

Career Development and Job Satisfaction: Investigating the Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion in Gen Z

Muhammad Harry Al Giffary, Ivan Ivan, Jubaedah Jubaedah*

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: Harry30999baron@gmail.com, ivanyulivan2@gmail.com, jubaedah@upnvj.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Generation Z employees, characterized by unique workplace expectations and technological fluency, present distinct challenges for organizational management, particularly regarding career development and job satisfaction dynamics. This study examines how emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between career development and job satisfaction among Gen Z workers in South Jakarta, Indonesia. Using simple random sampling, data were collected from 387 Gen Z employees (aged 18-40, predominantly 24-28 years) working across various sectors in South Jakarta. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0 was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. Results reveal that: (1) career development significantly and positively influences job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.409$, $t = 6.544$, $p < 0.001$); (2) career development significantly affects emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.654$, $t = 34.027$, $p < 0.001$); (3) emotional exhaustion significantly impacts job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.598$, $t = 8.118$, $p < 0.001$); and (4) emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the career development-job satisfaction relationship (indirect effect = 0.392, $t = 7.586$, $p < 0.001$). The model demonstrates strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.728$ for job satisfaction; $R^2 = 0.631$ for emotional exhaustion). These findings indicate that while career development enhances job satisfaction directly, it simultaneously generates emotional exhaustion, which negatively impacts satisfaction. For Gen Z employees specifically, organizations must balance career advancement opportunities with workload management, emotional support systems, and transparent communication to optimize satisfaction outcomes while mitigating burnout risks inherent in career progression demands.

KEYWORDS Career Development; Emotional Exhaustion; Job Satisfaction; Generation z; South Jakarta.



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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global workforce is undergoing unprecedented transformation driven by technological disruption, shifting employee expectations, and generational turnover. As Baby Boomers retire and Millennials advance into senior positions, Generation Z—individuals born between 1995 and 2012—is rapidly entering the workforce, bringing distinctive characteristics, values, and workplace expectations that challenge traditional management paradigms (Güngör & Alp, 2019). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z employees have grown up entirely in the digital age, demonstrating native fluency with technology, a preference for instantaneous communication, and expectations for rapid career progression and continuous learning opportunities (Hinduan et al., 2020).

Global research indicates that Gen Z workers prioritize meaningful work, work-life integration, mental health support, and authentic organizational cultures over traditional incentives such as job security or hierarchical advancement (Chen et al., 2023). Simultaneously, this generation exhibits higher rates of job mobility, with studies showing that

40-60% of Gen Z employees plan to change employers within two years of hiring—a phenomenon often termed "job hopping" (Nurrahman, 2022). This elevated turnover propensity creates substantial challenges for organizations investing in talent development, knowledge management, and long-term strategic planning.

Furthermore, emerging evidence suggests that Gen Z workers experience elevated levels of workplace stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion compared to previous generations at similar career stages (Hafidz, 2022). Multiple factors contribute to this vulnerability: constant connectivity enabled by digital technology blurs work-life boundaries; social media exposure creates unrealistic career comparison benchmarks; economic uncertainties—including student debt burdens and housing affordability challenges—generate financial stress; and the COVID-19 pandemic's lasting psychological impacts have heightened mental health concerns across this cohort (Amissah et al., 2022).

According to Susan (2019), the source of human resources is a formal system designed in organizations to achieve effective and efficient use, so that organizational objectives can be met. HR plays an important role in the organization and needs to be properly trained (Mubarok, 2021; Saputri et al., 2024). However, productivity will not be achieved without work that aligns with employees' skills (Sudiro, 2022, p. 201). Understanding the characteristics of those in the productive age, especially Generation Z, is very important to utilize the demographic bonus (Ismail et al., 2024).

Indonesia, as the world's fourth most populous nation with over 275 million people, faces a critical juncture in workforce management as Generation Z comprises an increasingly substantial portion of the working-age population. By 2024, Gen Z represents approximately 27% of Indonesia's population and constitutes a rapidly growing segment of the formal workforce, particularly in urban centers such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). The Indonesian Gen Z cohort exhibits characteristics both aligned with and distinct from their global counterparts, shaped by local cultural values, economic conditions, and educational systems.

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, has unique characteristics such as wanting to try new things and frequently feeling dissatisfied (Nurhasanah et al., 2023). They are also capable of multitasking, but this can cause emotional instability (Jufrizen & Rahmadhani, 2020). As a result, many from this generation are perceived as not being competent and responsible, and they often change jobs (Nurhasanah et al., 2023).

Studies show that 60% of Generation Z employees want jobs that involve technology development, and 41% believe their work must give them new experiences (Hinduan et al., 2020). Characteristics of Generation Z include dependency, freedom, individualism, and technology addiction (Güngör & Alp, 2019). According to a survey by Detik Finance, around 40% of Generation Z aged 19-24 years plan to leave their jobs within two years, and 46% felt emotional exhaustion at their workplace (Nurrahman, 2022).

This reality shows that they have low emotional stability and are more prone to emotional exhaustion (Hafidz, 2022). The contemporary workplace needs skilled and creative employees, as well as good management, to achieve success (Chen et al., 2023; Hakanen et al., 2008). Without these factors, employees may face problems of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and dissatisfaction in the workplace (Amissah et al., 2022; Maslach et al., 1986; Sonnentag & Frese, 2012; Yang, 2023).

Emotional exhaustion, identified by Maslach and Jackson as a core component of occupational burnout, encompasses feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of emotional resources due to excessive work demands (Spector, 2022, p. 123; Maslach, 1993). The burnout syndrome comprises three interconnected dimensions: (a) reduced personal accomplishment—feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement; (b) emotional exhaustion—depletion of emotional energy and feeling emotionally drained; and (c) depersonalization—development of cynical attitudes and detachment from work (Maslach et al., 1986). Among these components, emotional exhaustion represents the central strain dimension and typically manifests first in the burnout development process. Emotional exhaustion is the state in which a person feels drained and unmotivated, having lost the energy and enthusiasm that they once had (Karl & Peluchette, 2006).

More broadly, people tend to behave well in the workplace when they feel comfortable with their work and environment (Asaloei et al., 2024; Thangaswamy & Thiyagaraj, 2017). In any situation, satisfied employees help the organization grow. Job satisfaction depends on the type of work they do and what their employer expects from them (Aulia et al., 2025; Jules et al., 2017; Skaalvik, 2020).

Career development determines how a person feels about and evaluates their work achievements. This can be personal, like feeling satisfied, or external, such as being promoted or receiving a higher salary (Adekola, 2011; Ali et al., 2023; Dougherty et al., 1993; Santos, 2016). Meanwhile, subjective career success is based on internal satisfaction, whereas objective career success is measured by things that can be seen by others, such as income or position (Hajri et al., 2025; Walz et al., 1982; Zacher et al., 2017).

Despite the substantial literature on job satisfaction determinants and the growing body of research on generational differences in workplace attitudes, significant gaps remain in understanding the specific mechanisms through which career development influences job satisfaction in Generation Z employees. Three critical research gaps motivate this study: First, although career development generally promotes job satisfaction in broader populations, its applicability to Gen Z is unclear due to this cohort's distinct expectations for rapid advancement and continuous learning, which may alter this dynamic, as existing studies predominantly focus on earlier generations. Second, the potential mediating role of emotional exhaustion in this relationship is underexplored; career development might directly increase satisfaction but also indirectly decrease it by increasing workloads and pressures that lead to exhaustion, creating theoretical ambiguity about its net effect. Third, most insights into Gen Z's attitudes come from Western contexts, with limited studies in emerging economies like Indonesia. Cultural factors, labor market conditions, and societal expectations in Indonesia—such as high youth unemployment and a competitive entry-level market—likely moderate the relationships between career development, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction for Gen Z workers there, presenting unique challenges compared to their Western counterparts.

Studies show increasing interest in career development and the impact of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion greatly reduces satisfaction and performance in the workplace (Allam et al., 2023; Houkes et al., 2003; Seidler et al., 2014). Research confirms that emotional exhaustion is a main factor associated with lower job satisfaction among employees (Althammer et al., 2024; McDowell et al., 2019). The study by McDowell et al. (2019) states in its results that emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on

job satisfaction. This aligns with Maslach et al. (1993), who found that individuals who are exhausted often feel drained and unable to achieve meaningful results, which undermines their sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Conversely, Allam et al. (2023) stated the opposite, finding a positive influence of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction. Based on these two previous studies, there is debate regarding the influence of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction.

Recent studies show that tiredness and emotional exhaustion reduce job satisfaction. Garmendia et al. (2023) found this pattern among Gen Z nurses in Italy, while Talachi and Gorji (2013) saw similar results among Iranian workers. Allam et al.'s (2023) study in India linked emotional exhaustion with high work involvement. Researchers also show that heavy work burdens and uncertainty are the main reasons behind exhaustion and low satisfaction (de Reuver et al., 2021; Harini & Kartiwi, 2018).

Researchers show that supportive workplaces help reduce exhaustion and increase job satisfaction in the academic environment (Hansen et al., 2022). Career development increases satisfaction and offers opportunities for personal development (Hidayah & Lifiatnah, 2024). In the service industry, work involvement increases satisfaction (Selvanayagam & Thiagarajan, 2019). Career development also has a positive impact on job satisfaction (Ardani et al., 2024; Sheraz & Ijaz, 2021).

Career development is a process of improving work ability to achieve a desired job (Sudiro, 2022). High intentions to develop one's career will increase job satisfaction (Rulianti & Nupriadi, 2023). This relationship can be influenced by the level of emotional exhaustion. If emotional exhaustion is low, career development has a positive influence on job satisfaction (Rulianti & Nupriadi, 2023). However, if emotional exhaustion increases, the positive impact becomes insignificant, especially for young employees. Therefore, it is important for organizations to manage employee emotions to prevent exhaustion, so that career development remains positively associated with job satisfaction. Organizations also need to create a satisfactory work environment (Rulianti & Nupriadi, 2023). With good emotional management, employees will be more motivated to develop their careers and maintain job satisfaction stability.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of emotional exhaustion among Generation Z workers in the South Jakarta area as a mediating mechanism linking career development to job satisfaction. Specifically, this study addresses four research questions: Does career development directly influence job satisfaction among Gen Z employees? Does career development influence emotional exhaustion among Gen Z employees? Does emotional exhaustion influence job satisfaction among Gen Z employees? Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between career development and job satisfaction among Gen Z employees?

This study contributes to the literature in three significant ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on career development and job satisfaction dynamics specifically within Gen Z populations, addressing the generational gap in existing research. Second, it explicates emotional exhaustion as a critical mediating mechanism, offering theoretical advancement in understanding the complex pathways through which career development influences satisfaction outcomes. Third, it extends the geographic scope of Gen Z workplace research by

examining an Indonesian context, providing comparative insights valuable for multinational organizations and researchers studying emerging market labor dynamics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, associative research design to examine the direct and indirect relationships between career development, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction among Generation Z employees. It focused on empirically testing these hypothesized relationships using structured survey data and statistical analysis. The population consisted of all Gen Z employees working in South Jakarta, Indonesia—a major business district selected for its diverse industrial sectors and substantial Gen Z workforce, which enhanced sample representativeness.

A sample of 387 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for infinite populations (Ionas, 2019, p. 36), ensuring a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. This sample size provided adequate statistical power for the planned analyses and met the requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Respondents were selected through simple random sampling to minimize bias and were recruited via online networks and referrals, with eligibility verified through screening questions.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, delivered electronically and in paper form, which was pilot-tested with 30 respondents for clarity. The instrument contained four sections measuring demographics and the three core constructs using 5-point Likert scales. The scales for career development, emotional exhaustion (adapted from Maslach et al., 1986), and job satisfaction were derived from validated instruments to ensure reliability.

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4.0, following a multi-stage process that included data preparation, assessment of the measurement model for validity and reliability, and evaluation of the structural model. The analysis tested the direct paths from career development to job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion, and from emotional exhaustion to job satisfaction, while examining the indirect mediating effect of emotional exhaustion. PLS-SEM was selected for its suitability in predictive, complex models with mediating variables and its robustness with the sample size and data type.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Researchers conducted descriptive analysis with frequency testing on the questionnaire data to describe the characteristics of respondents who became the sample in this study. The data collected included 387 Gen Z respondents who work in the South Jakarta area through the questionnaire. To analyze the data, researchers used the SmartPLS program version 4 to conduct descriptive data testing.

Table.1 Characteristics Respondents

	Scale	F	%
Type Sex	Man – man	235	60.7%
	Woman	152	39.3%
Work	Employee Private	269	69.4%
	Employee Country	58	15%

Education	Indonesian National Armed Forces/Indonesian National Police	11	2.8%
	Self-employed	41	10.6%
	Employee State-Owned Enterprises	2	0.5%
	Laborer	2	0.5%
	Coolie Pt	1	0.3%
	State-Owned Enterprises	1	0.3%
	Employee	1	0.3%
	Doctor Tooth	1	0.3%
	Vocational School/High School	86	22.2%
	D3	26	6.7%
	D4 / Bachelor	214	55.3%
	S2	61	15.8%
	18 – 23	34	8.8 %
	24 – 28	286	73.9%
Age	29 – 35	21	5.4%
	36 – 40	45	11.6%
	< 40	1	0.3%

Source : Data Processed

The demographic profile reveals several important characteristics of the sample. The respondent pool is predominantly male (60.7%), though female representation (39.3%) is substantial. The majority work in the private sector (69.5%), reflecting South Jakarta's strong private enterprise presence. Educational attainment is relatively high, with 71.1% holding bachelor's degrees or higher, consistent with urban educated Gen Z populations. The age distribution shows strong concentration in the 24-28 year range (73.9%), representing Gen Z workers with 2-6 years of work experience—a critical career stage where development opportunities and satisfaction concerns are particularly salient.

Measurement Model Assessment

Prior to testing structural relationships, the measurement model's psychometric properties were evaluated to ensure construct validity and reliability.

Table 2. Convergent Validity & Realizability

Variable	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	AVE
Development Career	0.935	0.936	0.584
<i>Emotional Exhaustion</i>	0.920	0.920	0.609
Satisfaction Work	0.916	0.916	0.664

Source : Data Processed

All constructs demonstrate excellent internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the 0.70 threshold, indicating that items within each construct measure the same underlying concept consistently. The AVE values, all exceeding 0.50, confirm adequate convergent validity—meaning that each construct explains more than half

of its indicators' variance. These results validate the measurement instruments' psychometric quality.

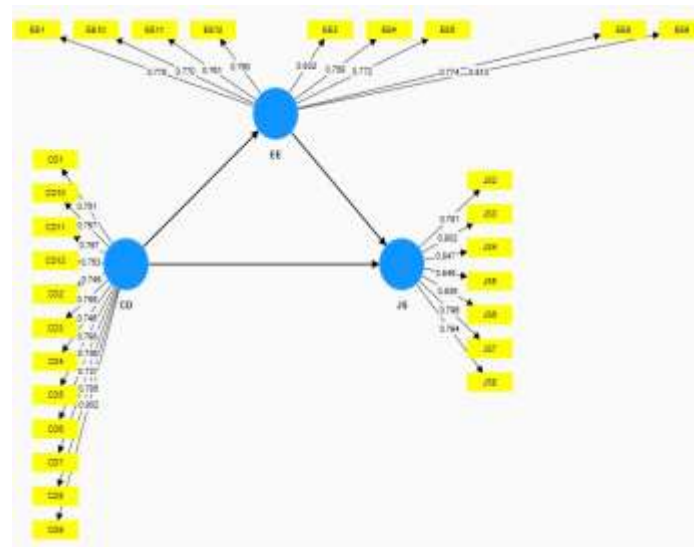


Figure 1. PLS – SEM bootstrapping analysis

Figure 1 shows the measurement model results with all outer loadings exceeding 0.70, the recommended threshold for indicator retention. Items with loadings above this value contribute substantially to their respective constructs and were retained for structural model analysis. The high loadings across all constructs further confirm convergent validity at the indicator level.

Table. 3 Mark Correlation Between Construct Variables

	Mark Correlation Between Construct				FULFILLED
	Development Career	Emotional Exhaustion	Satisfaction Work	AVE	
Development Career	0.764			0.584	Because all mark square correlation between construct latent > AVE each construct Which relate
Emotional Exhaustion	0.795	0.780		0.609	
Satisfaction Work	0.800	0.817	0.815	0.664	

Source : Data Processed

The Fornell-Larcker criterion assesses discriminant validity by comparing the square root of each construct's AVE (diagonal values) with its correlations with other constructs (off-diagonal values). For adequate discriminant validity, diagonal values should exceed all corresponding off-diagonal values in the same row and column. The table shows that all constructs meet this criterion, confirming that each construct is empirically distinct from the others despite moderate to strong inter-correlations. This validates that career development, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction represent separate conceptual domains.

Additionally, Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were calculated as a more stringent discriminant validity assessment (not shown in table). All HTMT values were below 0.85, further confirming discriminant validity according to conservative thresholds.

Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model analysis reveals significant relationships among all variables, as detailed in the following tables.

Table 4. Mark Path Coefficient, T Statistics Significant, P - Value, As well as Parameter Model Strength (Values of f^2 , r^2 , and Q^2)

SS	Endo	Exo/ Endo	Path Coefficient	T stat	P Value	Note	F ²	R ²	Q ²
I	JS	← CD	0.409	6,544	0,000	S	0.227	0.728	0.549

Source : Data Processed

Based on results analysis of substructure I, there is influence significant between development career and satisfaction work. The calculated t value of $6.544 > t$ table 1.968 and p-value $0.000 < 0.05$. Shows substantial relationship, in line with hypothesis first and Adekola's research (2011). In addition, emotional exhaustion also has an influence significant to satisfaction work, with t count $8.118 > t$ table 1.968 and p-value $0.000 < 0.05$, according to with hypothesis second and Ammisah et.al (2022). Effect size f^2 for development career to satisfaction Work is 0.227, indicating strong influence. While That, emotional exhaustion own effect size f^2 is 0.328, indicating influence Which Enough. Mark r^2 as big as 0.728 show that 72.8% variation satisfaction Work can explained by these two variables, with mark Q^2 which is 0.549, which shows relevance of the model in predict satisfaction Work.

In substructure II, development career also has an influence significant against emotional exhaustion, with t count $34.027 > t$ table 1.968 and p-value $0.000 < 0.05$. Effect size f^2 For development career to emotional exhaustion is 1.712. The r^2 value of 0.631 indicates 63.1% variation emotional exhaustion can explained by the development career and satisfaction work, with mark Q^2 of 0.505 shows relevance of the model in predict emotional exhaustion.

Table 5. Influence No Direct Between Variables Latent To Satisfaction Work

	Path Coefficient	Original Sample	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P - Value
Career Development → Emotional Exhaustion → Satisfaction Work	0.654	0.392	7,586	0,000

Source : Data Processed

Analysis results show that emotional exhaustion acts as a mediating variable between career development and job satisfaction. With statistical calculations, the calculated t-value is $7.586 > 1.968$, and the probability significance is $0.000 < 0.05$. This indicates that emotional exhaustion serves as a mediating variable between career development and job satisfaction, as hypothesized.

Theoretical Implication (2023) confirms that company support for career growth increases employee satisfaction. Niati et al. (2021) also stated that when companies help employees develop, they feel happier and more satisfied with their work.

According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, employee well-being and performance are influenced by two main factors: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Job demands cover physical, social, or organizationally draining aspects, such

as heavy workloads or conflicts with colleagues (Maslach et al., 2015). If demands continue without adequate support, they can cause mental and physical fatigue (Sonnetag & Frese, 2012). On the other hand, job resources—such as team support and learning opportunities—can increase motivation and help employees feel more driven and enthusiastic in their work (Hakanen et al., 2008).

Job satisfaction is a key factor influencing commitment and performance. According to Hasibuan (in Pranatasari & Saputri, 2020), job satisfaction is a positive emotional attitude toward work, including work morale and performance. Employees with high job satisfaction tend to be loyal, productive, and have low turnover. In South Jakarta, factors such as personality and interpersonal relationships influence emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Competitive work environments with high demands can cause psychological pressure (Ramadhani & Nindyati, 2022). On the other hand, safe work environments increase job satisfaction. Research shows that the connection between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction is more complex than expected. Garmendia et al. (2023) emphasized that the impact of emotional exhaustion varies depending on individual characteristics. Although generally negative, good emotional management can increase job satisfaction and reduce stress. Houkes et al. (2003) emphasized that emotional exhaustion is influenced by various factors, including motivation. Companies need to help employees manage emotions through guidance and motivation.

Managerial Implication

Research results show that the direct method for increasing job satisfaction uses career development, while using career development through emotional exhaustion as a mediator has a more significant influence. Emotional exhaustion directly influences job satisfaction.

Career development opportunities can reduce emotional exhaustion, especially for new workers (Gao et al., 2019). Companies need to provide structured career development programs and ensure appropriate compensation to reduce the risk of fatigue. Support from superiors and a positive work environment are also important.

Social interactions in the workplace can help reduce emotional exhaustion and enhance job satisfaction (Garmendia et al., 2023). Although career development can reduce fatigue, in some cases it may precisely increase stress (Sonnetag & Frese, 2012). Career management strategies are not always positive and can become a boomerang (Baruch & Vardi, 2016). Moving to new roles with career advancement can increase well-being (St-Jean et al., 2023). However, increases not balanced with wage growth can cause emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1986). This research shows that summer power sometimes has negative effects.

According to Hobfoll (2011), having sufficient resources protects from stress. Employees with high skills tend to feel less emotionally drained (Gao et al., 2019). Resources like career development opportunities can demonstrate employee commitment, but a lack of recognition can cause emotional exhaustion (Haines & Saba, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In general, the variables of career development, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction received high scores from Generation Z respondents, reflecting their strong desire for involvement in clear, structured development processes and an optimistic attitude tempered by expectations of company transparency. Job satisfaction is notably high,

particularly with teamwork, though wage satisfaction remains low, potentially undermining motivation and retention. Emotional exhaustion is also categorized as high due to intense time pressure, yet it is lower relative to workload, suggesting effective time management capabilities among these workers. For future research, longitudinal studies could explore how wage adjustments and enhanced transparency in career progression impact long-term retention and emotional exhaustion levels in Indonesian Gen Z cohorts across diverse industries.

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