



The Influence of Psychological Safety towards Employee Engagement Using Organizational Support as Intervening Variable

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Abstract

Psychological safety creates a safe and convenient environment for employees which can be seen by daring to take risks. Employee engagement can retain employees in their jobs so that physical, cognitive, and emotional involvement exists. When employees feel supported and valued, they are comfortable staying in their job. This study explores the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement with organization support as an intervening variable. This study was conducted on Generation Z employees in Central Java with a total of 155 employees. The analytical technique used is regression analysis. From the study result, psychological safety influences employee engagement significantly, and psychological safety also significantly influences perceived organization support. Meanwhile perceived organization support variable is not proven to mediate the effect of psychological safety on employee engagement.

Keyword: Psychological Safety, Employee Engagement, Perceived Organization Support

1. INTRODUCTION

Adequate employee is key to organizational success and competitive advantage (Rich et al., 2010). Eagerness, enthusiasm for work, dedication to the roles and tasks, and persistence in overcoming various challenges and problems encountered at work will be created when employees are fully involved (Young et al., 2018). It is a concern for every organization to take care of every employee in order to commit to their work.

Managing good human resources and retaining employees is a big challenge for an organization (Djarmiko et al., 2019). Organizations must create a comfortable, safe, and fear-free environment to retain employees. Inconveniences often occurs in organizations, are intimidations or exclusion, which negatively impact employees' safety and health (Rasool et al., 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing developing technologies have brought significant changes to the industry in Indonesia. This situation forces organizations to change their approaches, methods, and strategies to maintain market position. The solution is the that organizations prefer cost cutting or layoffs that harm employees because the organizations is

too focused on numbers, so it ignores human resources as essential assets. Looking at the generation Z character is enough to encourage each organization to pay more attention to human resources. Otherwise, the organization may lose its valuable employees. One way to retain employees is by making employees feel safe at work. Lack of attention to employee welfare could lead to decreased productivity. Employee welfare can be actualized from salary, work environment, and others. This study is expected to focus more on group dynamics, using the psychological safety theory. This theory has not been familiar enough, especially in Indonesia. The most commonly found is the topic of psychological well-being. Awareness of psychological safety in the work place is critical due to its ability to build employees to be engaged at work. Psychological safety creates an environment for employees to feel accepted, develop themselves, contribute completely, and become agents of change (Clark, 2020). Research conducted by Google proved that individuals on teams with higher psychological safety tend not to resign from Google, are more likely to use the power of idea from diverse teammates, generate more revenue, and are rated twice as effective. It is supported by previous research that stated a positive influence exists between psychological safety and employee engagement (Maulding et al., 2012).

This study is expected to explain the influence of psychological safety toward employee engagement by using perceived organization support as intervening variable on Generation Z employees in Central Java. The research problem are: 1) Does psychological safety influence employee engagement on Generation Z employees? 2) Does psychological safety influence perceived organization support on Generation Z employees? 3) Does perceived organization support mediate the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement on Generation Z employees? This study examines the effect of psychological safety on employee engagement in Generation Z employees by using perceived organization support as the intervening variable.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Psychological Safety

Clark (2020) defined psychological safety as an environment that rewards vulnerability. Interaction with others has its own risk, where vulnerability takes over in this case. Based on Indonesia Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia/KBBI*), vulnerability is easily exposed, sensitive, and easy to feel. When it comes to organizations, Clark (2020) give several examples of vulnerability behavior, which are: at the moment when asking something, admitting mistakes, disagreeing something, saying 'I do not know', giving feedback,

conveying ideas, asking for help, saying no, and so on. The response of others will influence future actions. When vulnerability is valued, employees will bond, contribute fully without fear, and give more than what is asked. According to Clark (2020), there are four dimensions to create psychological safety: inclusion safety, learner safety, contributor safety, and challenger safety. Meanwhile, Edmondson (1999) stated psychological safety as a shared belief held by team members that the team is safe in taking interpersonal risks. Another definition states that psychological safety is a condition when people feel able to express themselves without fear of consequences regarding self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990).

1.1.2. *Employee Engagement*

Based on Kahn (1990), employee engagement is the level of physical engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement in work roles, how far the work contribution of employees is, and personal relationships with coworkers. Employees physically involved in every task, cognitively alert, attentive, and emotionally connected to work and coworkers (Ferrer, 2005). The phenomenon of organizational involvement can be observed when employees focus on tasks, express concern to effectively complete tasks, work hard for the best results, provide ideas confidently, and put on thoughts, feelings, and experiences in carrying out tasks as well as possible (Kahn, 1990). When employees realize their significant role, they will commit and be involved in their work (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Three behaviors could be used to measure employee engagement, namely, say (only positive words said regarding organizations), stay (the willingness of employees to stay in organizations and have no desire to leave), dan strive (employees strive to support the success of organization) (Hewitt, 2004).

1.1.3. *Perceived Organization Support*

Eisenberger et al., (1986) defined perceived organization support as an individual's belief that the organization values the work result and shows concern by the actions for employees' welfare. Perceived organization support can be formed in various ways, such as giving respect, rewards: compensation and promotion, access to information, and others forms of support (Eisenberger et al., 2002). The previous theory from Robert Eisenberger would be the primary reference for this study. Several kinds of research conducted by some researches together with Robert Eisenberger found three things that created perceived organization support: fairness, supervisor support, and also organizational rewards (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades et al., 2001).

1.2. Research Hypothesis

Based on the research background and literature review written above, the hypotheses that are formulated in this study are:

- H1: There is an influence of psychological safety on employee engagement in Generation Z employees.
- H2: There is an influence of psychological safety on perceived organization support in Generation Z employees.
- H3: Perceived organization support mediates the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement in Generation Z employees.

2. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach. The source of data used is primary data obtained from the distribution of questionnaires with statements related to this study's purpose. Generation Z employees in Central Java province is the respondents for this study using the Likert measurement scale. Characteristics of the respondents are Generation Z employees in Central Java province with years of birth in the range of 1997-2012, the minimum education senior high school graduates (SMA/SMK), male and female, at least one year of work experience so that it is considered to have sufficient experience in work. A total of 150 respondents participated in this study. This research uses regression data analysis techniques and the Sobel test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Descriptive Data

Descriptive data provides a clear overview of each variable category (Mangkuatmodjo, 2015). This testing is measured using each variable indicator's average value or means. The variable category level ranges from 1-5, meaning 1 being very low and 5 being very high.

Table 1
Psychological Safety

No	Indicator	Mean	Category
Inclusion Safety			
1	I feel accepted by coworkers	4.37	High
2	I have good relationships with coworkers outside of work	4.28	High
3	I have intimate connections with the team	4.09	High

Average of Inclusion Safety		4.25	High
Learner Safety			
1	I easily deliver my opinion in a meeting	3.83	Medium
2	I am not afraid to admit mistakes	4.16	High
3	I dare to take risks	4.05	High
Average of Learner Safety		4.01	High
Contributor Safety			
1	I have verbal support from my supervisor/manager/boss	3.97	Medium
2	I have enthusiasm at work	4.25	High
3	I fully contribute to my work	4.32	High
Average of Contributor Safety		4.18	High
Challenger Safety			
1	I dare to make change	4.17	High
2	I often give creative ideas	4.18	High
3	I am a solution giver on a problem	3.88	Medium
Average of Challenger Safety		4.08	High
Average of Psychological Safety		4.13	High

Source: Primary data processed (2022)

In table 1, the psychological safety variable has an average value of 4.13, which is included in the high category. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of psychological safety for Generation Z employees in Central Java is relatively high. The inclusion safety indicator has the highest score of 4.25, meaning that employees feel accepted in the work place.

Table 2
Employee Engagement

No	Indicator	Mean	Category
Physical Engagement			
1	I put my total effort into the work	4.22	High
2	I try so hard to give my best	4.35	High
3	I work hard to finish jobs	4.38	High
Average of Physical Engagement		4.34	High
Cognitive Engagement			
1	At work, I only focus on jobs	4.34	High
2	I am not easily distracted at work	4.20	High

3	I do not think about anything else while working	3.94	Medium
Average of Cognitive Engagement		4.16	High
Emotional Engagement			
1	I am enthusiastic at work	4.20	High
2	I am interested and energetic at work	4.06	High
3	I am proud of my job	4.15	High
Average of Emotional Engagement		4.14	High
Average of Employee Engagement		4.21	High

Source: Primary data processed (2022)

Based on the data above, the employee engagement variable has an average value of 4.21, which includes the high category. Therefore it can be said that the level of employee engagement among Generation Z employees in Central Java is relatively high. The physical engagement indicator has the highest score of 4.35, meaning there is high physical involvement at work.

Tabel 3
Perceived Organization Support

No	Indicator	Mean	Category
Fairness			
1	I feel the organization cares about my welfare	3.72	Medium
2	The organizations helps me when I have a problem	3.63	Medium
3	My opinion is considered	3.83	Medium
Average of Fairness		3.72	Medium
Supervisor Support			
1	My supervisor/manager/boss is always there to help me	3.86	Medium
2	I have an excellent interpersonal relationship with my boss	3.93	Medium
3	I get a compliment from my supervisor/manager/boss	3.81	Medium
Average of Supervisor Support		3.87	Medium
Organizational Reward			
1	I get an appreciation for the work result that I do	3.68	Medium
2	I get a promotion or bonus	3.62	Medium
3	I feel that organizations want to maintain a relationship with me	3.81	Medium
Average of Organizational Reward		3.71	Medium
Average of Perceived Organization Support		3.77	Medium

Source: Primary data processed (2022)

The average value of the perceived organization support variable is 3.77, meaning the medium category. Therefore, level of perceived organization support on Generation Z employees in Central Java can be stated as moderate. The supervisor support indicator has the highest score of 3.87, meaning that employees feel to obtain support from their superiors (supervisor/manager/boss).

3.2. Hypothesis Testing

Each item of the statements has been tested with valid and reliable results. Before the regression test stage, the classical assumption test was tested to pass the test to the regression stage.

3.2.1. Regression Test

The first hypothesis testing examines the influence of the independent variable, psychological safety, on the dependent variable, employee engagement. If the significant value is < 0.05 thus, the hypothesis is accepted. The regression result shows that the significant value of psychological safety is $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore it can be said that the first hypothesis is accepted, which means that psychological safety is proven to affect employee engagement. In line with Clark (2020), the more employees feel comfortable, accepted, and appreciated, it will encourage employees to share ideas, contribute fully at work, create creative ideas, and become loyal. The research by Singh et al. (2018) also supports by explaining that there is an influence between psychological safety on employee engagement.

Table 4
Hypothesis 1

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	7.911	2.217		3.568	.000
Psychological Safety	.546	0.54	.673	10.092	.000

a. *Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement*

Source: Primary data processed (2022)

The second hypothesis testing examines the influence of psychological safety on perceived organization support. The attached table shows that the significant value of psychological safety is $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, it can be stated that the second hypothesis is accepted, which means that psychological safety is proven to affect perceived organization

support. Based on research from Lee (2021), it was proved that psychological safety influences perceived organization support.

Table 5
Hypothesis Testing 2

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	7.911	2.217		3.568	.000
Psychological Safety	.546	0.54	.673	10.092	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Organization Support

Source: Primary data processed (2022)

3.2.2. Sobel Test

The third hypothesis testing uses Sobel testing to know whether the intervening variable, perceived organization support, could mediate the influence between the independent variable, psychological safety, and the dependent variable, employee engagement. The Sobel testing formula used is:

$$z = \frac{-b \pm}{\sqrt{(b^2 SEa^2) + (a^2 SEb^2)}}$$

The counting result of Sobel testing in this study is conducted using Sobel Test Calculator made by Dr. Daniel Soper and the result obtained is 1.59532. If the z value is > 1.96, then it can be concluded that the intervening variable can mediate the effect between independent and dependent variables. From the Sobel testing result, the z value is 1.59532 < 1.96; thus, it can be inferred that perceived organization support cannot mediate the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement. The previous research by Yulivianto (2019) also supports that organizational support does not affect employees involvement.

4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

1. Psychological safety positively influences employee engagement because a more comfortable environment is created where close team connection exist, good relationships with superiors (supervisor/manager/boss) can increase employee engagement. Employees will be more motivated to work to the fullest physically, cognitively, and emotionally.
2. Psychological safety positively influences perceived organization support because a healthy environment created at work will also build organization support. Employees feel accepted when they obtain support from both organizations and superiors

(supervisor/manager/boss). Having a close relationship with superiors will indirectly create good cooperation. Organizations need to be sensitive to their employees condition due to small supports given by organizations the employees would appreciate. Creating good relationships could start from verbal appreciation, employee empathy, and building relationships either inside or outside work.

3. This study result shows that perceived organizational support does not mediate the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement. If employees do not obtain enough appreciation, the desire to contribute more will decrease so that engagement at work could not be created. Organizations should pay more attention by giving appreciation regardless of the size of achievements made by employees. When organizations grant verbal appreciation or rewards such as bonuses and promotions, then employees will motivate more and increase productivity.

Future research regarding psychological safety and employee engagement can be done with the suggestions:

The first limitation of this research lies in the number of respondents who are dominated by workers in Salatiga, as much as 43%, so they are not evenly distributed in Central Java Province. Hopefully, the further research could collect data evenly based on the target respondents.

Second, this study is aimed at the massive number of Generation Z, so it has varying results. In future research, it would be better to focus on various fields to provide more specific results and solutions.

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