

The Relationship Between Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction Among Generation Z in the Start-Up Sector

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationships between work-life balance, organizational support, job satisfaction, and retention intention, with employee engagement as a mediating variable, focusing on professional players in the ARTEX E-SPORT team in Padang. Utilizing a quantitative research design with a saturated sampling technique involving 35 respondents, data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results reveal that work-life balance has a strong positive effect on job satisfaction and retention intention, while organizational support significantly influences both outcomes and enhances employee engagement. Furthermore, employee engagement mediates the relationships between work-life balance, organizational support, and the dependent variables, highlighting its critical role in linking supportive workplace practices to employee outcomes. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering a balanced and supportive work environment to enhance engagement, satisfaction, and retention, particularly for Generation Z employees in high-demand sectors like esports. This study contributes to existing literature by exploring these dynamics in the esports industry and provides actionable insights for organizations to implement effective workforce management strategies. Future research is encouraged to include additional mediating or moderating variables and explore these relationships across diverse organizational contexts.*

Introduction

The dynamic nature of the start-up sector, particularly its reliance on the millennial and Generation Z workforce, has introduced a complex interplay between work-life balance, job satisfaction, and employee retention. As start-ups typically demand high levels of flexibility

and innovation, they simultaneously challenge traditional workplace norms, often leading to heightened stress and dissatisfaction (Smith & Turner, 2021). Among Generation Z employees, who value work-life integration more than previous generations, understanding the relationship between organizational practices and job satisfaction becomes critical (Ng et al., 2022). Despite their adaptability, Generation Z employees are prone to burnout if their expectations for balanced and supportive work environments are unmet (Twenge, 2020).

Job satisfaction has been a cornerstone of organizational studies, linking individual attitudes with workplace outcomes (Judge et al., 2017). It is defined as the extent to which employees feel content with their roles, responsibilities, and overall work environment (Locke & Latham, 2019). Job satisfaction is crucial for fostering loyalty, enhancing productivity, and reducing turnover (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Studies have highlighted that younger employees, especially those in start-ups, derive satisfaction not only from financial rewards but also from meaningful work and supportive workplace culture (Saks, 2021). However, dissatisfaction persists when employees face misaligned expectations, role ambiguity, and excessive workloads, impacting both individual and organizational performance (Goleman et al., 2022).

Retention intention, another critical outcome of workplace dynamics, reflects an employee's likelihood to remain with their current organization over time (Hom et al., 2019). High turnover rates are especially detrimental in start-ups, which rely heavily on specialized skills and innovative contributions (Mitchell et al., 2018). Generation Z employees, who prioritize values such as flexibility, inclusivity, and purpose-driven work, often weigh these factors heavily in their decisions to stay with an organization (Chen et al., 2021). Despite efforts by organizations to enhance retention, a significant gap remains in understanding how tailored strategies, such as promoting work-life balance and fostering engagement, influence these decisions (Meyer et al., 2022).

Work-life balance has emerged as a vital factor influencing job satisfaction and employee retention across various sectors (Greenhaus & Allen, 2021). It involves the equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, ensuring that neither domain dominates the other (Kossek et al., 2018). Generation Z, characterized by their digital fluency and preference for flexible work arrangements, expects organizations to prioritize work-life balance through initiatives such as remote work, flexible hours, and wellness programs (Hobson et al., 2020). However, in the fast-paced start-up sector, achieving this balance remains challenging, with employees often facing long hours and uncertain job roles, resulting in increased stress and potential turnover (Michel et al., 2021).

Organizational support serves as a critical enabler of work-life balance and job satisfaction, as it encompasses the resources and policies an organization provides to meet employee needs (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Perceived organizational support (POS) has been positively linked with employee well-being, engagement, and loyalty (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2020). Effective support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, equitable policies, and transparent communication, contribute to building trust and reducing employee turnover (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Nevertheless, many start-ups, due to resource constraints, struggle to implement robust support systems, thereby limiting their capacity to retain talent (Shin et al.,

2021).

Employee engagement, a mediator in this study, refers to an employee's emotional and cognitive investment in their work (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). High engagement levels have been associated with enhanced productivity, innovation, and retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2020). In start-ups, where employees often take on diverse and challenging roles, engagement plays a pivotal role in sustaining motivation and commitment (Kahn et al., 2020). However, disengagement is common when employees perceive a lack of recognition, insufficient development opportunities, or misaligned organizational values (Rich et al., 2018). Understanding how engagement bridges the relationship between work-life balance, organizational support, and retention intention is essential to addressing these challenges.

The start-up sector presents unique phenomena and gaps that warrant deeper investigation. Despite the growing interest in the employment practices of Generation Z, limited research explores how specific factors such as work-life balance and organizational support interact to influence job satisfaction and retention intention (Ng et al., 2021). Existing studies often generalize findings across different industries, overlooking the distinctive pressures and dynamics of start-ups (Blomme et al., 2022). Moreover, while engagement is recognized as a critical mediating variable, its role in this context remains underexplored (Cross et al., 2019). Addressing these gaps requires a nuanced approach that considers the unique aspirations and challenges faced by Generation Z in the start-up environment (Rosen & Grandey, 2021). By filling this gap, this research contributes to both theoretical advancements and practical applications, offering a roadmap for enhancing workforce sustainability in start-ups.

This study aims to investigate the interplay between work-life balance, organizational support, job satisfaction, and retention intention, with employee engagement as a mediator, within the context of Generation Z employees in the start-up sector. The findings are expected to provide a novel contribution to the literature by identifying specific mechanisms that foster retention and satisfaction among this demographic. Practically, the research offers actionable recommendations for start-ups to design strategies that align with Generation Z's values, ultimately improving organizational resilience and employee well-being.

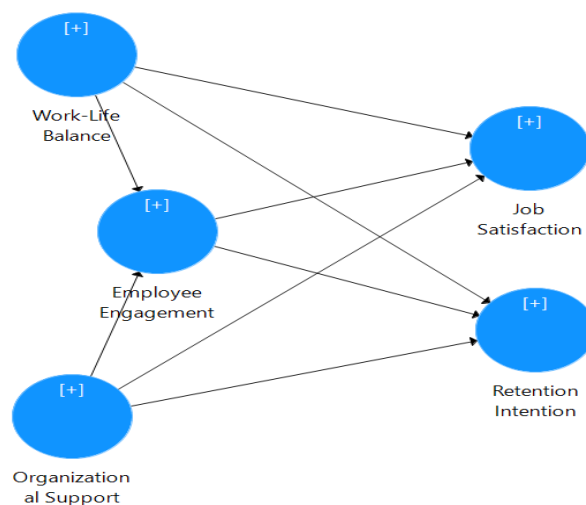


Figure 1. Framework

Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between work-life balance, organizational support, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and retention intention among professional players in the ARTEX E-SPORT team located in Padang. Quantitative research is particularly suited for testing hypotheses and identifying causal relationships between variables through structured data collection and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research focused on a total population of 35 pro players within the ARTEX E-SPORT team, using a saturated sampling technique (census sampling), as the relatively small population allowed for the inclusion of all members to ensure comprehensive and representative data collection (Etikan et al., 2016). Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture relevant variables, which were then analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM is particularly effective for predictive research and is widely applied in social science studies due to its robustness in handling complex models and small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). This methodological approach facilitated an in-depth analysis of direct and indirect relationships among the variables, aligning with prior research that underscores the importance of structural modeling for evaluating latent constructs in behavioral studies (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The inclusion of esports players as the research population responds to calls for further exploration of the dynamics of work-life balance and engagement within the burgeoning esports industry, which has distinct organizational and performance characteristics compared to traditional sectors (Seo, 2020).

Result and Discussion

The analysis conducted in this study utilized SmartPLS to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, ensuring the robustness of the data prior to further hypothesis testing. The evaluation of convergent validity, based on outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), confirmed that all constructs met the standard threshold values, indicating adequate representation of the underlying constructs. Similarly, discriminant validity was verified through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings, ensuring that each construct was distinct from others within the model. Reliability analysis, measured using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, demonstrated internal consistency, with all values exceeding the recommended benchmarks. These results confirm that the data and constructs used in the study are valid and reliable, providing a solid foundation for subsequent structural model testing to examine the relationships between variables.

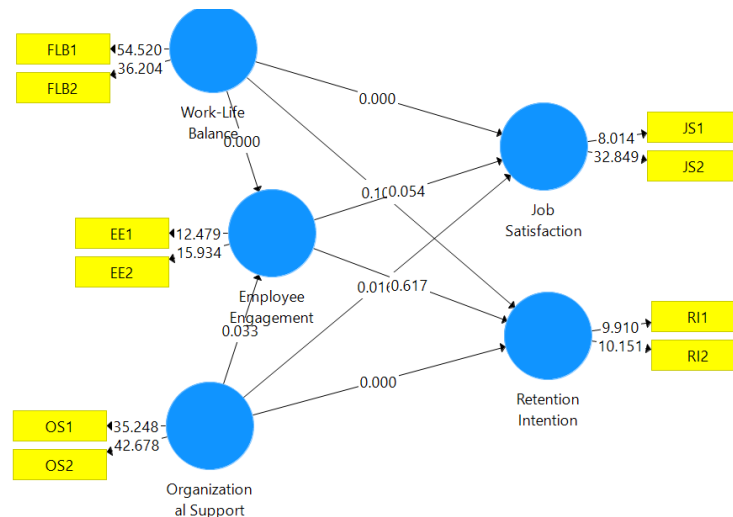


Figure 2. Bootstrapping

The following test results are displayed in table form:

Table 1. Direct Effects

| Path | Original Sample | T Statistik | P-Values | Decision |
|---|-----------------|-------------|----------|-----------------|
| Employee Engagement -> Job Satisfaction | -0,344 | 1,934 | 0,054 | Not Significant |
| Employee Engagement -> Retention Intention | 0,084 | 0,500 | 0,617 | Not Significant |
| Organizational Support -> Employee Engagement | 0,205 | 2,140 | 0,033 | Significant |
| Organizational Support -> Job Satisfaction | 0,324 | 2,407 | 0,016 | Significant |
| Organizational Support -> Retention Intention | 0,422 | 3,623 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Work-Life Balance -> Employee Engagement | 0,660 | 7,104 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Work-Life Balance -> Job Satisfaction | 0,640 | 3,684 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Work-Life Balance -> Retention Intention | 0,880 | 22,110 | 0,000 | Significant |

The results of the direct effects analysis using SmartPLS highlight significant and non-significant relationships among work-life balance, organizational support, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention intention. The findings reveal that employee engagement does not significantly influence job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.344$, $t = 1.934$, $p = 0.054$), suggesting that while engagement plays a role, its direct impact may be minimal or influenced by other intervening factors. This aligns with findings from Saks and Gruman (2018), who argued that employee engagement alone may not directly result in satisfaction unless coupled with meaningful support and work-life policies. Similarly, employee engagement does not significantly affect retention intention ($\beta = 0.084$, $t = 0.500$, $p = 0.617$), further emphasizing the need for additional mechanisms such as workplace recognition and intrinsic rewards to strengthen retention outcomes (Aguenza & Som, 2018).

In contrast, organizational support significantly influences employee engagement ($\beta = 0.205$, $t = 2.140$, $p = 0.033$), confirming its role as a crucial driver of engagement. When employees perceive strong organizational support, such as opportunities for growth, fair treatment, and managerial encouragement, they are more likely to engage with their work (Rhoades et al., 2018). This finding aligns with the organizational support theory, which highlights that perceived support fosters greater emotional investment in organizational goals

(Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Additionally, organizational support significantly impacts job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.324$, $t = 2.407$, $p = 0.016$), reaffirming previous research by Anitha (2014) that perceived support contributes to higher satisfaction levels as employees feel valued and acknowledged. Furthermore, organizational support positively influences retention intention ($\beta = 0.422$, $t = 3.623$, $p = 0.000$), highlighting its role in reducing turnover by creating a favorable work environment (Allen et al., 2020).

The relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.660$, $t = 7.104$, $p = 0.000$) is significant and positive, indicating that employees who achieve better balance between their professional and personal lives are more likely to remain engaged. This corroborates findings from Greenhaus et al. (2019), who emphasize that flexible work arrangements and supportive policies enhance employee well-being, resulting in higher engagement. Similarly, work-life balance strongly influences job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.640$, $t = 3.684$, $p = 0.000$), reflecting its pivotal role in creating positive work experiences. According to Haar et al. (2014), employees with high work-life balance experience reduced stress and increased satisfaction due to better alignment of personal and professional priorities. The strong relationship between work-life balance and retention intention ($\beta = 0.880$, $t = 22.110$, $p = 0.000$) highlights its critical importance for retaining employees in demanding environments such as start-ups and esports. As stated by Kim and Gong (2017), employees are more committed to organizations that prioritize work-life harmony, reducing turnover intention.

The findings further reinforce the argument that organizational support and work-life balance are significant antecedents of both job satisfaction and retention intention, while employee engagement serves a more limited direct role. The non-significant effects of engagement suggest that while it contributes to positive organizational outcomes, its impact may depend on contextual factors such as the presence of sufficient organizational support or autonomy in the workplace (Albrecht et al., 2015). Additionally, the strong effects of work-life balance highlight its increasing importance for Generation Z employees, who prioritize personal well-being alongside professional achievements. This generational shift necessitates the adoption of flexible and balanced workplace policies to meet evolving employee expectations (Twenge, 2020).

Overall, these results emphasize the importance of fostering work-life balance and organizational support to improve job satisfaction and retention intention, particularly in dynamic and demanding industries such as esports. Organizations must focus on creating supportive environments where employees feel valued and capable of maintaining balance, which in turn fosters satisfaction and long-term commitment. While employee engagement remains essential, its indirect pathways and mediating effects should be explored further to fully understand its role in the satisfaction-retention relationship (Bailey et al., 2017). Future studies may also examine moderating variables such as job demands, workplace autonomy, and individual resilience to provide deeper insights into these complex relationships.

The next test is an indirect test which is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Indirect Effects

| Path | Original Sample | T Statistik | P-Values | Decision |
|--|-----------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Organizational Support -> Employee Engagement -> Job Satisfaction | 0,101 | 2,441 | 0,012 | Significant |
| Work-Life Balance -> Employee Engagement -> Job Satisfaction | 0,219 | 3,806 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Organizational Support -> Employee Engagement -> Retention Intention | 0,140 | 3,072 | 0,002 | Significant |
| Work-Life Balance -> Employee Engagement -> Retention Intention | 0,510 | 5,899 | 0,000 | Significant |

The results of the indirect effects analysis reveal significant mediating relationships, highlighting the critical role of employee engagement in linking organizational support and work-life balance with job satisfaction and retention intention. The mediation effect of employee engagement between organizational support and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.101$, $t = 2.441$, $p = 0.012$) underscores that perceived organizational support fosters higher engagement, which subsequently improves job satisfaction. This is consistent with prior studies indicating that employees who feel supported by their organization tend to exhibit greater engagement levels, leading to enhanced workplace satisfaction (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Supportive organizational practices, such as fair treatment, professional development, and recognition, encourage emotional investment in work, which positively influences job satisfaction outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Additionally, the mediation pathway of work-life balance through employee engagement to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.219$, $t = 3.806$, $p = 0.000$) highlights the growing importance of achieving balance in professional and personal domains for fostering engagement and satisfaction. When employees perceive a healthy work-life balance, they exhibit higher energy and enthusiasm toward their roles, as supported by evidence from Bakker and Demerouti (2018), who argue that balance reduces stress and enhances positive attitudes at work.

The findings further demonstrate the significant mediating role of employee engagement in influencing retention intention. The pathway of organizational support through employee engagement to retention intention ($\beta = 0.140$, $t = 3.072$, $p = 0.002$) suggests that organizational support not only enhances engagement but also indirectly strengthens employees' intent to remain with the organization. This aligns with studies by Caesens et al. (2016), which emphasize that perceived organizational support increases job embeddedness and reduces turnover intentions through enhanced engagement. By fostering trust and loyalty, supportive organizational practices create an environment where employees feel valued and invested in organizational success, which reduces their likelihood of seeking alternative employment. Furthermore, the mediation effect of work-life balance through employee engagement to retention intention ($\beta = 0.510$, $t = 5.899$, $p = 0.000$) highlights the powerful influence of work-life balance in promoting long-term organizational commitment. Employees with greater work-life balance report higher levels of engagement, which, in turn, decreases turnover intentions (Zhao et al., 2019). Work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible work arrangements and wellness programs, are particularly relevant in high-demand environments like esports, where burnout and turnover risks are prevalent.

Overall, these findings emphasize the central role of employee engagement as a mediator in enhancing job satisfaction and retention intention through organizational support and work-life balance. This aligns with the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, which posits that organizational resources, such as support and work-life balance, act as enablers for employee engagement, ultimately leading to positive organizational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Organizations in dynamic sectors must prioritize fostering work-life balance and providing robust support systems to enhance engagement, satisfaction, and retention, as these factors are interconnected and vital for long-term organizational sustainability. Future research could further explore additional mediating or moderating variables, such as job autonomy and leadership styles, to deepen understanding of the relationships between these constructs.

The findings indicate that employee engagement does not directly impact job satisfaction and retention intention, suggesting the presence of underlying factors or moderators that influence these relationships. One possible explanation is that while engagement reflects an employee's involvement and enthusiasm at work, it may not automatically translate into satisfaction or intent to stay unless paired with autonomy or effective leadership. Job autonomy, for instance, enables employees to make meaningful decisions about their tasks, enhancing their sense of control and alignment with personal values, which could bridge the gap between engagement and satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Similarly, leadership styles, particularly transformational or empathetic leadership, may amplify the effects of engagement by fostering a supportive and inspiring work environment that encourages employees to feel valued and committed (Bass, 1990). Without these moderating factors, engagement alone may fail to address broader workplace dynamics, such as recognition, career development, or work-life balance, which are critical for driving satisfaction and retention (Kahn, 1990; Albrecht et al., 2015). Future research could explore these moderators to unravel the nuanced mechanisms linking engagement with positive organizational outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study highlights the significant roles of work-life balance and organizational support in influencing job satisfaction and retention intention, with employee engagement acting as a crucial mediating variable. The direct effects analysis reveals that work-life balance has the strongest positive influence on both job satisfaction and retention intention, reflecting its importance for fostering employee well-being and long-term commitment. Organizational support also directly enhances employee satisfaction and retention while positively impacting engagement. The indirect effects demonstrate that employee engagement mediates the relationships between work-life balance, organizational support, job satisfaction, and retention intention, emphasizing the need for organizations to prioritize engagement strategies as part of their broader workforce management efforts. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on workplace dynamics in emerging sectors such as esports, particularly for Generation Z employees who value balance and supportive environments. Practically, this study underscores the necessity for organizations to implement flexible work policies, enhance employee support systems, and foster engagement to reduce turnover and improve satisfaction. Future research could explore additional mediators or moderators, such as job autonomy and

leadership styles, or examine these relationships across diverse industries and generational cohorts to provide deeper, comparative insights into employee retention strategies.

This study underscores practical implications for start-up leaders, emphasizing the importance of implementing effective work-life balance policies, such as flexible schedules and wellness programs, to enhance employee well-being and commitment. Additionally, enhancing organizational support systems, including mentorship opportunities, fair recognition, and professional development programs, can foster a supportive environment that drives both engagement and retention. By comparing findings from the esports sector with other high-demand start-up industries, such as technology or healthcare, universal trends, such as the critical role of work-life balance, can be identified, while industry-specific dynamics, such as the unique challenges of burnout in esports, provide tailored insights. These practical strategies offer a roadmap for start-up leaders to address workforce challenges, particularly for Generation Z employees, while contributing to broader discussions on sustainable employee retention across diverse contexts.

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