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# Young workers career success model: A psychological perspective on minimizing educated unemployment

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background**: Young workers increasingly pursue careers based on personal meaning rather than long-term organizational paths. This shift can cause instability, as many leave mismatched roles or stay unemployed while seeking ideal opportunities, potentially contributing to higher unemployment among educated youth.

**Purpose**: This study aims to identify key psychological factors that shape and support career success among young workers.

**Method**: The research used a two-phase approach. Study 1 conducted qualitative interviews with four young workers to explore subjective career success experiences. Study 2 surveyed 148 young workers and applied descriptive and inferential analyses to validate the identified psychological elements.

**Findings**: Career meaning emerged as the strongest factor influencing career success, followed by work–life balance and psychological safety. These results show that internal psychological factors play a more central role than external conditions for young workers' success.

**Implication**: Organizations should foster meaningful work experiences, promote balance between personal and professional life, and ensure psychological safety. Strengthening these factors may enhance career success and help reduce unemployment among young workers.

**KEYWORDS**
Career success; young worker; employability

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## Introduction

Young workers, including millennials and Gen Z, constitute 60% of the workforce across various public and business organizations (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). However, youth employment remains a critical issue in Indonesia, where approximately 16% of individuals aged 15–24 are unemployed—more than twice the rate observed in neighboring countries such as Thailand and Vietnam (Llewellyn, 2025). Beyond unemployment, labor market vulnerability is further reflected in the predominance of informal work, which still encompasses over half of the national workforce and offers limited stability and social protection. Recent surveys also indicate that Indonesian youth hold more pessimistic views regarding the economy and government initiatives compared to their peers in other Southeast Asian countries, with optimism levels toward economic policy substantially below the regional average (Habir & Negara, 2023). These structural conditions, combined with perceptions of limited institutional support, create a context in which young people may struggle to envision secure and sustainable career trajectories.

There are two aspects considered important by young workers when pursuing career: independence and usefulness. These two factors are considered to be key pillars of career success. Career success is a concern not only for the individual employee but also for the organization, as personal success contributes to organizational success. Logically, this condition aligns with the rationale that young workers will feel successful in their careers if they feel happy, prosperous,

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and able to perform optimally (Katsaros, 2024), and that optimal individual performance will further impact organizational performance (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019).

Career success can be defined as the achievement or accomplishment perceived by an individual as a result of accumulated work experience over time (Arthur et al., 2005; Czeranowska, 2024). Career success can be measured using both objective and subjective indicators. Objectively, career success can be seen from a person's status, income, and professional competence. Meanwhile, subjectively, career success can be reflected in how an individual evaluates their achievements, work-life balance, health, and well-being related to career development (Laksmi & Sumaryono, 2018; Guan et al., 2020). In other words, individuals who consider themselves successful in their careers are those who perceive a sense of well-being at work. Given the close relationship between career success and well-being, a review or re-evaluation of the well-being factors at work that are in the minds of young workers is necessary. This is necessary, given the shift in mindsets regarding career success among young workers.

For young workers, career perspectives have shifted. They consider social recognition, job opportunities, accountability, career meaning, mentorship, flexibility, and feedback to be important aspects of a career. They also consider being motivated by tangible benefits, such as achievement and opportunities for career development. In relation to organizations, young workers demand transparency, clear structures, and instructions. This aligns with research findings (Sumaryono, 2022) that young workers place greater emphasis on two key issues: independence and usefulness in their chosen careers. Career success is measured not only by personal success but also by providing meaning and benefits to their social life.

The strengths of young workers include technological skills, a strong sense of curiosity, and high expectations. This gives them a high capacity to improve their career performance and impact organizational performance. To facilitate this, companies need to be willing to facilitate various means that enable the development of young workers' talents (Sharma & Pandit, 2020) and meet their needs (Baldonado, 2018). Therefore, one strategy in understanding this generation is to provide opportunities for young workers' talents to flourish in the world of work by being themselves (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018) and facilitating what makes young workers happy in the workplace. These various factors are essential parts of developing career success according to young workers.

In his field theory concept, Kurt Lewin emphasized that behavior, is largely determined by the presence of internal and external factors. This model can serve as a framework for this research. Internal factors can be represented by the presence of career meaning (Sumaryono, 2016), and are also supported by work-life balance. However, individual factors alone will be incomplete without external and situational factors. In this regard, based on various research studies conducted by Sumaryono (2022), it is clear that leadership is necessary, especially in the concept of psychological safety. Meanwhile, a contemporary situational factor among young workers is work-life balance. External and situational factors are inseparable in this context.

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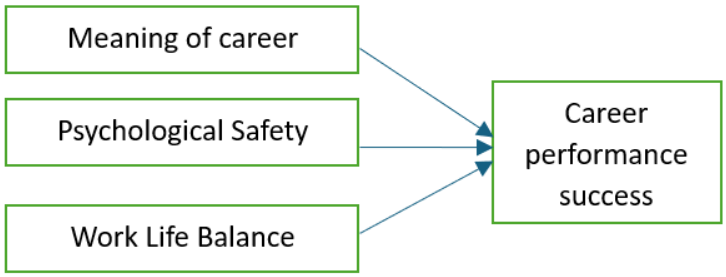


**Figure 1**. Framework of Career Performance Success

Considering Figure 1, further research is needed to identify the various factors that have been studied and to identify key factors that need to be emphasized in defining career success or career performance in the workplace. Several factors that have been major themes in various studies include career meaning, job crafting, psychological capital, and learning agility, all of which are internal factors. Meanwhile, external factors include several themes that have been researched, such as transformational leadership and psychological safety. Situational factors, on the other hand, relate to the work-life balance environment.

As previously discussed, young workers place a significant emphasis on career meaning as a crucial aspect of their career life. Young workers are a generation of ambitious professionals focused on career development (Putra, 2016). Gaidhani et al. (2019) noted that young workers desire work that aligns with their passions, making career meaning a crucial factor for this generation. Schaufeli & Bakker (2020) also stated that positive feelings at work result from a person's sense of meaning in their work.

Research conducted by Yap and Badri (2020) found that transformational leadership plays a significant role in influencing workplace happiness. Brousell (2015) revealed that millennials are employees who are driven by inspiring leaders who play a role in creating a positive impact on the organization. Young workers have a stronger desire to have leaders who are willing to listen to their ideas and respect their opinions (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). For young workers, a safe and comfortable environment is a prerequisite for developing into productive and happy workers. This concept is an implementation of the situation of a leader who is able to create psychological safety in the work environment in the organization. The implication of this concept emphasizes that leaders who are able to develop psychological safety will foster a work environment that makes workers feel unafraid to make risky decisions and are not embarrassed for expressing ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes (Edmondson, 1999; Hughes et al., 2024; McCausland, 2023, Plester & Lloyd, 2023).

Young workers highly desire support from a work-life perspective, fostering a sense of security and comfort in their work-life balance. According to Rashid (2022), work-life balance plays a significant role in young workers' happiness at work. Both generations Y and Z place a high emphasis on work-life balance, with expectations of freedom, flexible work schedules, and shorter work weeks. This is supported by research findings from Deloitte (2022), which found that mental health and burnout significantly impact workplace happiness for young workers. Consistent with this, research by Dwidienawati and Gandasari (2018) found that young workers are a generation that craves a sense of security, stability, and happiness in the workplace as a way to become more optimal and enthusiastic in their work. These conditions will support the career performance of young workers, making them more productive and innovative.

Based on the literature reviewed, the opportunity to specifically examine the concept of career performance or career success among young workers remains open and important for

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further study to find a formula capable of minimizing educated unemployment. The findings of this research are expected to serve as a reference in career development for young workers. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide an overview of alternative solutions to career opportunities that can address the problem of unemployment that impacts poverty alleviation and encourage economic growth. The focus of career success is on developing a way of thinking for young workers to develop self-confidence in seeing opportunities for success in life, both in pursuing permanent careers in organizations and independent careers. One thing to remember, subjective career success is a career identity for young workers (Inggarianti, et al., 2020).

## Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with an exploratory sequential design. Data collection was conducted in two stages. In study 1, a qualitative research based on phenomenology approach was conducted by interviewing four young workers to discover the factors that determine the meaning of work success according to young workers. The results of this study were then used as a basis for developing the concept of an instrument on career success used in study 2. Study 2 was conducted using quantitative methods to find a conceptual model of career success that is more appropriate in the context of Indonesian workers. The sampling process was carried out using a purposive sampling method with the requirements of at least 2 years of work experiences and a minimum education of a Bachelor's degree. Participants were drawn from the age groups commonly categorized as Millennials (born 1981–1996; approximately 29–44 years old at the time of data collection) and Generation Z (born 1997–2012; approximately 13–28 years old at the time of data collection).

In study 1, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants to uncover the factors and meanings of career success for them. Data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach to generate themes that represented each participant's experiences. Data validity was achieved through member checking with participants.

In study 2, this research examines four main variables, a continuation of Study 1. Career success, or more specifically, career performance, is positioned as the dependent variable, and career meaning, work-life balance, and psychological safety are the independent variables. The approach used in this research is quantitative. This research utilizes primary data collected through the online distribution of four instruments. Participants in this study were workers across Indonesia working in various sectors. A total of 148 participants were recruited: 91 (61.5%) were female, 69 (46.6%) holds Bachelor's degree, 65 (43.9%) were employed in the private sector.

Study 2 employed four instruments to measure the main variables. Career success was operationally defined as individual's perceived achievements and progress in their careers, encompassing both personal fulfillment and external indicators of accomplishment. Career meaning was defined as the extent to which individuals view their careers as purposeful and aligned with personal values, while work–life balance was conceptualized as the perceived ability to maintain equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life domains. Psychological safety was defined as the perception of a work environment that fosters interpersonal risk-taking and open expression without fear of negative consequences. All instruments were adapted from established measures. Career success, career meaning, and work–life balance were each assessed with 10-item scales developed by Sumaryono (2016), which demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha$ = .873, .917, and .796, respectively) and acceptable item discrimination indices. Psychological safety was measured using a scale originally developed by Edmondson (1999) and adapted by Gisela and Sumaryono (2022), with strong reliability ($\alpha$ =

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.877) and satisfactory item discrimination. Higher scores on all scales indicated stronger perceptions of the respective construct.

The research data collection process was carried out after obtaining an Ethical Clearance approval letter from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Gadjah Mada University, with number 9918/UN1/FPSi.1.3/SD/PT.01.04/2024. Data collection for the instrument trial and research data was conducted online using Google Forms. The online questionnaire included an explanation of the research, informed consent, and research instruments.

The collected data were statistically analyzed to examine whether career meaning, work–life balance, and psychological safety simultaneously influence career success using regression-based techniques within a structural equation modeling framework. The data analysis was conducted using SMART-PLS version 4 software by applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis process included evaluation of the outer model to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments and the inner model to examine the structural relationships among variables. Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure to estimate path coefficients and determine the significance of predictor variables on the dependent variable.

## Result and Discussion

The results of Study 1 which was conducted using structured interviews with 4 respondents showed several important things in individuals, especially young workers in understanding and interpreting work success, including:

a. **Independence.** This theme is a key one for young workers in defining work success. This was mentioned by respondent A, who said, "By working independently, I feel happy and feel I have the opportunity to develop myself more optimally." Therefore, it can be interpreted that independence is a demand for self-optimization in performance. Viewed from a theoretical perspective, the essence of this meaning is more about the aspect of individual existence that will be formed when independence occurs in the sense of fulfilling responsibilities, commitment to work, and professionalism. This independence is also inseparable from the concept of existence, which is one of the needs to become a motivated individual to show oneself as a successful individual. This concept represents a new definition of the meaning of existence, which was originally related to physiological needs and a sense of security (Miner, 1992), to existence with a stronger meaning. One example can be in line with the experience of the next generation of the Ning King family. The generation in this family was also unwilling to continue the legacy of managing the business. The heirs preferred to pursue the property business. The theme of self-existence, it turns out, is not only related to the challenge of demonstrating existence in the form of self-esteem. Challenges can also mean developing creativity or innovation in career development. The creative process involves generating new ideas for career development, innovating, or renewing a career or business model. The significance of this theme can be seen in several business ideas currently being driven by the younger generation.

b. **Challenges**. This theme emerged from one of the respondents who stated, "When there are no challenges at work, I start to move on or look at other organizations that can provide challenges for me." It is clear that for young workers, challenges are an opportunity to develop themselves to become better in terms of individual competencies. This understanding proves that workers need challenges more as a way to enrich

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themselves in terms of abilities and competencies in dealing with problems. With the development of competencies, it is hoped that they will be more empowered in facing problems. Challenges in this sense are more about the process of developing new things or innovations. This process presents new challenges for the younger generation and is what makes them more enthusiastic about career development in business. The creative process of career development can be seen from the decision of workers to present challenges as a trigger for the creative process in living their careers.

c. **Usefulness**. This theme focuses more on the willingness to build social relationships with other parties who become partners in carrying out work. The success of a work process is not solely focused on the individual but must also impact how the results of the work in question are perceived by others who experience the work process. One respondent said, "It's useless if I'm successful without having a social impact on others." This indicator of work success implies the existence of usefulness for others in the world of work, both internally and within the organization. Work is considered successful when an individual is able to provide services and provide assistance. Business or career development with the concept of innovation in various models, for example, can be seen in the presence of Gojek, Kaskus, or Tokopedia. Why is it categorized as innovation-based career development? Career development by presenting an application business developed with a network business model is a model duplicating patterns already existing in the global business map. The difference is the process of adaptation to the culture developing in Indonesia. The challenge with this new model lies in the thinking that is very unique to the patterns that exist in Indonesia. The theme of challenges characterized by innovation is increasingly developing as a success orientation in the meaning of career success chosen by the younger generation. Not just making yourself successful, but thinking more about being useful to others.

d. **Inspiration for the independence of others**. Respondent D stated, "Generating and implementing new ideas provides a means for others to imitate or duplicate them. There's no need to be afraid of competition, because it creates a discussion community that is useful for development." This theme provides a broader meaning. Working is not only useful for oneself, but also useful for others. This interpretation focuses more on the process of benefiting others, but in the sense of being able to open up job opportunities for others to succeed. This theme is not self-centered, but rather the process of making others independent. This theme is inseparable from the process of sharing success. The meaning of development is more defined by the concept of expanding networks and a willingness to provide meaningful opportunities for others. Interest in career choices is not solely aimed at self-interest but also builds the concept of happiness in work. This is in line with the concept of job satisfaction, which emphasizes the concept that happy workers are productive workers. This is the core of the concept of job satisfaction carried out by individuals. This is in line with Bellet et al. (2023) view, which emphasizes that workers' feelings of happiness will contribute to the quality of work and how workers carry out their career choices.

From these four themes, it can be concluded that career success indicators are supported by two main pillars: the self-focused pillar of independence and challenge. This pillar develops from personal qualities that contribute to academic achievement and the process of self-development into an independent individual. Meanwhile, the second pillar focuses more on success, which is built when there are usefulness and a willingness to provide tangible forms in the implementation process. One tangible form is the principle of providing services and

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assistance to internal parties. On the other hand, external blessings are also considered important, by creating creative and productive opportunities for others.

In study 2, we test the hypothesis based on three proposed model. In the first model, career meaning was entered as a predictor and produced a significant effect, $F(1, 112) = 60.40$, $p<.001$. Career meaning significantly predicted career success, $\beta = .59$, $t = 7.77$, $p<.001$, accounting for 35% of the variance. In the second model, psychological safety was added, which significantly improved the model, $F(2, 111) = 39.49$, $p<.001$. As an additional predictor, psychological safety significantly predicted career success, $\beta = .29$, $t = 3.53$, $p<.01$, increasing the explained variance to 42%. In the final model, work–life balance was included alongside career meaning and psychological safety, resulting in a further significant improvement, $F(3, 110) = 28.91$, $p<.001$. Work–life balance also significantly predicted career success, $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.23$, $p<.05$. Altogether, the three predictors explained 45% of the variance in career success (as shown in Table 1). Thus, all three hypotheses were supported.

**Table 1.**
Hypotheses testing with *multiple linear regression*

| Model | Predictor | *Beta* | *t* | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | *F* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Meaning of career | 0.59*** | 7.77 | .35 | .35 | 60,399*** |
| 2 | Meaning of career | 0.46*** | 5.52 | .42 | .07 | 39,485*** |
| | Psychological safety | 0.29** | 3.53 | | | |
| 3 | Meaning of career | 0.39*** | 4.57 | .44 | .02 | 28,911*** |
| | Psychological safety | 0.23** | 2.74 | | | |
| | Work-life balance | 0.19* | 2.23 | | | |

*Note. *** p<.001, ** p<.01; * p<.5*

The results of the multiple regression analysis also indicate that each predictor variable plays a significant role in the model. The coefficient value for career meaning is .398 ($p<.05$), while work-life balance is .215 ($p<.05$), and psychological safety is .188 ($p<.05$). The researchers then conducted an effective contribution analysis, and found that the total simultaneous contribution to this model was 40.8%. Thus, all three variables are able to play a role in supporting the career success process of young workers. In terms of role dominance, it appears that career meaning has the largest role compared to work-life balance and psychological safety. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2.**
Hypotheses testing with *Regression Analysis*

| Predictor Variable | Standardized coefficients | SE | *p-value* | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meaning of career | 398 | .062 | .000 | Significance |
| Work Life Balance | .215 | .110 | .006 | Significance |
| Psychological Safety | .188 | .072 | .012 | Significance |

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**Table 3.**
Determination coefficient

| | **Career Success** |
|---|---|
| *R-square* | .408 |
| *R-square* adjusted | .396 |
| Durbin-Watson test | 2.083 |

The research findings demonstrate that career meaning, work-life balance, and psychological safety simultaneously contribute to career success in young workers. In other words, improved career meaning, work-life balance, and psychological safety further enhance career success. These findings also support previous research that found that career meaning (Alzyoud, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2019), work-life balance (Oteng & Ngo-Henha, 2024; Yunita et al., 2023), and psychological safety (Lu et al., 2023; Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023) influence career success.

Career success can be defined as a positive psychological state or outcome of work, personal achievement, and professional success gained through work experience (Nexhip et al., 2023; Tu & Okazaki, 2021; Yamada et al., 2023). Individuals who experience career success tend to feel happier and consider themselves successful in their careers, even though they have not yet achieved the established work standards (Adiyono et al., 2017). Happy young workers are highly dependent on self-satisfaction with their level of career performance achievement (Alzyoud, 2017).

Young workers today have a top priority beyond material things, namely doing work that is meaningful to them (Mahapatra et al., 2022; Popaitoon, 2022). Therefore, career meaning becomes a significant factor, especially for millennials and Generation Z, because they seek not only financial stability but also emotional satisfaction and a sense of purpose throughout their careers (Hupkens et al., 2021; Nejad et al., 2021). Therefore, work that is perceived as meaningful tends to be attractive and able to sustain a good career (Albrecht et al., 2021; Blustein et al., 2022; Kruyen et al., 2024). Meaning in this sense is more directed towards the personal and social dimensions of career meaning. The personal dimension of career meaning is structured based on the beliefs, needs, and values held by the individual. On the other hand, the social dimension of career meaning is structured based on the career's benefits to the lives of others (Sumaryono, 2016). This is also emphasized by Hupkens et al. (2021), who stated that there has been a shift in the meaning of career nuanced benefits to social life as one of the important issues in an individual's career success or performance. This issue is starting to become a consideration for young workers in pursuing their career roles.

Besides the meaning of career, which can influence one's career success, work-life balance can also influence career success. According to Waworuntu et al. (2022), millennials and Generation Z currently highly value work-life balance. This is relevant to the increasing challenges of current developments due to digitalization, such as high work pressure, long working hours, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life.

Work-life balance, or what is commonly called work-life balance, is one of the main factors influencing employees' decisions to seek employment opportunities at other companies or even resign. Workers also often turn down job offers with attractive salaries and benefits if it would sacrifice the balance between social and family life. Everyone has various roles to fulfill, and the demands of these various roles often lead to role conflict. Satisfaction with work-life balance

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integrates life and work roles, and this condition can encourage the emergence of positive emotions in the workplace that can become energy for increasing career success.

Furthermore, this study found that psychological safety can influence career success. This aligns with previous research (Lu et al., 2023; Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023) that found psychological careers play a crucial role in increasing career satisfaction. A safe work environment allows employees to learn more quickly, rely on each other, and explore career opportunities and self-development, all of which contribute to career success (Lu et al., 2023; Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023). Employees will stay in their jobs if the job provides fairness and supports career advancement, as well as creates a safe and comfortable environment for career advancement. In today's world of increased demand for flexibility, adaptability to technology, and job diversity, psychological safety can encourage individuals to demonstrate their competencies and capabilities without fear of negative evaluation. This will facilitate employees' career success and directly impact individual career growth (Frazier et al., 2017).

This study found that career meaning has a greater influence on career success than work-life balance and psychological safety. This suggests that career meaning is a more profound factor in assessing career success. This finding can be explained by career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2005). CCT posits that individuals actively construct their careers by creating a sense of meaning from their life experiences and adapting to external career demands. CCT underscores that careers develop through personal narratives, adaptability, and the pursuit of meaning. Career meaning provides direction and sustained motivation, which may exert a stronger influence on career success than contextual factors such as psychological safety or work–life balance. Within this framework, psychological safety functions as an enabling context for exploration and adaptability, while work–life balance supports long-term adaptability. Together, these factors suggest that integrating strong career meaning with supportive environments and balanced life conditions increases the likelihood of achieving career success. Currently, young workers are more aware of prioritizing careers that align with their values and interests. Furthermore, they expect their chosen career will positively contribute to personal happiness and support organizational performance. A strong sense of career meaning can also help individuals better plan their careers and enhance career capital, such as social and psychological capital, that contribute to career success (Direnzo et al., 2015).

The dominant role of career meaning, compared to work-life balance and psychological safety, aligns with the views of Gu et al. (2022), who demonstrated that career meaning is indeed relatively prominent in an individual's career success journey. Career meaning reflects the important elements or thoughts underlying a worker's career role. This reinforces Kalleberg's (1977) view of work values, which refers to an individual's general attitude toward the meaning they attach to their work role and reflects what they consider important in terms of rewards from their career journey. Alzyoud's (2017) research also suggests that the meaning an individual assigns to their career role can predict career success. This finding is further supported by Lee & Lee's (2019) research, which found that the meaning of a job or career influences career success.

The results of this study provide a significant theoretical contribution to better understanding career success among today's workers, as well as the role of career meaning, work-life balance, and psychological safety in career success. This is particularly relevant in the Indonesian labor market, where structural challenges such as high youth unemployment, the dominance of the informal sector, and limited social security protections shape young people’s career pathways (Habir & Negara, 2023; Llewellyn, 2025). For many Indonesian workers, especially those from Generation Z and Millennials, career success is no longer defined primarily in terms of financial gain or job stability, but rather in terms of discovering and pursuing meaning

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in work. By identifying what is personally and socially meaningful, young workers are more likely to invest themselves fully in their chosen professions and experience greater harmony between personal identity and career roles.

In Indonesia, where formal employment opportunities remain scarce and competition for limited professional positions is intense, the pursuit of career meaning may encourage young people to expand their perspectives beyond conventional career choices. For example, careers in the creative economy, such as becoming a professional chef, digital content creator, or event planner, are increasingly viewed as legitimate and meaningful pathways that provide both personal fulfillment and broader social value. These choices align with national trends emphasizing entrepreneurship and innovation as strategies to reduce unemployment and strengthen the informal-to-formal transition in the labor force. For educated unemployed individuals, cultivating career meaning may foster resilience and adaptability, enabling them to construct career paths that align with their talents and values rather than being constrained by limited organizational opportunities.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that fostering career success among Indonesian youth requires more than simply expanding formal job opportunities. Government initiatives could focus on strengthening vocational education, entrepreneurial training, and digital skills development to support alternative and independent career pathways. Organizations, meanwhile, can play a role by cultivating psychologically safe work environments and promoting policies that facilitate work–life balance, thereby enhancing both career adaptability and long-term employee retention. At a broader level, integrating career meaning into national employment strategies may help reduce the gap between labor market demands and the aspirations of educated youth, while simultaneously addressing structural vulnerabilities in the workforce. Ultimately, career success for Indonesian youth may best be achieved through a combination of individual meaning-making processes, supportive organizational practices, and public policies that encourage innovation, adaptability, and inclusivity in career development.

This study has several limitations. The use of purposive sampling with a relatively small sample ($N$ = 148) restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Indonesian young workers. Data were also collected solely through self-report instruments, which may introduce bias. In addition, the cross-sectional design prevents establishing causal relationships between career meaning, work–life balance, psychological safety, and career success. Future research should therefore employ larger and more diverse samples, integrate multi-source or objective career indicators, and adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to capture the dynamic process of career development.

Furthermore, this study was limited to three predictor variables, while other important factors such as leadership style, job crafting, learning agility, and psychological capital were not included. Future studies are encouraged to expand the model by incorporating these variables and by examining cultural factors, such as collectivist values and family influence, which may shape career success in Indonesia. In addition, considering the significant role of informal employment and entrepreneurship among Indonesian youth, future research should compare career success models between organizationally employed workers and independent workers to better understand diverse career pathways in reducing educated unemployment.

## Conclusion

The main finding of this study is that career meaning, work-life balance, and psychological safety contribute to career success. Among these three predictors, career meaning is a stronger predictor than work-life balance and psychological safety in influencing career success. The

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characteristics of the current Millennial and Generation Z place greater emphasis on fulfilling personal values and the essence of meaning in their careers. Therefore, career meaning is a key factor for young workers in their career development process. Career meaning in the context of young workers has two main dimensions: the personal dimension and the social dimension. In this regard, the key thing to consider is understanding the meaning of the chosen career from a personal perspective, which essentially means independence, and from a social perspective, which essentially means benefiting others.

Therefore, the model of career success or career performance from a psychological perspective for young workers is supported by career meaning, quality of work-life balance, and psychological safety. The combination of these three elements aligns with the concept of performance, which is supported by two main factors: willingness to perform (career meaning and quality of work-life), and the opportunity to perform (psychological safety).

Career meaning is the most dominant factor, so it is hoped that companies or organizations can design strategies and support the fulfillment of career meaning for employees. This can be done by providing opportunities to do work that aligns with personal values, establishing policies to balance work and personal life, and creating a safe and comfortable environment for employees. In the context of young workers, this dominant career meaning provides new insight that career choices must be tailored to considerations of the benefits of a chosen career, focusing on meaning for the individual or meaning for society, or encompassing both. Therefore, this initial thinking needs to be used as a foundation so that choosing an independent career can be meaningful and does not have to focus solely on organizational-based career choices. Such thinking will encourage young workers to explore their talents to find meaningful career options and simultaneously begin to minimize the problem of unemployment in Indonesia.

## Credit/Acknowledgement

Author's Contributions; S was responsible for designing the research, conducting data collection and analysis, preparing the manuscript, and providing supervision. RNA and ZAP contributed to the development of measurement instruments, participated in data collection and analysis, and assisted in manuscript preparation. IFD supported the study through data collection.

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