

Work engagement influences affective commitment: Psychological capital and perceived organisation supports as moderators

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WORK ENGAGEMENT INFLUENCES AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT: PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND PERCEIVED ORGANISATION SUPPORT AS MODERATORS

ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: It is well-known that millennials have low levels of attachment towards the organisation. It is therefore necessary to consider ways of retaining them as leavers may affect the organisation financially. **Background Problem:** Previous studies have consistently shown that work engagement (WE) significantly affects affective commitment (AC). However, the correlation level varies. Hence, a moderator could be affecting the strength of their relationship. **Novelty:** This research investigated whether psychological capital (PsyCap) and perceived organisation support (POS) could act as moderators. **Research Methods:** The research was a quantitative and non-experimental study. Researchers using the convenience sampling technique and the participants were 111 Indonesian millennial employees who completed questionnaires virtually. **Findings/Results:** Regression analysis confirmed that WE influenced AC significantly and PsyCap was shown to be a moderator. Further, a three-way interaction revealed that a low level of POS has a significant effect, but only when the level of PsyCap is low, implying that POS is still valid as a moderator (even though only partially). **Conclusion:** This study concluded that both PsyCap and POS are important for millennial employees. Therefore, it is recommended that management consider these two variables when managing the millennials in their organisation.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Affective commitment,
work engagement,
psychological capital,
perceived organisation
support, millennial

JEL Code:
M52, M54,

1. Introduction

It is a given that every organisation wants to achieve its best and to be successful, organisations need to produce outstanding performance. To attain this, organisations depend largely on the performance of their employees (Peek, 2022). Hence, employees are considered the 'jewel in the crown' of organisations. Consequently, for the past decade, managements have been searching for the best way to retain employees in their organisation; in short, management do not want their employees to leave the organisation (Tupper & Ellis, 2022). This is because the cost of employees leaving the organisation is high. For instance, Charaba (2022) report that the loss of organisational productivity can reach up to \$1.8 trillion per year when employees leave an organisation. Besides the financial loss, the morale of remaining employees is diminished as losing colleagues causes frustration, anger, and burnout (Heinz, 2022), which then leads to poor individual performance and eventually serious effects on organisational success.

In the recent Indonesian population census of 2020, it was recorded that Indonesia has a total population of more than 270 million individuals. The population is largely dominated by millennials (nearly 26%, Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia (KOMINFO, 2021). A millennial is defined as an individual born between the years 1981 to 1996 (KOMINFO, 2021). Further, these individuals are classified as the most productive age category in terms of accelerating Indonesia's economic growth (KOMINFO, 2021). This means that these millenials will dominate the workforce in the future (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021). Indeed, Teamstage (2022) estimates that 75% of employees will belong to Generation Millennial in the year 2025. Therefore, it is not surprising that Indonesia is currently plunging into a phase of demographic bonus, in which there are more individuals of productive age than non-productive individuals (Otoritas Jasa Keuangan Indonesia, 2022). Research on millennial employees in relation to organisational performance should therefore be conducted as its findings will be beneficial to many organisations in Indonesia.

Millennials are often described as individuals who are constantly connected to advanced communication technology, and that includes social media, smartphones, electronic mail, and text messages (Freeman, 2022). It is thus no surprise that they prefer to work using these tools to complete any given task instantly and with minimal effort (Whyte, 2021). Furthermore, they prefer not to work under pressure or make things complicated. Another millennial characteristic is that their attachment towards organisations is low (Prayitno et al., 2022; Rigoni & Nelson, 2016). This view is supported by

Dale Carnegie's (2018) finding that 75% of millennial employees did not want to be involved with their organisation. Consistent with Dale Carnegie (2018), a recent survey conducted by Deloitte (2022) found that 24% of millennial employees left the organisation they worked for within two years, 32% would still leave even though they did not have a job offer elsewhere, and only 38% wanted to remain in the organisation for more than five years. This implies that millennials have a low commitment towards organisations, and are prone to leave organisations more frequently compared to other generations. This is worrying because leavers represent high costs for organisations, both financially and morally (Charaba, 2022; Heinz, 2022).

Attachment towards the organisation, according to Allen and Meyer (1996), is coined as organisational commitment. It has three dimensions, of which affective commitment has the biggest impact on organisational behaviour for three reasons. First, based on its definition, affective commitment is characterised by more emotional involvement than both continuance and normative commitment (Rashad & Rosari, 2020). Second, affective commitment provides more reliability and is considered the most important explanatory variable (Rashad & Rosari, 2020). Third, it is able to explain more variance in other organisational behaviour than the other two types of commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Additionally, since millennial employees have low attachment towards the organisation (Prayitno et al., 2022; Rigoni & Nelson, 2016), this research only focuses on affective commitment as the dependent variable.

Affective commitment is one of the most important variables to be researched in the field of industrial and organisational psychology for many reasons. Affective commitment leads to high levels of employee job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and incremental improvements in involvement in the organisation (Nkhukhu-Orlando et al., 2019). In addition, Lutuilean and Prasetyo (2019) report that affective commitment is linked with reduced job stress and higher organisational justice. Since numerous studies indicate that affective commitment is reflected in positive behavioural organisational outcomes, the factors that influence affective commitment should be considered.

One factor affecting affective commitment is work engagement, which has proven to be the best predictor of any organisational behaviour (Makikangas et al., 2022). Likewise, a study by Weiss and Zacher (2022) found that engaged employees tend to be both physically immersed in and cognitively aware of the work; hence it promotes connection to the task.

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The impact of work engagement on affective commitment has been widely studied in the literature. Regression analysis confirms that work engagement has a positive effect on affective commitment. However, the correlation between these two variables is inconsistent. For instance, Alishaabani et al. (2021) conducted a study using foreign employees in the Hungarian private service sector as their participants. They examined work engagement and affective commitment, finding a correlation of 0.26. However, Ko et al. (2022) report a correlation of 0.58 between work engagement and affective commitment among a sample of 280 industrial employees in South Korea. Similarly, Fukuzaki et al. (2021) produced a correlation value of 0.59. Moreover, quantitative research conducted by Istiqomah and Riani (2021) found a work engagement–affective commitment correlation of 0.75 based on 218 employees working in the hospitality industry.

Cohen (1988) suggested the following benchmarks for the effect size index: (a) 0.20 indicates a small effect, (b) 0.50 stipulates a medium effect, and (c) 0.80 specifies a large effect. Liu et al. (2019) have since reported that the correlation coefficient can also serve as the effect size index. On this basis, the effect size of the correlation between work engagement and affective commitment (based on previous studies – Alishaabani et al., 2021; Fukuzaki et al., 2021; Istiqomah & Riani, 2021; Ko et al., 2022) is varied, ranging from a small effect to nearly a large effect. Baron and Kenny (1986) speculated that there could be another variable causing the strength of the correlation between two variables to vary, which they called a moderator. A moderator is defined as a third variable that influences the magnitude of the relationship between the independent and dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

In psychology, the long-running debate over whether nature (internal factor) or nurture (external factor) primarily affect individual behaviour has come to the conclusion that both play a role (Bergland, 2022). Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the moderating variable affecting the strength of the correlation between work engagement and affective commitment will originate from both internal and external factors.

One variable that could represent an internal factor is psychological capital. The notion of psychological capital as a moderator in the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment is supported by previous studies (as detailed below) that have concluded: (a)

psychological capital significantly affects work engagement, and (b) psychological capital significantly affects affective commitment. The conclusions of these previous studies successfully meet the moderation criterion proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), which states that a variable is considered to be a moderator if (a) it influences the independent variable, and (b) impacts the dependent variable. First, many studies have shown that psychological capital has a significant and positive effect on work engagement (George et al., 2021; Giancaspro et al., 2022; Niswaty et al., 2021; Sihag, 2021; Tsaor et al., 2019). For example, Giancaspro et al. (2022) recently conducted a non-experimental study involving 1,219 Italian employees working mostly in the private sector, concluding that psychological capital significantly influenced work engagement ($d = 0.55, p < 0.05$). Second, many studies also report that psychological capital has a significant and positive effect on affective commitment (Gustari & Widodo, 2021; Mudifah & Mangundjaya, 2018). For instance, Gustari and Widodo (2021) carried out virtual research in which they tasked 469 senior high school teachers in Indonesia with filling out an online questionnaire. Their results revealed that psychological capital has a significant direct effect on affective commitment ($d = 0.46, p < 0.01$).

On the other hand, perceived organisation support (an example of an external factor) could be a moderator in the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment. Similar to psychological capital, perceived organisation support as a moderator in the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment is confirmed by the existing literature and simultaneously fulfills the moderation criterion set by Baron and Kenny (1986) as well. The literature shows that (a) perceived organisation support has a direct effect on work engagement, and (b) perceived organisation support has a direct effect on affective commitment. First, studies have consistently shown that perceived organisation support significantly affects work engagement (Canboy et al., 2021; Nguyen & Tran, 2021; Perwira et al., 2021; Sihag, 2021; Xu et al., 2021). For example, Xu et al. (2021) implemented a cross-sectional survey with Chinese nurses. Their reported result of $\beta = 1.07, p < 0.001$ implies that the positive effect of perceived organisation support on work engagement is significant. Second, the significant effect of perceived organisation support on affective commitment is evident in various studies (Ficapal-Cusi et al., 2020; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2021; Usadolo et al., 2022). For instance, a cross-sectional study in Australia by Usadolo et al. (2022) concluded that perceived organisation support significantly impacted affective commitment among participants ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$).

Besides this empirical support, the notion of psychological capital and perceived organisation support as potential moderators in the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment is

also supported and explained theoretically using broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001). Fredrickson (2001) argues that positive emotions induce individuals to widen their action or thought. Accordingly, when an individual possesses or gains sufficient resources (psychological capital and perceived organisation support), these resources will lead the individual to experience positive emotions. In turn, this will cause the individual to develop a robust work attachment (that is work engagement) and consequently this thought will eventually lead him or her to experience emotional attachment or identification towards the organisation (affective commitment).

Based on the above information, it can be concluded that psychological capital and perceived organisation support may act as moderators in the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment. However, no study in the current literature assesses these four variables concurrently. Additionally, research focusing on any of these four variables using millennial Indonesian employees as participants is scarce, thus providing the rationales for the current research. Moreover, based on the reviewed theoretical and empirical data, it is hypothesised that: (a) work engagement significantly affects affective commitment, (b) psychological capital moderates the effect of work engagement on affective commitment, and (c) perceived organisation support moderates the impact of work engagement on affective commitment. The conceptual framework of the current research is depicted below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Current Research



2. Literature Review

Affective commitment is defined as an individual's feeling of identification with and attachment to their organisation. Allen and Meyer (1996) classified three types of commitment: (a) affective commitment (emotional attachment that originates recognition of the organisation's vision and values), (b) continuance commitment (remaining in the organisation because of the support and rewards provided), and (c) normative commitment (having a sense of duty to not leaving the organisation).

Work engagement is explained as a positive working condition characterised by (a) vigour (possessing massive energy and a never-give up mindset), (b) dedication (having a strong attachment, high level of enthusiasm, and feeling proud at one's work), and (c) absorption (applying full concentration in completing one's task, Schaufeli, 2013).

Psychological capital is defined as a positive psychological condition in an individual that is characterised by (a) hope, (b) self-efficacy, (c) resilience, and (d) optimism (Luthan & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Hope relates to an individual's perception regarding achieving his or her goal. Self-efficacy is an individual's confidence regarding their capabilities for successfully completing any task and resilience is explained as an individual's ability to 'get up' or bounce back after a failure. Lastly, optimism refers to an individual mindset with a generalised positive outcome expectancy (Luthan & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), perceived organisation support is the extent to which employee believe the organisation acknowledges their inputs, looks after their well-being, and meets their socioemotional needs. Furthermore, perceived organisation support is a unidimensional variable and has acceptable internal validity (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

3. Method

Using the following convenience sampling method, a total of 119 participants were recruited for this study. First, the participant criteria were established. Second, an online questionnaire was made using Google Form and distributed to potential participants through a link sent either to their mobile phone or electronic mail. After the responses had been collected, the researchers carefully checked every participants' personal data to ensure they met the criteria for participation. If their data did not correspond to the criteria, that particular participant's data was eliminated. Consequently, eight participants were removed, leaving a final sample of 111. All participants were born between 1981 and 1996, thus classifying them as millennials. Their demographic data were as follows: (a) 56% were male, (b) 60% were undergraduates, (c) 57% were single, (d) 51% were permanent employees, and (e) on average, they had been working for at least 5.5 years.

This research adopted a quantitative, non-experimental, and cross-design research approach. This study consisted of one dependent variable – affective commitment, one independent variable – work engagement, and two moderating variables – psychological capital and perceived organisation support.

All participants were required to fill out an online form, which was distributed through a link via mobile application. There were six sections on the form. The first section introduced the study and provided instructions on filling out the questionnaire as well as obtaining informed consent. Affective commitment was measured in the second section using six items from the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Allen and Meyer (1996). There was an equal number of positive and negative items. Some examples are: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization" – "Saya sangat senang untuk menghabiskan sisa karir saya di perusahaan ini" (positive item) and "I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation" – "Saya tidak merasa

terikat secara emosional dengan perusahaan ini" (negative item). In the third section, work engagement was assessed using three items from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). All items on this scale were positive, for example: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" – "Saya bekerja dengan penuh energi". Next, psychological capital was calculated using a positive 12-item Psychological Capital Questionnaire developed by Luthans et al. (2007). One item from this scale is, "I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals" – "Saya mampu memikirkan berbagai cara untuk mencapai tujuan-tujuan saya dalam bekerja". In the fifth section, the eight-item Survey of Perceived Organisational Support developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) was implemented to measure perceived organisational support. As with the six-item OCCQ, there was an equal number of positive and negative items, including: "The organization values my contribution to its well-being" – "Perusahaan ini menghargai kontribusi saya" (positive item) and "The organization shows very little concern for me" – "Perusahaan ini kurang mempedulikan saya" (negative item). Lastly, participants were asked to provide their demographic data.

All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) highly not compatible to me (*sangat tidak sesuai*), (2) not compatible to me (*tidak sesuai*), (3) neutral to me (*netral*), (4) compatible to me (*sesuai*), (5) highly compatible to me (*sangat sesuai*). High scores indicate an individual has a high level of affective commitment, work engagement, psychological capital, and perceived organisation support, respectively. All items were translated from English to the Indonesian language by the researchers, who have strong language competency in both languages. A back-translation from Indonesian to English was then performed by a competent bilingual speaker who communicates in both languages on a daily basis.

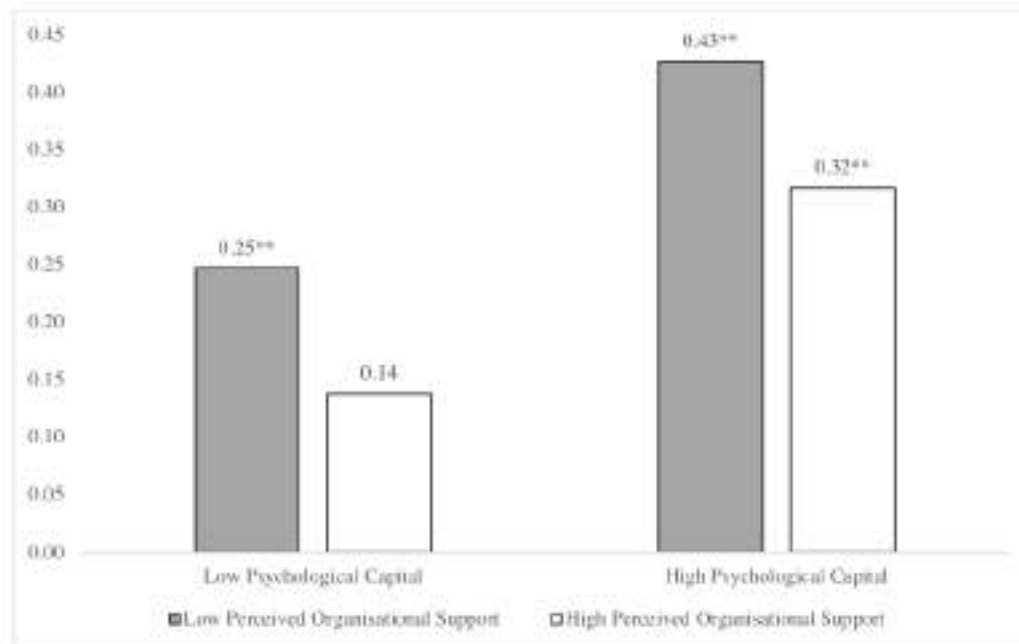
For the data analysis, instead of averaging the items for the construct, the researchers developed the construct through a factor analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Factor analysis allows latent constructs that cannot be measured directly to be estimated. When developing the construct from the items, items that had low factor loading (e.g., less than 0.40) were eliminated (Watterson et al., 2021). The resulting reliability of each variable was as follows: (a) affective commitment ($\alpha = 0.79$), (b) work engagement ($\alpha = 0.82$), (c) psychological capital ($\alpha = 0.85$), and (d) perceived organisation support ($\alpha = 0.93$). Such values indicate that the translated Indonesian language questionnaire was reasonably reliable. The researchers estimated the moderation model in Figure 1 through Model 2 in the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2022).

4. Results

Main Effect. The main effect of work engagement was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.29$ (0.09), $t = 3.34$, $p = 0.001$). This showed that higher work engagement was associated with an increase in affective commitment. Likewise, the main effects of the moderators, psychological capital ($\beta = 0.20$ (0.09), $t = 2.23$, $p = 0.028$) and perceived organisation support ($\beta = 0.43$ (0.07), $t = 5.92$, $p < 0.001$), were positive and significant as well.

Moderation Analyses. The interaction between work engagement and psychological capital was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.13$ (0.06), $t = 2.15$, $p = 0.034$). However, the interaction between work engagement and perceived organisation support was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.08$ (0.06), $t = -1.36$, $p = 0.177$). Since one of these interactions was statistically significant, a three-way interaction analysis was performed between work engagement, psychological capital, and perceived organisation support. Figure 2 shows that perceived organisation support significantly moderated the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment when psychological capital was high (low perceived organisation support – effect = 0.43 (0.12), $t = 3.70$, $p = 0.003$; high perceived organisation support – effect = 0.32 (0.10), $t = 3.32$, $p = 0.013$). However, when psychological capital was low, only a low level of perceived organisation support significantly moderated the impact of work engagement on affective commitment (effect = 0.25 (0.09), $t = 2.80$, $p = 0.006$). Conversely, a high level of perceived organisation support failed to moderate the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment when psychological capital was low.

Figure 2. Result of Two-Way Interaction Analysis



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** *p*-value is significant at 0.05 level.

5. Discussion

This current research simultaneously assessed four variables, namely work engagement, affective commitment, psychological capital, and perceived organisational support to test three hypotheses. The first hypothesis proposing that work engagement has a positive effect on affective commitment was supported. This means that when an employee is engaged with his or her work (in this case he or she is feeling proud of his or her work), he or she will tend to experience emotional attachment towards the organisation. Consequently, they will remain with the organisation and not think of leaving. This result is consistent with the previous literature (Alshaabani et al., 2021; Fukuzaki et al., 2021; Istiqomah & Riani, 2021; Ko et al., 2022).

The second hypothesis was supported as well: psychological capital was found to successfully moderate the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment. In other words, psychological capital strengthens the impact of work engagement on affective commitment. This implies that employees who have higher levels of psychological capital tend to be more engaged and this will eventually cause those employees to have stronger emotional attachment towards the organisation. These findings support Broader-and-Build theory's (Fredrickson, 2003) argument that

positive emotion originating from psychological capital causes an employee to be engaged with his or her work. This engagement will then lead employees to develop emotional attachment towards the organisation.

Besides Broaden-and-Build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), our findings also support Conservation of Resources Theory in terms of the Crossover of Engagement Model proposed by Hobfoll et al. (2018). This model posits that when an employee has a high level of resources, there is an increased possibility that such engaged employees will perform or experience other supportive behaviours. As shown in the current research, engaged millennial employees will tend to experience higher emotional attachment towards the organisation when they possess high levels of psychological capital (resource). This notion is also consistent with the second hypothesis.

However, the third hypothesis was only partially supported. At first glance, an interaction analysis (work engagement x perceived organisation support) suggested that perceived organisation support was not a moderator. However, a post-hoc analysis of the three-way interaction (this analysis was possible due to one of the interaction effects – work engagement and psychological capital – being statistically significant) indicated that when employees possess a low level of psychological capital, a low level of perceived organisation support significantly moderates the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment. Conversely, a high level of perceived organisation support fails to moderate the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment when the psychological capital of the employees is low. This result can be explained from the perspective of social exchange theory (Homans, 1958). This theory posits that human behaviour is based on the interaction between two parties in which individuals make a cognitive assessment of cost and benefit. It suggests that when employees have a low level of psychological capital, they tend to have low self-efficacy (low confidence in completing the task), and this will probably cause them to complete the task with only minimal effort. In this case, when the level of perceived organisation support is low, employees will believe their input towards the organisation matches what they receive back from the organisation, giving the impression that the organisation treats employees fairly. However, when they feel positively towards the organisation, they will engage with any given work and hence will remain in the organisation. In contrast, when the level of psychological capital is low but employees receive a high level of organisation support, employees will perceive a mismatch between input and output. This causes employees to experience cognitive imbalance and consequently they are demotivated. Once employees demotivate, they do not engage with any given task and this disengagement makes

employees more likely to leave the organisation and look for another job elsewhere. Nevertheless, this research argues that perceived organisation support is still a proven moderator (although only partially).

Additionally, this research confirms the nature and nurture argument, which contends that both internal and external factors influence individual behaviours (Bergland, 2022). In the present study, both psychological capital (internal – nature) and perceived organisation support (external – nurture) are both proven to be moderators. However, Zaky (2015) extended the debate on nature and nurture by asking how much each factor influences any psychological behaviour. The current research seems to shed some light on the question of how much, showing that psychological capital (internal factor – nature) plays a greater role (in terms of acting as a moderator) compared to perceived organisational support (external factor – nurture). Similarly, this result is consistent with findings by Gumilang and Indrayanti (2022), who concluded that nature ($\beta = 0.69, p < 0.001$) contributes more than nurture ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.001$) in employee engagement with their work.

Although the findings of the current research are largely consistent with the hypotheses, it has several limitations. First, Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002) stated that perceived organisation support is a reciprocal relationship between the organisation and its employees. The current research did not limit participation to employees from certain types of organisations. Hence, there is a possibility that different organisations provide different support, thus leading employees to have different perceptions, with implications for perceived organisation support. Second, the present research adopted an online mode of data collection in which researchers do not have full control in ensuring participants have understood the instructions for completing the questionnaire (although detailed instruction was provided on the first section of the questionnaire). Third, the current research utilised a self-administered questionnaire, which introduces a high possibility that participants do not answer truthfully (Saunders & Kulchitsky, 2021), thus affecting the results.

6. Conclusions and Suggestions

This study finds that psychological capital and perceived organisation support successfully moderate the relationship between work engagement and affective commitment. Additionally, this research confirms the importance of both nature and nurture in affecting the psychological behaviour at work (engagement and retention). Further, it demonstrates that psychological capital (the internal factor

component) plays a greater role as a moderator compared to perceived organisation support (the external factor component).

Future research should focus on other industrial and organisational variables such as (a) personality (internal factor), (b) leadership (external factor), and (c) individual work performance (dependent variable). One could examine the moderating role of personality and leadership in the relationship between work engagement and individual work performance. Furthermore, future research should seek to extend and incorporate the job demands-resources model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001). This model explains the well-being of employees in terms of demands and resources at work. In this regard, future research could add the variable job demand into the framework model (preferably as a moderator). Moreover, KOMINFO (2021) reports that Generation Z (born in the years 1997 – 2012) is another generation (besides millennial) that will dominate the workplace in the future. Thus, future research should study Generation Z employees.

This study highlights the importance of psychological capital and perceived organisation support for millennial employees' engagement and retention. Thus, management is highly recommended to recruit millennial employees with a high level of psychological capital. Training and other employee development programs are also suggested to maintain their level of psychological capital. To develop the dimension of hope, for instance, managers could offer ways to help employees achieve their goals. In addition, managers could generate other options to overcome possible future obstacles in order to reinforce the dimensions of optimism and resilience. Moreover, to amplify the dimension of self-efficacy, one could build employee confidence in mastering tasks through role modelling (for example, engaging a successful person to be a speaker in a training session) and positive feedback. In addition, management should provide support to their employees, including by (a) treating employees fairly in terms giving them equal compensation and workload, (b) providing feedback on any completed work and motivating employees, and (c) rewarding employees who work beyond their job description and show willingness to learn towards self-development.

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