
**THE INFLUENCE OF RECOGNITION AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE ON
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMONG GENERATION Z EMPLOYEES IN
INDONESIA**

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Abstract

The growing representation of Generation Z in the Indonesian workforce demands a re-examination of what drives employee engagement among this cohort. Unlike prior studies that investigated recognition and work-life balance independently or within narrow organizational contexts, this study simultaneously examines both constructs among Generation Z employees across Indonesia. Using an explanatory quantitative design, data were collected from 212 respondents via purposive sampling and analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0. The results reveal that recognition positively and significantly influences employee engagement (path = 0.318; $p < 0.05$), as does work-life balance (path = 0.482; $p < 0.05$). Together, both variables explain 52.4% of engagement variance ($R^2 = 0.524$). Work-life balance emerges as the dominant predictor ($f^2 = 0.299$), surpassing recognition ($f^2 = 0.130$), indicating that Generation Z prioritizes psychological well-being and boundary flexibility over symbolic appreciation. These findings contribute to the employee engagement literature by demonstrating that work-life balance is a stronger engagement determinant than recognition for this cohort, and offer actionable guidance for HR practitioners designing integrated retention strategies for the emerging workforce.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Generation Z, Indonesia, Recognition, Work-life Balance

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as the largest demographic cohort in Indonesia, comprising approximately 27.94% of the national population equivalent to 74.93 million people (BPS, 2020). As this generation enters the formal workforce in growing numbers, organizations face mounting pressure to understand what sustains their engagement. Yet employee engagement among Generation Z in Indonesia remains critically underdeveloped: only 27% are actively engaged, 68% are not engaged, and 5% are actively disengaged (Gallup, 2024). (Pendell & Vander, 2022) further identify Generation Z as the least engaged cohort in the current global workforce, a pattern consistent with high rates of workplace burnout (Microsoft Indonesia, 2021) and persistent feelings of being insufficiently supported (GoodStats, 2023).

Generation Z grew up in a fully digitized environment that has shaped expectations distinct from earlier cohorts. (Chillakuri, 2020) characterizes them as the Generation the first cohort to have never known life without the internet shaping preferences for instant feedback, meaningful work, and flexible arrangements. One in four Generation Z employees in Indonesia cite work-life balance as their top job-selection criterion (Ramadhani, 2024), while value congruence and purpose rank equally decisive (Hasya, 2023). Two organizational factors are theoretically and empirically associated with fostering engagement among this cohort: recognition the acknowledgment of employees' contributions which directly increases engagement for the large majority of employees, most of whom say they would remain longer if recognized more frequently (Cross, 2025) and work-life balance, which is similarly consequential: Indonesia ranks 43rd globally on this dimension (Atsir, 2024), and more than a third of Generation Z employees report leaving jobs specifically due to poor balance (Santoso, 2025).

Although each factor has been studied extensively in isolation, research examining both simultaneously among Generation Z in Indonesia remains scarce. Unlike previous studies that investigated recognition and work-life balance independently or within limited organizational contexts, this study simultaneously examines both constructs among Generation Z employees across Indonesia using PLS-SEM, thereby providing broader empirical evidence for HR strategies targeting the emerging workforce. This gap is addressed by answering three research questions: (1) Does recognition positively and significantly affect employee engagement among Generation Z in Indonesia? (2) Does work-life balance positively and significantly affect employee engagement? (3) Do both variables jointly and significantly influence employee engagement?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Organizational Behavior as the Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored in Organizational Behavior (OB) theory as the overarching conceptual framework integrating its three variables. (Robbins & Judge, 2024) define OB as a field that examines individual actions within organizations and how those behaviors shape overall performance and effectiveness. (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020) characterize OB as the study of human behavioral dynamics both individually and collectively in work contexts, serving as a foundation for designing systems that support organizational effectiveness. (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2021) further define OB as a discipline that seeks to understand, explain, predict, and ultimately influence human behavior in alignment with organizational goals. In this study, recognition (X1) represents an

interpersonal appreciation behavior; work-life balance (X2) reflects how work and personal life roles interact within behavioral patterns; and employee engagement (Y) represents the outcome of effective OB management.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a positive psychological state characterizing the emotional, cognitive, and physical attachment of employees to their work and organization. (Byrne, 2022) defines it as a positive motivational state driving enthusiasm, authenticity, and dedication, ultimately producing superior performance and organizational effectiveness. (AON Hewitt's, 2015) operationalizes engagement through three dimensions: Say (speaking positively about the organization), Stay (commitment to remain long-term), and Strive (exerting discretionary effort to exceed expectations). This study adopts this framework for its strong alignment with Generation Z characteristics: openness in communication, high expectations for value-congruent workplaces, and strong intrinsic motivation when their contributions are perceived as meaningful. This is consistent with evidence from the Indonesian higher-education sector, where (Rohman et al., 2021) found that employee engagement together with organizational culture significantly and positively shaped employee performance at Telkom University, reinforcing the practical relevance of engagement-oriented human resource strategies within Indonesian organizations.

Recognition and Its Effect on Employee Engagement

Recognition refers to the expression of appreciation, approval, or acknowledgment of an individual's efforts toward achieving work goals, functioning to reinforce desired positive behaviors (Presslee et al., 2023). (Sukrispiyanto, 2019) situates recognition within the Human Relation Approach, emphasizing how addressing workers' social and psychological needs strengthens their organizational bond. This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where recognition satisfies esteem needs—and when fulfilled, drives higher levels of engagement. (Baqir et al., 2020) assert that employee engagement is difficult to nurture without adequate recognition, as organizational acknowledgment reinforces employees' sense of being valued and increases their emotional investment. (Ndungu, 2017) corroborates this, finding that most employees expect recognition because it sustains motivation toward positive behavior. Empirical support is provided by (Annurussyadi et al., 2022), (Ramadhani Bayu & Wahyuningtyas, 2022), (Sadilla & Wahyuningtyas, 2023), (Jaya et al., 2024), and (Pinuntun & Wulandari, 2025), all of whom found positive and significant effects of recognition on employee engagement.

Work-life Balance and Its Effect on Employee Engagement

Work-life balance describes the state in which an individual achieves proportional satisfaction and involvement between professional and personal life domains, with time, energy, and commitment distributed equitably (Sirgy & Yi, 2023). (Fisher et al., 2009) conceptualize it across four dimensions: Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL), and Personal Life Enhancement of Work (PLEW). This study retains three dimensions (WIPL, WEPL, PLEW) after PLIW was excluded during instrument purification due to inadequate AVE (≥ 0.50). (Wood et al., 2020), reviewing 37 empirical studies, conclude that work-life balance consistently functions as a key antecedent of employee engagement. (Sopian et al., 2022) confirmed its direct and significant effect among 212 Indonesian workers, and (Ryke Kalalo et al., 2024) found that employees with better balance demonstrate notably higher engagement levels. These findings are especially pertinent given



Indonesia's low global ranking (43rd; Atsir, 2024) and the 37% of Generation Z employees who leave jobs specifically over work-life imbalance (Santoso, 2025). Comparable evidence from Indonesia's telecommunications sector reinforces this pattern: (Pratiwi & Silvianita, 2020) found that work-life balance among employees of PT Industri Telekomunikasi Indonesia (INTI) Bandung was primarily shaped by management of the work environment, time and role management, work-time flexibility, and organizational support, underscoring the multidimensional and context-specific nature of work-life balance within Indonesian corporate settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach combining descriptive, verificative, and causal designs. The causal design was selected to test the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships between the independent variables (recognition and work-life balance) and the dependent variable (employee engagement). Primary data were collected via a Google Form questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), distributed online through WhatsApp, Instagram, and other social media platforms to Generation Z employees across Indonesia.

Since the population of all Generation Z employees in Indonesia is unknown in size, the minimum sample was determined via power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Cohen, 1992) with parameters: F-test for multiple regression, effect size $f^2 = 0.15$ (medium), $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80, two predictors yielding a minimum of 68 respondents. This study collected 212 valid responses, well above the minimum. Purposive sampling was applied with three criteria: (1) Generation Z aged 18–28; (2) at least 3 months of work experience; (3) employed at any company operating in Indonesia. The three-month minimum ensures familiarity with organizational recognition practices and work-life balance conditions.

Variables were operationalized as follows. Recognition (X1) was measured using three indicators from (Antony et al., 2019). Work-life balance (X2) was measured using six indicators across three (Fisher et al., 2009) dimensions. Employee engagement (Y) was measured using six indicators across (AON Hewitt's, 2015) three dimensions. A total of 17 indicators formed the final measurement model.

Table 1.
Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Scale
X1: Recognition (Antony et al., 2019)	Verbal Appreciation	Thank-you remark from a supervisor	Ordinal
		Spontaneous applause following a presentation	
	Formal Acknowledgment	Employee's name mentioned in a key meeting	Ordinal

X2: Work-life Balance (Fisher et al., 2009)	Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL)	Maintaining motivation while managing competing time demands	Ordinal
	Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL)	Work activities enrich personal life and mood	Ordinal
	Personal Life Enhancement of Work (PLEW)	Personal experiences transfer positively to work performance	Ordinal
Y: Employee Engagement (AON Hewitt's, 2015)	Say	Advocates positively for the organization	Ordinal
	Stay	Intends to remain; demonstrates loyalty	Ordinal
	Strive	Exerts discretionary effort to exceed expectations	Ordinal

Source: Compiled by the researcher (2025)

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0 in two stages. The outer model stage assessed: (a) convergent validity via loading factors (> 0.70) and AVE (> 0.50); (b) discriminant validity via cross loading, Fornell-Larcker Criterion, and HTMT (< 0.85); and (c) construct reliability via Composite Reliability and Cronbach's α (both > 0.70). The inner model stage assessed R^2 , Q^2 , f^2 , path coefficients, and model fit indices (SRMR < 0.08 ; NFI > 0.67). Hypothesis testing was conducted through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, using a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$.

Table 2.
Outer Model Testing Parameters

Outer Model Test	Parameter	Criterion
Convergent Validity	Loading Factor	> 0.70
	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	> 0.50
Discriminant Validity	Cross Loading	Highest on its own construct
	Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Square root of AVE $>$ inter-construct correlation
	HTMT	< 0.85
Construct Reliability	Composite Reliability	> 0.70
	Cronbach's α	> 0.70

Source: (Duryadi, 2021)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Among the 212 respondents, 64.4% were female and 90.6% were aged 18-25 years, reflecting early-career Generation Z workers. A total of 88% were actively employed at the time of data collection. Geographic distribution was broad, with the largest shares from West Java ($n = 86$), DKI Jakarta ($n = 44$), and East Java ($n = 41$). Based on tenure, 46.1% had 1–3 years of experience, and 38.6% had less than one year. The most represented sectors were services ($n = 107$), trade ($n = 75$), and manufacturing ($n = 56$).

Descriptive Analysis

All three variables obtained mean scores in the Good to Very Good range. Recognition reached Very Good (86.40%), led by indicator X1.2 (91.13% employees feeling valued through verbal thanks), confirming that simple acts of appreciation have outsized emotional impact on Generation Z. Work-life balance scored Good (83.57%); the WEPL dimension performed best, indicating that work positively enhances personal life, while WIPL scored lowest (led by X2.3 at 81.32% work's support for personal activities suggesting room to improve flexibility. Employee engagement scored Good (83.46%); the strive dimension ranked highest (Y.6: 86.60%), reflecting strong intrinsic motivation, while the stay dimension scored lowest overall, signaling that long-term retention remains a strategic vulnerability.

Table 3.
Descriptive Summary of Research Variables

Variable	Mean Score	Category
Recognition (X1)	86.40%	Very Good
Work-life Balance (X2)	83.57%	Good
Employee Engagement (Y)	83.46%	Good

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2025)

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Figure 1 presents the outer model path diagram generated from SmartPLS 4.0, displaying the factor loadings for all 17 indicators and the path coefficients between constructs.

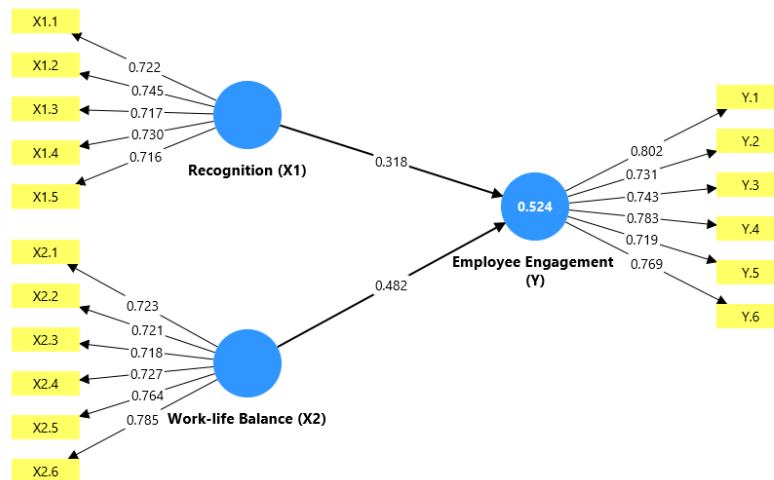


Figure 1.
PLS-SEM Outer Model Path Diagram

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

All 17 indicators produced loading factors above 0.70 (range: 0.716–0.802), with Y.1 highest and X1.5 lowest, satisfying convergent validity requirements. AVE values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, further confirming convergent validity.

Table 4.
Convergent Validity Results (Loading Factor and AVE)

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	Conclusion
Recognition (AVE=0.527)	X1.1	0.722	Valid
	X1.2	0.745	Valid
	X1.3	0.717	Valid
	X1.4	0.730	Valid
	X1.5	0.716	Valid
Work-life Balance (AVE=0.548)	X2.1	0.723	Valid
	X2.2	0.721	Valid
	X2.3	0.718	Valid
	X2.4	0.727	Valid
	X2.5	0.764	Valid
	X2.6	0.785	Valid
Employee Engagement (AVE=0.575)	Y.1	0.802	Valid
	Y.2	0.731	Valid

	Y.3	0.743	Valid
	Y.4	0.783	Valid
	Y.5	0.719	Valid
	Y.6	0.769	Valid

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

HTMT values for all construct pairs fall below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), confirming discriminant validity. Notably, the HTMT between work-life balance and employee engagement (0.797) approaches the threshold, reflecting some conceptual overlap that future research should address. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion is also satisfied, with square roots of AVE exceeding all inter-construct correlations.

Table 5.
HTMT Discriminant Validity Results

Variable	Recognition	Work-life Balance
Recognition		
Work-life Balance	0.768	
Employee Engagement	0.745	0.797

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

All constructs demonstrate strong reliability, with Composite Reliability values above 0.84 and Cronbach's α values above 0.77, both well exceeding the 0.70 threshold.

Table 6.
Construct Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's α	rho_a	Composite Reliability	AVE
Recognition	0.777	0.778	0.848	0.527
Work-life Balance	0.835	0.838	0.879	0.548
Employee Engagement	0.852	0.857	0.890	0.575

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

Structural Model (Inner Model)

$R^2 = 0.524$ indicates a moderate level of explanatory power: recognition and work-life balance jointly explain 52.4% of the variance in employee engagement (Duryadi, 2021). $Q^2 = 0.496$ (> 0) confirms adequate predictive relevance. Work-life balance contributes a moderate effect ($f^2 = 0.299$), while recognition contributes a small but statistically significant effect ($f^2 = 0.130$). Model fit indices confirm overall adequacy: SRMR = 0.075 (< 0.08) and NFI = 0.801 (> 0.67).

Table 7.
Inner Model Evaluation Summary

Parameter	Value	Category
R^2	0.524	Moderate

Q ²	0.496	> 0 (Good)
f ² Recognition	0.130	Small effect
f ² Work-life Balance	0.299	Moderate effect
SRMR	0.075	< 0.08 (Good Fit)
NFI	0.801	> 0.67 (Strong)

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

Hypothesis Testing

Table 8.
Bootstrapping Results (Hypothesis Testing)

Hyp.	Relationship	Path	T-Statistic	P-value
H1	Recognition > Employee Engagement	0.318	3.654	0.000
H2	Work-life Balance > Employee Engagement	0.482	6.822	0.000
H3	Recognition + Work-life Balance > Employee Engagement	R ² =0.524		< 0.05

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 output, processed by the researcher (2025)

The Influence of Recognition on Employee Engagement (H1)

H1 is accepted. Recognition exerts a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.318$; $T = 3.654$; $p = 0.000$). Each one-unit increase in perceived recognition is associated with a 0.318-unit increase in employee engagement, holding other variables constant. This confirms that consistent, meaningful acknowledgment strengthens Generation Z employees' emotional connection to their work and organization.

This finding aligns with (Annurusshadiq et al., 2022), (Ramadhani Bayu & Wahyuningtyas, 2022), (Sadilla & Wahyuningtyas, 2023), and (Jaya et al., 2024). Theoretically, it reinforces Maslow's esteem needs layer: when employees feel genuinely appreciated through verbal thanks, spontaneous applause, or public acknowledgment their higher-order psychological needs are met, driving stronger engagement (Sukrispiyanto, 2019). Generation Z's heightened sensitivity to recognition can be traced to their formative digital environment: having grown up amid the instant, visible validation cycles of social media, this cohort tends to read timely acknowledgment as a direct signal of their value to the organization, an expectation less pronounced among earlier generations (Chillakuri, 2020). However, the comparatively small effect size ($f^2 = 0.130$) suggests that recognition functions more as a maintenance factor than as a primary engagement driver for this cohort: appreciation alone, without accompanying structural support such as flexibility or growth opportunities, appears insufficient to sustain deep engagement on its own. This implies that HR practitioners should treat recognition programs as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, broader engagement strategies embedding structured and consistent appreciation, such as digital peer-recognition platforms, within a wider framework of employee support.

The Influence of Work-life Balance on Employee Engagement (H2)

H2 is accepted. Work-life balance has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.482$; $T = 6.822$; $p = 0.000$) the strongest coefficient in the model. A one-unit improvement in perceived work-life balance corresponds to a 0.482-unit increase in employee engagement. The moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.299$) confirms its dominant role in the model.

These results are consistent with (Sopian et al., 2022), (Rachmadini & Riyanto, 2020), and (Wood et al., 2020). (Fisher et al., 2009) framework provides the theoretical explanation: when work minimally interferes with personal life (low WIPL) and actively enhances it (high WEPL), psychological well-being improves creating conditions for stronger engagement. For Generation Z, who place work-life balance among their top career priorities (Mahardika et al., 2022), these effects are amplified. Notably, work-life balance's substantially larger path coefficient and effect size relative to recognition ($\beta = 0.482$ vs. 0.318; $f^2 = 0.299$ vs. 0.130) warrant closer scrutiny. This finding indicates that Generation Z prioritizes flexibility and psychological well-being over symbolic appreciation, suggesting that organizational policies enabling work-life integration may generate greater engagement than recognition programs alone. A plausible explanation lies in the developmental context of this generation: having entered the workforce during a period marked by heightened awareness of burnout and mental health, Generation Z appears to weight structural conditions time autonomy, boundary protection, and reduced role conflict more heavily than interpersonal gestures of appreciation. This does not diminish the relevance of recognition, but it does suggest that when organizational resources are limited, investment in work-life balance policies may yield a higher return in terms of engagement outcomes. A similar pattern of structural factors outweighing individual-level constructs was reported by (Rohman et al., 2021) at Telkom University, where organizational culture exerted a more dominant influence than employee engagement on employee performance, suggesting that broader organizational and structural conditions often carry greater explanatory weight than interpersonal or individual-level constructs within Indonesian workplace settings.

The Simultaneous Influence on Employee Engagement (H3)

H3 is accepted. With $R^2 = 0.524$, recognition and work-life balance collectively explain 52.4% of the variance in employee engagement a moderate explanatory level. The remaining 47.6% is attributable to factors outside the present model, including transformational leadership, compensation, organizational culture, and growth opportunities. Critically, the two predictors are functionally complementary: employees who feel valued through recognition and perceive a healthy work-life balance exhibit substantially stronger engagement than those who experience only one of these conditions. This synergistic effect points to the need for integrated HR strategies rather than isolated interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that recognition and work-life balance each exert a positive and significant effect on employee engagement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia, both independently and simultaneously. Descriptively, respondents rate recognition as Very Good (86.40%) and work-life balance as Good (83.57%), together producing a Good overall level of employee engagement (83.46%). Work-life balance emerges as the more dominant predictor

($f^2 = 0.299$ vs. 0.130), and both variables jointly explain 52.4% of engagement variance ($R^2 = 0.524$), confirming the value of their integrated application in HR strategy.

Organizations are recommended to pursue two strategic priorities. First, institutionalize a recognition culture through regular employee spotlight programs, digital peer-recognition platforms, and leadership coaching that normalizes verbal thanks, public acknowledgment, and formal appreciation in organizational settings. Second, embed work-life balance into operational policy through flexible scheduling, hybrid work options, strict after-hours communication boundaries, and comprehensive employee well-being programs. The low scores on the *stay* dimension of employee engagement further underline the need for transparent career development pathways to improve long-term retention among Generation Z talent.

This study has three primary limitations. First, only two predictors are included, leaving 47.6% of engagement variance unexplained; future research should incorporate additional antecedents such as transformational leadership, job autonomy, or psychological safety. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference over time; longitudinal designs would capture the dynamic nature of engagement. Third, self-report data may introduce common method bias. Future studies are encouraged to employ multi-source data collection, extend coverage across diverse sectors and regions of Indonesia, and explore potential mediating or moderating mechanisms such as psychological well-being or organizational commitment to deepen understanding of Generation Z employee engagement.

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