the various challenges associated with the attraction and retention of YG talent in Irish food and produce organisations. Findings concluded that factors such as the unattractive nature of the industry, the value of flexible work, the influential role of management, the value of career advancement opportunities and the importance of the EB were found to be critical influences on the attraction and retention of this cohort. The nature of the food and produce industry was found to have a negative effect on attraction and retention due to its unreliable seasonal nature, unattractive work tasks and anti-social work schedules. Poor management and lack of employer-employee communication was found to have a negative effect on these TM processes, with poor leadership skills, limited budgeting and restricted resources responsible for these implications.

Flexible working promoting better WLB, and opportunities in career advancement and upskilling were found to be positively associated with satisfactory YG attraction and retention. However, issues regarding the implementation of succession plans and the ramifications regarding the presence of a predominately aging workforce has caused issues for the attraction and retention of YG talent.

It is recommended that Irish food and produce organisations focus on improving their EB strategies to enhance brand awareness by promoting their EVP through communication channels that appeal to YG talent, such as social networks and brand ambassadors. Such strategies will strengthen engagement with the aim of improving attraction. It is proposed that organisations revise internal processes to develop succession plans and career advancement opportunities. Improving these TM processes will intend to better engagement and job satisfaction and thus retention. Further management training is required to upskill communication abilities, to ensure organisational culture remains supportive. Budgeting and resourcing plans will need to be revisited and amended to ensure management are supported in their roles. The alignment of YG expectations with the overall organisational strategy is crucial in ensuring attraction and retention processes for YG talent are successful.

## *7.2 Limitations and Future Research*

A methodological limitation of the present study was its small sample size. According to thematic analysis requirements, a sufficient sample size to achieve data saturation is twelve participants (Guest et al., 2006). The researcher initially reached out to twenty HR personnel and management from various Irish and Northern Irish food and produce organisations but received a response from only six individuals. This small sample size may cause implications for the validity of the findings. Therefore, it would be of use in future research to include a larger sample size to ensure the validity of findings.

Furthermore, one participant disclosed that they have a relatively small turnover of employees, specifically YG employees. Therefore, they felt they had limited knowledge in attraction and retention processes associated with this cohort. This participant was able to provide information regarding the topic of this study's research, however findings associated with this participant's data may generate questions regarding the reliability and generalisability of these findings. Perhaps it would be beneficial for future research to include the presence a substantial YG workforce on the inclusion criteria for participants for the study.

This study focused exclusively on the challenges associated with attraction and retention of YG talent within the Irish and Northern Irish food and produce industry. Therefore, findings cannot be generalised to other cohorts, industries or countries. As discussed, this research studied gen z and millennial cohorts as a collective group. Research suggests that there is a generational difference in what attracts and retains gen z and millennial talent (Dutta and Mishra, 2021). Therefore, it could be suggested that these findings are not universal for both gen z talent and millennial talent. To overcome this, future research should separate the two cohorts, and the challenges associated with both should be studied separately, to provide more universally sound findings.

Additionally, the challenges relating to attraction and retention of organisations were investigated at all organisational levels. It became prevalent throughout the study that there are different challenges regarding attraction and retention of YG that relate to specific organisational levels or departments of the food and produce industry. This was not considered when conducting this research. Therefore, future research should aim to examine the challenges of YG attraction and retention at varying organisaitonal levels within food and produce companies, to provide more accurate and distinct findings.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Semi- Structured Interview Schedule**

1. What talent management processes do you currently utilise in terms of attracting younger generation talent?
2. Are there any challenges that you face in attracting younger generation talent?
3. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge you face in terms of attracting younger generation talent?
4. Are you satisfied with the current talent management processes that you utilise within your company to attract younger generation talent?
5. In your experience, what is considered most attractive to current younger generation talent when seeking employment?
6. If you could improve upon your current attraction processes, what would you suggest?
7. What talent management processes do you currently utilise in terms of retaining younger generation talent?
8. Are there any challenges that you face in retaining younger generation talent?
9. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge you face in terms of retaining younger generation talent?
10. Are you satisfied with the current talent management processes that you utilise to retain younger generation talent?
11. In your experience, what is considered most attractive to current younger generation talent to remain within a job role?
12. If you could improve upon your current retention processes, what would you suggest?

## **Appendix B**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Title**

Exploration into the Attraction and Retention of Younger Generation Talent, in the Irish Food and Produce Industry: A Qualitative Study.

#### **Background**

My name is Una McCoy and I am a postgraduate student, studying Human Resource Management at the National College of Ireland. I am currently conducting the study named above for my final year dissertation and I would like to invite you to participate. Please read the following information regarding the study's aims and objectives, and what will be required of participants. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have regarding the information enclosed.

#### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to explore the challenges in the attraction and retention of younger generation talent within Irish food and produce companies.

#### **What will the research involve?**

The research will involve a one-to-one interview with the researcher using Microsoft Teams. Participants will not be required to turn on their video camera if they do not wish to do so but are welcome to if comfortable. For the purpose of the study, the interview will be recorded. Individuals will be asked a set of questions by the researcher, relating to the topic of investigation and will be asked to answer each question according to their own experiences and knowledge. Information collected during the interview will be stored on a password protected computer, which only the researcher will have access to.

#### **Study Duration**

Participants will only be required to partake in the one-to-one interview with the researcher. The interview should not last more than one hour.

#### **Possible benefits**

Whilst there is no assurance that this study will benefit you personally, the information that you provide will enable a greater understanding of what challenges organisations are facing

in relation to the attraction and retention of younger generation employees This may be utilised to assist employers, by drawing attention to areas within their attraction and retention processes that may require improvement.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation for the study is entirely voluntary. Individuals who wish to participate in the study will be forwarded a digital written consent form, which must be completed and returned to the researcher by email. This will confirm the individual's agreement to participate in the study.

### **Withdrawal Procedure**

Participants are free to withdraw from the study any time leading up to the interview process or up to one week after the interview process. They can contact the researcher through contact details which are provided, to state that they no longer wish to take part. The participant will not be asked to disclose their reason from withdrawing.

### **Confidentiality Procedure**

All information that is collected during the interview will be held on a password protected computer of which only the researcher will have access to. Information will only be utilised for the sole purpose of the study.

### **Anonymity Procedure**

To ensure anonymity is upheld throughout the study, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym to prevent the identification of individuals. All interview transcripts will be deidentified. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to completed written consent forms.

Please contact the researcher of the study via the below contact details, should you be interested in taking part in the study:

Researcher's email address: [X22117474@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:X22117474@student.ncirl.ie)

Research Supervisor's email address: [Amanda.kracen@ncirl.ie](mailto:Amanda.kracen@ncirl.ie)

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your consideration for partaking in this research.

**Appendix C**  
**Written Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:**

Exploration into the Attraction and Retention of Younger Generation Talent, in the Irish Food and Produce Industry: A Qualitative Study.

I confirm that I am aged 18+ ☐

I confirm that I have a length of service of 5 years or more. ☐

I confirm that I have read and fully understand the Participant Information Sheet for this study. ☐

I understand that this study will involve an interview via Microsoft Teams, and that this will be recorded for the purpose of the study. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I have a right to withdraw up to one week after the interview process, without providing a reason. ☐

I understand that all data collected during the study will be confidentially and securely held ☐  
by the researcher of this study. I will remain anonymous throughout the duration of the study.

I agree to partake in this study. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant      Signature      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Research (s)      Signature      Date

Please indicate if you wish to receive a copy of this report    Y/N

If yes, please provide an email address which a copy of the graded report can be sent to

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D**

### **Participant Debrief Sheet**

Thank you for taking part in this research project. The current research is exploring the attraction and retention of younger generation talent, in the Irish food and produce industry. It is not believed that there will be any risk or discomfort to participants of this research.

#### **Participation and Withdrawal**

You are free to withdraw from the study any time leading up to the interview process, or up to one week after the interview process. You will not be asked to disclose a reason for withdrawing. To withdraw from this study, please contact the researcher, or research supervisor, via the email addresses provided below.

Should you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, or research supervisor by the below details.

Researcher's email address: [X22117474@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:X22117474@student.ncirl.ie)

Research Supervisor's email address: [Amanda.kracen@ncirl.ie](mailto:Amanda.kracen@ncirl.ie)

#### **Support:**

If you feel you have been affected by this study, please get in contact with well-being support teams using the links below:

#### **Support links ROI:**

**Aware:** <https://www.aware.ie/>

- **Contact number:** 1800804848
- **Email address:** supportmail@aware.ie.

**HSE:** <https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/services-support/your-mental-health-information-line/>

- **Contact number:** 180111888

**Samaritans:** <https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/samaritans-ireland/>

**Contact number:** 1166123

**Email address:** jo@samaritans.ie



## **Support links NI:**

**Inspire:** <https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/>

- **Contact number:** +44289032 8474
- **Email address:** [hello@inspirewellbeing.org](mailto:hello@inspirewellbeing.org)  
[info@inspirewellbeing.ie](mailto:info@inspirewellbeing.ie)

**Aware:** <https://aware-ni.org/>

- **Contact number:** 02890357820
- **Email address:** [info@aware-ni.org](mailto:info@aware-ni.org)

**NI Direct:** <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/mental-health-services>

<https://www.mindingyourhead.info/services>