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Effect of Learning Climate and Work Overload on Adaptive Performance with Mediation of Employee Engagement among Generation Z Employees in East Java

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *This study examines the effect of learning climate and work overload on adaptive performance, with employee engagement as a mediating variable among Generation Z employees in East Java.* ***Methodology:*** *A quantitative research design was employed using a survey method. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS).* ***Results:*** *The results indicate that learning climate has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement, while work overload has a negative and significant effect on employee engagement. Furthermore, employee engagement positively influences adaptive performance and fully mediates the relationship between learning climate and adaptive performance, as well as between work overload and adaptive performance.* ***Findings:*** *These findings highlight the critical role of employee engagement in translating organizational conditions into adaptive work behavior among Generation Z employees.* ***Novelty & Originality:*** *This study offers novelty by examining the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between organizational conditions and adaptive performance, specifically within the Generation Z cohort in East Java, a demographic context rarely explored in prior research.* ***Conclusions:*** *The study concludes that fostering employee engagement is essential for enhancing adaptive performance among Generation Z workers.* ***Type of Paper:*** *This paper is an empirical research paper.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of the work environment driven by technological advancement, digitalization, and organizational change has increased the demand for employees who are able to adapt effectively. Adaptive performance refers to an individual's ability to adjust behavior, skills, and work strategies in response to changing job demands and uncertain work conditions (Sandria et al., 2022). In the post-pandemic era, organizations increasingly require employees who demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to continuous changes in work systems and expectations.

Generation Z has become a dominant cohort in today's workforce. This generation is characterized by high digital literacy, a strong preference for flexibility, and expectations for

continuous learning opportunities. However, Generation Z employees also face challenges related to workload pressure and adjustment to organizational demands, making employee engagement a crucial factor in supporting adaptive performance (Bakhtawar & Adnan, 2021).

This study adopts the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory as its theoretical framework. Within this framework, learning climate is conceptualized as a job resource that fosters motivation and employee engagement (Restrepo et al., 2022), while work overload represents a job demand that may deplete employees' energy (Hakro et al., 2022). Employee engagement is positioned as a motivational mechanism through which job demands and job resources influence adaptive performance (Bakhtawar & Adnan, 2021).

East Java was selected as the research context due to its status as one of Indonesia's major industrial and economic regions, with a high concentration of Generation Z employees across service and manufacturing sectors.

Based on the theoretical framework and prior empirical findings, this study aims to examine the effect of learning climate and work overload on employee engagement and their implications for adaptive performance among Generation Z employees in East Java.

Research Hypothesis:

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical evidence discussed above, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

H1: Learning climate has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement among Generation Z employees.

H2: Work overload has a negative and significant effect on employee engagement among Generation Z employees.

H3: Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on adaptive performance among Generation Z employees.

H4: Employee engagement mediates the effect of learning climate on adaptive performance among Generation Z employees.

H5: Employee engagement mediates the effect of work overload on adaptive performance among Generation Z employees.

METHOD

Research Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the effects of learning climate and work overload on adaptive performance, with employee engagement as a mediating variable among Generation Z employees in East Java, Indonesia. A survey approach was considered appropriate as it enables the collection of standardized data from a large number of respondents and allows for hypothesis testing using statistical modeling techniques.

The target population consisted of Generation Z employees working in companies located in East Java. In this study, Generation Z was defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2005, in line with widely accepted generational classifications. To ensure that respondents had sufficient work experience to evaluate their work environment, only employees who had been working for at least six months were included in the sample.

A non-probability sampling method was applied using a purposive sampling technique. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria:

1) being a Generation Z employee (born between 1997 and 2005);
2) currently employed in a company located in East Java; and
3) having a minimum tenure of six months in their current organization.

This approach was chosen to ensure that all participants were relevant to the research objectives and possessed adequate exposure to organizational learning climate and workload conditions.

The sample size met the recommended threshold for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. Following common guidelines suggesting a minimum of 100–200 observations for PLS-SEM, the number of valid responses collected was considered sufficient to estimate the proposed structural model and to ensure adequate statistical power.

Respondents were drawn from various organizational sectors, including services and manufacturing, and occupied different job positions, ranging from staff-level employees to supervisory roles. This diversity enhances the representativeness of the sample within the context of Generation Z employees in East Java.

Measures

All constructs in this study were measured using previously validated scales that have been widely applied in organizational and management research. The questionnaire was administered in Indonesian to ensure clarity and comprehension among respondents. All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Learning climate

Learning climate in this study was measured using 12 items. The items were designed to capture employees' perceptions of a work environment that supports learning, including learning opportunities, organisational support for skill development, openness to knowledge sharing, and encouragement of continuous learning. The measurement items were adapted from Cangialosi et al. (2020).

Work Overload

Work overload was measured using 7 items. The items reflect employees' perceptions of excessive job demands, including workload intensity, time pressure, and the amount of work required within limited time frames. The measurement items were adapted from Watanabe et al. (2023).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was measured using 9 items. The items capture employees' levels of energy, dedication, and involvement in their work roles. The measurement items were adapted from Sopian and Ningsih (2024).

Adaptive Performance

Adaptive performance was measured using 12 items. The items reflect employees' ability to adjust their behaviour, skills, and ways of working in response to changing job demands and unexpected work situations. The measurement items were adapted from Kaltiainen and Hakanen (2022).

Data collection Procedure

Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed to Generation Z employees working in companies located in East Java, Indonesia. The survey was conducted over a period of approximately one month. Respondents were approached through professional and social networks, and participation was entirely voluntary.

Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents were provided with an informed consent statement explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances regarding confidentiality and anonymity. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were used solely for academic research purposes. Only respondents who met the predefined criteria were allowed to proceed with the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for predictive research models, its ability to handle complex mediation relationships, and its robustness with relatively moderate sample sizes.

The analysis followed a two-step approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Convergent validity was assessed through average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Second, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesised relationships among variables. Path coefficients, t-values, and confidence intervals were estimated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, as recommended in PLS-SEM literature. Statistical significance was determined based on whether the bias-corrected confidence intervals excluded zero.

To examine the mediating role of employee engagement, mediation analysis was conducted following the bootstrapping approach. The significance of indirect effects was evaluated, and the type of mediation (full or partial) was determined by comparing the direct and indirect effects in the structural model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 126 questionnaires were collected and all responses met the sample selection criteria. The respondents consisted of 49% male and 51% female employees. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (63%), followed by senior high school graduates (24%). In terms of organizational background, the majority worked in service companies (54%), followed by manufacturing firms (42%). Most respondents occupied staff-level positions (79%). Regarding work experience, the largest proportion had worked for more than one year up to three years (43%). In terms of income, most respondents earned between IDR 4,000,000 and IDR 6,000,000 per month (55%).

Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 1. Convergent Validity (Loading Factor)

	Adaptive Performance	Employee Engagement	Learning Climate	Work Overload
AP1	0.820			
AP2	0.853			
AP3	0.844			
AP4	0.798			
AP5	0.838			
AP6	0.844			
AP7	0.827			
AP8	0.829			
AP9	0.785			
AP10	0.879			
AP11	0.813			
AP12	0.857			
AP13	0.864			
EE1		0.833		
EE2		0.882		
EE3		0.827		
EE4		0.817		

	Adaptive Performance	Employee Engagement	Learning Climate	Work Overload
EE5		0.819		
EE6		0.848		
EE7		0.789		
EE8		0.759		
EE9		0.835		
LC1			0.695	
LC2			0.804	
LC3			0.719	
LC4			0.851	
LC5			0.776	
LC6			0.742	
LC7			0.751	
LC8			0.809	
LC9			0.789	
LC10			0.821	
LC11			0.777	
LC12			0.806	
WO1				0.817
WO2				0.776
WO3				0.800
WO4				0.858
WO5				0.773
WO6				0.767
WO7				0.841

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Convergent validity was assessed by examining the loading factor values of each indicator. Indicators with loading factor values ≥ 0.60 are considered acceptable. Based on the results presented in Table 1, all indicators of adaptive performance, employee engagement, learning climate, and work overload show loading factor values above 0.60. Therefore, all indicators are declared valid and suitable for further analysis.

Table 2. Convergent Validity (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Adaptive Performance	0.697
Employee Engagement	0.679
Learning Climate	0.608
Work Overload	0.648

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Convergent validity was also evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 2, all constructs have AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table 3. Fornell Lacker Criterio

Variable	LC	WO	EE	AP
LC	**0.835**			
WO	0.778	**0.824**		
EE	0.675	0.723	**0.780**	
AP	-0.136	-0.190	-0.042	**0.805**

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Based on Table 3, the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that discriminant validity has been established.

Table 4. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Adaptive Performance	0.964	0.968
Employee Engagement	0.941	0.950
Learning Climate	0.941	0.949
Work Overload	0.911	0.928

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. As shown in Table 4, all constructs exceed the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, confirming that the measurement instruments are reliable.

Structural Model Evaluation

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Variable	R^2
Employee Engagement	0.549
Adaptive Performance	0.605

Source: Processed Data, 2026

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model. As presented in Table 5, learning climate and work overload explain 54.9% of the variance in employee engagement, while employee engagement explains 60.5% of the variance in adaptive performance, indicating a moderate explanatory power.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H1	Learning Climate → Employee Engagement	0.717	12.318	<0.000	Accepted
H2	Work Overload → Employee Engagement	-0.160	2.525	<0.000	Accepted
H3	Employee Engagement → Adaptive Performance	0.778	9.257	<0.012	Accepted

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Hypothesis testing was conducted using path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained from the SEM-PLS analysis.

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that learning climate has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement, while work overload has a negative and significant effect on employee

engagement. In addition, employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on adaptive performance. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 are accepted.

Mediation Analysis

Table 7. Mediation Test Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H4	Learning Climate → Employee Engagement → Adaptive Performance	0.557	6.532	<0.000	Accepted
H5	Work Overload → Employee Engagement → Adaptive Performance	-0.124	2.489	<0.013	Accepted

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine the indirect effects of learning climate and work overload on adaptive performance through employee engagement.

The results show that the indirect effects are statistically significant, while the direct effects are not significant, indicating that employee engagement fully mediates the relationship between learning climate and adaptive performance, as well as between work overload and adaptive performance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that a supportive learning climate plays a significant role in enhancing employee engagement among Generation Z employees. A work environment that encourages learning, knowledge sharing, and skill development enables employees to feel more motivated and involved in their work (Restrepo et al., 2022). This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, which categorizes learning climate as a job resource that can foster positive work-related attitudes and behaviors (Bakhtawar & Adnan, 2021).

In contrast, work overload was found to have a negative effect on employee engagement. Excessive workload and time pressure can reduce employees' energy and enthusiasm, leading to lower levels of engagement (Hakro et al., 2022). From the perspective of the JD-R theory, work overload represents a job demand that may result in strain when it exceeds employees' capacity to cope (Bakhtawar & Adnan, 2021). This condition is particularly relevant for Generation Z employees, who tend to value work–life balance and psychological well-being in the workplace.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on adaptive performance. Engaged employees are more likely to display higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption, which enable them to respond effectively to changes, solve problems creatively, and adjust their behavior in dynamic work situations (Sandria et al., 2022). This result highlights the importance of fostering engagement to enhance adaptive capabilities, especially in rapidly changing organizational environments.

Importantly, the mediation analysis reveals that employee engagement fully mediates the relationship between learning climate and adaptive performance, as well as between work overload and adaptive performance. This indicates that learning climate and work overload do not directly influence adaptive performance, but rather exert their effects through employee engagement (Bakhtawar & Adnan, 2021). In other words, organizational conditions must first shape employees' psychological engagement before leading to improved adaptive performance. This finding underscores the central role of employee engagement as a key mechanism linking job resources and job demands to adaptive work behavior.

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