Generation Z In The Workplace: Analyzing The Link Between Employee Entitlement And Work Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia. The research aimed to determine whether a significant relationship exists between these two variables. A sample of 111 Generation Z employees from various companies participated in the study. Data were collected through employee entitlement and work engagement scales, and analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation. The results indicated no significant relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement, with a correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) of -0.053 and p = 0.578 (p>0,05). These findings contrast with previous studies that found a significant influence of employee entitlement on work engagement, suggesting that cultural, generational, and contextual differences may play a role. The study highlights the importance of considering various factors that influence work engagement, including cultural norms and workplace dynamics. Further research is recommended to explore these factors in greater depth to better understand the complexities of work engagement among Generation Z employees.

Keywords: cultural differences, employee entitlement, generation Z, organizational behavior, work engagement, workplace dynamics

Introduction

Shuck and Wollard (2010) argue that one of the most important factors significantly influencing organizational activities and achievements is employee work engagement. However, work engagement remains understudied, and the financial impact of disengaged employees can be substantial (Hansen, Byrne, & Kiersch, 2014). Employee engagement with their work affects not only the financial performance of the organization but also work performance and occupational well-being. According to Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou (2011), work engagement is a positive, work-related, affective-motivational state characterized by three aspects: vigour, dedication, and absorption. When employees feel engaged with their work, they exhibit high energy levels, can overcome challenges, are more enthusiastic

about their work, and find their workday passes quickly. This indicates that employees are willing to invest physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into their roles at work to achieve better performance and well-being (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Kahn, 1990). When employees feel engaged with their work, they display more positive emotions and have a more optimistic outlook on their future within the organization.

Currently, organizational workforces consist of four different generations: baby boomers, generation X, millennials (generation Y), and generation Z (Leslie et al., 2021). Generations are often defined as 'social or birth cohorts that share unique socio-cultural events that define their upbringing' (Leslie et al., 2021). These social cohorts share unique socio-cultural events and develop similar perspectives and lifestyles. Differences among generational cohorts play a significant role in determining individual expectations and aspirations.

Generation Z are digital natives who are highly familiar with technology and have different characteristics and preferences compared to previous generations. They expect work flexibility, access to advanced technology, and an inclusive work environment (Workplace Intelligence, 2024). With a significant population, Generation Z plays a vital role in driving digital transformation and innovation within companies, making them valuable assets in achieving organizational goals in the modern era (Rishi, 2023).

Generation Z includes individuals born between 1996 and 2012 (Arum, Zahrani, & Duha, 2023). Generally, it is considered that Generation Z comprises individuals born after 1995 (Pew Research Center and Business Insider, as cited in Arum et al., 2023).

According to Iorgulescu (2016), Generation Z is characterized by multitasking skills, optimism, professionalism in viewing the future, high creativity and innovation, and an entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, they tend to communicate virtually, which can negatively impact their formal communication skills. Findings from the Generational White Paper (as cited in Gaidhani et al., 2019) indicate that Generation Z prefers instant gratification, is less ambitious than previous generations, easily distracted, and more demanding. They also appear less interested in adapting to communities compared to previous generations.

The entry of Generation Z into the workforce presents unique challenges for companies, given their distinct characteristics. When organizations fail to provide opportunities for Generation Z, it can lead to dissatisfaction, prompting them to frequently change jobs (Kusumawati, 2021). Generation Z tends to prefer autonomy

in their work, which makes them more likely to leave their jobs if they find the work environment unsupportive (Febyana, Emilisa, Ramadini, & Prayogi 2024; Kusumawati, 2021). This aligns with Kahn's (1990) concept of disengagement.

When employees do not feel engaged with their organization, they are likely to invest fewer resources in their work, a phenomenon Kahn (as cited in Allam, 2017) refers to as disengagement. Disengaged employees are more prone to turnover, which significantly impacts organizations by increasing recruitment and training costs (Kusumawati et al., 2021). Work engagement is crucial for several factors, particularly employee performance. Companies with engaged employees are predicted to operate more stably. Wijaya and Soeharto (2021) found that high levels of work engagement contribute to employees fulfilling their job responsibilities, thereby reducing turnover intentions.

According to Schaufeli (as cited in Bakker & Leiter, 2010), two factors influence work engagement: job resources and personal resources. Job resources include physical, social, and organizational aspects that help employees reduce job demands and associated physical and psychological costs. Personal resources refer to employees' internal assets, such as positive self-evaluations, which include their belief in their ability to control and impact their work environment. These resources enable employees to feel more confident in facing challenges and taking initiative.

The influence of job and personal resources on work engagement can be linked to employee entitlement. Ayu, Maarif, and Sukmawati (2015) suggests that employees with strong personal resources strive to control and influence their organization and possess high self-efficacy. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) state that individuals with high work engagement also have high self-efficacy. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to feel entitled to special treatment because they believe in their ability to control and impact their work environment. Bandura (1977) explains self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations and achieve desired outcomes. Klimchak, Carsten, Morrell, & MacKenzie (2016) notes that individuals with an entitlement personality tend to feel deserving without considering their performance levels.

Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) defines employee entitlement as a belief that one deserves special treatment within an organization, regardless of their contributions. This belief is influenced by personal resources, indirectly affecting employee entitlement. Employee entitlement occurs when individuals feel they deserve rewards and special treatment without considering their actual performance or contributions to the organization. This belief can undermine organizational functioning (Joplin, Greenbaum, Wallace, & Edwards, 2021; Rahmani, 2018).

Westerlaken et al. (2017) identify aspects of employee entitlement, including reward as a right, self-focus, and excessive self-regard.

Individuals with high levels of employee entitlement often have unrealistic perceptions of what they deserve from their organization compared to their actual performance. These individuals have high and specific expectations for outcomes they set for themselves and demand that these expectations be met, leading to lower work engagement (Byrne, Miller, & Pitts, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009; Joplin et al., 2021).

Based on the above discussion, the research question for this study is: "Is there a relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees?"

Methods

This study employs a correlational research design, involving an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y). The subjects of this study consist of 111 employees who are part of Generation Z.

Data collection was conducted using the Employee Entitlement Scale and the Work Engagement Scale, both of which were pre-tested on 101 subjects to determine their validity and reliability.

Work Engagement: Work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9), which has been adapted into Indonesian by Kristiana et al. (2018). This scale consists of 9 items rated on a scale from 0 ("never") to 6 ("every day"). The reliability of the instrument was assessed using person and item reliability, with values of 0.71 and 0.95, respectively. The UWES-9 also demonstrated good goodness-of-fit indices (RMSEA = 0.049; CFI, NFI, & GFI > 0.95).

Employee Entitlement: The Employee Entitlement Scale consists of 24 items, previously tested with 6 response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The item discrimination coefficients ranged from 0.291 to 0.688, with a reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.907.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in the following table:

Tabel 4. Descriptive Statistic

No	Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sex	Male	58	52,3%
		Female	53	47,7%
2	Job type	Full Time	75	67,6%
		Part Time	36	32,4%

Descriptive statistics for the study variables indicate that 58.6% (65 subjects) of the participants fell into the high category of work engagement, 39.6% (44 subjects) were in the medium category, and 1.8% (2 subjects) were in the low category. For employee entitlement, 47.7% (53 subjects) were in the high category, 51.4% (57 subjects) were in the medium category, and 0.9% (1 subject) were in the low category.

The normality test for employee entitlement yielded a K-S-Z value of 0.057 with a significance of $p = 0.200$, and for work engagement, a K-S-Z value of 0.061 with a significance of $p = 0.200$. These results indicate that both variables are normally distributed.

The linearity test showed a significance for deviation from linearity of 0.181, indicating a linear relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement.

Given that both assumptions were met, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) of -0.53 with $p = 0.578$. These results indicate no significant relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this study is rejected.

Discussions

The aim of this study was to determine whether there is a relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees. The hypothesis proposed was that there is a relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees. After conducting hypothesis testing using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, the correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) was found to be -0.053 with $p = 0.578$ ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that there is no significant relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement, thus rejecting the proposed hypothesis.

These findings contrast with the study by Joplin et al. (2021), which found a significant influence of employee entitlement on work engagement. The discrepancy may be due to variations in research context, variable measurement, and generational dynamics. Joplin et al. (2021) conducted their study in a different cultural and organizational context, using definitions and measurement tools that may differ from those used in this study.

Conversely, the results align with previous research by Klimchak et al. (2016), which stated that entitlement is not directly related to proactive work behaviors. Several reasons may explain why the hypothesis was rejected. First, cultural and geographical context differences can influence perceptions and attitudes towards work within organizations. This study was conducted in Indonesia, which has workplace norms and dynamics that may differ from other countries. This aligns with the view of Wu, Mei, and Cervantez (2022) that national culture can influence organizational behavior and individual work values. Indonesian culture has several differences compared to Western cultures, as noted by Garcia, Mendez, Ellis, and Gautney (2014), who stated that Western work culture is more individualistic compared to the more collectivist Asian cultures. These differences have significant implications in various aspects of life, including social, economic, and business contexts. Individualism in Western countries emphasizes personal freedom, individual achievement, and independence. Everyone is considered responsible for their own fate and is often expected to compete and innovate to achieve personal goals. In contrast, work culture in many Asian countries, including Indonesia, emphasizes group harmony, cooperation, and loyalty to family and community. In collectivist cultures, decisions are often made based on group interests rather than individual interests, and there is strong social pressure to maintain harmony and avoid conflict. These differences can affect how people interact, negotiate, and build relationships, both in daily life and in professional contexts. Understanding these fundamental differences is crucial for companies and individuals involved in cross-cultural relationships, as it can help reduce misunderstandings and enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

Second, differences in sample characteristics may also play a role. The sample in this study consisted of 111 Generation Z employees in Indonesia, who may have different characteristics compared to the sample used by Joplin et al. (2021), which included individuals aged 21 to 73 years. In contrast, this study focused on Generation Z, aged 18 to 29 years, in Indonesia, which may result in different views and attitudes towards work and their rights compared to previous generations.

Third, work engagement may be influenced by various factors other than employee entitlement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) suggested that leadership, work environment, and work-life balance are some factors that can influence work engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) stated that work engagement is a multidimensional construct influenced by many factors, and if these factors are not considered, the research results may be distorted.

In the analysis of work engagement using a scale among 111 Generation Z employee respondents, the researchers found that the level of work engagement among Generation Z employees ranged from medium to high. This indicates that some Generation Z employees are considered to have or adopt some aspects of work engagement. Meanwhile, the analysis to determine the category of employee entitlement found that among the 111 subjects, some were categorized as having medium to high levels of employee entitlement.

In conclusion, this study found no significant relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Factors such as cultural variations, methodology, and generational dynamics may contribute to these differing results. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the context and factors that may influence this relationship more deeply.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia. The hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant relationship between these two variables. However, the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis indicated no significant relationship between employee entitlement and work engagement, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis.

Several factors may explain the lack of a significant relationship found in this study. Cultural and geographical differences can influence perceptions and attitudes towards work within organizations. The Indonesian context, with its collectivist culture, may shape different workplace dynamics compared to more individualistic Western cultures. Additionally, differences in sample characteristics, such as the age range and generational cohort, may also play a role. Furthermore, work engagement is a multidimensional construct influenced by various factors, including leadership, work environment, and work-life balance, which were not the primary focus of this study.

Despite the lack of a significant relationship, the study provides valuable insights into the levels of work engagement and employee entitlement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia. The findings suggest that while many Generation Z employees exhibit medium to high levels of work engagement, a considerable proportion also display medium to high levels of employee entitlement.

Future research should continue to explore the complex interplay of factors influencing work engagement, considering cultural, generational, and contextual variables. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations aiming to foster a supportive and engaging work environment for their employees.

Acknowledgement

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