

Understanding generation Z's job engagement and performance in generationally diverse workplace

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ABSTRACT

While many experts and professionals recognize the significance of employee engagement for job performance, there is a lack of research focused on generation Z, who are expected to constitute the majority of Vietnam's future workforce. The emergence of generation Z in the workplace could create difficulties for organizational management and human resources professionals due to the increase in generational diversity. This study addressed the gap above by investigating key factors affecting the employee engagement of Vietnamese generation Z, and examine the degree of engagement influencing their job performance in the context of Vietnamese generationally diverse workplaces. Quantitative methods were utilized with primary data from an online structured survey of 258 Vietnamese generation Z in Ho Chi Minh City. The data were analysed by statistics techniques such as EFA, CFA and SEM via SPSS and AMOS software. The findings showed that supporting supervisor, working environment, and co-worker relationships positively influenced generation Z's engagement, which leads to higher job performance. However, training and development, and compensation and benefit demonstrated no relationship with their engagement, hence, no correlation with job performance was found. This study provides an academic contribution to the comprehension of generational diversity and employee engagement within the Vietnamese business setting. Additionally, practical recommendations for employee engagement were suggested, with an emphasis on the importance of supportive supervisors.

1. Introduction

In response to changing workforce composition, this is the first presence of all four generations in the workplace, including Baby Boomer, Generation X, Y and Z with different work values and expectations. Diversity within a workforce can have both positive and negative effects on companies, as it can result in either conflict between different generations or increased productivity depending on the quality of the organizational management. Therefore, the presence of a diverse workforce can be seen as a double-edged sword. Specifically, Vietnam, an Asian country of Confucian culture, is experiencing the golden population structure with an abundance of young and potentially excellent human capital, in which generation Z is predicted to make up

one-third of the future Vietnamese workforce by 2025. In addition, maintaining high levels of performance and morale among various employees in Vietnamese businesses is commonly viewed as achievable through the implementation of Employee Engagement (EE), which is considered a suitable human resources strategy (Ehambaranathan, Samie, & Murugasu, 2014). Because of the rarity of long-term engagement, there is a need to examine employee engagement among generation Z as their work preferences are greatly associated with their job performance, yet different to other generations, who have been widely researched. Previous study found that most age diversity-related research has been conducted in Western countries since 1991, but lacks studies in the generational diversity in developing countries or Asian context (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Also, the Western culture and work preferences are quite distinct from the Confucius countries, in which the ignorance of cultural differences might lead to misperceptions and conflicts on specific dimensions (e.g., collectivism-individualism shapes distinct thought and behaviour patterns). In relation to Vietnam, it is noted that retirement rate is higher than that of other countries in Asia region, which lead to the increase of the participation of young workforce into the workplace (Bartram & Cooke, 2022; Ehambaranathan et al., 2014). As such, the workplace becomes more generational and diverse. While research on employee engagement has been much offered from other contexts, research on employee engagement of generation Z in Vietnam is still limited (Bartram & Cooke, 2022). To address this gap, this research aims to identify key factors affecting the employee engagement of Vietnamese generation Z, and examine the degree of engagement influencing their job performance in the context of Vietnamese generationally diverse workplaces. There were two research questions this study adapted to.

1. What key determinants have an impact on Vietnamese generation Z's employee engagement in the context of workplace's generational diversity?
2. How is generation Z's job performance affected by their employee engagement in the workplace's generational diversity?

The findings are expected to bridge the literature gap by validating the social identity theory underpins this study's conceptual framework and assessing individual identification in the attitudes and engagement of generation Z in the Vietnamese workplaces, which also extends the current knowledge of diversity and generation theory with the mediation of employee engagement to individual performance. Furthermore, this study would help practitioners understand the concept of employee engagement among young workers and choose the most significant practices to boost their job performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Related theory

This study used the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) to build up the research framework (Tajfel, 1978). This theory proposes that "part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Individuals often identify themselves based on their social characteristics, such as their gender, nationality, age, or profession. This identification creates a sense of belonging to a particular group and differentiates them from others. In an organization, where individuals hold various roles in different departments and units, the organization can serve as a source of social identity, offering an alternative understanding of business behaviors and work-related outcomes. This cognitive bond between the individual and the organization is linked to the employee's work behaviors, such as their commitment and engagement. The employee's individual membership within the organization

reflects their desirable attitudes and behaviors in terms of their extra efforts and motivation. Terry (2003) argues that there can be multiple identities that an individual holds, especially generation-related differences, which are discussed further in this study. Acknowledging the work preferences among generational cohorts, particularly generation Z, can enhance organizational performance by recognizing the importance of social identity for operational effectiveness.

2.2. Generational diversity

According to Strauss and Howe's (1991) generational cohort theory, individuals who share the same 20-year birth period are grouped into a specific generation. The social and economic events that occur during a generation's lifetime shape their shared values, beliefs, and behaviors. In the contemporary workplace, numerous authors have acknowledged and compared the work values of the four main generations, which include Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y, and Z (Bencsik, Juhász, & Horváth-Csikós, 2016). The differences in work values among generations can be associated with the discussed Social Identity Theory (SIT), which characterizes the generational personality in each cohort toward work-related events. Employees tend to categorize themselves as part of the social ingroup of their generation, which has similar attributes to themselves, as opposed to the outgroup. As a result of the increasing mobility and changing demographics in today's business environment, such generational classifications can be found in the organization. This classification can act as a catalyst for organizational competitive advantage by promoting innovation and knowledge sharing for better outcomes, particularly with the presence of a multi-generational workforce.

2.3. Employee Engagement (EE)

Kahn (1990) defines EE as "the harnessing of organisation member's selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance" (p. 694). Similar definitions of Lee, Aravamudhan, Roback, Lim, and Ruane (2021); Ehambaranathan et al. (2014) also demonstrate the positive attitude an engaged employee continuously expresses within their roles, group and enterprises. Engagement heightens individuals' enthusiasm, commitment and dedication that they possibly go extra miles and outperform than others. It means that engaged employees have the ability to handle the demands of a job, supported by their sense of strenuous and active link to what they do (Schaufeli, Salanova, Lez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Such willingness to fully involve in role performance is determined by the three psychological states, namely meaningfulness (work elements), safety (social systems such as interpersonal and intergroup relationship, management style, norms) and availability (accessible individual physical, emotional, cognitive resources) (Kahn, 1990). As Schaufeli et al. (2002) propose, engagement is measured by vigor (level of energy persistence), dedication (level of perseverance and devotion), and absorption (level of full concentration on work in the long term) through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) 9-items of Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006), which will be adopted for this study's measurement scale. These findings are parallel with the degree of identification an individual has within a specific organisation, meaning they create a psychological bond to reinforce and engage with the company's goals and expectations. Based on the SIT discussed earlier, high identification within a particular organisation will determine high engagement with their work and company's goals. Meanwhile, the less identity a worker gets, the more likely they become disengaged and responsible for personal interest rather than mutual benefits. Over-engagement, on the other hand, also pushes employees to burnout and negative thinking. Engaged employees are associated with a positive attitude, and increased productivity and financial performance, compared to the higher turnover intention among their less engaged counterparts. Therefore, the

extent to which employees engage with their job and company is a predictor of their job performance and business effectiveness.

2.4. Generation Z's work preferences and their engagement

This research study focuses on the engaged employees belonging to the generation Z cohort. Existing studies have labeled individual generation based on their characteristics: "optimistic" - Baby Boomers, "special" - Generation X, "tenacious" - Generation Y, "tech-savvy" - Generation Z. Followed by the increasing participation of generation Z in the labour market (Anders, 2020), generational studies about them have been widely conducted, especially in the context of work management. Despite the controversy in the literature about their exact birth years range and classification, this study adopts the view that generation Z were born from 1995 to 2010 (Baker et al., 2019), a period of peace making them more optimistic about future than Baby Boomers born post World War II.

Compared to previous generations, a number of authors have recognised their distinct work and life preferences (Bejtkovský, 2016). They accord to the ingroup norms with different perception about life, time usage, meaningful relationship and ways of communication, making them "competitive, discriminatory, and conflictual" than older generations (Terry, 2003). The extensive access as well as attachment to technology and social networks during their upbringing classifies them as "digital integrators". Compared to generation Y, the first cohort of the technological revolution, generation Z was raised in the era of digital transformation, technologically sophisticated with smart devices and social platforms (Bencsik et al., 2016). To put it simply, technology is their identity in which the digital world drives their lifestyle and shapes their characteristics to be always connected to the virtual world. Getting high exposure to technology, they are able to digitalise everything like data searching and processing on the Internet. Such a tendency might pose challenges to older generations, who do not get used to advanced technology, sometimes causing them to move apart from each other. While instant messages are popular to Z-ers, they value in-person communication, especially with those in higher levels (Bejtkovský, 2016). According to Cameron and Pagnattaro (2017), the nature of virtual life and developed education has improved their critical judgement, giving straightforward opinions towards specific topics so that they are believed to be innovative, smart and creative in thinking. They have their own arguments, choosing a career that attracts them rather than following others' demands (Baker et al., 2019). A study of Bencsik et al. (2016) demonstrates their change-taker mindset, practicality and flexibility in the complex environment. Members of generation Z express a high willingness to do any given task, because of recognition and influential desire instead of monetary rewards (Bejtkovský, 2016). In contrast, Tapscott (2009) argues that high paycheque is their top motivator. There should be alternative training methods to fit their learning styles (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017). Also, Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018) hold the same view on generation Z's expectation, including flexibility in work arrangement and positive relationship with colleagues.

2.5. Job performance

According to Griffin and Moorhead (2014), job performance is considered as work-related behaviours, which can be understood as monetary and non-monetary gains to the organisation (Anitha, 2014). More detail, Katz (1964) divides job performance into in-role performance prescribed in job description, and contingent behaviours. The assigned roles required by the organisation must entail quantity and quality of performance to some extent, while the variability and spontaneity in sources of human actions enhance innovation and adaptability to environmental changes. While Campbell (1990) defines the first element as work performance, he argued that job

performance depends much on how employee actually do and take to facilitate the achievement of company's goals, instead of its outcomes because they have control over their own behaviours. Simply put, Campbell (1990) suggests that the organisational effective functioning stems from "individual behaviours or actions that are relevant to the goals of the organisation" (p. 704).

2.6. Hypothesis development and research model

2.6.1. Working environment and EE

According to Soliman and Wahba (2019), there exists a positive correlation between the working environment and EE, which is defined as the establishment of a safe and healthy work atmosphere (Anitha, 2014). From the perspectives of generation Z, a meaningful workplace motivating them entails flexibility and independence in work arrangements that promotes the balance of work-life barriers (Alang & Tran, 2022). Moreover, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) hold the same view about the state of disengagement from a perceived sense of unfairness within the organisation. Generation Z who prioritise transparency and equality would let off their engagement (Barhate & Dirani, 2021) and withdraw their feeling of psychological meaningfulness.

2.6.2. Compensation and benefits and EE

Compensation and benefit can be taken in the form of intrinsic (e.g., recognition, gift vouchers, etc.) and extrinsic reward package (e.g., salaries, bonuses). Argued by Saks (2006), this is regarded as the exchange between employees and the organisation when employees receive repayment from the organisation for their engagement deeply involved in job performance. Kahn (1990) also commented that an individual's engagement is a part of their belief in the resources and benefits they can get. In short, their level of engagement is determined by the attractiveness of salary and benefit, which is essential to generation Z, a generational cohort favouring competitive compensation and benefit (Bejtkovský, 2016).

2.6.3. Supervisory support and EE

Low levels of support from the supervisors and employee disengagement are closely correlated. Since psychological safety adheres to the ability to express and employ the self without the fear of consequences, care and support from supervisors get employees immersed themselves in their role-related tasks (Kahn, 1990). An empirical study of May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) also found the origin of psychology safety stemming from the relations with supportive supervisors. Supportive actions such as concerns towards employee's wellbeing, voice, involvement, inclusion and development are likely to engender perception of safety, enhancing individual membership and their dedication at work. Without such supportiveness, generation Z may withdraw their engagement and obligation, who have high in-person expectations in those level up (Bejtkovský, 2016) such as mentoring and extensive feedback.

2.6.4. Co-worker relationship and EE

There is an inconsistency in generation Z's preference for team climate. Using Method of Empathy-Based Stories (MEBS), a mix of surveys and interviews, Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018) highlight the bad perception of generation Z towards team climate, who lack necessary interpersonal skills and have distinct work preferences compared to others. Barhate and Dirani (2021) hold the contradictory view of their aspiration for a positive working interaction with their colleagues that contributes to their work meaningfulness (May et al., 2004). Also, interpersonal harmony between co-worker links to psychological safety. Although May et al. (2004) found lower psychological safety from the boundaries of team norms, the SIT of Tajfel (1978) and engagement study of Kahn (1990) are in line with the comfort of ingroup members towards the governed

appropriate behaviours and attitudes. In other words, cohesion in group can be enhanced as employees are more agreeable and respect towards their colleagues' opinions.

2.6.5. Training and development and EE

Numerous existing literatures highlight the strong consciousness of generation Z towards training and development (e.g., Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018), who shows unique learning styles from previous generations (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017). It is evidence that adequate learning opportunities promote psychological availability and meaningfulness, explained by the timely and structured career development plan preparing necessary capability and increasing employees' sense of fulfillment and security at work (Kahn, 1990). As long as they feel confidence in new role-related tasks, they are more likely to engage and stay in the current enterprise, especially generation Z whose ambition in career advancement navigates their interest in specific companies rather than others' command (Baker et al., 2019). Alternatively, the more they perceive an organisation invests in their career development, the higher engagement they display within their job performance.

2.6.6. EE and job performance

Studies on the outputs of engagement have shown a close connection to job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and turnover, and high performance. Since engagement has an impact on people's attitudes and behaviour (Kahn, 1990), their performance at work relies on their engagement level. Given a variety of research on the engagement-job performance influence (e.g., Anitha, 2014; Saks, 2006), this paper attempts to measure the strength of such relationship in the context of generational diverse workplace as a result of previous proposed hypotheses.

The research framework is constructed in Figure 1.

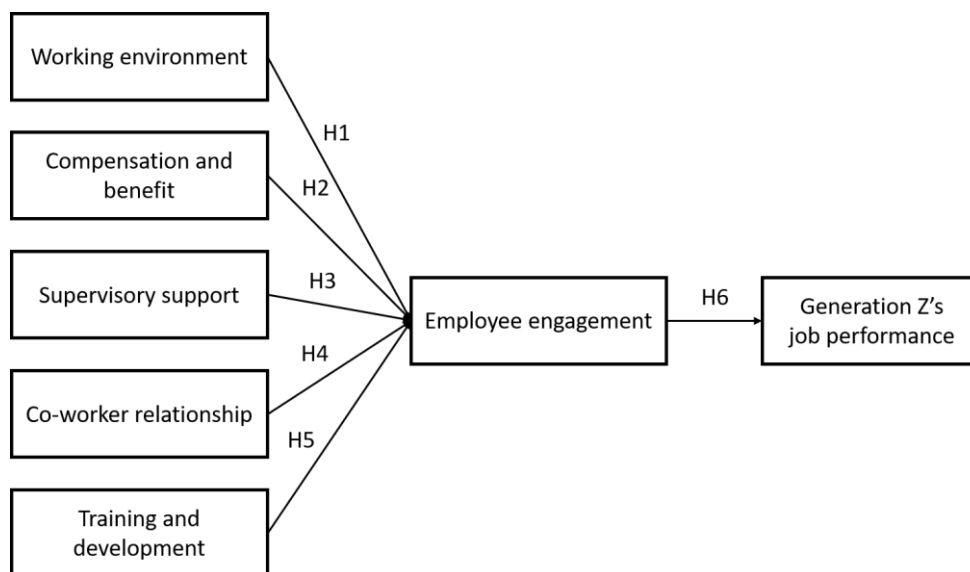


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

H1: Working environment positively influences generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity

H2: Compensation and benefits positively influence generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity

H3: Supervisor support positively influences generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity

H4: Co-worker relationships positively influence generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity

H5: Training and development positively influence generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity

H6: EE positively influences the job performance of generation Z employees in the workplace's generational diversity

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach to examine the aforementioned hypotheses. The convenience sampling is chosen to target Vietnamese generation Z (1995 - 2010) currently accommodating in Ho Chi Minh City, and the total sample size was 299, in which there were 258 valid responses (97% valid rate). The measurement scale consisted of 07 constructs: Working environment; compensation and benefit; supervisor support; co-worker relationship; training and development; employee engagement; and job performance with 37 scale items. All these constructs were adopted from previous studies such as Saks (2006); May et al. (2004). Five-point Likert scale was utilized in this study. The answers ranged from 1 - 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 - 'Strongly Agree'. The questionnaires also included demographic questions. The questionnaire was designed in the Google form, in which pilot study was made from 12 - 15th February for appropriate modification before publicising it to the sampling target mentioned above through the Internet, mainly on social media such as Facebook via a shortened link from 12 - 27th March. Primary data then will be demonstrated in Excel file before applying SPSS and AMOS to analyse and draw conclusions from descriptive analysis, EFA, CFA and SEM.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample description

As showed in Table 1 (see Table 1), 258 responses from generation Z were valid, including 59% female and 41% male. Overall, the highest education level is Bachelor's degree (78%) with intern being the most prominent working position (63%) and 01 generational gap in supervisor-employee relationship being the most popular (54%). These characteristics of sample reflects representatives of the research population.

Table 1

Respondents' demographic information

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	152	59%
	Male	106	41%
Education level	High school diploma	36	14%
	Associate degree	11	4%
	Bachelor's degree	200	78%
	Master's degree and above	11	4%
Working position	Intern	163	63%
	Executive	88	34%
	Manager	7	3%

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Monthly salary	Under 05 million VND	172	67%
	From 05 - 15 million VND	74	29%
	From 15 - 30 million VND	9	3%
	Above 30 million VND	3	1%
Supervisor-employee generational gap	0	49	19%
	1	139	54%
	2	64	25%
	3	6	2%

4.2. Reliability analysis

In the reliability analysis, two criteria should be focused, namely the Cronbach's Alpha and the Corrected Items - Total Correlation. The Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.768 - 0.872, indicating the satisfactory reliability coefficient, with Compensation and benefits being the lowest and EE being the highest. Meanwhile, the Corrected Item-Total Correlation fluctuated between 0.589 - 0.716.

4.3. Explanatory Factors Analysis (EFA)

After the extraction and rotation method in the EFA test, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test, Eigenvalues, factor loading are important ratios to the measurement of relative significance of factors. If these ratios do not reach the required standard, the value will be rejected. According to Hair, Babin, Anderson, and Black (2013), the KMO must be within $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$ and Sig. is less than 0.05, so that 0.895 KMO and 0.000 Sig. from the SPSS result indicated the quality and inter-relevance among items to continue implementing EFA (see Table 2).

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.895
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3768.238
	df	465
	Sig.	0.000

Table 3 shows good figures of all single item's factor loading and the initial Eigenvalues, which were higher than the requirement of 0.3 and 1 respectively. Also, the total percent of extract variance was 55.391% > 50% and the point stopping at the 7th factor was 1.213 > 1, so all conditions were met. The extraction of 07 factors supported the standards of EFA and the continual of the pattern matrix without any item removed.

Table 3

Total variance explained

Total Variance Explained							
Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	9.445	30.468	30.468	9.000	29.031	29.031	6.138
2	2.853	9.205	39.673	2.391	7.712	36.743	5.648
3	2.049	6.608	46.281	1.598	5.153	41.897	7.318
4	1.908	6.155	52.436	1.482	4.780	46.676	5.095
5	1.449	4.676	57.112	1.001	3.230	49.906	3.300
6	1.244	4.014	61.126	0.955	3.081	52.987	4.253
7	1.213	3.915	65.040	0.745	2.404	55.391	2.935
8	0.779	2.513	67.553				

4.4. Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA)

4.4.1. Model fit assessment

Determining the model fit depends on three criteria, including the Chi-square index (CMIN/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Firstly, the good Chi-square index indicating the degrees of freedom is constrained within $1 \leq \chi^2/df$ or $CMIN/df \leq 3$, in which the Chi-square index $1.449 < 3$ satisfied the requirement. Secondly, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) or Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) adjusts the model parameters without any effect on the model accuracy, whose qualified value must be equal or greater than 0.90 or 0.80 in some circumstances. The findings showed acceptable CFI or TFI (0.947 or $0.94 \geq 0.9$). Thirdly, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) aims to the fit of research model into population variance matrix, whose good value must be less than 0.05 or less than 0.07 (Hair et al., 2013). The RMSEA from CFA was appropriate $0.042 < 0.5$. Given the standardized CFA findings, the study's model was qualified.

4.4.2. Model validity measures

To check the scale reliability, the minimum value of the Composite Reliability coefficient (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must be at 0.70 and 50% (Hair et al., 2013). The findings gave CR from 0.804 - $0.86 \geq 0.70$, and AVE ranged from 50.6% - $68\% \geq 50\%$, satisfying all the thresholds and presenting a reliable scale (see Table 4).

Table 4

Model validity measures

	CR	AVE	SS	CR	EE	WP	WE	TD	CB
SS	0.86	0.506	0.711						
CR	0.855	0.541	0.494***	0.736					
EE	0.871	0.531	0.706***	0.593***	0.729				
WP	0.811	0.517	0.411***	0.362***	0.617***	0.719			
WE	0.804	0.507	0.431***	0.354***	0.535***	0.638***	0.712		
TD	0.814	0.523	0.335***	0.401***	0.390***	0.123	0.112	0.723	
CB	0.805	0.68	0.436***	0.476***	0.435***	0.245**	0.300***	0.106	0.824

4.4.3. Convergent validity checking

To check the convergent validity, there are three criterions. While the first two standards are included in the scale reliability (CR and AVE), all variance values (from 0.66 to 0.805) have to satisfy the requirement beyond 0.50, which concluded the good convergence of the scale.

4.4.4. Discriminant validity checking

In this test, the coefficient of covariance among factors must be different from 1, meaning there are 95% of confidence. The AMOS output showed all p-values were lower than 0.05, so the correlation coefficient for each pair of items met the requirement and the correlation obtained discriminant validity.

4.5. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM was conducted to investigate the causal relationship between variables of H1 - H6. New Chi-square, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA met the mentioned criteria. Findings from Figure 2 supported all hypotheses, except H2 and H5 being not statistically significant at 5%. A significant path validity between EE and job performance of Vietnamese generation Z (p - value < 0.05 and β = 0.611) was found, followed by the strongest impact of supervisory support on their EE (H3) (β = 0.387).

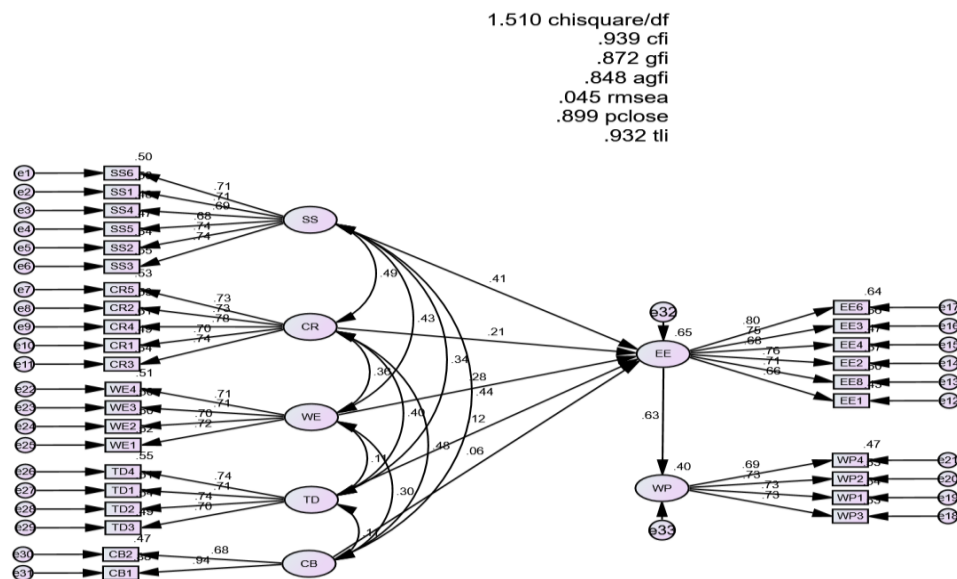


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model (Standardised)

Table 5 highlighted the strongest significance of supervisory support to EE of Vietnamese generation Z, followed by the working environment and co-worker relationship, with $\beta = 0.387$, $\beta = 0.297$, and $\beta = 0.297$ respectively. The determinants of *training and development*, and *compensation and benefit* were not statistically significant at the 5% level (p -value > 0.05), presenting that this significance was not strong enough for a reliable relationship. Meanwhile, evidence indicated there was a significant path validity between EE and job performance (p - value < 0.05 and $\beta = 0.611$). For generation Z in Vietnam, EE has a significant impact on their job performance (see Table 5).

Table 5

SEM and hypothesis testing result

Hypothesis		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1	Working environment positively influences generation Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity	0.297	0.07	4.26	***	Support
H2	Compensation and benefits positively influence gen Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity	0.07	0.076	0.917	0.359	Reject
H3	Supervisory support positively influences gen Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity	0.387	0.074	5.237	***	Support
H4	Co-worker relationship positively influences gen Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity	0.198	0.067	2.938	0.003	Support
H5	Training and development positively influence gen Z's EE in the workplace's generational diversity	0.106	0.055	1.904	0.057	Reject
H6	EE positively influences job performance of gen Z employees in the workplace's generational diversity	0.611	0.083	7.376	***	Support

4.6. Discussion

4.6.1. Finding summary

The present study has addressed the research questions. Firstly, it is concluded that three factors: (1) supervisory support, (2) working environment, (3) and co-worker relationships positively influence Vietnamese generation Z's EE, while compensation and benefit and training and development, show no influence on enhanced engagement, hence, no job performance. Secondly, there is a strong correlation between EE mediation and job performance. The most impactful factor to EE is supervisory support (**H3**), which is consistent with May et al. (2004) following Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions. Also, it is true with the nature of Confucianism where people prioritise social relationships and personal ethics. Generation Z's respondents prefer being valued and recognised, while their well-being is appreciated by their supervisor. Trustworthy and encouraging managerial behaviours create a perception of safety that satisfies generation Z the most owing to the freedom to raise opinions and be given autonomy at work. However, Vietnamese generation Z may not favour mentoring or coaching from supervisors, which

contradicts Bejtkovský's (2016) finding. It could be explained that HR practices in Vietnam remain incomprehensive to pay more attention to these programs (Truong, Pham, & Doan, 2021). Moreover, having a global mindset, generation Z would prioritise inclusion and diversity, while supervisors from older generations might find it strange.

Supporting the proposed premise (**H1**), individuals who have a safe and healthy working environment tend to engage in their roles, which is consistent with the study of Soliman and Wahba (2019). In agreement with Anitha (2014), the findings showed that the desirable office would have a combination of physical and emotional atmosphere where generation Z can create a sense of shared destiny and work like a home office. This is further supported by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), who confirm that the violation of fairness and equity expectations deteriorates the meaningfulness of the working environment, hence lowering generation Z's engagement. It highlights the conclusion of Barhate and Dirani (2021), as transparency is the top priority of generation Z.

The third factor of EE drivers is co-worker relationship (**H4**), revealing the preference of collaborative and open discussion within the team of workers. Also, they suggested bonding activities, which enhance the interpersonal off-work interaction and individual psychological safety. Because of the Vietnamese culture of collectivism, the targeted sample would need to be in groups for higher identification and better performance. Thus, these results might negate the argument of Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018) and May et al. (2004), who propose the poor psychological safety generation Z has within team norms.

Contrary to the expectations, compensation and benefits along with training and development are not the good determinants for EE of Vietnamese young generations (**H2** and **H5**), which is inconsistent with past studies about EE or generation Z (e.g., Anitha, 2014; Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Soliman & Wahba, 2019). The possible reasons for the insignificant relationship between training and development and EE is limited access of respondents to training programs in the company, mostly in SMEs, where employers tend to pay less attention to young staff. Moreover, general training topics can explain these consequences, pushing generation Z to seek attractive learning opportunities outside the workplace to upgrade their skills. Furthermore, since generation Z is well taken care of by their parent, compensation and benefits might not be a great incentive to them in generationally diverse workplaces. Also, the embeddedness of Confucianism makes them value justice over benefits.

Noticeably, the results highly support the **H6** that EE becomes the highest predictive power of job performance of Vietnamese generation Z. Compared to Saks (2006), who used regression analysis, this SEM found such a relationship has a higher weight of significance. Findings in this study reinforce the belief that the fulfillment of job requirements can be explained by generation Z's high involvement and passion for work, which is similar to job performance antecedents mentioned in previous papers of Anitha (2014). Also, it is indicated that the energy adhering to engagement can be fostered by meaningful work, a safe office, and motivating supervisors that contribute to better service, and organisational financial outputs.

4.6.2. Theoretical contribution

The results of the research confirm the significance of the working environment, supervisory support, and co-worker relationships for the EE of generation Z in a diverse workplace in Vietnam, which ultimately leads to better job performance. The differences in the level of importance among these factors contribute to the existing understanding of EE in the context of generational diversity in Vietnam.

The first benefit of this research is its ability to fill the gap in diversity-related academics in developing countries, as highlighted by Yadav and Lenka (2020), by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of generational diversity on job performance in Vietnam. With the presence of four generations in the workforce, this study offers insights into the challenges faced by organizational management in the country. While previous research has explored generation Z's work values in comparison to other cohorts, such as Lee et al. (2021), and Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018), there is a lack of knowledge about their work-preferred patterns in Vietnam. Therefore, this study not only expands on the generation cohort theory of Strauss and Howe (1991) from the perspective of generation Z in the workplace of the developing world, but it also confirms the distinct behaviors and attitudes of this cohort, which have been widely discussed in previous research.

Secondly, the proposed conceptual framework is based on Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes generational diversity and employee engagement. Although intergroup relations are complex due to the boundary between ingroup and outgroup, the relationship between supervisors and coworkers is particularly important for Generation Z. Despite their relatively low social identity in the current workplace, they feel comfortable following in the footsteps of their predecessors. This framework provides new theoretical insights into Social Identity Theory, as Generation Z is able to maintain their identification in ways that previous generations could not.

More importantly, the results address the claim of Ehambaranathan et al. (2014) regarding limited comprehensive Vietnam-based research in EE topic. EE's definition remains vague in Vietnam, in comparison with the global understanding. Moreover, the growing workforce signifies the mediation of EE to individual performance in terms of productivity, efficiency, and commitment. The last hypothesis in this analysis contributes to Vietnamese EE research with EE as a mediator, in which the study of Van and Nafukho (2019) has been known as the very first exploration in this field. Moreover, constructed based on Kahn's (1990) engagement model, a well-known researcher in EE, the findings contribute significantly to the existing relevant literature in Vietnam, a country of Confucian culture.

4.6.3. Practical/Managerial implications

Practical applications aimed at enhancing the engagement of Vietnamese generation Z in the workplace can prioritize the long-term impact of the work environment, support from supervisors, and relationships with co-workers, particularly in a workplace with a diverse range of generations.

Applying the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explain how employees behave and think, it can be inferred that acknowledging their distinctive viewpoints increases their commitment to engage and excel in their jobs, particularly in a workplace with multiple generations. To develop an effective engagement plan, the management and HR professionals in such organizations should recognize the diversities among generations and leverage their competitive strengths to retain and foster a youthful workforce. This would entail fulfilling the expectations of generation Z and engaging them in tasks that align with their roles.

The work environment can be tailored to meet the specific concerns and preferences of generation Z employees, including co-working spaces, work-life-related workshops, and activities that appeal to their interests, such as tarot reading or Korean film watching. To enhance their job satisfaction and engagement, it is important to ensure fair treatment, clear role expectations, and regular communication between supervisors and subordinates. This includes exchanging information about work and non-work issues to bridge the generation gap and foster psychological

attachment to the organization. Supervisors must have personalities that are open, friendly, and considerate to engage employees through daily communication and regular feedback. In the Vietnamese culture of collectivism, generation Z employees value trustworthy and drama-free relationships with their colleagues. Regular interaction among different generations is encouraged to give generation Z a voice, which increases their involvement and willingness to work.

Regardless of the methods used, it is important for practitioners and managers to consider the unique attributes of each generational group, as a “one size fits all” approach may not be effective. Due to the lasting impact of employee engagement on performance, it is important to provide personalized and adaptable strategies to cultivate commitment among Generation Z in the long run (Saks, 2006).

4.6.4. Limitation and future research

The study has several limitations, with the first being the data collection process. The small sample size of only 258 respondents limits the representation of Generation Z to only those residing in Ho Chi Minh City, while the ease of the online questionnaire may result in respondents providing random answers without carefully reading the questions. Additionally, time and budget constraints during the two-week survey period could prevent the identification of data errors, which may impede the generalization of the determinants of job performance to all Generation Z individuals in Vietnam. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct additional testing on a national scale by collecting data from urban and rural areas in Vietnam to obtain a more diverse sample and produce better data findings.

The second limitation of this research is the limited number of factors studied regarding generation Z’s engagement and job performance. Previous studies on job performance in the areas of EE or generational diversity have included numerous factors, leaving the possibility for future research to explore additional factors from the perspective of generation Z, such as organizational policies, corporate social responsibility, and technology. Moreover, there are other management concepts, such as employee satisfaction and employee voice, which have been found to influence job performance and may have a mediating effect. Therefore, future studies should further examine these factors and their relationships with generation Z’s engagement and job performance.

To conclude, the survey responses were possibly influenced by the unfamiliarity and confusion of Vietnamese people about EE, as some respondents found the survey items unconventional. Hence, future researchers who plan to study this field in Vietnam need to provide a clear and concise definition of engagement at the beginning of their survey to avoid confusion and increase the accuracy of responses.

5. Conclusions & recommendations

The research study focuses on the importance of Employee Engagement (EE) in improving the job performance of Generation Z, with results indicating that EE is a reliable predictor of their job performance. Among the five determinants of EE, three factors were found to have significant relationships based on the SEM analysis, including support from supervisors, the working environment, and relationships with co-workers. The study recommends that organizational management and HR practitioners prioritize EE strategies, particularly with regard to supervisory support. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the current literature on EE and enhance knowledge of the engagement-job performance effect of Generation Z in a workplace with generational diversity.

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