

The Effect of Happiness at Work in Boosting Employee Productivity Among Z Generation in Startup West Java

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between happiness at work and employee productivity among Generation Z employees in startups. Happiness at work is treated as a second-order latent variable comprising engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. Using a quantitative explanatory approach, data were collected from 170 respondents in West Java through an electronic questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. Analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM to assess convergent and discriminant validity, reliability, and the structural model. Results show that workplace happiness significantly enhances productivity, with job satisfaction having the strongest impact, followed by engagement and affective commitment. The findings align with previous studies, confirming that workplace happiness drives motivation, commitment, and efficiency, positively impacting individual well-being and organizational performance. This research contributes to understanding workplace happiness in startups, offering insights for organizations to design strategies that foster happiness and productivity in a dynamic and competitive environment.

Keywords: happiness at work, employee productivity, Z generation, startup, second-order construct.

1. INTRODUCTION

Labor productivity is one of the key indicators of a nation's competitiveness on the global stage. In Indonesia, labor productivity faces significant challenges, lagging far behind advanced economies such as South Korea, with a performance gap estimated to reach 28 years (Detik Finance, 2024; Kompas, 2024; RRI, 2018). Addressing this issue is critical to achieving the vision of Indonesia Maju 2045, where strengthening labor productivity is one of its main pillars. To tackle these challenges, innovative and holistic approaches are necessary, including understanding the factors influencing productivity among the dominant workforce demographic—Generation Z.

Generation Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has now become the largest demographic group in Indonesia, according to data from Badan Pusat Statistik. This generation exhibits unique characteristics, such as a strong need for happiness, flexibility, and work-life balance, which significantly differ from previous generations (GoodStats, 2023). In the workplace context, Generation Z tends to seek more meaningful experiences and supportive environments that promote their emotional well-being. These traits present both challenges and opportunities for companies, particularly in optimizing these characteristics to boost productivity.

At the same time, Indonesia is experiencing rapid growth in its startup ecosystem. With the fifth-largest number of startups globally, this sector has become an attractive option for Generation Z due to its more flexible, collaborative, and innovative work culture (IndoGen

Capital, 2023; Kumparan, 2023; Mojok, 2023). While this environment offers space for creativity and individual empowerment, it also introduces challenges such as job uncertainty and high work demands. In this dynamic context, the concept of happiness at work emerges as a crucial area for further exploration, particularly regarding its impact on employee productivity.

Previous studies have shown a strong relationship between happiness at work and productivity. Employees who feel happy are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to their jobs, leading to better performance in both quality and quantity of output (Kustiawan et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2024; Sikandar & Sikandar, 2023; Wesarat et al., 2015). Workplace happiness also enhances employees' ability to adapt to pressure and challenges, a quality highly relevant in the dynamic and fast-changing startup environment. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing Generation Z's workplace happiness and how this impacts productivity is a crucial issue.

This study aims to address the gap in literature by examining the relationship between happiness at work and productivity among Generation Z employees in startups. The theoretical framework employed is the Affective Events Theory (AET), which explains how workplace events influence emotions and, ultimately, employee performance. This theory provides a holistic approach to understanding how workplace happiness is shaped by the interaction of organizational, individual, and environmental factors.

The findings of this research are expected to make significant contributions, both theoretically and practically. From an academic perspective, this study enriches the limited literature on the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity within the startup context, especially among the Generation Z population. Practically, the study aims to provide insights for startup companies to create work environments that not only support employee happiness but also foster optimal performance. Through strategies informed by the study's results, companies can enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic and competitive ecosystem.

In conclusion, this research offers a fresh perspective on the importance of workplace happiness as a pillar for enhancing Generation Z's productivity in startups. By focusing on the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity, this study contributes to the effort of creating healthier, more innovative, and productive work environments in Indonesia.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Affective Events Theory

Affective Events Theory (AET) is a framework that explains how workplace events trigger emotional reactions, which in turn influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. This theory provides an in-depth perspective on the relationship between work experiences, emotions, and work outcomes, making it highly relevant in the context of modern organizational dynamics. In this study, AET serves as the foundation for understanding how workplace happiness affects the productivity of Generation Z employees in startup environments.

According to AET, specific workplace events elicit particular emotional responses in employees, both positive and negative (Junça-Silva et al., 2017; Rueff Lopes et al., 2017). These events can include interactions with colleagues, recognition of work achievements, time pressure, or conflicts with supervisors. The resulting emotional reactions—such as satisfaction, happiness, or frustration—become key elements shaping employees' attitudes and work behaviors.

The emotions arising from these workplace events act as mediators bridging the relationship between workplace incidents and various work outcomes. For example, positive emotions such as happiness and enthusiasm enhance work engagement and employee well-being, whereas negative emotions like stress and frustration are more likely to lead to turnover intentions or reduced performance (Junça-Silva et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2009; Rueff Lopes et al., 2017). Therefore, managing workplace events that trigger emotions is essential for fostering a productive and supportive work environment.

A central element of AET is the role of positive affect and negative affect. Positive affect has a more significant impact on improving well-being and performance than negative affect (Junça-Silva et al., 2017). Positive emotions, such as satisfaction and enthusiasm, tend to reinforce employee engagement and motivate individuals to deliver their best performance. Conversely, negative emotions, such as anxiety or dissatisfaction, have the potential to hinder productivity and reduce work commitment.

This theory is also instrumental in understanding the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity. Workplace happiness is often influenced by events that evoke emotional reactions, such as interactions with colleagues, recognition from supervisors, or supportive work experiences. These emotional reactions ultimately determine how employees behave and perform (Weiss & Beal, 2005). In the context of Generation Z employees in startups, workplace happiness can be shaped by unique experiences, such as collaborative team dynamics, work flexibility, and appreciation for creativity. These factors affect productivity through the interplay of workplace events and resulting emotions.

Furthermore, AET provides a framework for analyzing the role of emotions in shaping Generation Z's work experiences. As a generation that values work-life balance, Generation Z is particularly responsive to work experiences that impact their happiness. Thus, by applying AET, this study can identify how workplace happiness—shaped by events such as peer interactions or managerial styles—affects the productivity of Generation Z in startups.

Overall, AET not only offers theoretical insights into the relationship between workplace events and emotions but also provides practical guidance for managing work environments that support happiness and productivity. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is especially critical in the context of startups, which often exhibit unique and dynamic work cultures. By utilizing AET, this study contributes to the limited literature on the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity while also offering recommendations for startups to create more supportive work environments for Generation Z employees.

2.2. Happiness At Work

Happiness at work is a multifaceted concept encompassing various aspects of an individual's experience within the workplace. It is closely tied to subjective well-being and plays a pivotal role in influencing both individual satisfaction and organizational productivity (Sender et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2023; Wesarat et al., 2015). Fundamentally, workplace happiness goes beyond mere feelings of joy or satisfaction; it also includes emotional, social, and existential components derived from one's job.

Happiness can be defined as a global evaluation of one's life, encompassing personal satisfaction, a prevalence of positive moods, and low levels of negative affect (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). In the context of work, Pryce-Jones describes happiness at work as a mindset that maximizes performance and enables individuals to reach their potential (Tri et al., 2021). This perspective is supported by Harter et al., who define workplace happiness as a state in which employees demonstrate loyalty, job satisfaction, resilience, and high productivity, ultimately contributing to organizational success (Agustien & Soeling, 2020).

Further advanced the concept of happiness at work by developing and statistically validating a measurement scale (Salas-Vallina et al., 2017). They defined workplace happiness based on three key dimensions: engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. This approach balances high pleasure and emotional activation within the workplace context, offering a holistic perspective on happiness at work.

A primary component of workplace happiness is job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is the degree of pleasure or contentment an individual derives from their roles and responsibilities (Chaudhuri & Naskar, 2014; Fisher, 2010). Job satisfaction significantly impacts productivity, reduces employee turnover, and enhances overall performance (Chaudhuri & Naskar, 2014; Singh et al., 2023; Wesarat et al., 2015). Another critical element is work engagement, which refers to employees' enthusiasm and dedication to their work. Studies reveal that engaged employees tend to be more productive and exhibit higher organizational commitment (Fisher, 2010; Yang et al., 2022).

Additionally, positive emotions in the workplace play a crucial role in fostering workplace happiness. Emotions such as joy, satisfaction, and enthusiasm enhance creativity, problem-solving abilities, and resilience to stress (Fisher, 2010; Singh et al., 2023). Conversely, the prevalence of negative emotions like stress and frustration can hinder performance and diminish motivation. In this context, a consistently positive mood emerges as a vital element in creating a productive work environment.

Workplace happiness is also influenced by the quality of workplace relationships. Positive interactions among colleagues and support from supervisors create a conducive environment for employee well-being. Strong relationships not only enhance employee satisfaction but also foster an inclusive and supportive organizational culture. Moreover, meaning and purpose in work are essential components. Employees who find meaning in their work are more motivated, satisfied, and committed to their organizations (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).

Overall, happiness at work results from the complex interplay of various individual and organizational factors. Workplace happiness is not merely an outcome of emotional balance but also reflects the quality of social relationships, levels of work engagement, and the individual's ability to derive meaning from their work. By understanding these dimensions, organizations can design strategies that support employee well-being, which in turn drives productivity and organizational success.

2.3. Employee Productivity

Employee productivity refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of employees in performing tasks to achieve desired outcomes within a specific timeframe (Amit et al., 2021; Varun et al., 2023). Productivity is a critical element for the long-term sustainability and success of organizations, as it significantly impacts overall performance and competitiveness (Singh et al., 2022; Varun et al., 2023). In today's competitive business landscape, employee productivity has become a primary focus for organizations striving to create value and optimize resources.

In general terms, productivity is defined as the ratio of work output, in the form of goods or services, to the resources used in a production process (Jamaluddin et al., 2019). According to Liang Gie, as cited by Jamaluddin, productivity reflects the ability to produce a certain output by efficiently utilizing labor and available resources. Productivity described as a combination of the time spent working and the useful results achieved. This perspective underscores the importance of work quality, time utilization, and output in assessing productivity (Schultz et al., 2009).

Employee productivity is often measured by the amount of output or work completed by an individual within a given period (Ugbomhe & Simon, 2022). Work productivity define as an individual's ability to produce goods or services by optimally utilizing production resources, meeting quality standards, and adhering to the deadlines set by the organization (Jamaluddin et al., 2019). This indicates that productivity involves not only the quantity of work produced but also the quality and relevance of the output to organizational needs.

Employee productivity can be assessed through four main indicators: work quantity, work quality, timeliness in task completion, and cooperative attitude (Simamora, 2004). Work quantity refers to the amount of work successfully completed within a specific time frame, while work quality evaluates how well the output meets established standards. Timeliness reflects the individual's efficiency in completing tasks according to the predetermined schedule, and a cooperative attitude measures the extent to which an employee collaborates with colleagues and contributes to team goals.

In recent literature, employee productivity is also linked to various contextual factors, such as work environment, leadership style, and emotional well-being. Studies by (Amit et al., 2021; Varun et al., 2023) highlight that employee productivity is not solely influenced by individual abilities but also by workplace dynamics that affect motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. In other words, productivity results from the complex interaction of individual and organizational factors.

High productivity enables organizations to achieve strategic goals, enhance competitiveness, and maintain long-term business sustainability. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing productivity—including aspects of work such as satisfaction, engagement, and workplace happiness—is critical in the context of this research. A deep understanding of the concept of productivity also provides a strong theoretical foundation for evaluating the relationship between workplace happiness and the performance of Generation Z employees in startup environments.

2.4. Relation Between Happiness At Work And Employee Productivity

The relationship between happiness at work and employee productivity has been a central focus in management research. Studies by (Mustofa & Prasetyo, 2020; Wau, 2022) indicate that workplace happiness significantly influences productivity. Happiness at work not only enhances productivity but also positively impacts individual well-being, life satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. In an organizational context, happy employees tend to be more motivated, committed, and efficient in completing their tasks, ultimately contributing to corporate sustainability. However, contradictory findings were reported by (Nurasiah, 2023), who stated that happiness at work does not significantly affect employee productivity. These conflicting results suggest that the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity may depend on certain contextual factors, such as organizational characteristics, work culture, or employee demographics.

The startup work environment offers a compelling context to explore these dynamics. As a flexible, dynamic, and high-pressure ecosystem, startups possess unique characteristics compared to traditional companies. Rapidly changing work demands, flat organizational structures, and a more informal work culture can uniquely influence the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity. However, research focusing on workplace happiness in the startup context remains limited, highlighting the importance of further investigation into how the startup work environment affects employee productivity.

Generation Z, as the dominant workforce generation in Indonesia, adds a new dimension to understanding workplace happiness and productivity. This generation is known for their preferences for work-life balance, flexibility, and meaningful work. In modern workplaces, they tend to value work experiences that support emotional well-being and provide opportunities for personal growth. Nevertheless, research on the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity among Generation Z, particularly in startups, is still scarce. This presents an opportunity to explore further how workplace happiness can impact their productivity.

Affective Events Theory (AET) provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between work events, emotions, and employee productivity. The theory posits that daily work experiences can influence individuals' emotions, which in turn affect their work attitudes and behaviors. In the context of Generation Z and startups, AET offers insights into how specific work events, such as interactions with colleagues or recognition of contributions, shape workplace happiness and productivity. However, the

application of this theory to the specific context of Generation Z in startups remains underexplored, warranting further investigation to enrich the existing literature.

With these findings and gaps in literature, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between happiness at work and employee productivity, particularly in the context of Generation Z working in startups. This research is expected to make significant theoretical contributions while offering practical insights for organizations to create work environments that support happiness and optimal performance. The study's hypotheses and research model are illustrated as follows.

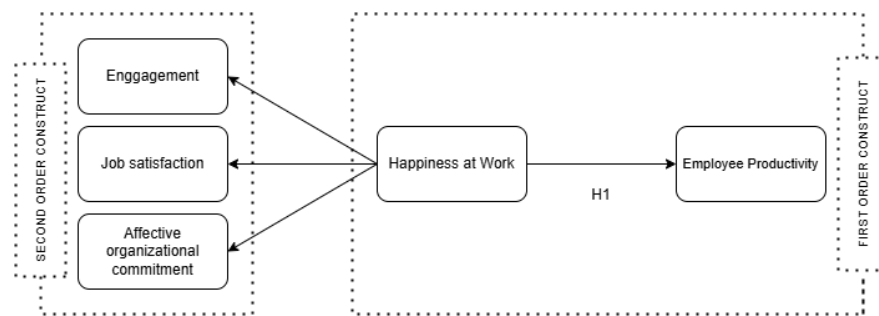


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

H1: Happiness at work has a significant positive effect on employee productivity.

3. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory approach to examine the relationship between happiness at work and employee productivity among Generation Z employees in startup companies. Happiness at work is modeled as a second-order latent variable comprising three dimensions: engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment.

The population includes Generation Z employees (born 1997–2012) working in startups, with sampling focused on those in West Java. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) guidelines, 170 respondents were required based on 17 research indicators. Data were collected via an electronic questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of happiness at work and productivity.

Analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), involving the evaluation of the outer model (validity and reliability), inner model (relationships among variables), and overall model fit. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how workplace happiness influences productivity in startup environments.

4. RESULT AND DISSCUSION

Convergent Validity

Table 1. Outer Loading

	AOC	EP	E	HAW	JS
KK2					0,792
KK2				0,791	
KK3					0,928
KK3				0,880	
KN1			0,860		
KN1				0,843	
KN2			0,776		
KN2				0,751	
KN3			0,874		
KN3				0,815	
KO1	0,876				
KO1				0,809	
KO2	0,761				
KO2				0,725	
KO3	0,898				
KO3				0,814	
Kete1		0,825			
Kete2		0,843			

The convergent validity analysis aims to assess the extent to which the indicators of each latent variable exhibit strong correlations with their respective constructs. All values meet the criteria for convergent validity (values > 0.70), indicating that the indicators are strongly correlated with their constructs.

Factor Analysis

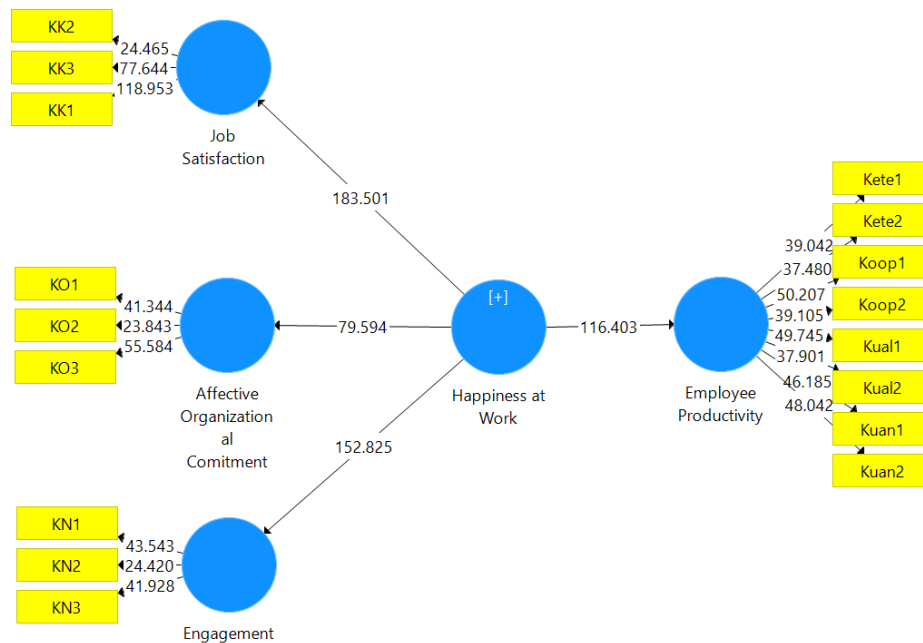


Figure 2 Path Correlation Coefficient

Based on the path analysis results, it can be concluded that all relationships between latent variables are positive and significant.

Construct Validity and Reliability

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	CR	AVE
AOC	0,801	0,808	0,884	0,718
EP	0,945	0,945	0,954	0,721
E	0,786	0,791	0,876	0,702
HAW	0,937	0,940	0,947	0,667
JS	0,867	0,876	0,920	0,794

According to Hair et al. (2017) reliability is considered adequate if Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceed 0.7. Similarly, convergent validity is confirmed if

the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5. In this study, all values fulfill those thresholds, ensuring that the measurement model is both valid and reliable. Thus, all constructs in the model are deemed valid and reliable, making them suitable for further analysis.

Convergent Validity Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	1	2	3	4	5
AOC (1)	0,925				
EP (2)	0,865	0,945			
E (3)	0,821	0,906	0,960		
HAW (4)	0,847	0,849	0,838	0,966	
JS (5)	0,829	0,921	0,917	0,817	0,891

The results of the discriminant validity analysis using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion indicate that all constructs in the research model meet the criteria for discriminant validity. These findings ensure that each construct in the model explains more variance in its own indicators than the variance shared with other constructs. Therefore, discriminant validity for all constructs has been achieved, confirming that these constructs are valid for measuring the intended concepts in this study.

Structural Hypothesis Analysis

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Hypothesis	Construct	T Stat	P Value	Remark
H1	Happiness at Work -> Employee Productivity	116,403	0,000	Accepted
Second Order Construct	Happiness at Work -> Affective Organizational Commitment	79,594	0,000	Accepted

Hypothesis	Construct	T Stat	P Value	Remark
	Happiness at Work -> Engagement	152,825	0,000	Accepted
	Happiness at Work -> Job Satisfaction	183,501	0,000	Accepted
	Happiness at Work -> Employee Productivity	116,403	0,000	Accepted

The hypothesis testing results using the PLS Bootstrapping method indicate that all relationships between constructs in the research model are statistically significant, with high T-Statistics values and P-Values of 0.000. These findings suggest that all proposed hypotheses are accepted.

The result shows that Happiness at Work has a significant influence on Affective Organizational Commitment, with a T-Statistics value of 79.594 and a P-Value of 0.000. This result indicates that workplace happiness plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' affective commitment to the organization. The relationship between Happiness at Work and Engagement also demonstrates a highly significant effect, with a T-Statistics value of 152.825 and a P-Value of 0.000, reinforcing that workplace happiness is a key factor in improving employee engagement. Additionally, the relationship between Happiness at Work and Job Satisfaction is significant, with the highest T-Statistics value of 183.501 and a P-Value of 0.000. These findings confirm that workplace happiness directly contributes to increased employee job satisfaction.

For the first hypothesis (H1), the relationship between Happiness at Work and Employee Productivity shows a T-Statistics value of 116.403 and a P-Value of 0.000. This result demonstrates that workplace happiness significantly affects employee productivity. In other words, the higher the level of employee happiness at work, the greater their contribution to productivity improvement.

These findings align with previous studies by (Mustofa & Prasetyo, 2020; Wau, 2022), which indicate that workplace happiness significantly influences productivity. Happiness at work not only enhances productivity but also positively impacts individual well-being, life satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. In an organizational context, happy employees tend to be more motivated, committed, and efficient in completing their tasks, ultimately contributing to corporate sustainability. The present study further substantiates these insights by demonstrating the strong relationships between happiness at work and its

key dimensions—engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment—and their collective impact on productivity.

These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Salas-Vallina et al. (2017) and Wesarat et al., (2015)) which confirmed that workplace happiness—through its components of engagement and job satisfaction—has a strong influence on performance outcomes. However, unlike these prior works which focused on general or public sector employees, this study extends the applicability to startup environments with Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Thus, it offers fresh empirical evidence from a dynamic and underexplored setting. Furthermore, in contrast with Nurasiah, (2023), who found that happiness had no significant effect on productivity, this study reinforces the positive association, suggesting that context (startup culture, demographic factors) plays a moderating role.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that happiness at work plays a central role in enhancing the productivity of Generation Z employees in startups. Workplace happiness, measured through job satisfaction, engagement, and affective organizational commitment, significantly impacts employee performance both directly and through the interplay of these dimensions. The findings underscore that workplace happiness is not merely an emotional concept but a strategic driver for achieving optimal productivity.

The analysis reveals that job satisfaction is the strongest factor influencing workplace happiness, highlighting the importance of supportive work environments, recognition for contributions, and work-life balance. Engagement also plays a critical role by increasing employee motivation to contribute maximally, while affective organizational commitment strengthens employee loyalty and emotional ties to the organization. Together, these dimensions create a cohesive ecosystem that fosters both happiness and productivity.

In the startup context, Generation Z exhibits strong preferences for flexibility, recognition, and meaningful work. These dynamics present both challenges and opportunities for companies to design policies oriented toward emotional well-being and employee performance. Work environments that address these needs are effective in managing the high pressure and rapid changes characteristic of startups, thereby enhancing employee contributions to organizational goals.

This study contributes theoretically by enriching the understanding of the relationship between workplace happiness and productivity in the relatively underexplored context of startups dominated by Generation Z. Practically, the findings offer insights for organizations to develop strategies centered on workplace happiness, not only to boost performance but also to attract and retain top talent.

Future research could expand on this study by incorporating additional factors such as organizational culture, leadership styles, or workplace technologies. A more comprehensive approach would enable companies to create more innovative, inclusive, and sustainable work environments while maximizing the potential of Generation Z as a key asset in the modern workforce.

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