

The relationships between psychological safety and work engagement among Generation Z employees in the Jabodetabek area

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z had just entered the workforce at a productive age. However, statistical data reveal that Generation Z is largely unemployed and is considered to have a lot of consideration of job selection due to the large amount of information spread and cultural changes, which makes Generation Z choose to quit work rather than carry out work that is not in accordance with their internal principles. A high quit rate is related to workers' work engagement. Early research has revealed that Generation Z has a low level of work engagement. The work engagement factor, psychological safety, is the belief that a safe work environment to be able to voice questions or suggestions without fear of negative consequences is also needed by Generation Z in their work. This study examined the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement experienced by Generation Z employees. Using a correlational quantitative method with convenience sampling technique, the participants were 210 Generation Z employees who worked in Jabodetabek at the age of 20–28 years, had at least high school/vocational school education, and had a minimum work experience of one year. Using measuring instruments Adaptation of the Psychological Safety Inventory (PSI) scale and the Utrecht Work and Well-Being Survey (UWES). The Spearman rank correlation test was used for data analysis. The results showed a positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Jabodetabek ($r = 0.504$ and $p < 0.05$).

Keywords: psychological safety, work engagement, Generation Z employees.

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

The generation known as "Generation Z" (born between 1997 and 2012, according to Dimock, 2019) is a technologically proficient group that is currently entering the workforce. Research indicates that this generation exhibits high levels of motivation and performance potential (Hafidz & Noviyati, 2022). However, data from Indonesia's National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas, 2024) demonstrate that Generation Z constitutes approximately 50% of the total unemployed population, with 3.6 million out of 7.2 million unemployed individuals belonging to this group. The challenges encountered by Gen Z college graduates in obtaining formal employment may be attributed to generational preferences and a selective approach to job selection (Fikri et al., 2024). According to the Randstad Workmonitor (2022), members of Generation Z exhibit a tendency towards low work engagement, opting for unemployment rather than remaining in unfulfilling employment. This suggests a stronger emphasis on personal values and workplace fit than in previous generations. Baldonado (2018) and Fajriyanti et al. (2024) have observed that Generation Z places significant value on career autonomy and flexibility. This demographic often exhibits minimal organizational commitment and a propensity to eschew long-term employment opportunities. These traits have the potential to conflict with conventional workplace cultures that prioritize loyalty and sustained engagement (Santoso & Susilo, 2025). Work engagement has emerged as a pivotal predictor of both individual and organizational performance in the context of escalating organizational competitiveness. Engaged employees have been shown to exhibit higher levels of initiative, responsibility, and productivity (Steven & Prihatsanti, 2017), which are essential attributes for the long-term sustainability of any organization. According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), work engagement can be defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor (energy and resilience), dedication (sense of significance and enthusiasm), and absorption (deep concentration and immersion in work). Employees exhibiting high levels of engagement are more likely to experience psychological and performance benefits, while concurrently reducing their turnover intentions (Muchtadin, 2022; Hendrik et al., 2021).

To comprehend the factors that facilitate this engagement among Generation Z, it is imperative to thoroughly examine its psychological underpinnings. According to Kahn's (1990) engagement theory, the occurrence of engagement is contingent on the presence of three psychological conditions: psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability, and psychological safety. The concept of psychological safety holds particular salience for Generation Z, which prioritizes authenticity and transparent communication in professional environments (Baswara, 2023). Psychological safety is defined as the shared belief that the environment is conducive to taking interpersonal risks, such as asking questions, sharing ideas, or expressing disagreement without fear of negative consequences. Clark (2020) has developed this construct into a four-dimensional model, comprising the following dimensions: inclusion safety (feeling accepted), learner safety (feeling safe to grow and ask questions), contributor safety (feeling safe to contribute), and challenger safety (feeling safe to challenge the status quo). The four dimensions of psychological safety can be theoretically mapped onto the three components of work engagement, as described by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). The concept of inclusion safety has been shown to support dedication by fostering emotional acceptance and a sense of belonging. The cultivation of learner safety fosters vigor by establishing a secure environment conducive to growth, thereby enhancing psychological energy. Enhancement of contributor safety has been demonstrated to facilitate the absorption process by enabling individuals to fully apply their capabilities to meaningful tasks. Finally, challenger safety has the potential to positively influence all the three engagement components by promoting openness to innovation and expression, thereby deepening focus, enthusiasm, and energy. This integrative model aligns with Kahn (1990) proposition that psychological safety enables individuals to bring their full selves to work.

A preliminary survey of 30 Generation Z employees in Jabodetabek revealed that 47% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement, "If you make a mistake in the team, it is often considered your fault". This suggests a low level of psychological safety. Concurrently, 48% of the respondents reported experiencing distractions at their places of employment, indicative of suboptimal levels of absorption. These findings suggest an initial indication that Generation Z employees may not be experiencing adequate

psychological safety or work engagement. A review of the extant literature reveals a paucity of conclusive findings regarding this relationship. For instance, [Yazıcı and Meccek\(2017\)](#) identified a substantial positive correlation between psychological safety and work engagement among Turkish academic staff. In contrast, [Gan and Kee \(2022\)](#) reported that psychological safety climate did not significantly predict work engagement in their Malaysian university sample. These contradictory findings indicate a lacuna in the extant literature, particularly with respect to understanding how specific dimensions of psychological safety influence engagement across different generational cohorts. Given the distinctive psychological and behavioral characteristics of Generation Z, the present study aimed to examine how each of the four dimensions of psychological safety influences the three core components of work engagement. By explicitly theorizing and testing these pathways, this study contributes to both academic understanding and practical management of engagement among the emerging workforces.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a correlational quantitative design using convenience sampling. According to [Sugiyono \(2019\)](#), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which samples are selected based on ease of access to the researcher. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire distributed to Generation Z employees, with a geographical limitation to the Jabodetabek area, and conducted online. Eligible participants were Generation Z employees working on-site in organizations located in Jabodetabek, with a minimum of one year of work experience, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or race. However, the use of convenience sampling introduces potential limitations to the generalizability of the findings. The sample may not represent the broader population of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Specifically, concentration in the Jabodetabek region could lead to the overrepresentation of certain sectors, such as technology, finance, or creative industries, which are more prominent in urban economic centers. This sectoral concentration may influence the reported levels of psychological safety and work engagement; thus, the findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to other contexts or geographic areas. Future research should use stratified or random sampling methods to enhance the representativeness of the results.

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were Generation Z employees who had one or more years of experience in the workplace with a minimum position of staff. The study limited the age from 20 to 28 years. Participant characteristics were not limited by ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and marital status. The total number of participants included in the study was 210. The following is a description of the respondent data based on gender, age, latest education, marital status, domicile, work experience, and employment status (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Overview by Gender

Category		Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	95	45.2
	Female	115	54.8
Age	20	7	3.3
	21	11	5.2
	22	9	4.3
	23	23	11
	24	29	13.8
	25	28	13.3
	26	37	17.6
	27	30	14.3
	28	36	17.1
Last Education	High School	38	16.1
	Diploma	34	16.2

Category		Frequencies	Percentage (%)
	Bachelor's degree	134	63.8
	Master's degree	4	1.9
Marital Status	Single	161	76.7
	Married	49	23.3
Domicile	Jakarta	132	62.9
	Bogor	18	8.6
	Depok	19	9
	Tangerang	22	10.5
	Bekasi	19	9
Tunure	1-2 Years	55	26.2
	2-3 Years	60	28.6
	3-5 Years	54	25.7
	> 5 Years	41	19.5
Employment Status	Permanent	117	55.7
	Contract	93	44.3

2.2. Measurement

The measuring instrument used for psychological safety variables was the Psychological Safety Inventory (PSI) developed by [Plouffe et al. \(2023\)](#). This instrument has been adapted to the Indonesian language by researchers and assessed by experts. This variable had five dimensions: mutual trust ($\alpha = 0.764$), supportive leadership ($\alpha = 0.838$), identity and clarity in the context of the team ($\alpha = 0.794$), organizational/structural support ($\alpha = 0.866$), and interpersonal risk-taking ($\alpha = 0.752$). One example of an item from this measure is “My team is concerned about my well-being.” The total number of items on this measuring instrument is 30, and it is measured on a Likert scale of 1-5, with details of the Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

The measuring instrument used for the work engagement variable was the Utrecht Work and Well-Being Survey (UWES) developed by [Schaufeli et al. \(2006\)](#). This variable had three dimensions: vigor ($\alpha = 0.786$), dedication ($\alpha = 0.77$), and absorption ($\alpha = 0.847$). One example of an item from this measuring instrument is “At work, I feel full of energy.” The total number of items on this measuring instrument is 17 and is measured by a Likert scale of 1-6, with the details of the Likert scale: (1) never, (2) once or less a month, (3) several times a month, (4) once a week, (5) several times a week, and (6) every day.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Normality Test

The assumption test carried out in this study is a normality test, which is carried out to determine whether the collected sample data are normally or abnormally distributed. The normality test using the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for the psychological safety variable yielded a sig value. $0.001 < 0.05$ and the work engagement variable obtained a sig value. $0.001 < 0.05$, so it can be concluded that the psychological safety and work engagement variable data are not normally distributed owing to the sig value, which is lower than the significance level.

3.2. Correlation Test

Spearman’s rank-order correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, given the non-normal distribution of the data, as indicated by the results of the normality test. The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between psychological safety and work engagement, $r_s = .504, p < .001$, based on a sample of 210 participants. This suggests that higher levels of psychological safety are associated with higher levels of work engagement among Generation Z employees. In other words, employees who feel safe to express themselves,

contribute, and take interpersonal risks at work are more likely to report feeling energized, dedicated, and absorbed in their work.

Table 2. Spearman’s Correlation Between Psychological Safety and Work Engagement

Variable	Psychological Safety	Work Engagement
Psychological Safety	1	
Work Engagement	0.504**	1

Note. $N = 210$. Spearman’s rho correlation was used due to non-normal data distribution. $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

3.3. Difference Test

Additional data analysis conducted is a different test of psychological safety and work engagement variables based on certain group differences, which aims to determine the factors that determine the differences in psychological safety and work engagement. The groups tested consisted of differences in sex, education level, length of service, and employment status. The non-parametric difference test was conducted for data that were not normally distributed with the Mann-Whitney test to analyze differences in two groups of categories and the Kruskal-Wallis test to analyze differences in more than two groups of categories.

Different tests for psychological safety variables carried out on gender using the Mann-Whitney test showed that there was no significant difference in the value of psychological safety variables from different gender categories because of the sig value $p = 0.897 > 0.05$. Different tests for psychological safety variables carried out on the last education using the Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was no significant difference in the value of psychological safety variables from different categories of the last education due to the sig value $p = 0.312 > 0.05$. Differential tests of psychological safety variables carried out on length of service using the Kruskal–Wallis H test showed that there was a significant difference in the value of psychological safety variables from different categories of length of service due to the significant value $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. The differential test of psychological safety variables carried out on employment status using the Mann-Whitney test showed that there was no significant difference in the value of psychological safety variables from different categories of employment status due to sig p-value $= 0.312 > 0.05$.

The Mann-Whitney test for the difference in work engagement variables carried out on gender showed that there was no significant difference in the value of work engagement variables from different categories of gender due to the sig p-value $= 0.478 > 0.05$. The test of different work engagement variables carried out on the last education using the Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a significant difference in the value of the work engagement variables from the last education category due to the sig value $p = 0.026 < 0.05$. The differential test of work engagement variables carried out on length of service using the Kruskal–Wallis H test showed that there was no significant difference in the value of work engagement variables from different categories of length of service due to sig p-value $= 0.606 > 0.05$. The differential test of work engagement variables carried out on employment status using the Mann-Whitney test shows that there is no significant difference in the value of work engagement variables from different categories of employment status due to sig p-value $= 0.254 > 0.05$.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support Hypothesis 1: there is a significant relationship between psychological safety and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Jabodetabek, with a positive Spearman correlation of $r = 0.504$ ($p < 0.05$). This result indicated a moderate and statistically significant monotonic association between the two variables. It is not possible to determine whether higher psychological safety causes increased work engagement, or whether more engaged employees perceive the workplace as psychologically safer. This relationship may also be influenced by other unmeasured variables such as leadership, organizational culture, or peer support. Therefore, while the findings suggest that these

variables are related, caution must be taken not to assume a direct cause and effect relationship. The findings of this study are similar to those of Yazıcı and Meccek (2017), who found a positive correlation between psychological safety and work engagement among employees. However, their study was conducted on academic staff at Turkish universities and did not focus specifically on Generation Z. In contrast, the present study provides more targeted insights by examining a specific generational group in a distinct regional and cultural context.

The results also support Kahn's (1990) conceptualization, which identifies psychological safety as one of the key psychological conditions that enable employees to fully engage at work. When employees feel safe to speak up, take interpersonal risks, and express ideas without fear of negative consequences, they are more likely to engage in their work. Similarly, Cazan (2023) identified psychological safety as a form of organizational support that fosters employee involvement and commitment. This study further explored differences across demographic groups that may affect psychological safety and work engagement, including gender, education level, length of service, and employment status. For psychological safety, significant differences were found based on length of service. Specifically, employees with 1–2 years of service had lower psychological safety scores (mean = 119.09) than those with 2–3 years (mean = 128.47), 3–5 years (mean = 127.29), or more than 5 years (mean = 127.63) of service. This suggests that employees develop a greater sense of psychological safety as they become more integrated within the organization, build relationships, and understand workplace norms. These findings are consistent with Koopmann et al. (2016), who identified a non-linear pattern in psychological safety across tenure, with a noticeable dip of around 1.7 years of service.

No significant differences in psychological safety were found across gender, education level, or employment status. On the other hand, work engagement showed significant variation according to educational level. High school graduates reported lower engagement (mean = 80.5) than diploma holders (mean = 85.55), bachelor's degree holders (mean = 83.47), or master's graduates (mean = 81.75). This finding supports Hermawan et al. (2017), who argued that lower levels of formal education may limit one's technical and conceptual understanding of work tasks, thereby affecting engagement. No significant differences in work engagement were observed according to gender, tenure, or employment status. Despite these findings, this study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. Most notably, the use of convenience sampling and the restriction to Generation Z employees in the Jabodetabek area limits the generalizability of the results. The absence of an experimental or longitudinal design limits the interpretation of causality.

Future research should use more representative sampling methods, consider broader geographic and generational comparisons, and explore potential mediating or moderating variables that may explain the link between psychological safety and engagement. Longitudinal studies would be particularly useful in assessing how these variables evolve over time and whether psychological safety can predict increases in work engagement. There is also a need for more comparative studies focusing specifically on Generation Z, particularly in Indonesia, where research on psychological safety remains limited. Future investigations could explore its relationship with other variables, such as self-efficacy, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and job satisfaction, to build a more comprehensive understanding of its role in modern workplaces. Furthermore, while this study focuses on Generation Z, it does not compare their experiences with those of other generations, which could offer valuable insights into intergenerational dynamics in psychological safety and engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between psychological safety and work engagement among Generation Z employees in Jabodetabek. This shows that, if the level of employee psychological safety is high, the level of employee work engagement increases. Conversely, if the level of employee psychological safety is low, the level of work engagement decreases. In the different test analyses conducted for the psychological safety variable, the length of the service factor had a significant influence on the psychological safety variable. In the difference test analysis

conducted for the work engagement variable, the last education factor had a temporarily significant influence on the work engagement variable.

Based on the findings of this study, companies are expected to create and maintain a psychologically safe work environment so that employees feel comfortable conveying ideas, opinions, and concerns, without fear of negative consequences. This can be an effective strategy to increase work engagement among employees, especially Generation Z, which is given its own stigma or assumptions regarding feasibility and work standards in companies that often cause Generation Z to have low work engagement. There are suggestions for future research, namely, to explore comparisons between generations (Generation X, Y, and Z), so that the findings obtained are not limited to the Generation Z group. The findings of this study can be used as a basis for developing further research models on psychological safety, work engagement with self-efficacy, psychological well-being, organizational commitment, leadership, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, both as mediators and moderators. This approach is expected to enrich the theoretical insights and provide a deeper understanding.

Ethical approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in Tarumanagara university.

Informed consent statement

The participants were fully informed about the aim of the research, and their consent was secured before any data were collected. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all responses were treated as confidential and used exclusively for academic research purposes.

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, AD, Z., and RF; methodology, AD and Z; validation, Z and RF; formal analysis, AD, Z., and RF; resources, AD.; writing original draft preparation, AD, Z., and RF; writing review and editing, AD and Z.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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