



Career Development and Employee Engagement Mitigate Quiet Quitting among Gen Z in Indonesian Startups through Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

To address the growing challenge of "quiet quitting" among Generation Z employees in fast-growing startups, this study aims to examine the impact of career development and employee engagement in reducing this behavior, specifically evaluating job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Using an explanatory mixed-methods design, quantitative data from 937 surveyed Gen Z employees were analyzed using SEM-PLS and AMOS, while qualitative insights from 12 in-depth interviews were processed using NVivo. The results reveal that career development exerts a significantly stronger direct negative effect on quiet quitting and a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction than employee engagement. Furthermore, job satisfaction was found to fully mediate the impact of both career development and employee engagement on quiet quitting. Practically, these findings imply that to effectively curb quiet quitting among young professionals, organizations must position clear career development pathways as their primary human resource strategy, utilize employee engagement initiatives as complementary tools, and actively cultivate overall job satisfaction to ensure these efforts successfully sustain employee dedication.

Keywords: *career development, employee engagement, job satisfaction, quiet quitting*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has accelerated the growth of Indonesia's startup ecosystem. By early 2025, Indonesia ranked sixth globally with 3,161 active startups and contributed 5.11% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Despite this impressive growth, startups in Indonesia continue to face persistent human resource challenges. Data from the Startup Indonesia Mapping & Database (2021) show that human resource issues account for 18.7% of startup challenges, exceeding strategic issues (12.3%), regulatory issues (13.3%), and market-related concerns (12.9%). This indicates that human resource management remains one of the most critical barriers to startup sustainability. One visible manifestation of this problem is quiet quitting, a situation in which workers become disengaged and limit their effort based on job requirements (Atiq et al., 2025).

The post-pandemic work environment has intensified this issue, as employees increasingly reassess their relationship with work. Quiet quitting gained broad public attention in 2022 through widespread discussion on social media platforms such as TikTok, reflecting a broader shift in how workers respond to job demands and organizational expectations. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is particularly relevant among Generation Z employees, who constitute an important part of the emerging digital workforce.

The expectations of Gen Z revolve around flexibility at work, consistent for career advancement, and an inclusive, diverse environment (Khansa Nabila Zain et al., 2025). When these expectations are not met, it leads to low employee engagement, decreased job satisfaction, and ultimately quiet quitting. In startup environments, where work is fast-paced, demanding, and highly dependent on employee commitment, such disengagement poses a serious threat to organizational performance and long-term growth.

In fact, this issue is increasingly urgent because startups rely heavily on the quality, motivation, and adaptability of their human resources. Job satisfaction plays a central role in maintaining employee productivity and organizational stability, as employees who feel unsupported or undervalued are more likely to reduce discretionary effort. Likewise, career development and employee engagement are essential HR practices that can strengthen employees' attachment to the organization and reduce the likelihood of quiet quitting. For this reason, startups need a more responsive human resource approach that aligns with the values and expectations of Generation Z while sustaining productivity and competitiveness.

Obviously, prior studies have examined these variables from various angles. Career development positively influences job satisfaction as a mediator of turnover intention (Jayasri & Annisa, 2023), while confirming job satisfaction reduces quiet quitting tendencies (Parsasi & Prawitowati, 2025). Job satisfaction mitigates quiet quitting in digital environments (Suhendar et al., 2023). From global perspectives, researchers have examined quiet quitting in India and China, finding that career opportunities and employee engagement are among the strongest protective factors (Anand et al., 2024; Megha Bhatt et al., 2024; Xueyun et al., 2023). The consistent finding across these works is that structured HR practices, especially career development programs and engagement-oriented communication, most effectively reduce quiet quitting.

However, previous research still has important limitations. Most studies examine career development, employee engagement, and quiet quitting separately rather than in an integrated model. In addition, no study has specifically tested the dual mediation of job satisfaction between career development and employee engagement and quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in the Indonesian startup context. This gap makes it difficult for practitioners to obtain a context-specific and evidence-based framework for managing employee disengagement in startups.

Therefore, this study constructs an integrated mediation model grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), in which career development and employee engagement simultaneously predict quiet quitting through job satisfaction as a dual mediator. The scientific novelties of this study are: (1) simultaneously examining career development and employee engagement as dual antecedents of quiet quitting in one model; (2) positioning job satisfaction as a dual mediator for both pathways; and (3) contextualizing the model specifically within Gen Z employees in Indonesian startups. Primarily, this study aims to assess how career development and employee engagement affect quiet quitting among Gen Z employees in Indonesian

startups, with particular attention to the mediating role played by job satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) holds that interactions between individuals and organizations are governed by reciprocity. Under Social Exchange Theory (SET), when an organization invests in employees through career development and engaging work practices, employees reciprocate with higher commitment and effort. Failure to meet these obligations leads employees to withdraw discretionary effort, the core behavioral pattern of quiet quitting.

Obviously, career development refers to organizational initiatives that enhance employees' skills, competencies, and professional readiness through training, mentoring, and long-term planning (McDonald & Hite, 2023). It is a continuous process where companies and employees collaborate through structured programs to improve competencies and achieve optimal work results (Nabi et al., 2025). Effective career development requires a multidimensional approach, encompassing activities such as technical skills workshops, seminars, mentoring, newsletters, and career counseling, delivered in a hybrid format to ensure accessibility and effective knowledge sharing (Rapol, 2021). Under SET, career advancement and growth opportunities function as motivator factors generating intrinsic satisfaction. When startups provide structured career planning, mentoring, and performance feedback (Noe, 2017), employees perceive organizational investment in their growth, which elevates job satisfaction. This reciprocal dynamic reduces the likelihood of quiet quitting.

In addition, employee engagement describes the degree of emotional commitment, cognitive involvement, and behavioral dedication employees exhibit toward their work and organization (Kamaraj R, 2022). Employee engagement also reflects an employee's intrinsic drive to exert greater effort for the company's progress while maintaining a strong commitment to remain within the organization (Jayanto et al., 2025). This concept encompasses three core dimensions emotional, cognitive, and behavioral which collectively serve as important indicators of an individual's dedication to the company and its goals (Cybellium, 2024). Within the field of human resource management, a high level of engagement is closely associated with increased productivity, work efficiency, loyalty, and alignment of work behavior with company values, making engaged employees a strategic asset that directly strengthens organizational competitiveness and contributes to the company's overall performance (Paul Turner, 2020; Soumi Majumder & Bitan Misra, 2025). In the context SET of Gen Z employees who highly value meaningful work and regular feedback, high engagement translates directly into greater job satisfaction, which in turn reduces propensity for quiet quitting.

Moreover, job satisfaction reflects the degree to which employees feel fulfilled in their roles, encompassing satisfaction with compensation, work environment, recognition, and growth prospects (Spector, 2022). In this study, the mediating role of job satisfaction is evident when career development and engagement practices signal high organizational support, employees develop greater job satisfaction, which reduces the motivation to disengage behaviorally. Job satisfaction thus serves as the affective mechanism through which organizational HR investments translate into reduced quiet quitting outcomes (Kaur et al., 2020).

Furthermore, quiet quitting refers to the practice of employees limiting contributions strictly to formally required tasks, withdrawing discretionary effort without formally resigning (Klotz, 2022). Quiet quitting gained widespread attention following a short TikTok video posted by Zaid Khan on July 25, 2022, in which he clarified that the concept does not refer to actually leaving a job, but rather an employee's deliberate choice to limit their efforts strictly to formal job responsibilities. This phenomenon reflects a conscious rejection of hustle culture, where employees continue to fulfill their core duties without feeling obligated to go beyond their contractual obligations (Mary Uhl-Bien et al., 2023). The phenomenon gained global attention in 2022 and has been positioned in HR literature as a form of employee disengagement reflecting systemic failures in career development and organizational support (Moovala Vijayalaxmi, 2024; Sreedharan Sreejith, 2024). In the startup environment, quiet quitting represents a silent but significant threat to organizational productivity, making it critical to understand its antecedents and mediating mechanisms.

Clearly, the theoretical structure illustrates the career development and employee engagement as the primary independent variables due to direct relevance to the nature of quiet quitting. Additionally, job satisfaction is conceptualized as a mediating variable because the quiet quitting phenomenon is presumed to be shaped and driven by the levels of career development and employee engagement experienced by workers not only directly but also indirectly. This conceptual framework seeks to empirically examine these relationships.

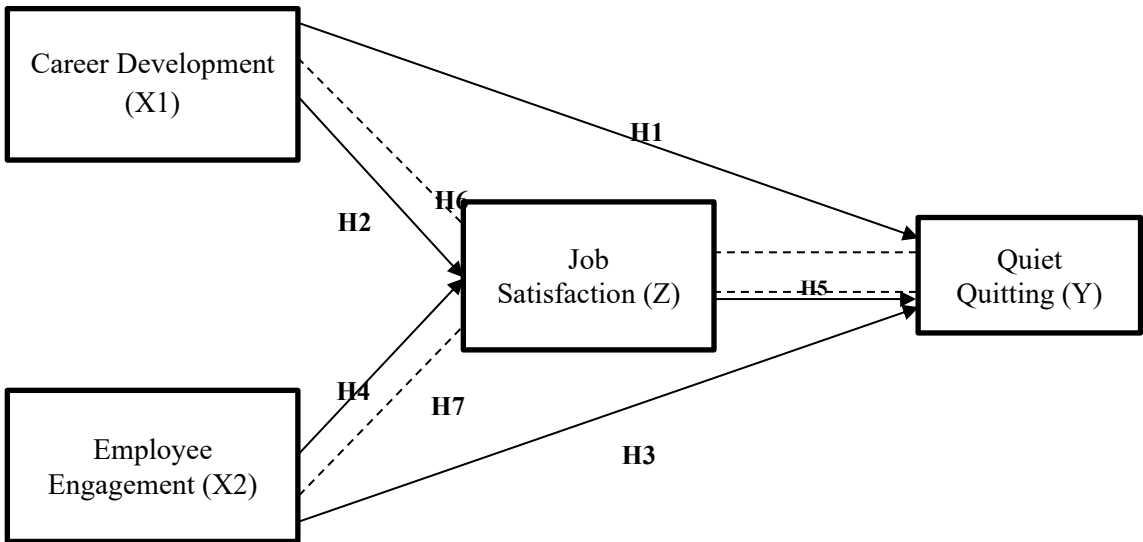


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses:

- H1: Career Development has negative influence on Quiet Quitting
- H2: Career Development has positive influence on Job Satisfaction
- H3: Employee Engagement has negative influence on Quiet Quitting
- H4: Employee Engagement has positive influence on Job Satisfaction
- H5: Job Satisfaction has negative influence on Quiet Quitting
- H6: Job Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Career Development and Quiet Quitting
- H7: Job Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Employee Engagement and Quiet Quitting

3. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, was employed. The quantitative method was utilized as the primary approach to examine correlations among variables, while the qualitative component was incorporated to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings, particularly in capturing participants’ perspectives that cannot be fully represented through numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative sample used nonprobability sampling with the requirements: full-time Generation Z employees (aged 17–29) who have worked at Indonesian startups for at least six months. In this study, the Likert scale was utilized. The data were collected through an online survey distributed to 937 Gen Z employees at a variety of Indonesia Startup, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 selected participants to acquire a more profound understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The quantitative data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS 4, and the qualitative analysis was conducted using NVivo 15.

Table 1 | Item Indicator

Variables	Item	Indicator	Source
The Independent Variables			
Career Development (X1)	CD1	My company provides career discussions for each staff member.	Nava Macali, J., Nava-de Jesus, C., & Almar, E. P. (2019)
	CD2	Career coaching and mentoring support me in collaborating effectively with colleagues.	
	CD3	My organization offers regular training sessions.	
	CD4	My workplace promotes upgrading skills and knowledge through training.	
	CD5	The training programs are aligned with my career growth.	
	CD6	Every employee gets the same chance to participate in training.	
	CD7	Career counseling and guidance assist me in building a positive self-image.	
	CD8	Career counseling at my organization helps clarify my purposes and work mission.	
	CD9	It helps me understand my goals and their connection to the organization's goals.	
	CD10	Employee training and development are an integral part of career development.	
	CD11	Career planning helps me create a roadmap to improve my skills.	
	CD12	Career planning evaluates my current skill level.	
	CD13	My need for skills to meet future qualification requirements can be identified through career planning	
Employee Engagement (X2)	EE1	I feel energized at my workplace.	Fitra F. (2024)
	EE2	I remain persistent in my work, even when things aren't going well.	
	EE3	I experience a sense of being energized and motivated at work.	
	EE4	I find this job meaningful, as it aligns with my personal values and interests.	
	EE5	I am enthusiastic about my work.	
	EE6	My job offers opportunities to grow and develop intellectually.	
	EE7	Time elapses rapidly when I am engaged in work.	
	EE8	I experience joy and pride when accomplishing a goal or finishing a job.	
	EE9	I am actively engaged and take initiative in my work.	
	EE10	I am persistent in my ability to keep moving forward despite facing challenges or obstacles.	
Mediating Variable			
Job Satisfaction (Z)	JS1	I have made positive contributions to my organization.	Abdelmoula, L., & Boudabbous, S. (2021).
	JS2	I prioritize career growth rather than financial rewards.	
	JS3	My position offers me opportunities to acquire new skills for my career path.	
	JS4	I feel proud of my work in the company because it has contributed to my personal growth.	
	JS5	I have adequate authority to carry out my duties.	
	JS6	I get a sense of worth when I do a task effectively.	
	JS7	I take pride in working for a company that acknowledges my contributions.	
	JS8	I am satisfied with my work because it provides me the chance to develop professionally within the company.	
	JS9	I am happy with my job because I have a well-defined career path within the organization.	
	JS10	I am satisfied with my job, as it allows me to envision a long-term career with the organization.	
	JS11	My manager consistently provides guidance and maintains communication with the team every day.	
	JS12	I am pleased with the advancement opportunities.	
	JS13	I am happy with the benefits and welfare programs.	
	JS14	I enjoy working with my colleagues.	
	JS15	I am satisfied with the work environment	
The Dependent Variable			
Quiet Quitting (Y)	QQ1	I only work the minimum required hours and avoid putting in extra time.	Lestari, N. S., Zainal, V. R., Chan, S., & Nawangsari, L. C. (2024)
	QQ2	I complete only the essential tasks and rarely go beyond what is necessary.	
	QQ3	I leave the workplace as soon as possible whenever the chance arises.	
	QQ4	I try to appear very busy even when I have little to do.	
	QQ5	I let colleagues handle some of my tasks if they are willing to do so.	
			Suhendar, et al. (2023). Stefańska, M., &

QQ6	I hold back my ideas and suggestions at work out of concern that I might be given more responsibilities.	Gawel, A. (2024).
QQ7	I avoid working overtime unless there is additional compensation.	
QQ8	I feel there are limited chances to develop and grow within my organization.	
QQ9	I am not interested in participating in meetings.	
QQ10	I find little meaning in my work, which makes me lack the passion and motivation to go beyond basic duties.	
QQ11	I consistently leave the office right on time.	
QQ12	I never perform work-related tasks during my days off.	
QQ13	I only focus on work while I am physically in the office.	
QQ14	I avoid taking on my coworkers' responsibilities.	
QQ15	I am not willing to take on tasks that belong to my boss.	
		Taufik, N., Rosyadi, A., & Aliyuddin, M. (2024).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4. 1 RESULTS

4.1.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed for each concept indicator. An indicator is regarded as satisfactory if its loading exceeds 0.70, whereas a loading value ranging from 0.50 to 0.60 is still considered acceptable. This study’s variables were valid because the factor loading values for all of them were higher than 0.7. Thus, the questions on the form can be used for further studies.

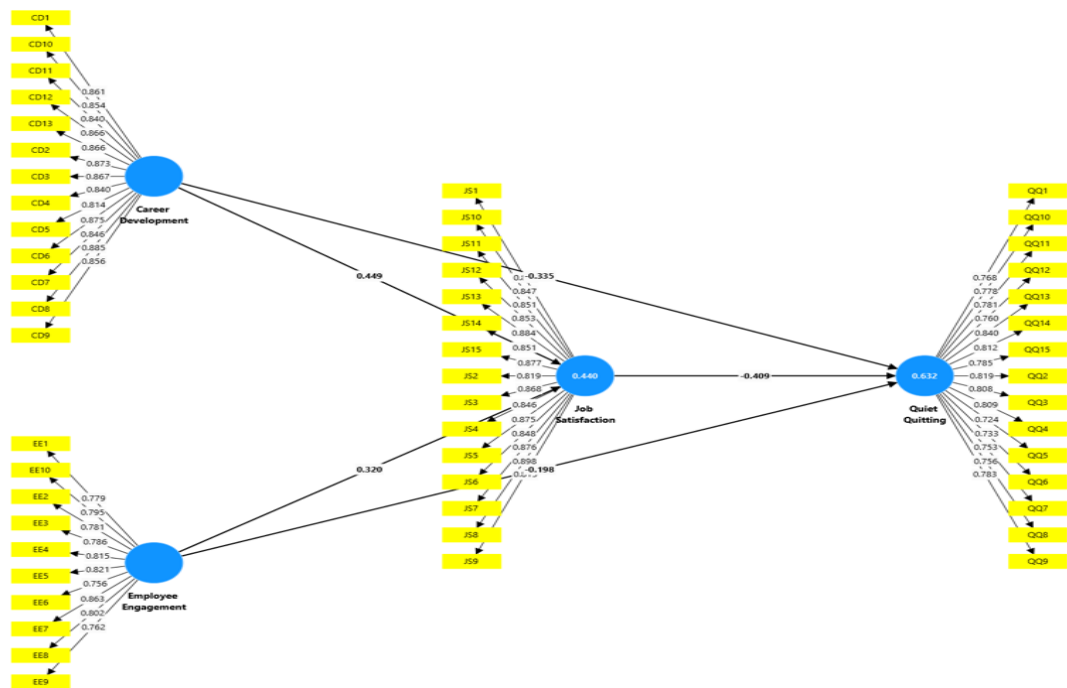


Figure 2. SmartPLS 4.0 Algorithm Results

The AVE value sought to quantify how much a build component varies, while considering the error level. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was additionally computed to assess the proportion of construct variance attributable to the indicators relative to measurement error. The test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of AVE		
	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Description
Career Development	0,735	Valid
Employee Engagement	0,635	Valid
Job Satisfaction	0,733	Valid
	0,611	Valid

Source: Analysis Results Utilizing SmartPLS 4.0

According to Table 2, the AVE value exceeds 0.50, demonstrating that each indicator satisfied the specified criteria and had the potential to be reliable for further testing.

Discriminant Validity

a. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The discriminant validity evaluation entailed comparing each construct's square root of the AVE ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) against its intercorrelations with all other constructs. Discriminant validity was established when the $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ value exceeded all corresponding inter-construct correlations.

Table 3 | Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Career Development	Employee Engagement	Job Satisfaction	Quiet Quitting	Description
Career Development	0,857				Valid
Employee Engagement	0,472	0,797			Valid
Job Satisfaction	0,600	0,532	0,856		Valid
Quiet Quitting	-0,674	-0,574	-0,716	0,781	Valid

Source: Analysis Results Utilizing SmartPLS 4.0

As shown in Table 3, the $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ for each construct is larger than all corresponding inter-construct correlation values, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity for all constructs.

b. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

The HTMT procedure offered an additional method for evaluating discriminant validity between construct pairs.

Table 4 | HTMT Results

	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Description
Employee Engagement <-> Career Development	0,479	Valid
Job Satisfaction <-> Career Development	0,614	Valid
Job Satisfaction <-> Employee Engagement	0,536	Valid
Quiet Quitting <-> Career Development	0,695	Valid
Quiet Quitting <-> Employee Engagement	0,582	Valid
Quiet Quitting <-> Job Satisfaction	0,736	Valid

Source: Analysis Output with SmartPLS 4.0

All HTMT ratios fell below the 0.90 threshold (Hair et al. 2017), confirming that discriminant validity was satisfactorily achieved for all construct pairs in the model.

Reliability Test

a. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Construct reliability was evaluated through Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

Table 5 | Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Test Results

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho a)	Composite Reliability (rho c)	Description
Career Development	0,970	0,971	0,973	Reliable
Employee Engagement	0,936	0,945	0,945	Reliable
Job Satisfaction	0,974	0,975	0,976	Reliable
Quiet Quitting	0,954	0,957	0,959	Reliable

Source: Analysis by SmartPLS 4.0

Table 5 indicates that all latent variables are reliable. This is due to the fact that the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values are both greater than or equal to 0.70. Therefore, it can be inferred that the questionnaire employed as a research instrument is consistent or reliable.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study's empirical data measurement approach used AMOS software to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This analysis aims to make sure that every indicator accurately represents the hidden construct being assessed.

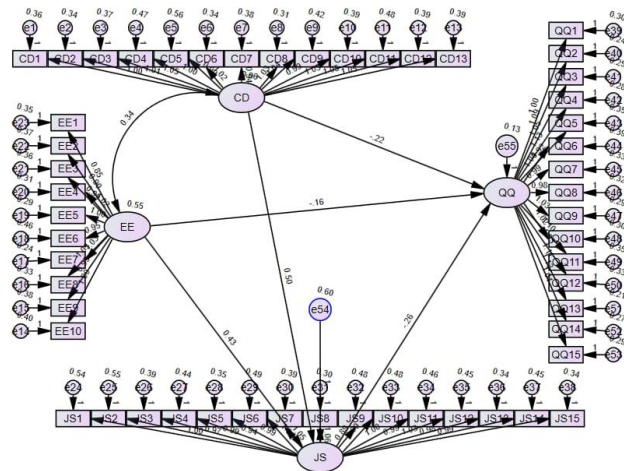


Figure 3. Final CFA Model

This figure is used to illustrate the relationships among the latent constructs Career Development (CD), Employee Engagement (EE), Job Satisfaction (JS), and Quiet Quitting (QQ), as well as the directions of direct and indirect effects among these variables.

Hypothesis Testing

a. Direct Effect

Path coefficient significance in the structural model was assessed via bootstrapping. A path is considered statistically significant when the computed t-statistic surpasses the critical t-table value of 1.96, corresponding to a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 6 | Direct Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Notes
Career Development -> Quiet Quitting	-0,335	-0,336	0,033	10,185	0,000	Supported
Career Development -> Job Satisfaction	0,449	0,450	0,029	15,254	0,000	Supported
Employee Engagement -> Quiet Quitting	-0,198	-0,198	0,027	7,230	0,000	Supported
Employee Engagement -> Job Satisfaction	0,320	0,320	0,028	11,370	0,000	Supported
Job Satisfaction -> Quiet Quitting	-0,409	-0,409	0,027	15,250	0,000	Supported

Source: Analysis by SmartPLS 4.0

Based on Table 6, all five direct hypotheses were supported:

- (1) career development significantly reduces quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.335$);
- (2) career development significantly increases job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.449$);
- (3) employee engagement significantly reduces quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.198$);
- (4) employee engagement significantly increases job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.320$);
- (5) job satisfaction significantly reduces quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.409$).

b. Indirect Effect

The following are the results of testing the hypothesis of the indirect effect of X on Y through Z:

Table 7 | Indirect Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values	Notes
Career Development -> Job Satisfaction -> Quiet Quitting	-0,184	-0,184	0,016	11,631	0,000	Evidenced
Employee Engagement -> Job Satisfaction -> Quiet Quitting	-0,131	-0,131	0,016	8,321	0,000	Evidenced

Source: Analysis Output with SmartPLS 4.0

1. The Mediator Effect of Job Satisfaction on Career Development and Quiet Quitting. The t-statistic value of 11.631, which was good above 1.96, and $p < 0.05$ indicated that the indirect effect of Career Development on Quiet Quitting through Job Satisfaction was negative and significant.
2. The Mediator Effect of Job Satisfaction on Employee Engagement on Quiet Quitting. The t-statistic value of 8.321, which was good above the significance threshold of 1.96 and $p < 0.05$, indicated that Employee Engagement had a significant indirect effect on Quiet Quitting through Job Satisfaction.

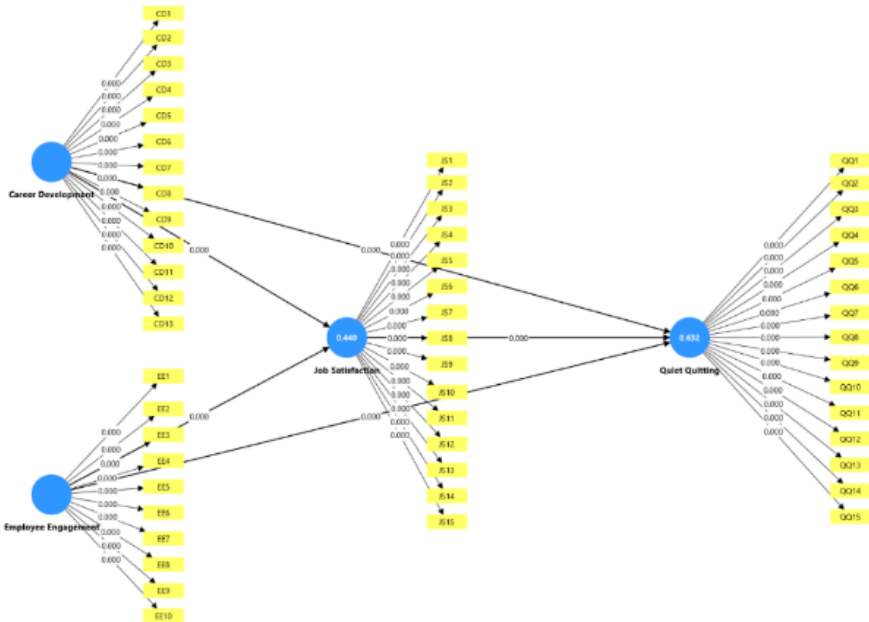


Figure 4. Bootstrapping Test Results

4.1.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Interview Results of Career Development on Quiet Quitting

Based on the interview results, which were analyzed using NVivo software through project map visualization, the data was grouped into main themes. In this visualization, career development is divided into three main dimensions: training and skill development, career path clarity, and mentoring and coaching.

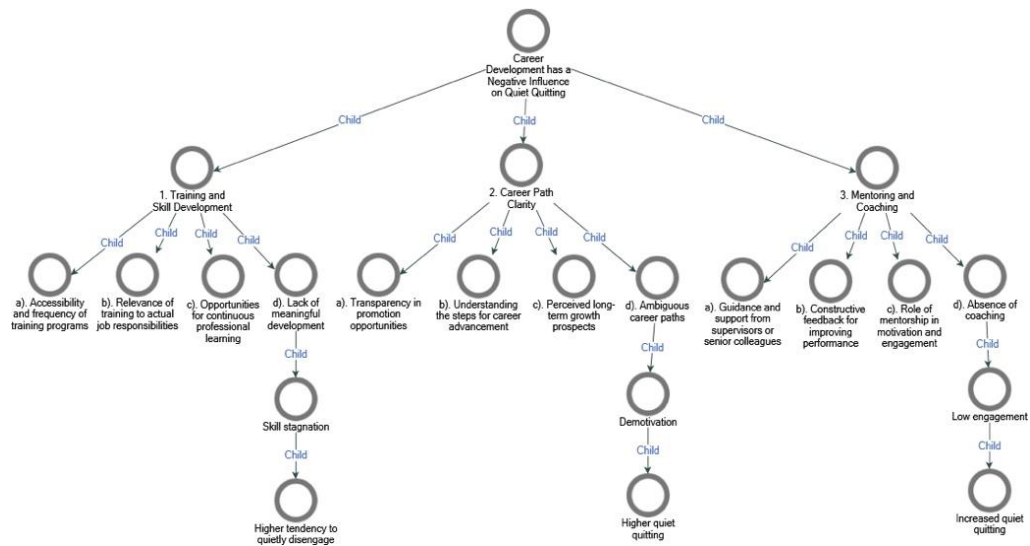


Figure 5. Project Map of Career Development on Quiet Quitting

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in an informant's statement that "on-the-job training exists, but it isn't very frequent, and sometimes the material isn't really aligned with daily work." In the career path clarity dimension, the lack of clarity regarding promotion opportunities, steps for career advancement, and long-term career prospects leads to demotivation, resulting in higher rates of quiet quitting. As one informant stated, "I know there are promotion opportunities, but the process and criteria for achieving them are not clearly explained," and "when the career path is unclear, I find it difficult to see the direction of my development within this company." Meanwhile, in the mentoring and coaching dimension, a lack of guidance, support, and constructive feedback leads to low engagement and increased quiet quitting. This is evident from the informant's statement that "if there is guidance from a supervisor or senior colleague, I feel more confident and motivated in my work," whereas without clear guidance, employees feel merely working to complete tasks, not to grow.

Interview Results of Career Development on Job Satisfaction

According to the interview results, career development influenced job satisfaction through two main dimensions: satisfaction with skill development and satisfaction with career progression.

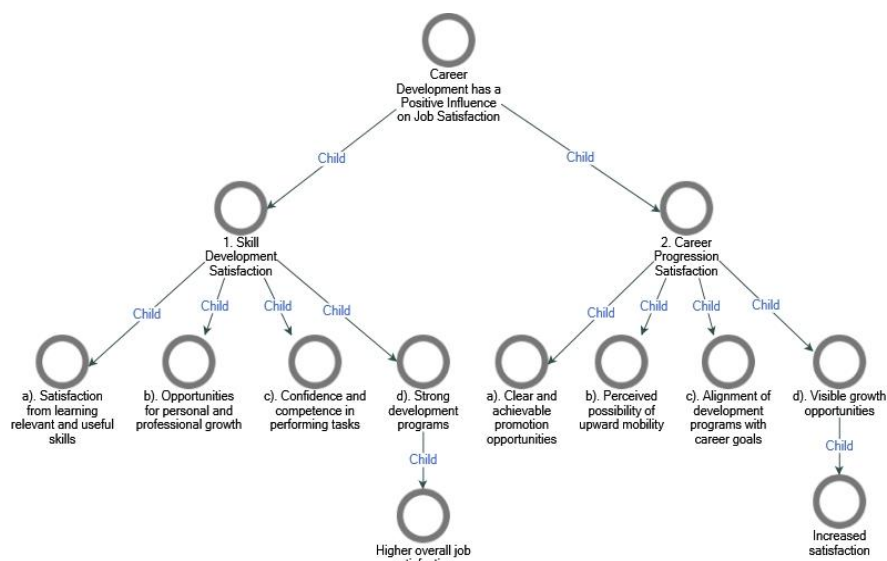


Figure 6. Project Map of Career Development on Job Satisfaction

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in an informant’s statement that “when I learn new skills relevant to my job, I feel more developed and more satisfied at work.” Meanwhile, in the career progression satisfaction dimension, clarity regarding promotion opportunities, the possibility of moving to higher levels, the alignment of development programs with career goals, and the presence of visible growth opportunities contributed to increased satisfaction. This was evident from an informant’s statement that “if promotion opportunities are clearly explained, I feel more optimistic and satisfied with my job,” as well as “when I see a clear direction for career development, I feel my work is more meaningful and has a future.

Interview Results of Employee Engagement on Quiet Quitting

Based on the interview results, which were analyzed using NVivo software through project map visualization, the data was grouped into main themes. In this visualization, career development was divided into two main dimensions: work involvement and supportive work environment.

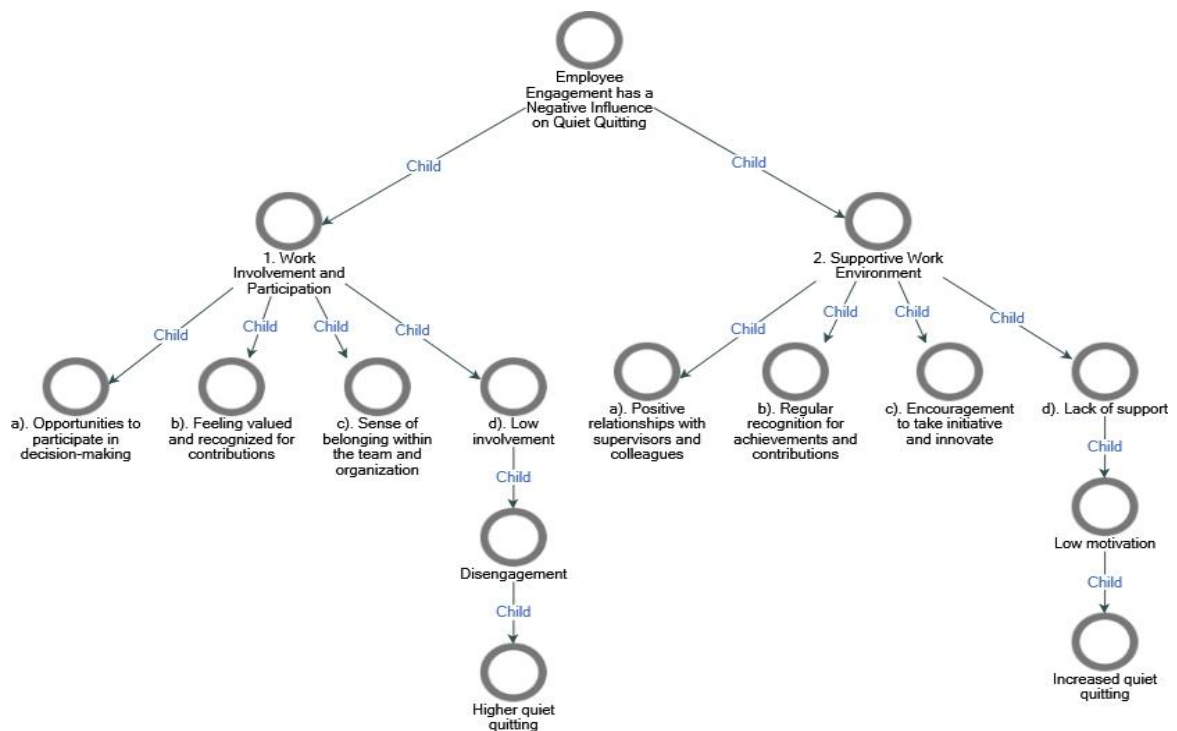


Figure 7. Project Map of Employee Engagement on Quiet Quitting

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in one informant’s statement that “when I am involved in discussions, and my opinions are considered, I feel more valued as part of the team,” while another informant stated that “if the contributions I make are never acknowledged, eventually I lose the motivation to get more involved.” Meanwhile, regarding the supportive work environment dimension, positive relationships with supervisors and coworkers, recognition of achievements, and encouragement to take initiative were the key factors in maintaining engagement. However, a lack of support was linked to low motivation, which subsequently led to increased quiet quitting. This was evident from an informant’s statement that “good relationships with supervisors and coworkers make me feel more comfortable, more motivated, and more willing to engage in my work,” whereas without adequate support, employees tend to do only the bare minimum.

Interview Results of Employee Engagement on Job Satisfaction

According to the interview results, employee engagement influenced job satisfaction through two main dimensions: job involvement satisfaction and organizational support.

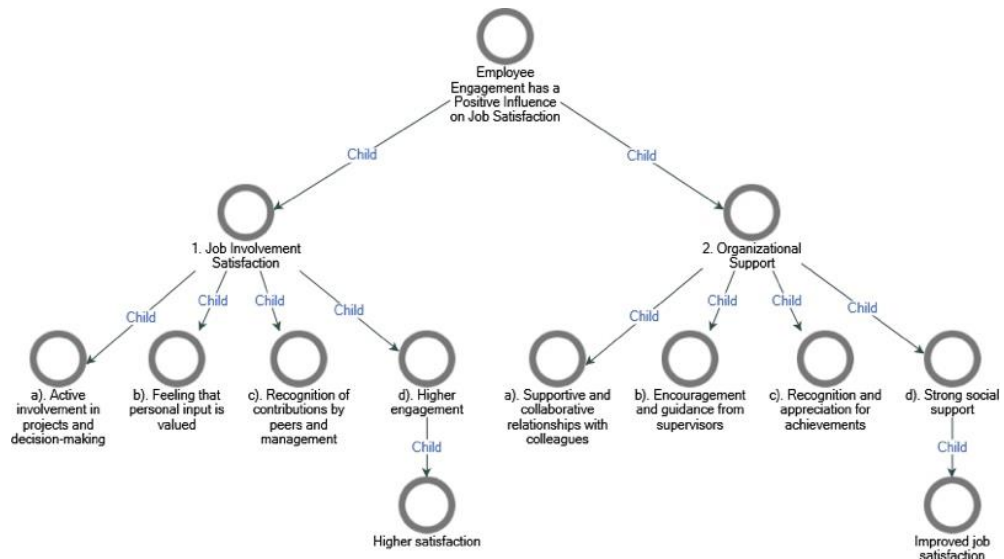


Figure 8. Project Map of Employee Engagement on Job Satisfaction

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in the informants' statements that "when I am involved in projects and decision-making, I feel more valued as an important part of the team, and that makes me more satisfied at work," and "when my opinions are heard and considered, I feel more appreciated, and that makes me more comfortable and happier at work." Meanwhile, regarding the organizational support dimension, supportive working relationships with colleagues, guidance and support from supervisors, and recognition of achievements contributed to increased job satisfaction. This was evident from informants' statements such as "good, mutually supportive relationships with coworkers make me feel more comfortable; work feels lighter, and that makes me more satisfied with my work," and "when supervisors provide guidance and support, I feel more confident in my work, more motivated, and more satisfied with my job."

Interview Results of Job Satisfaction on Quiet Quitting

According to the results from the interviews, job satisfaction influenced the tendency toward quiet quitting through two main dimensions: work motivation and organizational commitment.

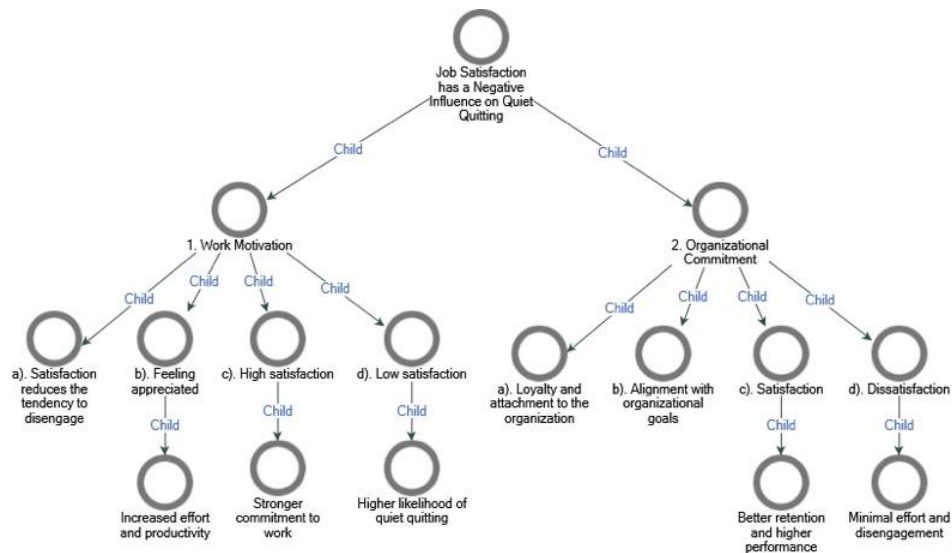


Figure 9. Project Map Job Satisfaction on Quiet Quitting

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in the informants' statements that "if I feel satisfied with my job, I become more motivated to deliver the best results," and "when my work is appreciated, I feel valued, and that makes me want to work harder." Conversely, when job satisfaction was low, employees tended to lose motivation and do only the bare minimum. Meanwhile, regarding the

organizational commitment dimension, job satisfaction was linked to loyalty, attachment to the organization, and a commitment to stay and contribute one's best. This was evident from the informants' statements that "if I feel satisfied working here, I feel closer to the organization and want to remain active," and "when I am satisfied with my work and the work environment, I become more committed to giving my best for the company."

Interview Results of Job Satisfaction Relationship between Employee Engagement and Quiet Quitting

According to the interview results, job satisfaction acted as a go-between for staff involvement and quiet quitting through two main dimensions: the mediation role of satisfaction and pathway examples.

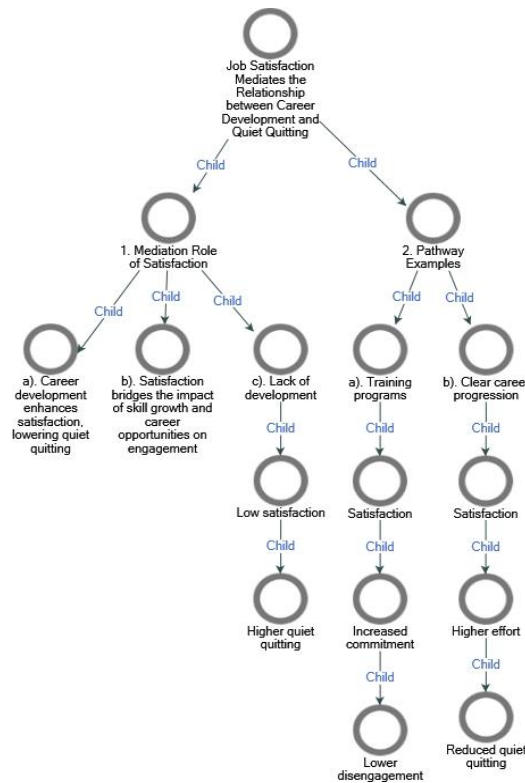


Figure 10. Project Map of Job Satisfaction Mediating Employee Engagement and Quiet Quitting

Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in one informant's statement that "if I'm actively engaged in my work, I usually feel more satisfied because my work feels more meaningful," while another informant stated that "Despite remaining committed to my work, the lack of fulfillment undermines my sense of engagement; I can still feel exhausted and end up just going through the motions." These findings indicated that engagement alone was insufficient to curb quiet quitting if it was not accompanied by adequate job satisfaction. Meanwhile, regarding the pathway examples dimension, the visualization showed that recognition could increase engagement, which then developed into satisfaction and ultimately led to reduced quiet quitting, while participation in meaningful projects increased satisfaction, strengthened commitment, and resulted in less disengagement. This was evident from the informants' statements that "when my work is recognized, I feel more motivated, more satisfied, and don't feel like distancing myself from the job," as well as "when I'm involved in projects that I consider important, I feel more satisfied because my work feels purposeful, and that makes me more committed."

Interview Results of Job Satisfaction Relationship between Career Development and Quiet Quitting

According to the interview results, job satisfaction mediated the relationship between employee engagement and quiet quitting through two main dimensions: the mediation role of satisfaction and pathway examples.

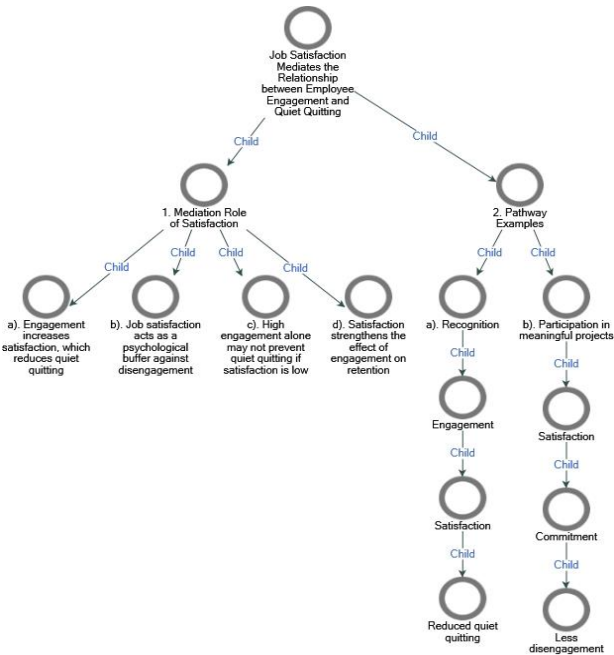


Figure 11. Project Map of Job Satisfaction Mediating Career Development and Quiet Quitting
Source: NVivo 15

This is reflected in informants’ statements such as “when the company provides growth opportunities, I feel my work is more meaningful, and I become more satisfied,” and “if there are learning and development opportunities, I become more enthusiastic and more engaged in my work.” Conversely, a lack of career development could lead to low satisfaction, which in turn resulted in higher rates of quiet quitting, as one informant noted: “When I feel there’s no progress, over time I become less satisfied and just go through the motions at work.” Meanwhile, regarding the pathway examples dimension, the visualization showed that training programs could increase satisfaction, which then led to increased commitment and resulted in lower disengagement, while clear career progression increased satisfaction, reinforced higher effort, and ultimately reduced quiet quitting. This was evident from the informants’ statements that “the training I attended made me feel more capable and satisfied, so I became more committed to my work,” and “if the career path is clear, I feel more at ease and satisfied, so I’m also more motivated to put in extra effort.”

Interview Result Word Cloud



Figure 12. Keyword Cloud
Source: Output of NVivo 15

Based on the word cloud visualization, it is evident that the most dominant words are “satisfaction,” “engagement,” “development,” “commitment,” and “quiet.” The dominance of these words suggested that respondents’ perceptions were heavily focused on aspects of employee involvement and work satisfaction inside the organization.

4.2 DISCUSSION

4.2.1. Career Development and Quiet Quitting

Career development negatively and significantly influenced quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.335$), confirming that organizational investment in employee growth generated a reciprocal obligation under Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). Employees who perceive genuine career support respond with sustained commitment rather than passive withdrawal. This finding reframes quiet quitting in Indonesian startups as a structural failure: unclear promotion criteria, inconsistent training, and absent mentoring create an exchange imbalance that employees resolve by silently reducing effort rather than formally resigning. Gen Z employees who feel unsupported in career development exhibit substantially higher quiet quitting tendencies (Satriawan Budhi et al., 2025), underscoring that structural HR reform yields more durable behavioral change than motivational approaches alone.

4.2.2. Employee Engagement and Quiet Quitting

Employee engagement significantly reduced quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.198$), though with a weaker effect than career development, a theoretically meaningful asymmetry. Engagement captures present psychological connection to work, but this connection erodes without structural career support, as interview participants consistently reported: team involvement did not prevent quiet quitting when growth prospects remained absent. Within SET, engagement reflects employees' current investment in the exchange relationship, while career development determines whether that investment feels worthwhile long-term. Engagement initiatives are therefore necessary but insufficient; they must be paired with developmental structures to sustain behavioral commitment (Mathushan et al., 2025).

In addition, employee engagement significantly reduces quiet quitting, although its effect is weaker than career development, indicating a theoretically meaningful asymmetry that can be further explained through Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). Within SET, employee organization relationship is not homogeneous but differentiated into economic exchange and social exchange. Economic exchange is short-term and transactional, whereas social exchange is long-term, relational, and characterized by accumulated trust, obligation, and perceived future returns.

In this framework, career development represents a structural form of social exchange that is future-oriented, as it signals organizational investment in the employee's long-term career trajectory. This structural investment strengthens the perceived durability of the exchange relationship and therefore generates a stronger and more stable reciprocal obligation. Employees interpret such investment as a commitment to their future within the organization, which increases the psychological cost of disengagement and sustains discretionary effort. By contrast, employee engagement reflects a proximal and present-oriented exchange, primarily rooted in daily interactions, recognition, and relational quality at work. Although engagement enhances emotional attachment and improves immediate work experience, it does not substantially alter employees' long-term cost-benefit evaluation of remaining in the organization when structural career opportunities are perceived as limited. Consequently, engagement may sustain relational comfort but is insufficient to prevent behavioral withdrawal when expectations of career progression are unmet.

4.2.3. Career Development and Employee Engagement on Job Satisfaction

Career development was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.449$), significantly exceeding employee engagement ($\beta = 0.330$). Career development generates aspirational satisfaction; employees who perceive genuine organizational investment in their professional future develop a durable sense of work meaning that extends beyond extrinsic reward. Employee engagement, by contrast, generates relational satisfaction through present-tense experiences of recognition and meaningful participation. Both dimensions jointly explained 44% of job satisfaction variance ($R^2 = 0.440$), confirming that

robust satisfaction requires both structural opportunity and relational inclusion. For Indonesian startups with informal HR practices, even modest but systematic career development efforts yield disproportionately large gains in employee satisfaction (Pratama, 2025).

4.2.4. Job Satisfaction and Quiet Quitting

Job satisfaction significantly reduced quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.286$), functioning as the psychological buffer that makes full organizational commitment worthwhile. Within SET, satisfaction signals that the exchange relationship is balanced that what employees receive justifies discretionary effort. When this balance is disrupted, quiet quitting emerges as a rational behavioral adjustment, not a character failure a reframing with direct implications for HR diagnostics. Dissatisfaction rooted in unmet expectations of career growth, workload fairness, or recognition is the most proximate antecedent of quiet quitting, preceding and explaining it more completely than low engagement alone (Gray et al., 2025; Taufik Nuryanti et al., 2024).

4.2.5. Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction fully mediated both the career development–quiet quitting path ($\beta = -0.184$, $t = 11.631$) and the employee engagement on quiet quitting path ($\beta = -0.131$, $t = 8.321$), with career development producing the stronger mediated effect. Full mediation in both paths reveals a critical sequencing principle: neither career development nor engagement directly suppresses quiet quitting; both must first elevate job satisfaction, which then reduces passive disengagement. This temporal sequencing has concrete implications for program evaluation: startups should treat job satisfaction as the leading indicator when assessing the impact of HR initiatives, rather than expecting immediate behavioral change. The stronger mediation through career development confirms that satisfaction formed from structural growth opportunities carries greater power in preventing quiet quitting than satisfaction formed from relational engagement, positioning career development reform as the primary strategic lever for retaining Gen Z talent in Indonesian startups. Quiet quitting significantly reduces job satisfaction (Kim & Sohn, 2024). Job satisfaction serves to diminish the likelihood of quiet quitting among employees from both the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, meaning that a higher level of job satisfaction corresponds to a reduced likelihood of quiet quitting behavior being exhibited in the workplace (Taufik Nuryanti et al., 2024). Indonesia shows that employees who feel satisfied with organizational justice have lower levels of quiet quitting (Margaretha & Panggabean, 2025). This interpretation directly informs the mediating mechanism observed in this study. Since job satisfaction functions as the evaluative outcome of exchange balance, both career development and engagement must first be translated into perceived satisfaction before influencing behavior. However, because career development shapes long-term expectations more strongly than engagement, it generates a more durable form of satisfaction, which subsequently exerts a stronger indirect effect on quiet quitting. This explains the stronger mediated pathway through career development in the structural model, reinforcing the argument that SET reciprocity is conditional upon the temporal depth of organizational investment.

5. CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore how career development and employee engagement shape quiet quitting tendencies through the mediating role of job satisfaction among Gen Z employees within Indonesia's startup sector. The findings confirmed that career development and employee engagement positively influenced job satisfaction, which in turn significantly reduced quiet quitting behavior, thereby answering the research questions as hypothesized. Job satisfaction was proven to be a critical mediating mechanism, meaning that interventions targeting only performance without addressing employee well-being will be insufficient. Accordingly, startups are strongly recommended to implement structured career roadmaps, competency-based mentoring programs, participatory engagement activities, and anonymous satisfaction surveys integrated into routine HR processes as concrete strategies to retain talent and prevent disengagement among Generation Z employees.

6. LIMITATION AND IMPLICATION

One key limitation lies in the sample composition, whereby respondents were largely concentrated within specific professional sectors of Indonesian startups, which may limit the generalizability of the results to the broader workforce population, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings to other industries, organizational sizes, or cultural contexts. In terms of implications, the findings supported Social Exchange Theory by confirming that career development and employee engagement act as antecedents of job satisfaction, which mediate quiet quitting, reinforcing rather than challenging existing theoretical frameworks. Beyond academia, these findings offered practical value for HR practitioners in startup environments seeking to address employee disengagement among Generation Z. Therefore, future research is encouraged to expand the sample across multiple industries, incorporate additional variables such as transformational leadership or psychological safety, and explore hybrid and remote work contexts to build a more comprehensive understanding of quiet quitting behavior.

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