Adaptive Leadership and Organizational Culture: Workplace Happiness as a Bridge to Generation Z Employee Performance—A Conceptual Analysis

* Reva Noor Azizah [1],Kusuma Chandra Kirana [2], Henny Welsa [3]

[1,2,3] Master of Management Study Program, Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[1*]revaazizahsp98@gmail.com
[2]kusumack@ustjogja.ac.id,[3]h.welsa_ust@yahoo.com,

* Corresponding Author

Abstract. The purpose of this research is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how Gen Z workers' levels workplace happiness the effect of adaptive leadership and company culture on their ability to adjust to new situations. In order to analyse the dynamics of employee well-being and performance, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is utilised. This theory classifies job demands and resources. This study lays the theoretical groundwork for future empirical testing by synthesising previous material through a conceptual review technique, which also maps research gaps. Findings suggest that leadership and organisational culture do have an impact on performance, but that there needs to be psychological mediating mechanisms for these effects to be successful due to empirical discrepancies. Thus, according to this theoretical framework, adaptive leadership and organisational culture positively affect Generation Z's adaptable performance, both immediately and indirectly via elevated workplace happiness. In order to tackle the issue of "quiet quitting" and the high expectations for work-life balance among this demographic, this study presents workplace happiness as a crucial link. To put it into practice, this framework helps businesses plan for leadership support and an environment that promotes mental health and decreases the intention to "quiet quit."

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Generation Z Performance, Organizational Culture, Workplace Happiness

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1 Introduction

Employee performance is crucial to an organization's strategic goals, especially in complex and dynamic environments. Companies with outstanding employee performance can boost production by 21% and cut attrition [1]. High performance in public safety influences operational efficiency, public safety, and national stability. High employee engagement increases work satisfaction and fully mediates the engagement-turnover intention relationship, according to research [2].

Improved performance in uncertain circumstances is driven by adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership theory emphasises that modern organisational issues require leadership that promotes learning and adaptability [3]. From the individual to the team and organisational levels, adaptive leadership can improve resilience, having the greatest benefit at the team level [4]. Concurrently, organizational culture serves as a shared value system that shapes employee behavior and attitudes [5].

Previous research has revealed that, in the context of Ghana's security services, employee agility—driven by commitment and engagement—significantly enhances the adaptive capacity of security personnel [6]. The characteristics of Generation Z, which dominates the new workforce, bring different values regarding work-life balance, a preference for flexible work environments, and a greater need for recognition [7].

The ideal scenario is the creation of synergy between adaptive leadership and a conducive organizational culture, resulting in optimal performance through mechanisms that foster workplace happiness. In this ideal scenario, adaptive leaders encourage innovation and learning to traverse the workplace, while a strong organisational culture provides values and norms that promote common goals. Workplace happiness engagement, work satisfaction, and affective commitment enables leadership and culture inputs to produce greater performance [8].

Leadership, organisational culture, and performance are linked in principle, but empirical data shows otherwise. According to recent study, remote workers' performance is best when work engagement mediates the relationship between job attributes (change self-efficacy, work autonomy, and perceived organisational support) [9]. This indicates that direct pathways from organizational variables to performance are not always effective without the presence of mediating psychological mechanisms.

The issue becomes even more complex when considering the unique characteristics of Generation Z as the research subjects. The phenomenon of "quiet quitting," which is prevalent among Gen Z, shows that this generation tends to reject intense competition and prioritizes work-life balance [7]. Working conditions, job security, and perceived career development opportunities significantly influence Gen Z's decision to remain committed to the organization. In the context of the Junior Non-Commissioned Officers corps, which is dominated by young personnel, this issue becomes crucial because high job demands can conflict with this generation's preferences for flexibility and well-being.

The implementation of algorithmic management practices and digital transformation has altered the dynamics of workplace well-being. A study of 21,869 European organizations shows that algorithmic management practices have a moderate influence on workplace well-being; however, they indirectly have a negative

impact through a reduction in job autonomy and perceived justice [10]. This paradox demonstrates that management modernization does not necessarily improve employee well-being, especially when humanistic aspects are neglected.

Specific issues within the public security sector add a unique layer of complexity. Servant leadership in the Bangladesh Police confronts long hours, poor logistical assistance, stress, and an unjust performance evaluation system [11]. Similar conditions may exist within the Samapta Directorate, where high power distance and a rigid hierarchical structure can hinder the effectiveness of adaptive leadership in influencing performance. There is a common assumption that strict discipline is the sole key to performance, but recent literature suggests that for Generation Z, pressure without psychological support actually reduces performance [12].

Addressing literature inconsistencies is crucial. Most studies show that leadership improves employee performance, but the results vary by circumstance. Transformational leadership is directly and positively connected with innovative work behaviour, but psychological capital hope and self-efficacy mediates this relationship [13]. On the other hand, other studies reveal that digital transformation has a contradictory relationship with firm performance, where environmental uncertainty actually strengthens this relationship [14]. These findings challenge the common assumption that leadership directly and consistently improves performance without considering mediating mechanisms.

A deeper academic paradox emerges when considering paradoxical leadership behavior (PLB). Several studies have found that members' reactions to PLB vary depending on individual cognitive traits and abilities [15]. Members with lower self-regulation abilities find it more difficult to understand seemingly contradictory leadership behavior, leading them to perceive the leader as unpredictable. This situation can disrupt performance and reduce well-being. Conversely, followers with strong self-regulation skills can actually thrive under adaptive leadership. This paradox creates an academic tension regarding when and how adaptive leadership is most effective.

Inconsistent findings exist on job instability and employee workplace behaviours. A meta-analysis shows a complex curvilinear relationship: job instability, task performance, and OCB-organization show a negative relationship that turns positive after an inflection point, validating the preservation motivation idea [16]. This contradiction challenges organisational relationship linearity assumptions.

Supporting research suggests mediation mechanisms explain these inconsistencies. Through serial mediation, resilience and job engagement affect employee performance in sustainable HRM approaches [17]. Similarly, Workplace well-being also affects sustainable HRM and engagement, as it increases engagement and work satisfaction [18].

This study provides an integrative model that mediates the effects of adaptive leadership and organisational culture on employee performance using workplace happiness as a mediator. According to this solution, leadership and culture do not directly affect performance but rather psychological transformation that leads to workplace happiness. Engaging leadership affects employee engagement and team success through personal (optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, adaptability) and team (performance feedback, trust in management, communication) resources) [1].

Based on the previously presented phenomenon, this study was conducted with

the aim to: (1) find out and analyze the positive effects of adaptive leadership, organizational culture, and workplace happiness on Generation Z's performance; (2) find out and analyze the positive effects of adaptive leadership and organizational culture on Generation Z's happiness at work; (3) find out and analyze the positive effect of workplace happiness in mediating the positive impact of adaptive leadership on Generation Z's performance; and (4) find out and analyze the positive effect of workplace happiness in mediating the positive impact of organizational culture on Generation Z's performance.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) is a comprehensive theoretical framework used to analyze employee well-being, behavior, and performance within organizations [19]. The JD-R Theory divides work characteristics into demands and resources. employment demands are physical, psychological, social, or organisational factors that need sustained effort and can cause weariness, while employment resources help fulfil work goals, minimise demands, and encourage personal growth [20].

Conceptually, job resources such as Leaders, autonomy, and perceived organisational support boost work engagement and adaptable performance [21]. Recent findings suggest that shift self-efficacy, work autonomy, and organisational support directly affect performance and mediate the relationship between job qualities and employee productivity. Accordingly, the JD-R theory emphasises the need to balance work demands and resources to sustainably optimise employee performanc e[22].

In this study, JD-R Theory describes how adaptive leadership and organisational culture can boost job engagement and performance. It also describes how job resources motivate people by meeting their basic demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness [23].

2.2 Generation Z Employee Performance

Employee performance is defined as the work outcomes achieved by an individual in carrying out their tasks and responsibilities in accordance with standards set by the organization. Research indicates that employee performance is a multidimensional outcome encompassing task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance [24]. Task performance refers to the execution of formal tasks as outlined in the job description; contextual performance encompasses behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness beyond formal tasks; and adaptive performance refers to an employee’s ability to adapt to change.

In an ever-changing work environment, employee performance is measured not only by productivity but also by adaptability and contributions to the organization’s overall goals. According to research, leadership, job happiness, and the work environment affect employee performance, with organisational culture strengthening these linkages [25].

2. 3. Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes a leader's ability to foster adaptation and learning in the face of contemporary organizational challenges [26]. Unlike technical leadership, which focuses on immediate solutions, adaptive leadership promotes organizational learning and behavioral change to address problems that do not have simple solutions. In the post-COVID era, characterized by instability and constant change, traditional leadership theories are no longer sufficient, necessitating an integrated framework to explain the challenges and essential skills required of leaders [27].

In an increasingly complex and discontinuous public service landscape, adaptive leadership plays a critical role in building organizational resilience through the reinforcement of ethical practices and responsiveness to crises. Fundamentally, adaptive leadership is sharply distinguished from traditional leadership styles; traditional leadership tends to focus on authoritatively providing technical solutions, while adaptive leadership emphasizes empowering followers to manage adaptive challenges independentl [28].

From an academic perspective, various studies indicate a positive and direct correlation between adaptive leadership and an organization's readiness for change. This relationship is reinforced by the role of innovative behavior as a significant mediator, which enables organizations not only to survive difficult situations but also to thrive sustainably through crises [28]. Thus, adaptive leadership acts as a catalyst that transforms difficulties into learning opportunities, ultimately shaping an organizational structure that is resilient and adaptive to a dynamic environment.

Research shows that leadership plays a crucial role in creating a data-driven culture conducive to digital transformation and in strengthening employees' skills and competencies [29]. Adaptive leadership is becoming increasingly important for Generation Z, who value flexibility, career growth, and a work environment aligned with the values of sustainability and diversity [30].

2.4 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as a configuration of values, norms, goals, and collective expectations that are internalized by all members of an organization to systematically enhance commitment and work performance [31]. Organisational culture affects staff interactions, decision-making, and daily duties. Organisational culture moderates the relationship between leadership, job happiness, the workplace, and employee performance, according to research [25].

Fundamentally, organizational culture acts as a key determinant that guides individual behavior, drives productivity, and ensures long-term sustainability through the development of distinctive organizational capabilities. The essence of this organizational culture is often reflected in the proposition "how things are done here," which describes standardized patterns of interaction and task execution within the work environment.

From a contemporary HRM perspective, organizational culture is not merely a social backdrop but functions as a strategic instrument that aligns individual aspirations with the collective vision. A strong culture enables organizations to

navigate environmental changes with greater stability, as ingrained values provide moral and professional guidance for employees in decision-making. Therefore, the effectiveness of leadership in driving adaptive performance depends heavily on the extent to which organizational culture can foster innovation and flexibility amid the complexity of industry challenges[31].

In the era of digital transformation, organizational culture must focus on sustainability and innovation so that organizations can compete both locally and globally[32]. The knowledge management cycle also affects employee engagement and organisational culture, which are linked to work satisfaction and culture[33].

2.5 Workplace Happiness

Workplace happiness is an optimistic mental state that workers encounter when they are at work, including contentment with one's employment, active participation in tasks, and emotional investment in the company's success. Engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional organisational commitment contribute to employee grit [34].

Workplace happiness is a multidimensional concept that represents employees' positive affective state toward their overall work experience. Conceptually, workplace happiness has a broader emotional scope than job satisfaction, as it integrates aspects of engagement, positive affect, and meaningfulness in work. Cross-cultural studies indicate that the dimensions of Psychological Capital (PsyCap)—which include hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and happiness—can explain approximately 59% of the variance in workplace well-being [35]. This confirms that employees' internal psychological factors are key determinants in shaping a positive work ecosystem [36].

In the context of organizational mechanisms, workplace happiness serves as a crucial mediator linking organizational values to employee behavioral outcomes. Koul's (2024) findings confirm that workplace happiness acts as a mediating variable between workplace spirituality and overall employee well-being. Thus, for future-oriented organizations, prioritizing employee happiness is not merely an effort to boost short-term job satisfaction but a fundamental strategy for building resilience and sustainable well-being at both the individual and organizational levels [37].

CSR focused on primary and secondary stakeholders improves employee work satisfaction and happiness management, with job satisfaction mediating the relationship[38]. The sustainable HRM framework emphasises workplace well-being for employee engagement and satisfaction [39].

3 Methodology

This work uses a conceptual method to explain theoretical elements and create a fresh interpretation based on literature synthesis. In line with the perspective presented in, This conceptual examination identifies research gaps and lays the groundwork for empirical testing. This study adopts a conceptual analysis approach by synthesizing various theories, concepts, and previous literature to build a conceptual framework [60]. This method is chosen because the research is not focused on testing empirical data, but rather aims to clarify the boundaries of constructs, map the interrelations

between concepts, identify theoretical gaps, and formulate research propositions that can be applied in future empirical studies [60]. The analysis was carried out by examining four main constructs: adaptive leadership, organizational culture, workplace happiness, and Generation Z employee performance. This study integrates relevant and contextual literature to analyse the connections between the primary variables and create a test-ready conceptual model for future research. This framework aims to answer several key questions: (1) Do Adaptive Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Workplace Happiness have a positive effect on Generation Z's performance? (2) Do Adaptive Leadership and Organizational Culture have a positive effect on Generation Z's workplace happiness? (3) Does workplace happiness mediate the positive effect of Adaptive Leadership on Generation Z's performance? (4) Does workplace happiness mediate the positive effect of Organizational Culture on Generation Z's performance?

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Adaptive Leadership and Workplace Happiness

Adaptive leadership, which adapts to change, is projected to boost Generation Z employee happiness. Leadership may boost job engagement by meeting employees' psychological needs, according to the JD-R Theory [23]. Past study shows that engaging leadership affects work engagement through optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptability. Engaging leaders help subordinates develop resilience and adaptability to novel work settings. These findings suggest that leaders who inspire, empower, and connect with their followers create a stimulating workplace that boosts staff resource s[1].

Generation Z wants flexible, career-focused, and responsive leaders [40]. The study of new nurses from Generations Y and Z found that career growth and task-related work values are significantly associated with job satisfaction, particularly for Generation Z, while task, reputation, and environment-related work values were associated with Generation Y. These findings suggest that structured programs to help Generation Z nurses grow professionally and improve job satisfaction are needed [41]. A Chinese study of Generation Z employees found that working conditions, job security, perceived career development opportunities, affective organisational commitment, and perceived organisational support positively affect employee well-being and negatively impact "quiet quit" intentions" [42].

Adaptive leaders who can create a safe work environment for experimentation and encourage learning from failure can enhance employees' sense of meaningfulness and job satisfaction. Based on Self-determination theory suggests that inclusive leadership promotes psychological safety and error-learning to improve meaningful work. Because it improves job qualities, inclusive leadership makes work meaningful [43]. Daily transformational leadership has been shown to increase followers' work engagement [44].

4.2 Organizational Culture and Workplace Happiness

A positive organizational culture is expected to influence workplace happiness. Research shows that the knowledge management cycle has a positive impact on employee engagement, and engagement significantly influences job satisfaction and organizational culture [33]. An organizational culture that is people-oriented, prioritizes employee well-being, and supports innovation can increase employee satisfaction and engagement.

Generation Z highly values an organizational culture that supports diversity, sustainability, and social responsibility [45]. Organizations that adapt their culture and strategies to prioritize sustainability will be better positioned to enhance employee happiness [32]. A Chinese research of Generation Z employees found that work circumstances, job security, perceived career advancement prospects, emotional organisational commitment, and perceived organisational support improve employee well-being. Employee well-being negatively affects Gen Z employees' quiet resigning intentions, while job burnout positively affects them. These findings help organisations and practitioners address these factors and prevent quiet quitting intentions [42].

In the context of sustainable HRM, a culture that supports employee well-being has been shown to increase engagement[39]. Inclusive leadership approaches that foster personal growth are important, especially in cultures that reward high performance and dedication like Indonesia [46].

4.3 Workplace Happiness and Employee Performance

Workplace happiness is a multifaceted idea. Employee performance is projected to improve with workplace happiness, which includes work engagement, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. The JD-R Theory states that work engagement vigor, devotion, and absorption is directly linked to improved performance [47]. Burnout is work-related tiredness and cynicism, while work engagement is vigour, determination, and absorption. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory is used to predict employee well-being, work behaviours, and performance [48]. Over the past decade, the JD-R theory has undergone four major innovations: the person-situation approach, multilevel theory, proactive approach, and work-home resources model, which enhances understanding of how demands and resources impact employee well-being and performance [19].

High employee engagement maintains work satisfaction and performance [49]. A study of 203 Romanian employees found that transformational leadership improves work engagement and performance by integrating organisational processes and outcomes into a unified framework that shows how leadership style affects employee commitment, engagement, well-being, burnout, and performance [50]. Engagement is contagious and caused by socio-psychological processes. Coworkers, bosses, and intimate relationships can foster engagement. Teams with engaged members synchronise their actions and perform better, and leaders can impact employee work engagement through quick (unconscious) and slow (conscious) influence methods [51].

Research suggests that telework satisfaction improves subjective well-being and self-reported performance, with well-being mediating the link [52]. Engagement,

job satisfaction, and affective organisational commitment boost employee resilience and adaptation, which boosts long-term performance[34].

4.4 Adaptive Leadership and Employee Performance

In addition to its indirect influence through workplace happiness, adaptive leadership is also expected to have a direct impact on employee performance. Research shows that inclusive leadership significantly improves workplace performance by influencing task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance [24]. Adaptive leaders can directly enhance performance by providing clear direction, appropriate support, and constructive feedback. In Pakistan's healthcare sector, adaptive leadership influences safety citizenship behaviours through readiness to change, psychosocial safety climate, and proactive personality, indicating significant implications for organisations in stable and uncertain environments [53].

Transformational leadership behaviours like intellectual stimulation and individual concern foster personal initiative, which predicts next-day job performance [47]. A cross-sectional study of 584 intensive care nurses in China found that transformational leadership directly affects job performance and partially mediates it through psychological empowerment and work engagement, with mediation effects of 24.64% and 21.74%, respectively. Transformational leadership and job performance are also mediated by psychological empowerment and work engagement, with a 15.94% mediation impact [54].

In the post-COVID era, digital leaders need to develop new skills to drive organizational performance and employee motivation [27]. A new institutional theory study indicated that digital transformational leadership and organisational agility positively affect digital transformation, with organisational agility mediating the link. These findings illuminate how leadership styles and organisational agility can boost digital transformation [55]. An expanded Job Demands-Resources theory, designed to understand how organizations and employees cope with COVID-19 and other crises, confirms that regulatory strategies employed by leaders and organizations can modify the impact of demands and resources on employee well-being and performance outcomes during times of crisis and turbulence [56].

4.5 Organizational Culture and Employee Performance

Organizational culture is also likely to affect employee performance directly. Research shows that leadership, job happiness, and work environment affect employee performance, with organisational culture reinforcing these impacts [25]. A strong organizational culture creates clarity of expectations, consistency in behavior, and alignment of values that support the achievement of high performance. A quantitative SEM-PLS study of 254 respondents found that leadership, job happiness, work environment, and organisational culture significantly affect employee performance. A culture that values integrity, synergy, honesty, adaptability, and respect strengthens the behavioural translation of commitment into performance, according to empirical findings. This confirms that culture is not merely a backdrop—but rather a system of meaning that guides actions [25].

In digital transformation, organizational capabilities—influenced by

technological, organizational, and environmental dimensions—play an intermediary role in driving organizational success [57]. A culture that supports innovation, collaboration, and employee skill development can directly improve both individual and team performance. According to the "environment-behavior-performance" paradigm, technological turbulence directly improves job performance and indirectly improves it through a chain mediation pathway involving workplace digitalisation and job crafting[58]. A PLS-SEM study found that employees who use technology at work perform better, mediated by job meaningfulness and reinforced by proactive personality qualities. These findings may encourage companies to motivate and offer flexible job structures to improve technology use [59].

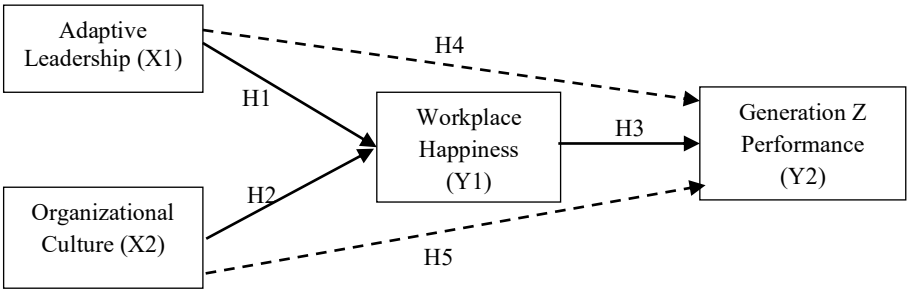

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 1. The research conceptual framework was derived from theoretical discussions and the integration of previous empirical studies. This conceptual model proposes that Adaptive Leadership and Organizational Culture have a positive influence on Generation Z employees' performance, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of Workplace Happiness. This flow of relationships among the variables aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory in explaining motivational processes, in which adaptive lea dership and a healthy organizational culture are viewed as essential job resources. In this model, Workplace Happiness plays a crucial role as a mediator; leaders who are flexible and capable of navigating the complexities of tasks will foster a sense of security, which in turn enhances work engagement and the performance of young non-commissioned officers. The same applies to the Organizational Culture element, where reinforcing collaborative values and clear procedures will increase job satisfaction and the affective commitment of personnel, which ultimately impacts the optimization of task, contextual, and adaptive performance of young non-commissioned officers in the field.

5 Conclusion

Rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, this conceptual study formulates a model that highlights workplace happiness as a central mediating variable. The model conceptualizes how adaptive leadership and organizational culture influence Generation Z employees' performance, positioning these elements as part of a job resources system that supports individual well-being and performance within the organization. Leadership

and culture directly affect performance, although empirical contradictions require further study of intermediary mechanisms. Thus, adaptive leadership and a supportive culture boost performance directly and indirectly by increasing workplace pleasure, which is compatible with the JD-R theory's motivational processes.

Contextually, this idea is highly relevant for analyzing the dynamics of Generation Z employees, who are characterized by the phenomenon of "quiet quitting," a rejection of hyper-competition, and high demands for work-life balance and career development guarantees. The theoretical novelty of this paper lies in positioning workplace happiness as an essential bridge that has not yet been fully mapped in the literature on this generation's performance. From a managerial perspective, this framework helps managers optimise leadership support and work climate to improve employee well-being and prevent "quiet quit." Future study should use PLS-SEM to quantitatively evaluate these theoretical assertions in a wider sample and more diversified organisational environments.

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