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Generation Z's Expectations for Well-being in the Workplace: The Role of Work Meaningfulness and Gender Factors

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Gen-Z envisions well-being in the workplace, particularly within the framework of sustainable work environments. Using the PERMA model, which encompasses Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, as the guiding theory, the research examines whether these five dimensions effectively capture Gen Z's expectations for future workplace well-being. Besides that, the research also examines the relationship between work meaningfulness and well-being, moderated by the gender factor. Data were gathered from 454 university students in Indonesia. through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and SEM PLS. Interestingly, rather than emerging as five distinct dimensions, the PERMA items loaded onto two dimensions named Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-being. This suggests that Gen-Z views workplace well-being from both a short and long-term perspective. Research also found that work meaningfulness positively impacts well-being, but gender does not moderate that relationship. The findings may also reflect a broader cultural inclination toward relational connectedness and shared meaning when assessing well-being. Besides that, the research also found that work meaningfulness positively impacts well-being on students, but gender does not moderate that relationship. By offering these insights, the study contributes to higher education institutions, career guidance service providers, and curriculum designers in developing self-development and career readiness programs that not only emphasize improving short-term happiness aspects (hedonic), but also prioritize strengthening meaning, engagement, and sustainable achievement (eudaimonic).

Keywords: Well-being, PERMA Model, Work Meaningfulness, Gender

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INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization, marked by technological advancements and increasing complexity in the work environment, has brought workplace well-being issues to the forefront as a top priority in human resource management. Well-being is no longer merely an effort to improve performance, but also encompasses attention to physical, mental, psychological, and social well-being (Ruggeri *et al.*, 2020). The shift toward a hybrid work system and the use of technology highlight the need for a more comprehensive managerial approach. The PERMA model (psychological well-being) serves as an

effective theoretical foundation for developing sustainable organizational well-being strategies (Goodman *et al.*, 2018; Al-Hendawi *et al.*, 2024).

Gen Z is one of the segments of the productive age group that has different characteristics from previous generations. They possess a unique perspective on the professional world, viewing work-life balance, diversity, inclusion, personal values, and meaningful work as essential components of well-being in the workplace (Salvadorinho et al., 2024). Survey data shows that this group experiences high levels of mental pressure, as well as strong expectations for organizational support in personal development and mental health (OECD, 2021). In this context, work meaningfulness becomes a crucial aspect, even for students who have not yet fully entered formal employment. Many of them have already begun developing early work experiences through activities such as internships, organizational involvement, volunteer work, and independent projects. Therefore, understanding Gen Z's well-being preferences is essential in designing effective human resource strategies that are relevant to the needs of the future generation.

Gen Z's expectations of a sustainable work environment are strongly influenced by the personal values they uphold. They tend to place greater priority on emotional well-being, flexibility in work schedule arrangements, and meaningfulness in their work, rather than solely on financial rewards. The 2023 Deloitte Global survey revealed that more than 46% of Gen Z experience stress on an almost daily basis. (Deloitte, 2023). The majority of this group also expects organizational support for mental health, work-life balance, and personal development opportunities. Gen Z tends to seek a work environment that fosters optimal productivity without causing burnout (Salvadorinho et al., 2024). The high turnover rate among Gen Z is a clear indication that companies must pay greater attention if they wish to attract and retain this age group in the long term (Kompasiana, 2024).

Previous studies have emphasized that the perception of meaningful work is positively associated with various aspects of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and job engagement (Allan et al., 2019; Steger et al., 2012). Individuals who perceive their work as valuable and meaningful tend to be better at managing work-related stress, demonstrate higher levels of loyalty to their organization, and exhibit more optimal job performance. From a positive psychology perspective, meaningful work is considered a key element influencing well-being, which emphasizes personal growth and the pursuit of life's meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Gen Z students today, in particular, demonstrate a high sensitivity to work values, expectations for sustainability, and the importance of work-life balance. Therefore, a deep understanding of how individuals in Gen Z construct meaning in their work is essential as a foundation for designing strategies to enhance well-being in the workplace.

The relationship between work meaningfulness and well-being has been widely demonstrated in various studies, consistently showing that meaningful work is positively correlated with overall well-being. However, there are still several research gaps, particularly regarding the mechanisms of this relationship and the moderating factors that may influence it (Allan *et al.*, 2018; Lips-Wiersma *et al.*, 2023). The way individuals find meaning in their work can vary depending on various factors, including demographic characteristics such as gender. Several studies have shown that women tend to place greater emphasis on social relationships, teamwork, and personal meaning in their work. In contrast, men are often more focused on achievement, status, and material rewards (Fischer & Luiz, 2024; Silva & Carvalho, 2021). These differences suggest that the impact of meaningful work on workplace well-being may not be universal, but can vary based on gender. Therefore, it is important to examine more specifically how gender plays a role in moderating the relationship between work meaningfulness and individuals' psychological well-being in the workplace.

Bridging the aforementioned research gaps, this study aims to examine the concept of well-being among Gen Z (specifically university students). The main objectives are to analyze Gen Z's expectations of workplace well-being using the PERMA well-being dimensions and to explore the influence of work meaningfulness on these expectations. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining the PERMA theoretical framework with Gen Z's expectations and incorporating the concept

of work meaningfulness to explore the relationship between these variables within the context of the future workforce.

Most existing well-being research still focuses on active employees, while exploration of future workers (particularly Gen Z students) in relation to sustainability values remains limited. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between work meaningfulness, well-being, and the role of gender from the early stages of higher education can serve as a foundation for organizations to design talent management strategies that are more responsive and inclusive to individual needs. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the extent to which perceptions of meaningfulness work contribute to levels of well-being and whether gender serves as a moderating variable in this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well-being and the PERMA Model

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the overall quality of an individual's life, including psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions(Seligman, 2011). From the perspective of positive psychology, well-being is understood as an ideal condition that enables individuals to thrive optimally, find meaning in life, and realize their highest potential (Grosz *et al*., 2021). herefore, well-being is regarded as "the good life" and serves as a measure of organizational effectiveness(Goodman *et al*., 2018).

Well-being can be understood through two main approaches: the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches(Ryan & Deci, 2001). he hedonic approach focuses on subjective well-being, characterized by high life satisfaction, the predominance of positive emotions, and low levels of negative emotions. Its primary goal is to maximize pleasure and reduce suffering. In contrast, the eudaimonic approach emphasizes the importance of self-actualization, personal growth, and achieving life meaning. Within this framework, dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and life purpose are key components of authentic and sustainable well-being. To gain a comprehensive understanding of well-being, both in the context of the workplace and education,Seligman (2011) formulated the PERMA model, which consists of five key aspects of psychological well-being: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This model is a synthesis of the eudaimonic well-being approach while still accommodating elements of hedonic well-being, thereby providing a holistic representation of an individual's well-being.

Butler & Kern (2016) explained each dimension of well-being in detail. The positive emotion dimension reflects the experience of positive feelings such as happiness, comfort, and gratitude, which play an important role in strengthening psychological resilience. Engagement refers to the level of a person's involvement in activities that are both challenging and enjoyable. The relationships dimension emphasizes the importance of having deep, supportive, and meaningful social connections with others. Meaning relates to the sense that life and work have value and a greater purpose beyond daily routines. Finally, accomplishment encompasses feelings of satisfaction with achievements, success, and recognized personal growth.

The PERMA model has been widely adopted in various studies as a framework for measuring and developing well-being in organizational, educational, and community settings (Butler & Kern, 2016; Goodman *et al.,* 2018; Al-Hendawi *et al.,* 2024). Specifically, in the context of Generation Z preparing to enter the workforce, these five dimensions provide a relevant conceptual framework for understanding and evaluating their expectations of well-being in future professional environments (Al-Hendawi *et al.,* 2024).

H_1: *The five PERMA dimensions are predictors of well-being among Generation Z.*

Work Meaningfulness and Well-being

Work meaningfulness reflects the extent to which individuals perceive their work as valuable and recognize the broader impact of their activities within social and organizational contexts (Steger *et al.*, 2012). The value of sustainability encourages individuals to view their work as meaningful because it aligns with their personal beliefs and life principles. Thus, work is not merely seen as a means of earning income, but also as a form of positive contribution to the environment and society. A high level of meaningfulness in work has been proven to be positively associated with various dimensions of well-being. When individuals see their work as meaningful, they tend to experience greater inner satisfaction, feel more engaged with their tasks, and have stronger resilience to stress in the workplace. Specifically, Generation Z tends to uphold social values, appreciate harmonious interpersonal relationships, and desire a comfortable working atmosphere (Maloni *et al.*, 2019). In addition, they place great importance on self-development, career stability, and achieving a balance between professional and personal life. Previous studies have also shown that meaningful work positively influences well-being (Lips-Wiersma *et al.*, 2023; Soren & Ryff, 2023).

H_2: *Work meaningfulness has a positive impact on well-being.*

The Moderation Role of Gender

Gender is understood as a social and cultural construct that defines the roles, behaviors, activities, and characteristics considered appropriate for men and women within a society(WHO, 2022). It reflects social expectations about how individuals should think, feel, and act under prevailing norms. Gender is often used as a moderating variable in psychological and organizational behavior research because gender differences are frequently accompanied by variations in values, needs, and behavioral orientations. Several previous studies have indicated that demographic characteristics influence how individuals perceive well-being. For example, women generally place greater value on dimensions such as social relationships and meaningful work, while men tend to emphasize aspects of personal achievement (Da Costa *et al.*, 2020). Previous research has also extensively linked work meaningfulness to gender (Kennedy & Dzialo, 2015; Odrowaz-Coates, 2021; Olsson & Gericke, 2017), as well as well-being to gender (Matud *et al.*, 2019; Matud *et al.*, 2020; Fischer & Luiz, 2024)

H_3: *Gender moderates the relationship between work meaningfulness and well-being.*

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach with the aim of exploring well-being expectations in the workplace, as well as the influence of work meaningfulness on Generation Z's well-being expectations, with gender as a moderating variable. The study was conducted on university students as part of Generation Z and future members of the workforce. The research population includes all students enrolled in public and private universities across Indonesia. The sampling technique used is purposive random sampling, with criteria including being an active university student aged between 18 and 24 years. This study uses primary data collected through a questionnaire distributed both offline and online.

The research questionnaire was developed based on measurements from previous studies. Well-being was measured using the PERMA model, consisting of 15 items adopted from previous research (Butler & Kern, 2016). Work meaningfulness was measured using the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), which includes 10 statements across three dimensions: positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivation, adopted from Steger *et al.* (2012). All questionnaires use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The data analysis process used SPSS examined the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the dimension well-being of SEM PLS, and PLS SEM analysed the relationship between variables through two stages of model testing, namely measurement model testing

to test the construct validity and reliability of each indicator, as well as structural model testing to test the model and analysis of the influence between variables in the model (Hair et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS

Descriptive Data

The study involved 454 respondents, consisted of 255 women (56%) and 199 men (44%), divided into four categories of education: Diploma degree (8%), Bachelor's (91%), Postgraduate (0,5%), and Doctorate (0,5), categorized on sainted (11%) and socio-Humaniores (89%). The age of respondents in the Z Generation ranges from 17 to 28 years, and demographically came from some islands in Indonesia, like Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Seram, Sumbawa, Sulawesi, and Timor Island. Descriptive statistics and a pairwise correlation matrix are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

	Means	Std Dev	WB	WM
WB	67.998	7.045	1.000	
WM	38.828	6.171	0.399**	1.000

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Exploratory Factor Analysis Well-Being for PERMA Model

The initial stage involved conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of well-being using the PERMA dimensions. The analysis was performed using SPSS. The results of the factor extraction analysis using the component rotated matrix showed that the well-being indicators based on the PERMA Model clustered into two matrices, and one questionnaire item was removed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variable of sustainability value produced a scale with two dimensions. These results are not consistent with the original scale of the PERMA Model (Butler & Kern, 2016), in which well-being is identified across five dimensions with a total of 15 questionnaire items. The final results of the well-being factor analysis process are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component	
	1	2
VAR00001	.101	.856
VAR00002	.425	.752
VAR00003	.375	.776
VAR00004	.578	.619
VAR00005	.629	.517
VAR00007	.574	.539
VAR00008	.578	.554
VAR00009	.668	.443
VAR00010	.733	.197
VAR00011	.762	.368
VAR00012	.763	.188
VAR00013	.775	.330
VAR00014	.790	.288
VAR00015	.550	.298

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]

	Component	
	1	**2**

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Based on Table 2, it can also be explained that two factors/dimensions were formed from the factor analysis. To determine which indicators belong to which factor group, the largest correlation values between the indicators and the formed factors are used. It can therefore be concluded that Dimension 1 consists of indicators 5–15, while Dimension 2 consists of indicators 1–4. To ensure that these results appropriately summarize all the analyzed indicators, reference can be made to the transformation component matrix values, as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Component Transformation Matrix

Component	1	2
1	.780	.626
2	-.626	.780

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Table 3 shows that the correlation value for each component, dimension one, is 0.780, while dimension two, it is 0.781, or greater than 0.5. Since the correlation value for all components is greater than 0.5, it can be concluded that the two dimensions resulting from the factor analysis are suitable for summarizing all the indicators of the variables analyzed. Previous research on well-being measurement scales has demonstrated that well-being can be measured using different dimensions across various domains that reflect diverse aspects of life(Linton et al., 2016). Several earlier studies have proposed two dimensions of measurement: the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being dimensions (Zhang *et al.*, 2024; Ryff *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, Ryan & Deci (2001) identified hedonic well-being as focusing on pleasurable experiences and freedom from suffering, and eudaimonic well-being as the achievement of life meaning, purpose, and the actualization of one's potential. Based on this, the PERMA model dimensions of well-being for Gen Z can be summarized into two dimensions: Hedonic Well-being (including all Positive Emotion indicators and one Engagement indicator), and Eudaimonic Well-being (including one Engagement indicator and all indicators from Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment).

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the five PERMA dimensions did not emerge as distinct factors, indicating that Hypothesis 1 is not supported. However, the analysis results still show that the PERMA indicators contribute to two newly formed dimensions. Therefore, the emerging factor structure still represents aspects of the PERMA model, even though it does not fully align with the original theoretical structure.

The Measurement Model

The initial stage in the PLS-SEM analysis involved testing the measurement model, which included assessments of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE). Used measurement model test, the results indicated that there are two indicators that were removed because the value of the loading factor is below 0,7. Additionally, the AVE values for all constructs were greater than 0.5, indicating that the convergent validity was satisfactory. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the results showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, confirming adequate discriminant validity. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR). All constructs demonstrated Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.9, and the CR values were also higher than 0.9, indicating that all constructs were reliable.

The Structural Model

After conducting the measurement model test (outer model), the next stage in data analysis using PLS-SEM is the structural model test (inner model). This test is conducted to examine the relationships between variables within the developed model. The first step is to assess the significance and relevance of the structural model using p-values, commonly referred to as path coefficient analysis. This analysis is used for hypothesis testing of the structural model through estimation and testing of the proposed hypotheses. The overall values of the structural model are shown in Figure 1:

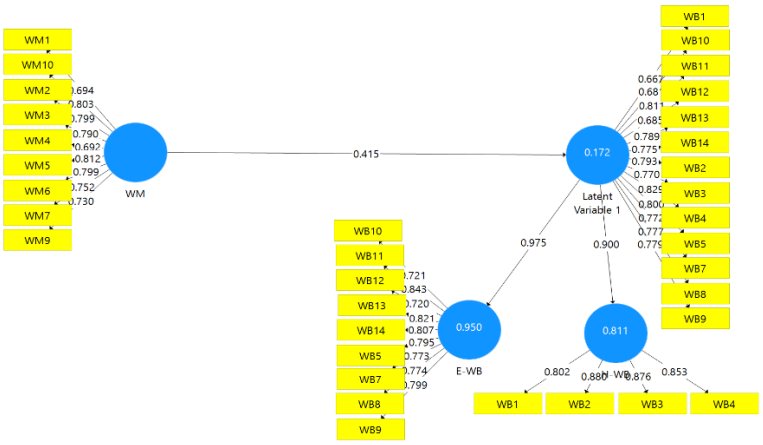

Figure 1. Structural Model

The detailed results of the path coefficient analysis can be seen in Table 4:

Table 4. Path Coefficient

Group	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Stat	P Values
Complete	WM -> WB	0,415	0,418	0,039	10,595	0,000
Men	WM -> WB	0,427	0,429	0,059	7,292	0,000
Women	WM -> WB	0,417	0,422	0,044	9,51	0,000

Based on Figure 1 and Table 4, it can be explained that overall, work meaningfulness has a positive effect on well-being, with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Similarly, within both male and female groups, work meaningfulness shows a positive influence on well-being, indicating that **Hypothesis 2 is supported**.

The MGA test (Table 5) showed that the PLS-MGA value is 0.889, the Parametric Test value is 0.891, and the Welch–Satterthwaite Test value is 0.893, all of which are above 0.05. This indicates that gender does not moderate the relationship between work meaningfulness and well-being. In other words, there is no significant difference in the effect of work meaningfulness on well-being between males and females; thus, **Hypothesis 3 is not supported.**

Table 5. Multy Group Analysis

Criterian	P Values
MGA	0,889
Parametric Test	0,891
Welth-Setterthwait Test	0,893
Confidence Interval (Bias Corrected)	0,493

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the five dimensions of well-being in the PERMA model—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment do not emerge as five separate constructs. Instead, the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) show that these indicators cluster into two main dimensions: Hedonic Well-Being and Eudaimonic Well-Being. This outcome reflects a conceptual shift in the psychological well-being structure of university students, aligning with classical theory distinguishes between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in positive psychology. Hedonic well-being refers to aspects related to pleasure, positive emotions, and short-term satisfaction, while eudaimonic well-being represents a deeper and more long-term dimension of well-being, including engagement in meaningfulness activities, quality social relationships, life goal achievement, and a sense of direction and meaning in life(Ryan & Deci, 2001). Empirically, several studies on well-being using the PERMA model have also shown that exploratory factor analysis results do not always form five independent dimensions. For instance, a study by Kern *et al.* (2015) found that EFA grouped the PERMA items into four well-being dimensions, while Al-Hendawi *et al.* (2024) found that EFA grouped the items into a single well-being dimension.

The integration of the five PERMA well-being dimensions into two main factors, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, suggests a contextual adjustment in the conceptual structure of psychological well-being for job-seeking university students. The transition from academic life to the professional world is often accompanied by high uncertainty, social pressure, and the expectation to quickly secure employment. As a result, hedonic well-being aspects, such as positive emotions, are the most readily felt and the temporary form of well-being. On the other hand, eudaimonic well-being indicators—such as engagement, interpersonal relationships, life meaning, and accomplishments—reflect deeper psychological complexity and are closely tied to the formation of career identity, life direction, and internal motivation for growth. Therefore, this two-dimensional structure provides a more comprehensive picture of student well-being in facing the challenges of entering the workforce, while emphasizing the importance of balancing short-term affective experiences with long-term life meaning.

The analysis results also show that gender does not function as a moderating variable in the relationship between work meaningfulness and well-being among job-seeking Gen Z students. This means that the influence of perceived work meaningfulness on well-being is relatively similar for both male and female students. Socioculturally, gender differences are generally associated with variations in behavior and expectations in the context of work and life. However, based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Ryan & Deci, (2001) said that when individuals feel that their work is meaningful and supports their basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they tend to experience enhanced well-being, regardless of demographic characteristics like gender.

In the context of students currently in the job-seeking phase, gender role constructions may not yet be fully established, as they have not fully entered the workforce. Additionally, the process of exploring personal identity and work values is still ongoing and tends to show relatively similar patterns between males and females at this age stage. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation to find meaning in future work may be considered equivalent across genders, suggesting that the influence of work meaningfulness on well-being is not moderated by gender. This finding is supported by Sharabi, (2017) and Herr *et al.*, (2023), who found that work meaningfulness has a direct impact on well-being regardless of gender differences.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the PERMA psychological well-being model, originally developed with five core dimensions—positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—did not emerge as five independent constructs in the context of Generation Z students currently in the job-seeking phase. Through exploratory factor analysis, it was identified that the model's indicators clustered into two central dimensions: hedonic well-being, representing affective aspects such as positive

emotions, and eudaimonic well-being, which includes engagement, social relationships, life meaning, and achievement. These results suggest that Gen Z students tend to interpret well-being more holistically and contextually, in line with their developmental characteristics and the life challenges they face.

This study also confirms that the perception of work meaningfulness makes a significant positive contribution to students' well-being. The greater the individual's sense of meaning in work, the higher the level of psychological well-being they experience, encompassing both emotional and existential aspects. However, gender was not found to be a moderating variable in this relationship, meaning that both male and female students gain equal well-being benefits from meaningful work experiences.

These findings provide important contributions and implications for higher education institutions, career guidance service providers, and curriculum designers in developing personal growth and career readiness programs. Such programs should not only emphasize short-term happiness (hedonic aspects), but also focus on strengthening meaning, engagement, and sustainable achievement (eudaimonic aspects). Given that work meaningfulness is a key predictor of student well-being regardless of gender, career development programs, soft skills training, and self-potential enhancement initiatives should be designed inclusively and grounded in meaningfulness values. Activities such as self-reflection-based career training, career coaching, and purposeful internships with both personal and social value have the potential to be effective strategies for fostering eudaimonic well-being among students. In addition, approaches to evaluating student well-being should consider this two-dimensional structure, recognizing that the original five-factor PERMA model may not fully reflect a framework of well-being that is relevant to the characteristics and needs of today's younger generation.

Recommendations

Universities are expected to integrate the strengthening of character education and the provision of career orientation that focuses on values of meaningfulness from the early stages of a student's academic journey. Students should also be encouraged to develop a broader understanding of work, not merely as a means of earning income, but as a platform for social contribution and self-actualization. For future research, it is recommended that researchers consider moderating variables beyond gender, such as personal value systems, levels of religiosity, or self-concept, which may have a more substantial influence in strengthening or weakening the relationship between perceived work meaningfulness and psychological well-being.

Future studies should also consider the use of the PERMA model among Generation Z students by adapting the instruments locally and contextually. The construct validity of this model should be re-examined under various social and cultural conditions to ensure its relevance and accuracy. Additionally, qualitative approaches are important to further explore the subjective perceptions of Gen Z students regarding well-being, as well as how they integrate life values into their career aspirations.

Future research could also expand the population scope by comparing students from various academic programs, institutions, or even across cultures, to examine the consistency of the effect of work meaningfulness on well-being. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to trace how perceptions of work meaning and well-being evolve from the study period into the early stages of a career. Furthermore, exploring other moderators such as work value orientation, social support, or psychological resilience may enrich the understanding of factors that influence the relationship between work meaning and student well-being at a deeper level.

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