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THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND JOB CRAFTING ON WORK ENGAGEMENT: JOB SATISFACTION AS A MEDIATOR AMONG MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

The engagement of millennial and Gen Z employees is among the most important issues of modern organizations. This research investigates the role of digital leadership and job crafting in work engagement, with work satisfaction as a mediating variable. The data of 106 professionals was analyzed applying PLS-SEM. The results of the statistical analysis contradict expectations, because it seems that neither digital leadership nor individual job crafting directly influence engagement. Instead, job satisfaction serves as a complete bridging mechanism for both relationships. For the younger workforce, tech-competent management and the freedom to modify tasks are perceived merely as baseline job requirements rather than actual incentives. These factors would create the early workplace satisfaction before they can generate greater professional commitment. This paper contributes to the knowledge of human resources by showing that the happiness of employees is a key condition for the transformation of digital resources into tangible commitment. In other words, the investments in technology are not profitable unless organizations focus on the well-being of internal staff.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has accelerated the pace of change in enterprises. To remain competitive, enterprises must operate in an environment of continuous uncertainty (Li et al., 2026; Zeike et al., 2019). The problem is amplified by the fact that most of today's workforce consists of Millennials and Gen Z. These younger employees are setting new standards in the workplace, such as the need for autonomy, flexible working hours, and a voice in company decisions. However, actively engaging them in work is a challenge of mammoth proportions. Employee engagement is falling rapidly around the world. According to a recent study Revan et al. (2026) only 23% of employees feel engaged in their work. Local data show that only about a quarter of millennial workers feel attached to their companies (Saputra et al., 2022). These statistics point to a significant gap between young employees' expectations and their real experiences at work. The problem is not only the age gap, but the fact that the modern digital office itself entails real problems. Constant connectivity and too complex tools have been shown to cause severe technostress, information overload and rapid burnout (Li et al., 2026; Serenko, 2024). To handle this pressure, many young employees prefer to quietly quit. They cut down their daily effort and do only the minimum required by their job descriptions. For this generation, a good work-life balance is far more important than high pay or praise from the company. As a result of this change, traditional management practices do not work anymore. Ignoring this problem is very costly, especially because almost 70% of digital changes fail due to leaders' lack of attention to staff engagement and support (Saputra et al., 2022).

Researchers still debate what actually drives employee engagement, particularly when looking at the impact of digital leadership. Some findings suggest that having a tech-savvy boss directly helps boost team morale (Li et al., 2026; Muhammad Sidik et al., 2025). There are even those who argue that good digital guidance is needed in today's offices (Saputra et al., 2022; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023). However, the results are not always positive. For example,

Revan et al. (2026) in PT Suka Fajar research states that digital leadership does not affect employee engagement. This is consistent with Wanasida et al. (2021) some years ago. In an Indonesian startup, which reported that digital transformational leadership did not change engagement metrics. A parallel empirical inconsistency emerges Job Crafting. Most of the classic literature is in favor of proactive job modification leading towards more dedication to the job such as longitudinal meta-analysis work by Frederick & VanderWeele (2020) and the work of Tims et al. (2012). Some recent studies by Pangestu et al. (2024) and Nazahra & Nasution (2025 are also in favor of the same. However, there are some findings that contradict the consensus. For example, the research of Aldrin and Merdiaty (2019) did not prove the effect of job crafting among IT employees, and Fazriati (2017) did not prove the significant increase of engagement levels (Rahardini & Frianto, 2020). Further, Anwar & Ekhsan (2024) and Setyawati (2019) found that the job crafting fails when employee expectations are not aligned with the workplace realities. All these conflicting facts create a substantial empirical divergence. It also indicates an urgent need to study the interaction between digital leadership and job crafting in particular, in a workforce that includes the Gen Y (Millenial) and Gen Z generations, who tend to have different reactions to the digital transformation.

The JD-R model, along with SET and SDT, is a popular model used by researchers to comprehend employees' motivation in digital workplaces. The traditional models generally portray a simple chain reaction between digital leadership, job crafting, and, in turn, work engagement. However, this linear approach does not represent the actual mindset of younger employees. Today's Millennials and Gen Z employees want autonomy, but they are also highly susceptible to digital threats like technostress and information overload (Li et al., 2026). Just having supportive bosses or making personal task changes does not guarantee that someone will care about their work. Old theories tend to forget what happens internally in an employee's mind. This gap is why we must look at job satisfaction as the missing link. The real bridge is the one that determines whether digital tools and proactive habits will turn into real energy and dedication. External support and task adjustments don't mean much if the employees aren't happy with their jobs in the first place.

Due to the empirical inconsistencies and theoretical gaps in the existing literature, this study aims to investigate the complex mechanism of the behavioral outcomes of young employees in the digital era. More specifically, this research is interested in the following key questions:

1. Does Digital Leadership have a significant direct impact on the Work Engagement of Millennial and Generation Z employees?
2. Does Job Crafting have a significant and direct impact on Work Engagement in this demographic?
3. Does Digital Leadership have a direct impact on Job Satisfaction in a digitalized working environment?
4. Does Job Crafting have a direct impact on the Job Satisfaction of younger segments of the workforce?
5. Does there exist a significant and direct improvement of Work Engagement through Job Satisfaction?
6. Does Job Satisfaction act as a significant mediating mechanism between Digital Leadership and Work Engagement?
7. Does Job Satisfaction significantly mediate the path linking Job Crafting to Work Engagement?

This study contributes to the human resource management literature by examining job satisfaction as an intervening variable between digital leadership, job crafting and work engagement. The conventional assumption in the literature is that these variables have a direct positive relationship, but this research addresses empirical contradictions that exist in the literature. More specifically, this study examines the missing link in those frameworks by testing if external leadership support and employee proactivity require job satisfaction as a necessary prerequisite to generate work engagement among Millennial and Generation Z employees. This study offers a practical reference for organizations and HR practitioners for workforce management in the digital era. The framework does not encourage management to increase digital monitoring or to expect employees to be highly proactive to solve work engagement problems. Instead, the study provides practical advice on why organizations should focus on structural workplace satisfaction, such as reducing technostress and improving work-life balance, to effectively secure long-term employee engagement.

The research is set in the specific context of the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts of which the majority are public-sector employees. The Indonesian public sector has been aggressively mandating bureaucratic digital transformation, and the younger civil servants are required to adapt to digital platforms rapidly. Unlike the private sector, where digital adoption is largely driven by market agility, the implementation of technology in public agencies is based on structural mandates. Therefore, studying this particular cohort provides important insights into how younger generations manage workplace resources when digital tools are a requisite. However, since the public sector composition of respondents is high and Generation Z is the dominant cohort in this sample, the empirical bounds of these findings are particularly contextualized in public-administrative environments, thus avoiding overgeneralization to unintegrated private corporate models.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The present study is based on the **JD-R framework** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to explain the relationship between the variables. In this regard, digital leadership is a workplace resource that provides a clear sense of direction in the context of technological transitions (Bethabara et al., 2024; Li et al., 2026). The presence of this type of leader favors the development of job crafting, an active behavior to change the task structure to better fit the person's skillset (Tims et al., 2012). Through the JD-R motivational process, the combination of supervisory resources and individual proactivity can directly act to reduce role ambiguity. This integrated process is a necessary precondition for organizations to produce positive work outcomess (Nazahra & Nasution. 2025; Rinaldy et al., 2026).

In addition, the **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** contributes to explain this mechanism, positing that employees work optimally when their fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this context, the supervisory digital leadership and autonomous job crafting are directly associated with the satisfaction of these intrinsic needs. The fulfillment of these structural needs is a prerequisite that enhances the overall job satisfaction (Ghazzawi et al., 2023; Wijayati & Pusparini, 2024). As the level of job satisfaction increases, employees systematically respond with more focus and energy to their respective roles, which directly causes work engagement, this can be measured by increased vigor, dedication and absorption. Therefore, job satisfaction is a necessary intervening variable to convert external leadership support and individual proactivity into real work engagement in digital workspaces.

Other than JD-R model, **Social Exchange Theory** (SET) by Blau (1964) may explain the mutual relationship between employees and organizations systematically (Serenko, 2024). This is framed as good digital leadership and organizational permission for job crafting, a positive social investment from management, and generous treatment in line with the core tenets of SET and creation of a clear psychological contract for employees to reciprocate (Rinaldy et al., 2026). However, the reciprocal mechanism does not directly lead to behavioral engagement. First, employees evaluate their work environment which influences their job satisfaction directly (Matriadi et al., 2021; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023). When this condition is met, employees reciprocate their part of the exchange by displaying greater vigor, dedication, and absorption . Therefore, job satisfaction is an obligatory intervening variable that translates structural organizational support into real work engagement in digital workspaces.

Digital leadership (DL) is the leader's ability to develop a clear vision of digitalization and implement tactical approaches to make it happen (Zeike et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). It merges conventional leadership qualities with digital proficiency and technical know-how to drive organizational transformation (Eberl & Drews, 2021; Salamzadeh & Gunton, 2026; Wesche & Handke, 2025). The major characteristics of this leadership style include visionary thinking, technological agility, management of virtual collaboration, and objective and data-driven decision-making (Muhammad Sidik et al., 2025; Tulungen et al., 2022). Digital leadership is a key tool in the modern workplace, mitigating the shortcomings of traditional management by providing organizational governance and resilience in digital transitions (Matriadi et al., 2021).

Job crafting (JC) is a proactive behaviour initiated by employees in which they adapt their task, relational and cognitive boundaries to better align their job roles with their personal abilities (Schouten, 2022.; Tims et al., 2012). This internalized way of modifying jobs facilitates employee agency and allows workers to control task demands and leverage structural or social resources without direct managerial guidance (Lanke et al., 2024; Lazazzara et al., 2020; Verelst et al., 2021). In today's work environment, job crafting is an important means that helps employees adapt to the risks of digital transformation. By independently changing their tasks, employees can improve their functional roles and mitigate operational stressors associated with technology-based workplaces (Damayanti, 2024.; Pangestu et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2022).

Job satisfaction (JS) is defined as a positive emotional state arising from the assessment of one's work experiences and job characteristics (Robbins et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2022). his concept functions as a multidimensional construct, which is a subjective assessment of how the job fulfills individual needs, expectations, and professional values (Özpehlivan & Acar, 2016; Wyrwa & Kaźmierczyk, 2020). The main characteristics of this variable are grouped into intrinsic facets such as autonomy and work meaningfulness and extrinsic facets such as supervision, co-worker relationships, and digital infrastructure (Lechevalier & Mofakhami, 2025; Spector, 1985). In today's work environment, job satisfaction is an important operational necessity for developing work engagement. It is also a significant buffer against workplace stressors resulting from rapid digital changes and the increasing phenomenon of quiet quitting (Nugroho et al., 2024; Serenko, 2024; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023).

Work engagement (WE) is a profound and enduring psychological state where employees dedicate all their physical, mental, and emotional energy to their work (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Teixeira & Almada Santos, 2024). Work engagement is not a temporary mood, but it is a lasting state that is characterized by three important elements. First, engagement means having high resilience and energy in the performance of duties, which is called vigor. Second, it includes dedication, that is, feeling genuinely enthusiastic about the significance of one's work. Finally, absorption is when a worker is so absorbed that he/she loses track of time in the performance of daily work(Schaufeli et al., 2006). In today's organizational contexts, work engagement is a major factor contributing to internal productivity and innovation capacity. Acquiring this condition is a significant management goal aimed at guaranteeing the

efficiency of workforce performance during technology-driven transformations (Nugroho et al., 2024; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023).

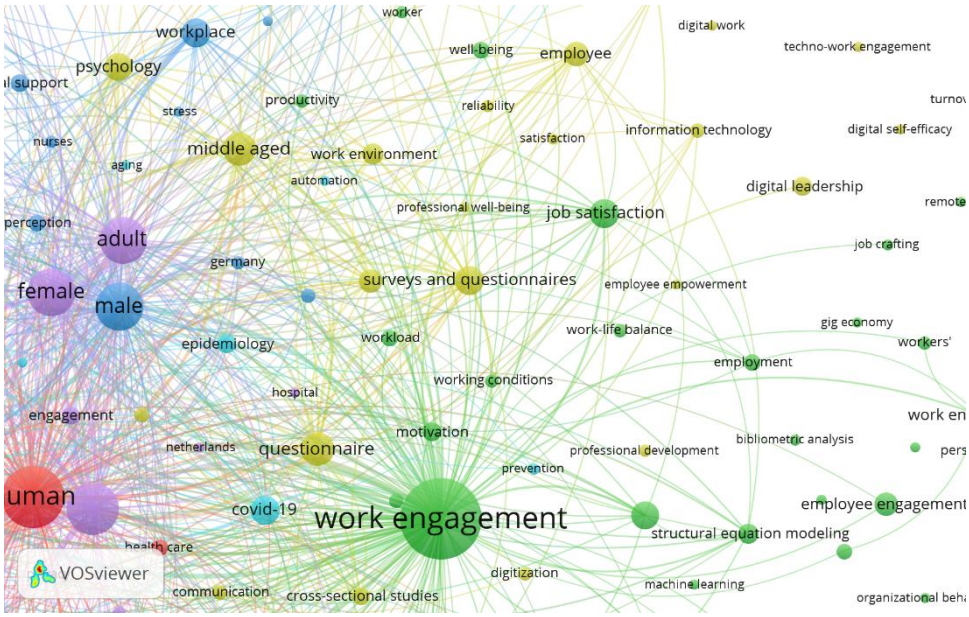


Figure 2.1 Network Visualization
Source: VOSviewer (2026)

Figure 2.1 shows the structural patterns of the study variables obtained from the bibliometric network mapping of 357 Scopus-indexed documents. From the network visualization, the keywords analyzed are grouped into specific thematic clusters. Specifically, JS, JC, and WE are grouped in the same green cluster, while Digital Leadership (DL) is located in a different yellow cluster. The width of the paths also offers important empirical indications on the current literature. The link between JS and WE was indicated by a thick and well-formed line and confirmed that the relation between employee satisfaction and psychological attachment is largely confirmed. The paths from DL to WE and from JC to WE are particularly slim, however, and this indicates a weak direct structural integration in the extant literature.



Figure 2.2 Density Visualization
Source: VOSviewer (2026)

This research gap is clearly visible in the density map in Figure 2.2. Work Engagement appears as a bright large yellow area, proving that studies on engagement outcomes are already very common. On the other hand, Digital Leadership and Job Crafting are located in pale green areas, meaning that there is still very little research combining these two topics within digital work settings. Meanwhile, Job Satisfaction is located in a shifting green-yellow zone. The position suggests that although satisfaction is a well-known term, there is little research that looks at satisfaction as a dominant bridge to link digital resources such as DL and JC to the common topic of Work Engagement. Consequently, this density topology objectively proves that the proposed mediation model directly addresses an unexplored empirical gap in contemporary organizational literature.

2.2 Empirical Review and Hypothesis

2.2.1 Digital Leadership and Job Satisfaction

The way in which management applies digital leadership has a direct impact on the level of employee job satisfaction. In this case, the JD-R framework states that the presence of clear technological direction and the ability to coordinate virtually as an adaptive resource are necessary. When digital communication channels are well managed and the decisions are based on objective data, role ambiguity in virtual operations can be alleviated. Alleviation of operational stressors can directly meet the expectations of employees and then lead to a positive evaluative state that results in higher job satisfaction. According to Nugroho et al. (2024), Saputra et al. (2022), and Sulistiana & Darma (2023) the digital leadership variable has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. However, Subiantoro (2024) shows no significant impact on employee job satisfaction between digitalization implementation and employee job satisfaction. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Digital Leadership has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction.

2.2.2 Job Crafting and Job Satisfaction

Proactive task modifications by job crafting are an employee-initiated approach that is positively associated with job satisfaction. The most significant level of work satisfaction occurs when basic intrinsic needs for autonomy and competence are satisfied as suggested by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) . Employees independently modify their task and relational boundaries through job crafting to match job demands to their personal capabilities and digital system demands. The capacity to independently manage workloads and use structural resources gives workers a greater sense of control over their work responsibilities . This internal need fulfilment, in turn, has a direct positive effect on the employee's positive evaluation of everyday work experiences. Several previous studies have shown that job crafting has been proven to have a positive and significant direct influence on increasing job satisfaction (Hardiyanti & Siswadi, 2023; Rahardini et al., 2020; Wijayati & Pusparini, 2024; Yuridha, 2022). On the other hand, Ghazzawi et al. (2023) and Schouten (2022) found that there was no relationship between the job crafting dimensions and job satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 (H2): Job Crafting has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction.

2.2.3 Digital Leadership and Work Engagement

The implementation of digital leadership functions is a structural driver that is theoretically predicted to boost employee work engagement in technology-driven settings. The JD-R model suggests that a supervisor's ability to effectively coordinate virtual directives and manage digital communication platforms is an organizational resource. Typically, a structured leadership support is expected to reduce the technical ambiguity and release the operational technostress. By reducing these administrative and technical barriers personnel can efficiently channel their cognitive and mental capacities towards their core functions. This efficient energy allocation gives the theoretical underpinning for the rise of vigour, dedication and engagement in digital transformations. Prior empirical research indicates that digital leadership exerts a positive and significant effect on employee work engagement (Muhammad Sidik et al., 2025; Saputra et al., 2022; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023). However, Revan et al. (2026), found that digital leadership has no significant effect on employee engagement. Hypothesis 3 (H3): Digital Leadership has a significant positive effect on Work Engagement.

2.2.4 Job Crafting and Work Engagement

Job crafting should, in theory, be positively and causally related to work engagement levels, as it refers to an autonomous adjustment. From the SDT perspective, the structural liberty granted to employees to autonomously change task boundaries and to use social resources promotes their psychological ownership of their responsibilities. This proactive fit allows individuals to adapt their daily work demands to the available competencies. When person-job fit is achieved through these autonomous modifications, psychological barriers to completing professional responsibilities are minimized. Theoretically, this operational autonomy serves as an internal stimulus that drives employees to remain dedicated, energized, and fully absorbed in achieving organizational performance targets.Authors should back their hypothesis with the latest empirical studies in the related field. Although Anwar (2024) indicates that job crafting does not contribute significantly to employee engagement, the vast majority of prior empirical studies demonstrate that job crafting exerts a positive and significant direct effect on work engagement (Aisyah, 2022; Mochamad Rokib Vadya Mulyadi & Rizka Hadian Permana, 2022; Pangestu et al., 2024; Rinaldy et al., 2026). Hypothesis 4 (H4): Employee job crafting behaviors positively and significantly influence work engagement.

2.2.5 Job Satisfactionn and Work Engagement

Job satisfaction is a main factor that shapes how engaged employees feel at work. Following the reciprocity rule in Social Exchange Theory (SET), when a company meets its workers' daily expectations and values, employees naturally feel a psychological need to give back. In this context, job satisfaction acts as the initial check that proves this workplace relationship is fair for both sides. As a rational response, employees reinvest their cognitive and physical capacities back into their respective duties. This causal relationship is directly generate higher levels of vocational vigor, dedication and task absorption. Previous empirical studies establishes that job satisfaction exerts a positive and significant effect on work engagement (Fairnandha, 2021; Lestari et al., 2023; Saputra et al., 2022; Sulistiana & Darma, 2023). However, indicates that job satisfaction has no significant effect on employee engagement. Hypothesis 5 (H5): Job Satisfaction has a significant positive effect on Work Engagement.

2.2.6 The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Digital Leadership and Work Engagement

Job satisfaction is demonstrated as a required mediating variable for the influence of digital leadership on work engagement. In digitized working environments, leadership interventions via technological vision and virtual coordination do not directly trigger behavioral engagement. Based on the integrative views of the JD-R model and SET, these external digital leadership resources first need to be transformed into a stable evaluative basis of job satisfaction. When good digital supervision reduces role ambiguity and gives people a good working environment, employees always show up with more engagement. Thus, the insufficient direct relationship between digital guidance and employee engagement demands job satisfaction as a key underlying explanatory process. However, empirical evidence from Revan et al. (2026) indicates that the relationship between digital leadership and employee engagement is not significantly mediated by job satisfaction. Hypothesis 6 (H6): Job Satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between Digital Leadership and Work Engagement.

2.2.7 The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Job Crafting and Work Engagement

Job crafting behaviors positively influence work engagement significantly and job satisfaction is a main mediating factor. Based on SDT, job crafting is changes in task and relational boundaries that are initiated by oneself, mainly to fulfill the basic intrinsic need of autonomy and competence. However, this operational autonomy does not directly translate into deep work engagement without first creating a positive evaluative state. The causal sequence is linear. Autonomous job modifications improve need satisfaction, which in turn increases overall job satisfaction, and this achieved satisfaction then leads to high dedication and task absorption. Therefore, job satisfaction becomes the ultimate nexus of operations that associates individual proactive behaviour to lasting workplace engagement. Rahardini (2020) shows that higher job crafting leads to a significant increase in employee job satisfaction during task execution. Due to this established satisfaction, employees tend to engage in job crafting, which, in turn, helps in task execution and improves their overall work capacity. Hypothesis 7 (H7): Job satisfaction serves as a key intervening mechanism between employee job crafting and work engagement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Operational Framework

The present study uses a quantitative explanatory design to examine causal relationships between variables. The main objective of the study is to test specific hypotheses and understand how the factors influence each other, which led us to use an explanatory design. In order to clearly define and replicate the study, the fieldwork was divided into several practical steps. Firstly, the research instrument was constructed, which consisted of a structured online questionnaire that included validated scales for digital leadership, job crafting, job satisfaction and work engagement. Then, the data collection was carried out by administering the survey to the target respondents, ensuring the anonymity and voluntary participation of the answers. Then, we tested the measurement model (outer model) on the collected responses using SmartPLS. This included the assessment of item reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity. Then, we estimated the structural model (inner model) by using bootstrapping techniques to evaluate path coefficients, validate our direct hypotheses, and calculate the indirect effects of the mediation paths. This systematic process allows future researchers to replicate and validate the whole analytical procedure.

3.2 Study Population, Sampling Procedures, and Data Collection

The focus group of this study is Millennial and Gen Z workers, which includes corporate staff and civil servants who are highly dependent on digital tools in their daily work. In line with these particular requirements, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was adopted. To ensure the quality of data, respondents were required to meet two main criteria. First, they must be born between 1981 and 2012, to be classified as Millennials or Gen Z. Second, they had to use digital communication and project management platforms as their main daily workflow tools. Through this approach, we collected 106 valid responses for the final analysis. The online survey was distributed via professional networks, peer groups and contacts at the workplace. We used a referral method of word-of-mouth to identify the participants who fit our exact criteria. According to Hair et al. (2019), To determine the adequacy of the sample, the total number of participants needs to be at least ten times greater than the maximum structural paths aimed at any specific construct. With five structural paths pointing toward our endogenous constructs, the minimum requirement is easily met.

It is important to note the demographic composition of the gathered sample, where most of the respondents operate within public sector institutions (government agencies/civil servants) and they belong to Generation Z. Consequently, the interpretation of these findings is highly reflective of a structured, policy-driven public administrative environment undergoing digital transition. This paper explicitly mentions its specific sectoral focus to avoid overgeneralization of our findings to fast-paced startups or profit-driven private corporations. We collected the primary data using structured surveys through Google Forms. Participants had to read and check an informed consent clause on the introductory page before answering any questions, which ensured that the study was conducted following the standard research ethics for human participants. This setup made it completely voluntary to participate, which meant that respondents could close their browsers and drop out of the process at any stage without any

consequences. The settings of the platform were adjusted to ensure complete anonymity thus preserving the integrity of the data and maintaining the privacy of the respondents.

3.3 Operational Definition and Measurement of Variables

In the present study, all the structural constructs are operationalized using the measurement scales validated and adapted from the existing literature. Each question was evaluated using a 5-point Likert system, where a score of 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement.

Digital leadership is operationally defined as a supervisor's capability to effectively guide, coordinate, and protect employees in a digitalized work environment. Digital leadership is measured with an 8-item scale consisting of four core dimensions adapted from Westerman et al. (2019) and Zeike et al. (2019): 1) Digital Media Skills: The supervisor's proficiency of using and selecting appropriate digital communication channels; 2) Digital Telecooperation Skills: The ability to maintain team cohesion and give clear virtual instructions; 3) Data-Driven Decision Making: The ability to objectively use digital data, system reports, and performance metrics for problem solving; and 4) Digital Health Leadership Skills: The leader's structural adjustments to mitigate technostress and prevent employee burnout..

Job crafting is the self-initiated and proactive alteration of the task, relational and boundary conditions by employees to improve their workflow. This variable is operationalized using an 8-item scale adapted from the model by Tims et al. (2012), that includes four dimensions: 1) Increasing Structural Job Resources: Proactive behaviors to learn new skills and maximize personal capabilities; 2) Increasing Social Job Resources: Actions taken to mobilize feedback and constructive inputs from supervisors and peers; 3) Increasing Challenging Job Demands: Voluntary initiatives to undertake extra responsibilities and challenging projects; and 4) Decreasing Hindering Job Demands: Physical and mental workload adjustments to minimize operational stressors and stress.

Job satisfaction is operationalized as the positive evaluative base and emotional state resulting from the employee's assessment of his/her experiences in the workplace. This mediating construct is assessed with a 6-item scale across three core domains adapted from Robbins et al. (2017): 1) Satisfaction with the Work Itself: Assessing internal interest and alignment with daily occupational tasks; 2) Satisfaction with Supervision: Evaluating perceived fairness, supportiveness, and guidance provided by the direct supervisor; and 3) Satisfaction with Coworkers: Evaluating the quality of communication and supportiveness within the peer network.

The current study measures **Work Engagement** through the 9-item scale adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli et al. (2006). This variable measures a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind through three main components. The first component is vigor, which analyzes the level of physical energy, mental toughness and stamina an employee has during work hours. Dedication, the second component, is concerned with the sense of pride, enthusiasm and inspiration a person gets from their job. The third component is absorption, which is the extent to which staff members are absorbed and happy in their work, especially when they are so absorbed that time seems to fly by.

3.4 Data Analysis Method and Structural Model

To test our proposed hypotheses, we used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) using the SmartPLS software. This approach was chosen because of its high statistical power in testing complex mediation paths, especially in the context of a relatively small sample size (N = 106). Moreover, SEM-PLS does not assume the data are strictly multivariate normal. Our analytical process was performed in two distinct steps: the first step involved the assessment of the measurement model (outer model) to confirm the quality of the data, and the second step involved the assessment of the structural model (inner model) to empirically test the directional relationships as hypothesized.

Within this framework, the linear regression equations of our structural model are expressed as follows:

$$JS = \beta_1 DL + \beta_2 JC + \zeta_1$$

$$WE = \beta_3 DL + \beta_4 JC + \beta_5 JS + \zeta_2$$

Where:

DL = Digital Leadership; JC = Job Crafting; JS = Job Satisfaction; WE = Work Engagement

To test whether the direct and indirect paths are significant, we ran a non-parametric bootstrap using 5,000 repetitions. This allowed us to calculate two-tailed t-values alongside 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

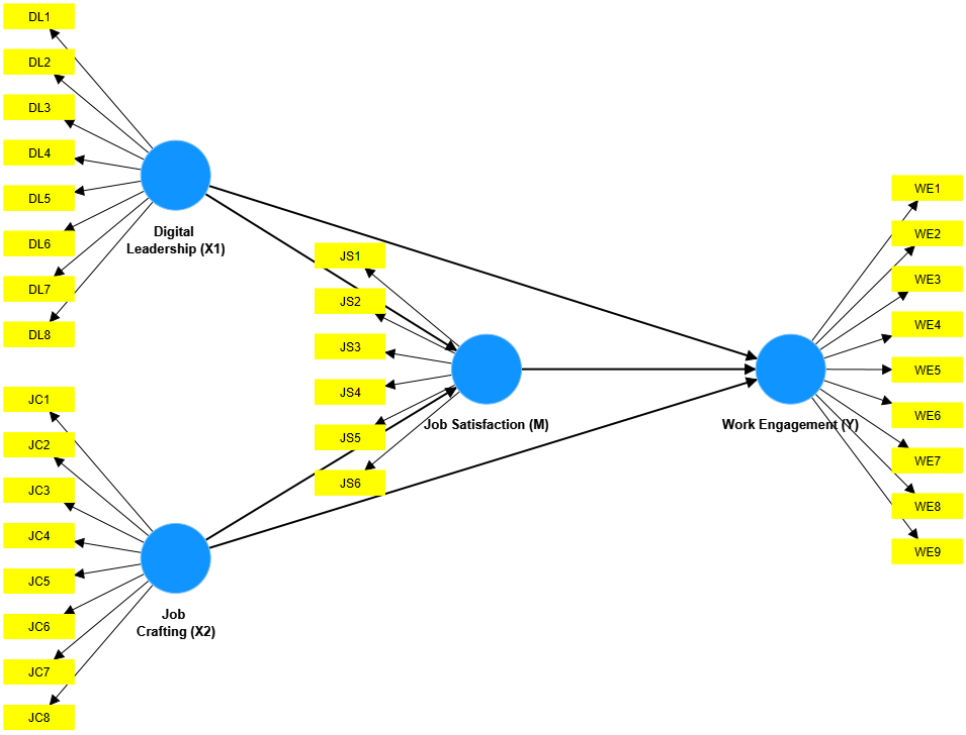


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

3.5. Measurement and Structural Model Evaluation

The evaluation of the empirical data via SmartPLS is strictly divided into a two-stage assessment procedure to verify the statistical parameters before drawing conclusions from the structural hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019).

3.5.1 Measurement Model Assessment (Outer Model Verification)

To validate our measurement instruments, we conducted three typical statistical procedures for testing construct reliability and validity. First, we examined the outer loading and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to verify the convergent validity. The ideal item loading score should be higher than 0.70 as stated by Hair et al. (2022). However, scores between 0.40 and 0.70 are acceptable if the AVE of the construct is above the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). We also eliminated poorly performing indicators that pulled the AVE below the minimum level to protect the integrity of the data. The second step tested internal consistency reliability based on Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to ensure that both measures were above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). Third, we tested discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The HTMT scores should be lower than 0.85 for separate structural lines, but up to 0.9 is acceptable for similar organizational behaviors of concepts (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2022). Finally, because this study is based on cross-sectional, self-reported survey data, we also calculated full collinearity variance inflation factors (VIF) to avoid common method bias, with a strict safety cut-off of less than 3.3.

3.5.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model Hypotheses Testing)

The outer model was confirmed for sufficient reliability and validity, and then the structural framework was assessed by following a two-step approach. Firstly, the R-square scores were computed to measure the explained variance of both Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement by the predictor variables. Secondly, the path coefficients and their significance were assessed for all the proposed direct and indirect relationships. To test these hypotheses, a bootstrapping method with 5,000 repetitions was used. The paths were validated according to the standard statistical cutoff marks i.e. t-values should be greater than 1.96 and p-values should be less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics and Respondent Profile

The descriptive analysis was performed before the assessment of the structural equations to describe the demographic profile of the participants. The final sample includes 106 valid respondents, with a particular interest in Generation Z and Millennial employees who are heavy users of digital platforms in their daily work-related activities. The respondents' demographic characteristics, categorized by gender, generational cohort, occupational sector, educational background, job position and organizational tenure, are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Respondent Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	33	31.13

	Female	73	68.87
Generational Cohort	Millennial	35	33.02
	Gen Z	71	66.98
Occupational Sector	BUMN/BUMD	2	1.89
	Government	83	78.30
	Private Sector	11	10.38
	Others	10	9.43
Highest Education Level	Diploma	34	32.07
	Bachelor's Degree	49	46.23
	Master's Degree	23	21.70
Job Position	Staff	95	89.62
	Non-Staff	11	10.38
Tenure	< 1 Year	8	7.55
	1 – 5 Years	55	51.89
	> 5 Years	43	40.56

Source: Survey Data (2026)

4.1.2. Measurement Model Assessment (Outer Model Verification)

First, we evaluated the outer model to make sure the data were of good quality and psychometrically sound overall before testing our structural hypotheses. Following the guidelines by Hair et al (2022), this process involves a strict check of three core areas. To confirm both internal consistency and convergent validity, we evaluated the individual item loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR). This preliminary analysis ensures that all latent variables are stable enough before we look at discriminant validity and proceed to the final hypotheses testing. During the initial algorithmic estimation, two indicators from the job crafting construct, specifically JC5 and JC6 which originally operationalized the increasing challenging job demands dimension, demonstrated low outer loadings well below the acceptable parameters. These low loadings severely suppressed the construct's overall variance extraction. To satisfy mandatory methodological requirements, a systematic elimination process was performed.

Table 4.2 Results of Construct Validity and Consistency Assessments (N = 106)

Construct	Final Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Digital Leadership (DL)	8	0.610 – 0.902	0.932	0.936	0.685
Job Crafting (JC)	6	0.681 – 0.821	0.839	0.853	0.556
Job Satisfaction (JS)	6	0.715 – 0.831	0.880	0.883	0.626
Work Engagement (WE)	9	0.681 – 0.872	0.925	0.931	0.629

Source: Data Analysis (2026)

The final measurement results in Table 4.2 confirm that all latent constructs satisfy the required standards for internal consistency and convergent validity. To achieve this data quality, we removed items JC5 and JC6 from the job crafting scale as their initial loadings were too low. As a result, all other items had high final outer loadings. More importantly, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all variables was above the safety cut-off value of 0.50. The Job Crafting AVE of 0.556 and Digital Leadership AVE of 0.685 means that each construct was able to explain most of the variance of its indicators.

Table 4.3 HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)

Constructs	DL	JC	JS
DL	-	-	-
JC	0.714	-	-
JS	0.855	0.908	-
WE	0.639	0.806	0.878

As shown in Table 4.3, the HTMT values between constructs are mostly below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The HTMT value between Job Crafting and Job Satisfaction is 0.908 and between Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement is 0.878. Although these values are slightly above the strict cut-off of 0.85, they are within the acceptable range of less than 0.90 to 0.95 for the latent variables that are conceptually and behaviorally close, in the context of organizational behavior research (Henseler et al, 2015; Hair et al, 2022). The close conceptual proximity can be explained by the natural interlinkage of proactive changes (job crafting) and emotional evaluations (job satisfaction) in highly digitalized public sector settings without giving up on the structural distinctiveness of the model.

4.1.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model Hypotheses Testing)

Prior to the assessment of the structural paths, we performed a comprehensive collinearity analysis using the inner Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) to identify any potential multicollinearity and common method bias.

Table 4.4 VIF (Variance Inflation Factor)

Predictor Constructs	Job Satisfaction	Work Engagement
Digital Leadership	1.690	2.503
Job Crafting	1.690	2.642
Job Satisfaction	-	3.889

Table 4.4 shows that the inner VIF values for Digital Leadership and Job Crafting are well below the threshold of 3.3. The path from Job Satisfaction to Work Engagement has a slightly higher VIF of 3.889, which is likely to be a consequence of the inherent conceptual association between employee satisfaction and commitment, but the model is not suffering from substantial common method bias. Therefore, these values do not taint our results and we can rely on the interpretation of the path coefficients (Kock, 2015).

After the check for collinearity, we proceeded to examine the predictive capability of the structural model to test our hypotheses. We started by examining the coefficient of determination (R-squared) to determine the variance explained by our predictor variables. The SmartPLS analysis shows an R-squared of 0.725 for Job Satisfaction which means that Digital Leadership and Job Crafting explain 72.5% of the variance in this mediator and thus show a strong predictive power. Also, the R-squared value for Work Engagement was significant to 0.643, indicating that the predictors explain 64.3% of the variance in employee engagement.

Next, the following is a compilation of calculation results for the original sample, f-squared, t-statistics, and p-values of the research model.

Table 4.5 Structural Model Evaluation: Direct Effects and Effect Size

Structural Path	Original Sample	f^2	t-statistics	P-values	Decision
DL – JS (H1)	0.473	0.477	7.485	0.000	Supported
JC – JS (H2)	0.467	0.465	6.674	0.000	Supported
DL – WE (H3)	-0.080	0.007	0.898	0.369	Rejected
JC – WE (H4)	0.177	0.035	1.582	0.114	Rejected
JS – WE (H5)	0.718	0.397	6.545	0.000	Supported

Source: Data Analysis (2026)

Furthermore, the magnitude of influence of some independent variables on the dependent constructs was tested using the Cohen's effect size (f-squared). Table 4.3 shows that the paths between DL and JS (f2 = 0.477), JC and JS (f2 = 0.465), and JS and WE (f2 = 0.397) all have large effect sizes, far exceeding the threshold of 0.35. Conversely, the direct paths from DL and JC to WE have negligible effect sizes (0.007 and 0.035 respectively).

The significance of the structural paths was systematically tested via a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure utilizing 5,000 resamples. A hypothesis is statistically confirmed if the generated p-value is below 0.05 and the t-statistic strictly exceeds 1.96.

As detailed in Table 4.5 regarding direct effects, the empirical data rejects both H3 and H4. Digital Leadership exhibits an insignificant negative direct effect on Work Engagement ($\beta = -0.080$; $t = 0.898$; $p = 0.369$). Similarly, Job Crafting has no significant direct effect on Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.177$; $t = 1.582$; $p = 0.114$). In contrast, H1, H2 and H5 are well supported. Digital Leadership significantly impacts Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.473$; $t = 7.485$; $p = 0.000$), and so does Job Crafting ($\beta = 0.467$; $t = 6.674$; $p = 0.000$). Job Satisfaction itself has the most powerful direct positive impact on Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.718$; $t = 6.545$; $p = 0.000$).

Table 4.6 Structural Model Evaluation: Specific Indirect Effects

Mediation Path	Original Sample	t-statistics	P-values	Decision	Mediation Type
DL – JS – WE (H6)	0.340	5.333	0.000	Supported	Full Mediation
JC – JS – WE (H7)	0.335	4.246	0.000	Supported	Full Mediation

Source: Data Analysis (2026)

The mediation analysis is represented in Table 4.6. The results indicate an important structural dynamic . H6 is strongly supported because Job Satisfaction is a significant mediator between Digital Leadership and Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.340$; $t = 5.333$; $p = 0.000$). Also, H7 is supported because Job Satisfaction is a significant mediator between Job Crafting and Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.335$; $t = 4.246$; $p = 0.000$). Since the direct effects in H1 and H2 are statistically not significant and the indirect effects in H6 and H7 are highly significant, Job Satisfaction plays as a full mediator in this structural model.

Based on the statistical evaluations of both direct and indirect paths, this study provides clear answers to the core research questions. First, regarding the direct effects, the data shows that Digital Leadership and Job Crafting do not directly drive Work Engagement among Millennial and Generation Z employees. This statistical evidence directly answers the first set of research questions in the negative, as both paths failed to reach significance. Instead, the direct effects of Digital Leadership and Job Crafting are completely transferred to Job Satisfaction, which becomes the main factor directly affecting Work Engagement.

Therefore, our results answer the main research question, showing that Job Satisfaction plays a full mediation role in this model. Neither supervisory digital competency nor individual job crafting behavior can successfully boost

work engagement unless employees are satisfied with their jobs first. This full mediation points to a clear operational path. Digital Leadership and Job Crafting become the first drivers that build Job Satisfaction, which then serves as the essential gateway needed to unlock higher Work Engagement for employees who use digital platforms on a daily basis.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Interpretation of Findings and Novelty

Our data suggest a full mediation model. In this setup, Digital Leadership (X1) and Job Crafting (X2) do not directly impact Work Engagement (Y). Instead, their actual effect goes entirely through Job Satisfaction (M). This full mediation is the main new finding of our study. Previous studies have proven that techsavvy bosses or the personalization of work will automatically make the employees energetic and dedicated (Pangestu et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2022). However, our data shows a completely different trend among the surveyed Millennials and Gen Z workers.

The reason why H3 and H4, the direct paths from Digital Leadership and Job Crafting to Work Engagement, were rejected, is closely related to our sample profile. The data shows that 78.30% of the participants work as civil servants (ASN) in the public sector and 66.98% of them are Gen Z. These numbers show a particular workplace reality. In the Indonesian public sector, digital transformation and the use of official platforms is a mandatory rule set by the government. Thus, the use of these digital tools is a structural requirement not a personal choice of an individual employee.

For younger digital natives in a bureaucracy, being digital is simply a basic daily requirement of a boss. They consider being tech-savvy a normal working tool rather than a source of inspiration. Likewise, changing the way you work by means of job crafting takes a lot of effort in a rigid public agency. In a strict system, changing tasks or boundaries of work does not automatically make employees feel energetic or dedicated. These individual changes only increase engagement if the employee feels satisfied with his or her job in the first place. Therefore, in a mandatory digital workspace, structural leadership and proactive behaviors cannot bypass the emotional state of the employee; they must first build institutional job satisfaction to effectively trigger deep work engagement.

4.2.2 Study Limitations and Interpretative Shortcomings

This study provides useful insights into the full mediation model of work engagement, but there are some empirical and methodological limitations to be noted. Total respondents were 106. Although this size meets the minimum statistical requirements for PLS-SEM estimations based on the minimum path parameters (Hair et al., 2019), it is a relatively small sample size in relation to the larger population of Millennials and Generation Z in the digital workplace. This limitation, together with the high concentration of respondents from the public sector (78.30%), may limit the statistical power to detect smaller or more subtle direct pathways between Digital Leadership, Job Crafting and Work Engagement that a larger and more diverse sample across sectors might identify.

Secondly, the data collection was done using a cross-sectional design, with a digital questionnaire administered at one point in time. As such, the findings provide a temporal empirical snapshot of employee behaviour and perceptions. However, this study is cross-sectional, and thus we cannot make definitive causal conclusions in the long term, as digital platforms and workplace technologies are dynamic.

Finally, the study was based solely on self-report questionnaires that are susceptible to common method variance and social desirability bias. Young professionals at an early stage of their career or those working in more structured public sector jobs are more prone to engage in professional impression management by over-reporting their levels of work engagement or proactive behaviors. This is empirically supported by the data where the HTMT between Job Crafting and Job Satisfaction is 0.908, and the inner VIF for the path from Job Satisfaction to Work Engagement indicates a localized inflation of 3.889. These points are just above the conventional limits of 0.85 for HTMT and 3.3 for VIF but do not destroy the overall model. These figures only indicate that job satisfaction and dedication are very closely related in this sample. To remedy this, future studies should collect data at different points in time or different sources such as supervisor ratings. Testing a larger sample across different sectors would also help distinguish these concepts and see if the results are generalizable.

4.2.3 Future Research Directions and Theoretical Postulates

Longitudinal studies and quasi-experimental approaches are required to validate this model of full mediation over time. These methodologies will be useful to demonstrate the evolution of employee behavior as digital workflows evolve. In addition, the subsequent studies should increase the sample size, as well as samples from public offices and private companies. Evaluation of broader samples is essential to determine whether these generational trends are consistent across various work contexts.

Two new theoretical ideas can be tested in future studies based on our findings. First, we propose the notion of digital routine saturation . This refers to the situation when a workplace is already mature in the use of technology, and the digital leadership of a boss is no longer effective. In such technology-rich environments, employees no longer require digital guidance. Rather, they require more profound emotional and relational support to stay engaged. Second, we propose a boundary condition called crafting fatigue. The idea is that the satisfaction of changing your own job tasks will only be realized if your manager supports you. Good leadership is essential, or the constant

adjustment of your workload will lead to burn out, turning a good habit into something negative and downward spiraling.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationships among Digital Leadership, Job Crafting, Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement among Millennial and Gen Z employees who work on digital platforms daily. Our analysis shows that the direct relationships are not significant. Neither a leader's digital skills nor an employee's individual job adjustments directly boost work engagement in this younger group.

However, the mediation paths are fully supported. The data proves that both factors work entirely through Job Satisfaction. This means employee satisfaction acts as the essential gateway needed to build dedication in a digital workplace. In this environment, a leader's tech-savviness is viewed as merely a daily necessity, not a motivational factor. Consequently, structural digital inputs and individual proactivity cannot bypass the internal emotional evaluation of the employee to generate sustained work engagement.

Based on the empirical scope of the data, organizations and human resource practitioners are advised to move away from unmediated digital management models that focus solely on expanding digital surveillance or demanding unguided individual Rather, practical interventions should be aimed at the internal infrastructure of the workplace that directly affects Job Satisfaction. Organizations should concentrate on initiatives that reduce digital communication friction, reduce technostress and protect work-life balance. Leadership development should also emphasize the provision of relational and emotional support, as well as technical guidance, to ensure that younger employees feel structurally supported in their digital workflows.

Several limitations should be considered in the interpretation of these findings. First, the relatively modest sample size (106 respondents) and the considerable sectoral concentration (78.30% in the public sector as civil servants) limit the broader generalizability of the findings to highly agile private corporations or startups. Second, the cross-sectional design offers only a momentary snapshot of behavioral mechanisms, limiting the ability to establish long-term causal claims as workplace technology continues to evolve. Third, because the data relied on self-reported questionnaires, the dataset exhibits a localized conceptual proximity and variance inflation, empirically reflected in the HTMT value of 0.908 between JC and JS, and the inner VIF value of 3.889 for the path from Job Satisfaction to Work Engagement. While these scores do not ruin the model, they show a common limit in single-source data.

Future research should extend the duration of follow-up with participants or use a quasi-experimental design to address this. Future studies can also collect data from multiple sources, such as supervisor ratings. Finally, a larger sample size and different corporate sectors would serve to untangle these concepts. This would allow the researchers to find the point at which ongoing job crafting no longer increases engagement and starts to cause burnout.

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