

The effect of grit on the work engagement of the millennial generation

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Abstract

Employees of millennial generation are concerned about the sector since they are perceived to have less work engagement. This study used the positive psychology concept to empirically test the effect of grit on work engagement of millennial employees (N=159) aged 20 to 40, with a minimum service period of one year. The method of this study was quantitative, and data collection used a questionnaire, namely the short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and the Short Grit Scale, with 9 and 8 items for work engagement and grit, respectively. The sample used the purposive sampling technique, and the data were analyzed through a simple linear regression technique with the SPSS version 25.0 for windows. The analysis showed that grit positively affected work engagement with a value $F(1,157) = 12.019$, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.071$, R adjusted = 0.065, and regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.603$). The grit effect on work engagement was shown by the R square value of 0.071, meaning the grit variable of 7.1% influences the work engagement variation.

Keywords

grit, millennial employees, work engagement, workforce, work performance

Introduction

In the 2020 Population Census results, the Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia recorded that the millennial generation proportion was 25.87% of the total population. This generation is included in the productive age category, which can be an opportunity to accelerate economic growth. In the future, they will dominate the workforce in the country (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021)

As the largest workforce, millennial is identical, with high turnover rates. The average industry turnover rate is above 10%, which also occurs in start-ups whose work environment is popular among millennials (Perspectives, 2019). However, the millennial workforce has low work engagement (Mulyati et al., 2019; Rigoni & Nelson, 2016).

Low millennial work engagement may become a problem because it has an essential role in organizations. It optimizes employees' roles (Davids, 2011), and stimulates their tasks and performance (Sonntag et al., 2012). Work engagement also affects high commitment and work satisfaction due to better levels of psychological well-being, better performance, lower absenteeism, and desire to leave work (Alzyoud et al., 2014).

Several previous studies found that millennial has low work engagement. In contrast to the preliminary study, employees have relatively high work engagement. The difference has promoted further investigations, specifically regarding the factors influencing millennial work engagement in the industrial era 4.0, where the business world is becoming more competitive. It is the most compatible model and the key to success for the millennials as the main actors in organizations to win a highly competitive business world (Mulyati et al., 2019).

The factor that has been assessed as influencing the difference in work is the characteristics of millennial, who likes freedom, fast, instant, and digital. Millennials grow dissatisfied when they do not receive an expected benefit at work (Perspectives, 2019). This is in line with the statement of Taylor & Keeter (2010) that millennial depends on internet connections. The desire for speed and rapid gratification gives the impression that it is not dependable. Understanding the characteristics is important for developing work engagement because they are completely different from previous generations. Therefore, this study is intended to examine the Grit effect on work engagement in millennial. Grit is persistence and a great desire to achieve long-term goals for a long time (Duckworth et al., 2007). High grit makes employees work hard, have high standards, focus on fulfilling responsibilities and keep showing effort even though failure, difficulties, and obstacles are always experienced (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013).

The millennial generation is known as Gen-Y, Net, WE, Boomerang, and Peter Pan Generation. It was born at the turn of the millennium from 1980 to 2000 (Yuswohady, 2016). Furthermore, it has different characteristics from previous generations, including in the working world. Millennial employees do not pursue work satisfaction (Adkins, 2016), but want the opportunity to develop their potential (Deal & Levenson, 2016; Adkins, 2016). They do not want superiors who like to command and control (Adkins, 2016). The

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superiors should write targets on paper to help employees stay focused (Hess, 2012). Furthermore, they are reluctant to improve on their weaknesses and prefer to develop their strengths. The work-life balance and personal well-being at work are very important for millennial employees (Adkins, 2016).

Work engagement is the extent to which employees enjoy and believe in what they do (Wellins et al., 2018). It is a positive psychological construct in which employees feel enthusiastic and happy at work, represented by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2011). Individuals with high vigor will have high energy and work flexibility, the desire to devote effort to work, and persistence when facing difficulties (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Dedication shows pride and happiness in their work (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006), and absorption means high concentration and an exciting work experience (Bakker, 2014).

Work engagement in the millennial generation is influenced by many factors, including work crafting (Mulyati et al., 2019), work design, career growth, and psychological capital (Amalia & Hadi, 2019). Generally, the factors that cause work engagement are the relationship with superiors, trust in the leader's ability, pride in working for organizations (Dale, 2012), and the employees' work and personal resources. Factors within employees play a role in increasing work engagement, such as knowledge. Meanwhile, work source factors relate to the work environment, starting from organizations to the colleagues (Bakker, 2011).

Work engagement has benefits for organizations as well as for employees. In organizations with strong work engagement, employees will show good performance, engage in teamwork, and tend to help colleagues in a team. Moreover, with creative, innovative ideas and entrepreneurial spirit (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), they will try to achieve goals. Therefore, it allows employees to give full energy and potential to their work (Bakker & Leiter, 2010).

Individuals with grit show a strong working power against challenges and maintain their efforts and goals despite failures and obstacles in the process. The ease or good fortune transforms into tenacity, but the concentration remains on the objective when confronted with adversity or boredom as a signal to change course or cut losses. Grit shows persistence and a desire to achieve long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Individuals with strong grit have the following characteristics (a). Consistency of interest shows how consistent an individual's efforts are toward a direction. This can be seen from individual interests and goals that do not change easily, are not distracted by other ideas, interests, or goals, and remain true to their main goals. (b). Effort perseverance shows how hard individuals try to achieve goals. It can be seen in diligent or hardworking behavior, persistence in facing obstacles and challenges, and in choices (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Grit is not correlated with one's intelligence but with conscientiousness's big-five personality dimension. It is also suspected to be a determinant of success compared to conscientiousness and IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007). In a cross-sectional study with a Japanese population, there was a positive relationship between conscientiousness and self-control with grit. Furthermore, this study also found that grit correlated with work engagement (Suzuki et al., 2015).

As the largest workforce, millennial is a challenge for organizations. Employees from this generation have a very high turnover rate. According to Deloitte, 40.8% of respondents stated their ideal period of working in one place was 3-5 years. Meanwhile, 20% reported that 1-2 years was the ideal time to work in one workplace (Perspectives, 2019). The millennial employees' tendency to become 'work hoppers' indicates their low engagement to work.

Work engagement is an important factor for organizations to achieve its goals. Organizations need employees who are committed and engaged in their work. Furthermore, work engagement significantly affects employees' performance (Handoyo & Setiawan, 2017; Muliawan et al., 2018), task performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Chhetri, 2017). It is more influenced by positive factors such as perceived organizational support (Chhetri, 2017) and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020).

Grit is an internal factor influencing employee work engagement (Singh & Chopra, 2018; Suzuki et al., 2015). Individuals with grit will show their sincerity and perseverance to carry out their work. It makes individuals able to focus on their goals, not easily distracted, and have persistence in trying to achieve them (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Each individual has a different degree of grit, and it is part of personality traits that determine how to interact in various environments (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The millennial generation can show high work engagement. Therefore, this study aims to test the ability of grit to predict work engagement in millennial employees.

Method

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach to test the hypothesis of the grit effect on work engagement.

Participants

The subjects are millennial employees with 40-48 hours per week. There were 159 employees consisting of 48% male and 52% female. The age range of 27-33, 34-40, and 20-26 years is 50.3%, 28.3%, and 21.4%, respectively. The educational background of Bachelor's Degree, High School, and Vocational Degree is 64%, 31%, and 3%, respectively. The tenure of 2-5, 6-10, and <2 years is 44%, 25%, and 16%, respectively, while the rest having more than 10 years (> 10 years) is 15%. Data were collected online and shared through WhatsApp, social media, and email. To ensure that the subjects followed their actual conditions, they were asked to fill out informed consent stating the willingness to participate with a statement sheet.

Research Instrument

The instrument used to measure work engagement is the UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale) (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), which has been adapted by Mulyati et al. (2019). The work engagement scale contains 9 items, and all are favorable. The measurement tool uses a Likert Scale with 7 (seven) alternative answers, namely "Never" (N), "Rarely" (R), "Occasionally" (O), "Sometimes" (S), "Often" (Of), "Very Often" (VO), and "Always" (A).

The value of the item validity coefficient ranges from 0.520 to 0.799, and Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.883, hence, this measure is declared valid and reliable. The instrument used to measure grit was the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) from Duckworth & Quinn (2009), adapted to the Indonesian context (Priyohadi et al., 2019). It consisted of 5 favorable and 3 unfavorable items. This measuring instrument used a Likert scale with 5 (five) alternative answers, namely "Strongly Disagree" (SD), "Disagree" (D), "Doubtful" (R), "Agree" (A), "Strongly Agree" (SA). The value of the item validity coefficient ranges from 0.328 to 0.698, and Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.642. Therefore, the instrument is declared valid and reliable.

Data Analysis Technique

The descriptive and regression analysis techniques were adopted. Before testing the hypothesis, the assumption test was carried out, namely the normality and the linearity test. The normality test was conducted using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov, and a significance value of 0.2 ($p < 0.05$) was obtained. Therefore, the data obtained were normally distributed. The linearity test results obtained an F value of 11.946 with a significance = 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). It can be stated that the data were linear. The grit effect on work engagement was further analyzed using a simple linear regression analysis technique, SPSS version 25.0.

Result

The descriptive analysis test found that 0.6%, 39.6%, and 59.8% of the subjects had low, medium, and high grit levels, respectively. For the work engagement variable, 1.3%, 36.5%, and 62.2% of subjects had low, moderate, and high levels, respectively. Simple linear regression was used to predict the grit effect on work engagement. Data obtained $F(1.157) = 12.019$, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.071$, R adjusted = 0.065 with regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.603$, 95%). Therefore, increasing grit by 1 unit will increase work engagement by 0.603, which is significant at the 5% alpha of the t-test. From the hypothesis testing results, the calculated F is 12.019 with a significance value (sig.) of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). There was a significant effect of grit on the work engagement variable, and the R^2 value of 0.071 was obtained. This value means that the Grit effect is 7.1%, while 92.9% is influenced by other variables not examined.

Discussion

The hypothesis testing proved that there is a significant effect of grit on millennial employees' engagement. Therefore, the higher the grit, the greater the work engagement. These results were reinforced by the descriptive analysis result, which is known that most subjects have a high grit level followed by high work engagement. This finding was quite interesting because it is different from previous studies. Millennial employees are known to lack work engagement (Mulyati et al., 2019; Rigoni & Nelson, 2016). Meanwhile, the results of the hypothesis testing were consistent with a previous study which found a significant positive relationship between grit and work engagement (Suzuki et al., 2015; Tiara & Rostiana, 2018).

Grit has received considerable attention and is an important predictor of long-term achievement and success. It is necessary in the working world and the military, sales, high school, and marriage domains (Agrawal et al., 2022). For organizations, grit provides direction for the formation of ecosystems in the workplace, increasing work satisfaction and performance (Agrawal et al., 2022). Moreover, it is very important to select employees who have high grit to develop the culture (Duckworth, 2018). Grit is beneficial for self-development (Duckworth, 2018) and career success (Popoola & Karadas, 2022).

At work, millennial employees do not solely prioritize salary. They chase goals and are less concerned about work satisfaction. Millennial prefers developing themselves on the work (Adkins, 2016). They are more concerned with self-development because it opens opportunities for self-growth and future success. Organizations that provide space for career growth are an attraction for millennial employees. Furthermore, it can increase vitality and dedication and make them more attached to organizations (Bai & Liu, 2018)

According to Calk & Patrick (2017), organizations should promote a collaborative and team-based work environment with challenging and meaningful work rather than simply providing adequate pay to retain millennial employees. They will show engagement by working enthusiastically and are willing to be involved with various tasks when these factors exist in organizations (Manggabarani et al., 2020). Millennial employees love the life balance and want to be happy at work. Furthermore, they prefer a flexible work environment with few rules and regulations (DeVaney, 2015).

Based on the characteristics and expectations, to make millennial employees attached to their work, organizations should be able to develop and challenge them at work. The easy and usually performed steps are to conduct work rotation, enlargement, and enrichment. Employees learn to perform several different organizational tasks with work rotation and enlargement. They are given the same number of tasks at any time with work rotation. In contrast, employees are given more tasks to be carried out at one time in work enlargement.

Work enlargement can be conducted in two ways, knowledge used and tasks performed. Employees can make more complex decisions, participate in decision-making, and are given more tasks (Aamodt, 2015). Work enrichment is a design that provides the most satisfaction for employees. It promotes employees to use their knowledge and skills because it gives them increased authority and responsibility. Therefore, it allows the work to be performed more completely, having freedom in planning, organizing, and evaluating work to satisfy workers for growth, recognition, and responsibility.

Work enrichment allows employees to have autonomy and take more control over how to do their work. Meanwhile, work rotation and enlargement challenge employees to conduct several works while reducing boredom (Aamodt, 2015). Due to its impact on long-term achievement and success, employees will enjoy the organization's challenging assignments (Duckworth et al., 2007). The work engagement of millennial employees is influenced by grit, an internal factor. It will be stronger when accompanied by employees' development. This strategy pays attention to their personal and work values through work design Ma'rifah & Anisah (2021),

because millennial employees are very concerned about work-life balance (DeVaney, 2015; Adkins, 2016). The work design of the Job Characteristics Model from Hackman and Oldham enables organizations to design interesting, varied work with autonomy.

Therefore, it can increase employability. Employees are also more motivated and inspired to invest energy in work, making them more attached (Truss et al., 2014). These characteristics also influence millennial employees' work engagement. An employee with persistence, consistency of interest, and high endurance in doing business will be more involved and have a good sense of engagement (Manggabarani et al., 2020). Meanwhile, those with high grit will be more successful at work, and previous studies proved that this variable strongly predicts work and academic performance. A person with high grit will be more diligent at work, will not give up easily after failing, and can even make failure a motivation to try harder to achieve goals (Suzuki et al., 2015). High grit makes employees work hard, have high standards, focus on fulfilling responsibilities and keep showing effort even though failure, difficulties, and obstacles are experienced (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013).

There are differences in work engagement between men and women. Men have high work involvement in professional fields and work 41-52 hours per week without experiencing work discrimination. Meanwhile, women have high work involvement as employees, college graduates, and professionals working 41-52 hours a week without experiencing gender and work discrimination (Song, 2019).

This study has limitations, such as the data collection is carried out online, and due to the pandemic, the process cannot be conducted directly. Online data collection allows for errors and inaccurate responses by respondents following technical difficulties. It is advisable to include the researcher's WhatsApp number or email to provide an opportunity for respondents to discuss when using the online method.

Conclusion and Implications

This study proved that grit predicts employees' work engagement. Furthermore, millennial has high work engagement, which is different from previous findings. Individual characteristics, namely grit, influence high work engagement. The results provided benefits for employees and organizations. Grit is a crucial factor for millennials and makes their work tenacious. Therefore, they become more enthusiastic, happier, as well as physically and psychologically healthy, with a good relationship and work environment. For grit organizations, it can be used as a reference in selecting employees.

This study examined an individual's internal factors that influence work engagement. However, it requires further study to enrich the knowledge of work engagement in the millennial generation. Different analyses are suggested to examine other internal and external factors, such as organizational culture, leadership, and learning, which also affect work engagement. Data collection was carried out online with subjects from several organizations. Further study is recommended to obtain data using subjects from the same organizations. Therefore, the organization's role in developing work engagement can be more clearly described.

Declarations

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Author contributions

Conceptualization, EKP; methodology, YAR; validation, EKP; formal analysis, MR; investigation, M. R; data curation, MR & EKP; writing—preparation of the original draft, MR; writing—review and editing, EK P.; visualization, MR; Supervision, EKP, and YAR; project administration, M. R.; All authors have read and agree to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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