

The Impact of Authentic Leadership on The Work Motivation of Generation Z Employees in Indonesia

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Abstract

The increasing participation of Generation Z in Indonesia's workforce has created new challenges for organizations, particularly in maintaining employee motivation, engagement, and long-term retention. Compared with previous generations, Generation Z places stronger emphasis on transparency, meaningful work, and trust-based relationships with leaders. Although previous studies have extensively discussed leadership style and turnover intention, limited empirical research has specifically examined how authentic leadership influences work motivation among Generation Z employees in the Indonesian context. Since work motivation functions as a psychological foundation for employee engagement, commitment, and retention, examining this relationship is considered important both theoretically and practically. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the impact of authentic leadership on the work motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. This study employed a quantitative survey design involving 361 Generation Z employees from five major provinces in Indonesia selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire and analysed using validity, reliability, and simple linear regression tests. Validity testing confirmed that all measurement items were statistically valid, while reliability testing demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.916 and 0.981 for Authentic Leadership and Work Motivation, respectively. The results showed that authentic leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on work motivation ($\beta = 0.734$; $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 value of 0.653, indicating that authentic leadership explains 65.3% of the variance in work motivation. These findings confirm that authentic leadership plays an important role in strengthening the motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Practically, organizations are encouraged to implement leadership development initiatives focused on self-awareness, transparent communication, ethical decision-making, and regular feedback practices to improve employee motivation, engagement, and long-term retention among Generation Z in the workplace.

1. Introduction

Changes in the demographic structure of the global workforce over the past two decades have shown a significant increase in Generation Z's participation across various organizations. This generation is not merely a new demographic group; it differs fundamentally from previous generations in terms of values, expectations, and work attitudes. In Indonesia, this trend is becoming increasingly visible as Generation Z enters the labor market in large numbers, particularly in urban sectors, digital industries, and service-based organizations. As part of Indonesia's ongoing demographic transformation, Generation Z brings distinct workplace expectations, including stronger preferences for meaningful work, flexibility, career development opportunities, and supportive leadership. These changes have created new challenges for organizations in Indonesia in maintaining employee motivation, engagement, and retention, making leadership style an increasingly relevant issue in the contemporary workplace. Much of the literature in international research indicates that Generation Z exhibits a stronger orientation toward work meaning, organizational justice, work-life balance, and authentic relationships with leaders [1], [2], [3]. Saracel et al. in their study from a managerial perspective, revealed that Generation Z's expectations of leadership are higher than those of previous generations; they particularly value transparency, honesty,

and consistency in a leader's values [4]. These findings suggest that traditional leadership approaches, which are hierarchical and transactional, are insufficient to enhance the motivation and commitment of Generation Z employees. This situation has become increasingly complex with the emergence of flexible working models, remote work, and workplace autonomy, which have expanded in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period [5], [6]. In Indonesia, Generation Z is becoming an increasingly dominant segment of the labor force, particularly in urban sectors, digital industries, and service-based organizations. As part of Indonesia's demographic transformation, this generation brings distinct workplace expectations, including stronger preferences for meaningful work, flexibility, career development opportunities, and supportive leadership. This shift has created important challenges for Indonesian organizations in maintaining employee motivation, engagement, and retention, making leadership style an increasingly relevant issue in the contemporary Indonesian workplace.

In this context, the concept of authentic leadership is receiving increasing attention in the organizational behavior literature. Authentic leadership emphasizes elements such as the leader being unique, demonstrating consistency between their values and behaviors, transparency in relationships, and relying on internalized moral perspectives in the decision-making process. Aydinoglu revealed that authentic leadership has a significant and positive effect on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, particularly in the education sector [7]. These findings suggest that authentic leadership is not only an ethical leadership approach but also a powerful psychological mechanism that influences employee attitudes and behaviors. The issue of work motivation among Generation Z employees has become increasingly important in recent years, with the rise of quiet quitting, declining work engagement rates, and increasing intentions to leave among young workers [8], [9], [10]. The literature shows that low work motivation negatively impacts not only individual performance but also organizational stability and sustainability.

According to the Deloitte report, Generation Z employees are able to maintain their motivation more strongly when they feel psychologically supported, morally valued, and led by authentic, honest, and principled leaders [11]. Research conducted in the Indonesian context has also revealed that the work motivation and performance of Generation Z employees are influenced by various organizational factors such as leadership style, work-life balance, and organizational culture [12], [13]. Syukur et al. emphasized that work motivation plays an important role in shaping the proactive behavior of Generation Z employees, and that leadership style is a factor that reinforces this relationship [14].

However, most current research in Indonesia focuses on transformational leadership or general leadership approaches; studies that directly examine the impact of authentic leadership on the work motivation of Generation Z are still limited. Previous empirical studies have shown that authentic leadership contributes to reducing turnover intention and strengthening employee commitment among Generation Z employees [15], [16]. However, these studies primarily focus on turnover intention and employee retention as organizational outcomes, while work motivation as an underlying psychological mechanism remains underexplored. This study considers work motivation to be a more fundamental variable because it serves as a psychological precursor to employee engagement, organizational commitment, and long-term retention. Employees with higher levels of work motivation are generally more likely to demonstrate stronger commitment, better performance, and lower intentions to turnover. Therefore, examining the relationship between authentic leadership and work motivation provides a stronger theoretical foundation for understanding subsequent employee attitudes and behavioral outcomes among Generation Z employees in Indonesia.

Therefore, there is a significant research gap in studies examining the direct relationship between authentic leadership and the work motivation of Generation Z employees, particularly in the context of a developing country such as Indonesia. Addressing this gap is important both theoretically and practically, as work motivation plays a central role in shaping employee engagement, commitment, and long-term retention among Generation Z employees. In addition to contributing to the leadership and organizational behavior literature, this study is expected to provide practical insights for organizations in developing leadership approaches that align with the characteristics and expectations of Generation

Z. In order to address this gap, this study aims to examine the impact of authentic leadership on the work motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organizing Modern Organizations

The development of modern organizations cannot be separated from the dynamics of an increasingly complex, fast-paced, and uncertain global environment. The processes of globalization, advances in information and communication technology, and changes in societal values have directed organizations away from rigid bureaucratic structures toward more flexible, adaptive, and human-centered organizational forms. According to Kanbur, in the era of globalization, organizations are evolving toward postmodern structures in which decentralization, flexibility, collaboration, and an increased emphasis on organizational values and culture become prominent. This structural transformation requires radical changes in the way leadership is practiced. In modern organizations, leadership is no longer viewed solely as the ability to control or direct subordinates through formal authority. Instead, leadership is considered a social process involving interaction, influence, and the co-creation of meaning between leaders and followers [17]. Menteşoğulları, within the framework of a systems approach, emphasizes that modern organizations are open systems that continuously interact with their environment. In this context, leadership functions as a binding mechanism that balances organizational goals, individual needs, and the demands of the external environment [18].

Along with these developments, significant evolution has occurred in the leadership literature. According to Demir, Yılmaz, and Çevirgen, classical approaches that examined leadership through individual characteristics and behaviors began to be replaced by more contextual and relational approaches. Leadership is now evaluated not only based on the personal qualities of the leader but also on their ability to adapt to situations, organizational culture, and the characteristics of their followers [19].

Baker notes that this evolution of leadership is a reflection of the shift in management understanding from a mechanistic to a humanistic approach. In the modern paradigm, leaders are expected not only to achieve goals and ensure efficiency but also to develop human resources, uphold ethical principles, and support organizational sustainability. This approach aligns with the view that the leader-follower relationship is one of the fundamental elements of contemporary leadership. Modern leaders are expected to build trust-based relationships, encourage two-way communication, and respect diversity [20].

Changes in the organizational environment have also paved the way for the emergence of various contemporary leadership approaches. Transformational leadership, ethical leadership, participative leadership, and value-based leadership are approaches that stand out in this context. Özkaynar indicates that with increasing awareness of the importance of transparency, fairness, and employee participation, interest in contemporary leadership approaches has increased, especially in the public sector. This situation demonstrates the validity of modern leadership not only in the private sector but also in public and social organizations [21].

In the context of organizational transformation, leadership is closely related to the capacity to manage and facilitate change. Kaya and Erdem emphasize that in modern change management approaches, leaders are positioned as “change agents” who guide change, communicate it, and ensure its internalization by organizational members. In this process, leaders are responsible not only for planning change but also for the psychological states of the employees affected by it. Therefore, modern leadership requires sensitivity to the emotional and motivational needs of employees [22].

The ethical dimension has become one of the fundamental elements of leadership in modern organizations. In an increasingly transparent and open work environment, the behavior of leaders is closely monitored by employees and stakeholders. Gürler and Erkasap revealed that the perception of ethical leadership has a significant influence on employee work motivation, and that employee loyalty

plays a mediating role in this relationship [23]. These findings suggest that leadership grounded in moral values not only enhances employee motivation but also strengthens the relationship between employees and the organization. Modern leadership also emphasizes alignment between leaders' personal values and organizational values. In increasingly diverse organizations, consistency, integrity, and authenticity are essential for building employee trust and sustaining motivation. This perspective has contributed to the development of authenticity-based leadership approaches, particularly authentic leadership. Overall, leadership in modern organizations can be understood as a dynamic process shaped by relationships, values, and adaptation to change, with an important role in improving employee motivation and commitment.

2.2. Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is one of the leadership approaches that has developed in response to the growing need for leadership that is not only effective in terms of performance but also grounded in ethical values, transparency, and morality. This approach emerged as a critique of traditional leadership concepts that focused solely on power, control, and results, relegating the authenticity and personal integrity of the leader to a secondary role. In this context, authentic leadership places the authenticity of the leader as a fundamental element in fulfilling their leadership role within the organization [24].

According to Akyürek, authentic leadership emphasizes the importance of harmony and consistency between a leader's personal values, beliefs, and behaviors. Rather than projecting an artificial leadership image, authentic leaders display an attitude that is at peace with themselves, consistent, and trustworthy. This authenticity lays the foundation for building more open, sincere, and meaningful working relationships between the leader and employees [25].

Conceptually, authentic leadership consists of four interrelated fundamental dimensions. The first dimension, self-awareness, refers to the leader's awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, values, and the impact of their behavior on others. Leaders with high self-awareness are able to question their behavior and adapt more easily to organizational changes because they are open to feedback [25]. The second dimension, relational transparency, means that the leader is open and honest in their communication with employees. Relational transparency fosters a trust-based work environment by ensuring that leaders do not conceal important information and demonstrate consistency between their words and actions. In such an environment, employees can express their thoughts and ideas more freely and feel more psychologically safe.

The third dimension, balanced processing, refers to a leader's ability to objectively evaluate diverse perspectives in the decision-making process. Authentic leaders are open to criticism and suggestions from employees, rather than relying solely on their own perspective. This approach ensures that leadership is conducted fairly and rationally, reducing the risk of biased or authoritarian decision-making [26].

The fourth dimension, internalized moral perspective, refers to the leader's behavior being guided by internalized moral values rather than external pressures or short-term interests. Leaders with a strong moral perspective can demonstrate consistent and ethical behavior even in challenging and uncertain situations. This characteristic makes authentic leadership a highly meaningful approach for organizations that value integrity and sustainability [24]. Many studies in the organizational context have shown that authentic leadership has positive effects on employee attitudes and behaviors. Authentic leaders increase employee trust in their managers, improve the quality of working relationships, and create a more psychologically healthy work environment.

Individuals working under this type of leadership feel more valued and involved in processes; this contributes to increased work motivation and engagement levels [25]. Empirical studies also show that authentic leadership is positively correlated with non-technical performance indicators such as work engagement and contextual performance. Korku and Yıldız revealed that authentic leadership enhances employees' contextual performance, and that work engagement plays a mediating role in this

relationship [27]. These findings suggest that the effects of authentic leadership occur not only directly but also indirectly through employees' psychological processes, particularly motivation and commitment. This relationship can also be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that motivation becomes stronger when three basic psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of authentic leadership, leaders who demonstrate transparency, ethical consistency, balanced decision-making, and genuine interpersonal relationships are more likely to create a work environment that supports these needs. Employees feel more valued, trusted, and connected to their leaders, while also being encouraged to develop their abilities and contribute meaningfully at work. For Generation Z employees, who place high value on meaningful work, openness, and supportive workplace relationships, authentic leadership can therefore serve as an important driver of intrinsic work motivation.

In conclusion, authentic leadership can be considered a leadership approach that prioritizes authenticity, integrity, and interpersonal relationships in organizations. This approach is becoming increasingly important, particularly for the modern workforce and Generation Z employees who expect transparency, honesty, and meaningful working relationships. Therefore, examining the influence of authentic leadership on employee motivation and work behavior provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding effective leadership practices in contemporary organizations.

2.3. Work Motivation

Work motivation is considered a central concept in organizational behavior and human resource management because it is directly related to how individuals perform their jobs, the level of effort they exert, and how long they can sustain that effort. In general, work motivation is defined as the intrinsic and extrinsic drives that direct individuals toward specific work goals and enable them to maintain the effort required to achieve those goals. A high level of work motivation is often associated with improved performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment [28]. In the organizational context, work motivation is not only a factor that activates work behavior but also a fundamental factor that determines the quality of contributions employees make to the organization.

Highly motivated employees tend to show greater work enthusiasm, a sense of responsibility, and a greater willingness to contribute beyond formal job descriptions. Conversely, low work motivation is associated with negative consequences such as decreased productivity, absenteeism, and high employee turnover rates [29]. Various theoretical approaches have been developed in the literature to explain work motivation. Among these approaches, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory, the two-factor theory, and approaches based on psychological needs stand out. Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that comes from the individual who considers their work inherently valuable and meaningful.

Personal satisfaction, a sense of achievement, interest in the work, and finding meaning in one's job are among the fundamental components of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated individuals tend to continue working without relying on extrinsic rewards. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is associated with environmental factors such as salary, bonuses, recognition, promotions, and favorable working conditions that drive individuals to work. In many organizations, extrinsic motivational tools are widely used to enhance employee performance. However, research suggests that practices based solely on extrinsic motivation, when intrinsic motivational elements are not supported, may not be sufficient to provide sustained motivation in the long run [28].

Contemporary approaches also consider the psychological and social dimensions of work motivation. Work motivation is influenced not only by material rewards but also by perceptions of organizational justice, social relationships in the workplace, and the alignment between individuals and the values adopted by the organization. In this context, it is stated that a fair and supportive work environment that enables the holistic personal development of employees enhances work motivation [30]. In modern organizations, the relationship between work motivation and performance is becoming increasingly complex. Doymuş et al. revealed that work motivation has a positive influence on employee performance, but this relationship is particularly strengthened by a favorable work environment and an

open management system. These findings suggest that work motivation is not evaluated in isolation but in interaction with various factors in the organizational context [29].

In addition, ethical and moral values are also important factors that influence work motivation. Heath emphasizes that work motivation does not only stem from individual interests or economic incentives; it is also closely related to the moral values and ethical principles held by individuals. Employees demonstrate stronger and more durable motivation when they believe their work aligns with their own moral values. In the context of leadership, employees' work motivation is greatly influenced by the leadership style and behaviors demonstrated by managers. Leaders who can create a fair, transparent, and meaningful work environment can increase both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of employees. Leadership approaches that value employees as individuals, communicate goals clearly, and prioritize employee well-being reinforce work motivation and organizational commitment [31].

In conclusion, work motivation can be considered a multidimensional concept shaped by the interaction of individual, organizational, social, and ethical factors. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of work motivation is essential in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Especially in managing Generation Z employees, who have different needs, values, and expectations compared to previous generations, a proper understanding and support of work motivation becomes an important element for organizational success.

2.4. Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z is a generation that grew up and was shaped in an environment of rapidly advancing digital technology, increasingly intense globalization, and rapid social change. Having been accustomed to the internet, social media, and digital technology from an early age, Generation Z has developed different ways of thinking, values, and attitudes compared to previous generations. In the context of working life, Generation Z is known for its high adaptability to technology, openness to change, and a strong orientation toward work meaning and work-life balance [32]. The values held by Generation Z are shaped around transparency, fairness, authenticity, and the importance of personal and professional development opportunities. The study by Alp et al. shows that there are significant motivational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z; Generation Z considers not only financial elements but also intangible factors such as a supportive work environment, flexibility, and self-development opportunities. These values cause Generation Z to exhibit a more critical attitude toward organizational policies and managerial behavior. Generation Z's work attitudes also reflect these values [33].

This generation has high expectations for equitable working relationships based on open communication, role clarity, and mutual respect. Pekel et al. revealed that Generation Z prefers fair, transparent, and participatory work systems [34]. They are known to prefer participatory and communicative leaders over authoritarian and hierarchical management styles [35]. In terms of career planning, Generation Z demonstrates a flexible and dynamic approach that focuses on competence development and meaningful work experience rather than long-term commitment to a single organization [36].

One of the key characteristics that distinguishes Generation Z from other generations is their digital mindset. Quick access to information, data-driven decision-making, and instant communication through digital platforms are some of the natural behavioral patterns of this generation. Gümüş states that Generation Z exhibits a more rational and analytical tendency in decision-making processes, and this is reflected in how they evaluate organizations and leaders. This digital mindset raises Generation Z's expectations regarding technology use, flexible work arrangements, and the speed of organizational response. Societal value transformations have also influenced the characteristics of Generation Z [37]. Ekiz and Zabun emphasize that Generation Z exhibits more egalitarian attitudes regarding gender roles and is more sensitive to issues of justice and inclusion in the workplace. This further strengthens Generation Z's expectations of fair and ethical leadership approaches that respect diversity. Overall, the characteristics of Generation Z are: strong work values, critical and adaptive work attitudes, and a dominant digital mindset that shapes this generation [38]. These characteristics have significant

implications for organizations. In particular, leadership practices and human resource management need to be restructured to be more flexible, transparent, and value-based in order to support the motivation, commitment, and long-term sustainability of Generation Z.

2.5. Generation Z and Leadership

The presence of Generation Z in the workforce has significant consequences for leadership practices in organizations. This generation not only exhibits different values and work attitudes but also sets specific expectations about the type of leaders they consider effective and worthy of emulation. From Generation Z's perspective, leadership is no longer understood merely as a formal position or source of power, but as a relational process involving trust, communication, and value alignment between leaders and followers. Durahim shows that Generation Z's leadership preferences are largely influenced by the personality traits of this generation. Accordingly, Generation Z prefers leaders who can empathize, embrace open communication, and understand the individual needs of employees. Authoritarian and hierarchical leadership styles are generally viewed negatively by Generation Z, who value freedom, participation, and fairness [39]. These findings reveal that effective leadership for Generation Z requires a flexible approach that can adapt to psychological and social characteristics. Qualitative research conducted by Mücevher also supports these findings and shows that Generation Z views leadership as a tool for supporting individual development and potential [40].

Generation Z defines a good leader as someone who can provide clear direction but also enables dialogue and self-assessment. In this context, leaders are expected not only to be role models but also to act as facilitators, encouraging learning, creativity, and new experimentation. It is stated that rigid, instruction-oriented leadership approaches are not sufficient to enhance the motivation and commitment of Generation Z. Psychological dimensions play an important role in the relationship between Generation Z and leadership. Yıldırım and Demir revealed that Generation Z employees, who have adaptive psychological characteristics such as flexibility and resilience, have higher expectations regarding leadership quality. Generation Z, especially under intense work pressure and rapid change, expects their managers to understand the emotional and psychological dynamics of their employees [41].

This situation suggests that leadership approaches sensitive to the psychological needs of employees are becoming increasingly important for the Generation Z workforce. Generation Z's expectations of leadership are also closely linked to their perceptions of the future and the organizational vision. Yakışır draws attention to the importance of visionary leadership in an environment of uncertainty and change. Generation Z values leaders who can present a clear vision for the organization's future, communicate this vision clearly, and involve employees in this process. Visionary leadership not only guides Generation Z but also strengthens organizational commitment by providing broader meaning to their work [42].

Generation Z's perceptions of leadership are not limited to the organizational context but also extend to the social and political spheres. Öztay states that perceptions of organizational and political leaders are influenced by leadership image, credibility, and communication skills [43]. Demir and Özdemir [44] and Ayparçaşı [45] emphasize that Generation Z exhibits a more critical and rational attitude when evaluating leaders, prioritizing values, integrity, and behavioral consistency. This suggests that Generation Z brings their leadership evaluation standards to the workplace. Overall, Generation Z prefers participatory, visionary, and individually-oriented leadership approaches [44], [45].

This generation expects leaders not only to direct work but also to build fair, sincere, and meaningful relationships. Leadership approaches that can meet these expectations have the potential to enhance Generation Z employees' work motivation, commitment, and the sustainability of their relationships with the organization. In this context, studies addressing the relationship between Generation Z and leadership offer a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the importance of contemporary leadership approaches. The leadership preferences and expectations of Generation Z presented in this subsection provide strong theoretical justification for choosing authentic leadership as the main focus

of this research; it particularly emphasizes the importance of leadership approaches aimed at enhancing the work motivation of Generation Z.

2.6. Generation Z and Work Motivation

Work motivation is one of the fundamental factors that determine the attitudes, behaviors, and performance of individuals in an organization. When viewed in the context of Generation Z, the issue of work motivation becomes increasingly important, as this generation has different values, expectations, and working styles compared to previous generations. Generation Z views work not merely as a means to meet economic needs, but also as an area for self-actualization, learning, and finding life's meaning. Therefore, understanding the factors that affect the work motivation of Generation Z is crucial for organizations to develop effective human resource management strategies. The literature states that work motivation is shaped by a combination of internal and external factors.

Çikmaz emphasizes that intrinsic motivational factors such as the desire to achieve success, a sense of ownership over one's work, and personal satisfaction play an important role in enhancing individual performance and work motivation. Although this research was conducted in the context of female entrepreneurs, these findings are also useful in understanding Generation Z, who are highly focused on personal success and work meaning. Generation Z exhibits higher motivation in work that allows for creativity, autonomy, and self-development opportunities [46].

Work motivation in the public sector is often influenced by intrinsic values rather than purely material incentives. Factors such as contributing to societal values, serving the public interest, and a sense of responsibility can positively shape employees' work attitudes. These findings suggest that work motivation is not limited to financial rewards; it is also driven by social values and broader organizational purpose. For Generation Z, which tends to show high sensitivity to issues of social justice and social responsibility, value- and purpose-based sources of motivation become particularly strong driving forces.

Work motivation is greatly influenced by the work environment and leadership practices. Rengi and Bozkurt revealed that organizational support, performance recognition, and the quality of relationships with managers play important roles in determining employees' motivation levels [47]. This suggests that motivation is not only an individual process; it is also shaped through social relationships and organizational structures in the workplace. In the context of Generation Z, the quality of relationships built with leaders and colleagues has a decisive influence on motivation and work commitment. Technological advances and digitalization processes are also important factors influencing Generation Z's work motivation.

Rani and Suneja highlight that Generation Z holds high expectations for the integration of digital technology in the workplace, particularly in areas such as training and development, work-life balance, and employee engagement, as this generation has grown up in a fully digital environment and naturally expects technology-driven approaches from their employers. Generation Z is more motivated in work environments where technology is used effectively; however, excessive digital workload and continuous online activity can lead to loss of motivation and digital fatigue over time. Therefore, organizations need to strike a balance between technological capabilities and healthy workload management [48].

On the other hand, various organizational challenges can negatively impact Generation Z's work motivation. İş and Bulut revealed that excessive workloads, prolonged stress, and lack of organizational support can lead to burnout and declining motivation in employees [49].

Generation Z, which places greater importance on psychological well-being, has lower tolerance for unsupportive work environments, and this can accelerate the loss of motivation. Furthermore, a lack of appreciation for one's work or the perception that one's contributions are insignificant also negatively impacts motivation. Hatipoğlu Özcan et al. study in the field of education shows that lack of organizational support and ambiguity in reward systems negatively impact motivation. Evaluated from a working life perspective, these results reveal that perceptions of fairness, support mechanisms, and

goal clarity are among the fundamental elements that determine employee motivation. Generation Z employees can quickly lose their motivation in situations where organizational systems are not transparent or constructive feedback is not provided [50].

Studies focusing on Generation Z indicate that this generation's work motivation is primarily shaped by career opportunities, personal development opportunities, and work-life balance. Çevik and Deniz state that Generation Z has a flexible career understanding and prioritizes work that offers personal satisfaction and learning opportunities [51]. Alay and Bağdoğan, on the other hand, draw attention to intergenerational differences in motivation, emphasizing that Generation Z prefers supportive, meaningful, and easily adaptable work environments [52].

Overall, the work motivation of Generation Z is shaped by the interaction of individual characteristics, work environment, leadership practices, and technological and societal dynamics. This generation's motivation toward work is not limited to economic expectations, but also exhibits a multidimensional structure that includes psychological, social, and value-based elements. Finding meaning in work, opportunities for personal and professional development, supportive social relationships, and effective and balanced use of technology are some of the key factors that enhance the motivation of Generation Z employees. However, factors that undermine motivation are also quite significant. Excessive workloads, role ambiguity, pressure to always be online, digital overload, lack of feedback, and the perception of not being valued can cause a rapid decline in the motivation of Generation Z employees. Given the importance of psychological well-being and work-life balance for this generation, it is clear that unsupportive working conditions have negative and unsustainable effects on motivation.

In addition, Generation Z is highly sensitive to values such as fairness, transparency, and consistency. Therefore, inconsistencies between organizational practices and the discourse and behavior of managers can lead to a loss of motivation. Generation Z employees prefer to work with leaders who understand, listen, provide feedback, and support their development, rather than managers who simply tell them what to do. This suggests that motivation is not merely an internal individual process but also a phenomenon shaped by leadership and organizational climate.

A proper understanding of these dynamics is considered a fundamental requirement for developing leadership and management approaches that enhance the commitment and performance of Generation Z employees and support long-term organizational sustainability. In particular, human-centered and value-based leadership approaches that take into account the psychological needs of employees can be said to play an important role in strengthening Generation Z's motivation. In this context, studies focusing on the motivational dynamics of Generation Z offer significant theoretical and practical contributions to effective contemporary organizational management.

2.7. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical review, authentic leadership is conceptually positioned as a central determinant of employee motivational outcomes. Authentic leaders demonstrate honesty, transparency, self-awareness, and moral integrity, which foster trust, psychological safety, and value alignment within the workplace. These characteristics create a supportive relational climate in which employees feel respected and valued. For Generation Z employees, who highly prioritize meaningful work, ethical consistency, and open communication, leadership authenticity is expected to play a particularly significant motivational role.

From a motivational perspective, work motivation is shaped not only by material rewards but also by relational and psychological factors embedded within the organizational environment. When employees perceive their leaders as authentic and morally consistent, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, stronger work commitment, higher job satisfaction, and a greater willingness to contribute beyond formal role requirements. In the context of Generation Z, whose motivational orientation is strongly influenced by values, purpose, and personal development opportunities, authentic leadership becomes a theoretically relevant predictor of motivational outcomes.

Accordingly, this study proposes a direct relationship between authentic leadership and work motivation, as illustrated in Figure 1.

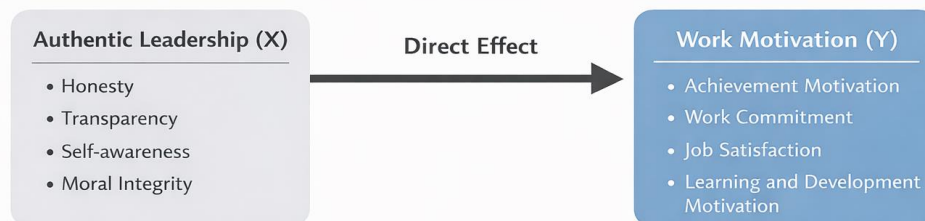


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the conceptual model, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1: Authentic leadership has a positive and significant effect on the work motivation of Generation Z employees.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of Authentic Leadership on the Work Motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Quantitative methods were chosen because they allow for objective measurement of relationships between variables through statistical analysis. Data were collected at a single point in time using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The collected responses were then analyzed using validity and reliability testing, classical assumption tests, and simple linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

3.1. Research Variables

This research is designed as an explanatory study within the scope of quantitative research methods. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables the objective and measurable testing of relationships between variables using numerical data. Explanatory research aims to examine causal relationships between independent and dependent variables based on a theoretical framework.

In this study, Authentic Leadership is treated as the independent variable, while Work Motivation of Generation Z employees is positioned as the dependent variable. Accordingly, this research seeks not only to describe the phenomenon but also to analyze the influence of authentic leadership on employee motivation.

A survey approach was employed to collect data systematically from a large group of participants. This method is considered appropriate due to its compatibility with the characteristics of Generation Z, who are accustomed to digital communication platforms.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on established indicators of authentic leadership and work motivation. Authentic Leadership was measured using five indicators adapted from Walumbwa et al., covering honesty, transparency, value consistency, leader support, and openness to feedback. Work Motivation was measured using four indicators reflecting achievement motivation, work commitment, job satisfaction, and learning and development motivation. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) [53].

The population of this study consists of Generation Z workers aged 18–30 who are employed in Indonesia. To ensure contextual relevance, the study focuses on five major provinces: West Java, East Java, Central Java, North Sumatra, and Banten. These provinces were selected due to their high concentration of young workers and economic diversity.

The final sample consisted of 361 respondents, which is considered statistically adequate for regression analysis and provides sufficient power for hypothesis testing. Purposive sampling was employed based on the following criteria: (1) participants were actively employed in one of the selected provinces in Indonesia; (2) belonged to Generation Z (18–30 years old); (3) had a direct supervisor in their workplace; and (4) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) demographic information; (2) Authentic Leadership measurement; and (3) Work Motivation measurement. Authentic Leadership was measured using five questionnaire items (X1–X5) adapted from the four-dimensional framework of Walumbwa et al., including self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Work Motivation was measured using four questionnaire items (Y1–Y4) assessing employees' motivation to perform, job attachment, job satisfaction, and willingness to continuously learn and develop. Composite scores for both variables were calculated by averaging responses to their respective items, allowing each construct to be analyzed as a unified variable in the regression model [53].

3.2. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. All statistical tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and to present the distribution of responses for each variable. Validity was assessed using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis, with an item considered valid if the correlation coefficient exceeded the threshold of $r > 0.30$. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with $\alpha > 0.70$ used as the minimum acceptable threshold for internal consistency. The results indicated that all questionnaire items met the required validity and reliability criteria and were therefore considered suitable for further analysis. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality and heteroscedasticity tests, to ensure that the regression model met the required statistical assumptions. Since the model includes only one independent variable, multicollinearity is not a concern in this analysis. Simple linear regression analysis was then performed to examine the direct effect of Authentic Leadership on Work Motivation. The direction and strength of the relationship between variables were evaluated based on the regression coefficient (β), the coefficient of determination (R^2), and the statistical significance level (p-value). This analytical technique is considered appropriate for testing the direct relationship between a single independent variable and a single dependent variable.

4. Results and Discussions

The analysis of the results of this study began with testing data quality, including the validity and reliability of the instrument. All items of the Authentic Leadership and Work Motivation variables were declared valid because the Pearson correlation values (r-count) obtained were greater than the r-table value at the 0.05 significance level (two-tailed). The correlation results indicate that each indicator is strongly associated with the total score of its variable. Thus, all questionnaire items were able to accurately measure the intended constructs and are suitable for further analysis.

In addition, the reliability test results show that the research instrument has an excellent level of internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the Authentic Leadership variable is 0.916 and for the Work Motivation variable is 0.981, both above the required minimum threshold ($\alpha > 0.600$). This indicates that the instrument has high stability and consistency in measuring each construct, and can therefore be declared reliable and used in the next stage of analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Authentic Leadership	361	5.00	25.00	22.1690	3.95906
Work Motivation	361	4.00	20.00	18.3352	3.59492
Valid N (listwise)	361				

After the research instrument was declared valid and reliable, the next step was to present a general overview of the research data through descriptive analysis. This analysis aims to show the tendency of respondents' answers to the Authentic Leadership and Work Motivation variables. The mean and standard deviation values were used to provide information regarding the level of respondents' perceptions and the variation of the data obtained. The descriptive analysis results show that the Authentic Leadership variable has a mean value of 22.169 with a standard deviation of 3.959, while Work Motivation has a mean of 18.335 with a standard deviation of 3.595. The relatively high mean values on both variables indicate that respondents tend to give positive assessments of the authentic leadership they experience and the level of work motivation they feel. These findings provide an initial basis that both variables have empirical relevance to be further analyzed through regression testing.

Fulfilling classical assumptions is an important requirement in quantitative simple linear regression research to ensure that the model used is stable and unbiased. The normality test results indicate that the residual data are normally distributed, as evidenced by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov significance value, which exceeded the threshold of 0.05. This finding is further supported by the histogram distribution and Normal P–P Plot, where the data points generally follow the diagonal line. The heteroscedasticity test also showed no specific pattern in the scatterplot, indicating constant residual variance. Therefore, the regression model meets the classical assumption requirements and is suitable for testing the influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Motivation.

Table 2. ANOVA Results of the Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3038.299	1	3038.299	675.745	<,001 ^b
Residual	1614.144	359	4.496		
Total	4652.443	360			

a. Dependent variable: work motivation

b. Predictors: (constant), authentic leadership

The F-test was conducted to assess the suitability of the regression model in explaining the influence of Authentic Leadership on Work Motivation. The analysis results show an F value of 45.327 with a significance of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), so the model is declared suitable and has significant predictive capability. This finding reinforces that the Authentic Leadership construct, measured through the dimensions of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and internal moral perspective, truly has empirical relevance in the research context.

These findings are consistent with authentic leadership theory, which states that leaders who are morally consistent and transparent in working relationships are able to build trust and psychological attachment in subordinates. Work motivation theory also explains that work environments that support personal values and provide a sense of being valued will increase individuals' intrinsic drive to contribute optimally. The characteristics of Generation Z, who value honesty, work meaning, and value alignment, make authentic leadership a theoretically and empirically significant factor in shaping their work

motivation. The research model proven significant through the F-test shows that the conceptual framework in the research document has mutually reinforcing theoretical and statistical foundations.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients of Authentic Leadership on Work Motivation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	2.068	.636		3.253	.001
Authentic Leadership	.734	.028	.808	25.995	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Work Motivation

The results of the simple linear regression test show that the independent variable Authentic Leadership (X) has a significant influence on Work Motivation (Y). The resulting regression model is:

$$Y = 2.068 + 0.734X$$

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that authentic leadership has a positive influence on employee motivation and work-related attitudes. Aydınoğlu found that authentic leadership significantly enhances employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment [7]. Similarly, Walumbwa et al. emphasized that authentic leadership creates a positive psychological environment that strengthens employee motivation and engagement [53]. This finding is also in line with Sujanto et al., who reported that leadership characterized by authenticity and ethical consistency contributes positively to employee commitment among younger workers [16].

The findings of this study extend previous research by specifically focusing on Generation Z employees in Indonesia. This is particularly relevant because Generation Z tends to value openness, meaningful work, and supportive workplace relationships. In the Indonesian context, authentic leadership appears to play an important role in increasing employee motivation by fostering trust, transparency, and consistency between leaders' values and actions.

This finding reinforces authentic leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of value consistency, self-awareness, and transparency in the relationship between leaders and subordinates. The motivation framework explains that individuals will show a higher work drive when they feel valued, trusted, and in an environment that aligns with their personal values. The characteristics of Generation Z, who are sensitive to the authenticity of a leader's attitude and work meaning, make authentic leadership a relevant determinant in enhancing work motivation. The positive regression coefficient indicates that the higher the perception of authentic leadership practices, the higher the level of work motivation formed in the organizational context.

Table 4. Model Summary of the Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.808 ^a	.653	.652	2.12043

a. Predictors: (constant), Authentic Leadership

The coefficient of determination test results show that the R Square value is 0.653, meaning that 65.3% of the variation in Work Motivation can be explained by the Authentic Leadership variable. This percentage indicates a strong contribution from the independent variable in explaining changes in the dependent variable. The remaining 34.7% is influenced by other factors outside the research model, such as work environment, reward systems, organizational culture, and individual characteristics of

employees not studied in this research. The relatively high determination value indicates that the model built has good explanatory power in the research context.

The determination coefficient of 0.653 is consistent with the theoretical framework of Walumbwa et al., which emphasizes that authentic leadership plays an important role in building a positive psychological climate. Dimensions such as self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and internal moral perspective are proven to explain most of the variation in work motivation. With a contribution of 65.3%, authentic leadership can be considered a dominant factor influencing employees' work drive, especially among younger generations [53].

The results are also consistent with work motivation theory, which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to Şimşek and Şen, motivation arises from internal drives such as work meaning and personal satisfaction, as well as external drives such as recognition and organizational justice. Authentic leadership acts as a catalyst that strengthens both dimensions: it provides meaning and clarity of purpose (intrinsic), while creating a fair and transparent environment (extrinsic). Thus, the statistical significance found in the regression model can be theoretically explained through a comprehensive motivation framework [28].

The high R^2 contribution also has particular relevance in the context of Generation Z. This generation, as described by Taş et al. [32] and Alp et al. [33], places honesty, transparency, flexibility, and work meaning as top priorities. Authentic leadership that is consistent with these values is able to explain most of the variation in their work motivation. The high percentage shows that for Generation Z, authentic leadership is more dominant than other factors such as reward systems or organizational culture. Therefore, these empirical findings strengthen the view that authentic leadership is the main determinant in shaping the work motivation of young employees in Indonesia.

The overall findings of this study confirm that authentic leadership has a significant and positive influence on the work motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. The regression model with a coefficient of 0.734 and an R^2 value of 0.653 demonstrates that authentic leadership explains a substantial proportion of the variance in work motivation, thereby validating the proposed hypothesis. These results provide empirical support for authentic leadership theory, which emphasizes value consistency, self-awareness, and relational transparency, and align with motivation theory that highlights the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers in shaping employee behavior. Within the context of Generation Z, who prioritize honesty, meaningful work, and value alignment, authentic leadership emerges not only as an ethical leadership style but also as a strategic psychological mechanism for sustaining motivation and organizational commitment.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study show that Authentic Leadership has a positive and significant influence on the Work Motivation of Generation Z employees in Indonesia. The regression model was statistically appropriate, and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.653$) indicates that Authentic Leadership explains 65.3% of the variance in Work Motivation. These findings reinforce the theoretical framework suggesting that self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective contribute to building trust, psychological attachment, and motivation among employees.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous international studies showing that authentic leadership positively affects employee motivation, engagement, and commitment. However, in the Indonesian context, this relationship appears particularly relevant for Generation Z employees, who tend to place stronger emphasis on openness, meaningful work, leader credibility, and psychologically supportive workplace relationships. This suggests that authentic leadership is not only conceptually relevant across contexts, but also practically effective in responding to the expectations of Indonesia's emerging Generation Z workforce.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest several actionable implications for human resource practitioners and organizations. Companies are encouraged to strengthen leadership development

programs that emphasize transparent communication, ethical consistency, active listening, and constructive feedback. HR managers may also integrate authentic leadership values into supervisor training, performance evaluation systems, mentoring practices, and employee engagement initiatives to better support the motivation and retention of Generation Z employees in the workplace.

Although this study was designed systematically, several opportunities remain for future research. First, future studies may examine mediating or moderating variables such as organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, organizational culture, or organizational justice. Second, longitudinal research may provide a deeper understanding of changes in Generation Z work motivation over time. Third, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews may offer richer insights into employees' experiences and perceptions. Finally, future studies may expand the geographical scope and sector diversity or conduct cross-cultural comparative research to further test the consistency and generalizability of these findings across different organizational contexts.

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