

## **Bridging the Digital Divide: The Impact of Digital Leadership on Career Commitment with Work Engagement as a Mediator in the Hospitality Sector**



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**ABSTRACT:** The adoption of digital leadership in the hospitality industry has introduced transformative dynamics in employee management and development. While digital leadership enhances innovation and operational efficiency, concerns arise regarding its potential to diminish leaders' commitment to fostering employee career growth and promotions. The increasing reliance on digital tools and processes may inadvertently reduce personal engagement between leaders and employees, potentially weakening work engagement—a critical driver of career commitment. This study investigates the influence of digital leadership on career commitment, with work engagement as a mediating variable. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS, the findings demonstrate that digital leadership positively impacts career commitment. However, the mediating effect of work engagement is less pronounced, highlighting gaps in interpersonal connections within digitally driven environments. The findings emphasize the need to balance digital leadership with strategies that strengthen interpersonal relationships and support employee development. These insights provide valuable guidance for hospitality managers to align digital transformation initiatives with employee career aspirations, enhancing long-term retention and engagement.

**KEYWORD:** Digital Transformation, Work Engagemnet, Career Commitment, Hotel Industry

### **INTRODUCTION**

The hospitality industry in Bandung, a prominent tourist destination in Indonesia, has experienced significant growth in recent years. This expansion is driven by the city's rich cultural heritage, culinary attractions, and status as a shopping hub, attracting both domestic and international tourists. Consequently, hotels in Bandung are striving to enhance service quality and operational efficiency to meet the increasing demands of guests. In response to the evolving digital era, many hotels in Bandung are transitioning from traditional leadership models to digital leadership. Digital leadership emphasizes the integration of advanced technologies into management practices, aiming to improve decision-making processes, streamline operations, and enhance customer experiences. This shift is expected to facilitate more efficient management of human resources, enabling leaders to monitor performance metrics, coordinate tasks, and communicate with staff through digital platforms.

However, this transition raises concerns regarding its impact on employee relations. The reliance on digital communication tools may reduce face-to-face interactions between leaders and employees, potentially diminishing the quality of interpersonal relationships. Such a reduction in direct communication can lead to decreased employee engagement, as personal connections and immediate feedback are integral to fostering a motivated and committed workforce. Research indicates that employee engagement is closely linked to job performance and organizational commitment .

Furthermore, the ambiguity in communication resulting from digital interactions may lead to unclear career development pathways for employees. Without regular personal interactions, employees might find it challenging to discuss career aspirations, seek mentorship, or receive constructive feedback, leading to uncertainties regarding their professional growth within the organization. Studies have shown that career development significantly influences work engagement, which in turn affects employee performance .

The shift to digital leadership, while offering numerous operational benefits, necessitates a balanced approach that maintains strong interpersonal relationships. Leaders must be cognizant of the potential drawbacks associated with reduced face-to-face interactions and strive to implement strategies that preserve employee engagement and clear communication regarding career

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development. This balance is crucial to ensure that the advantages of digital transformation do not come at the expense of employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In conclusion, as Bandung's hospitality industry embraces digital leadership, it is imperative to address the challenges posed by decreased interpersonal communication. By fostering an environment that combines technological advancements with meaningful human interactions, hotels can enhance employee engagement and provide clear career development opportunities, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and employee retention.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Digital Leadership**

Digital leadership refers to a leader's ability to leverage digital technologies to direct, influence, and inspire a team or organization towards achieving goals. This includes adapting to technological change, developing digital competencies, and implementing digital strategies in managerial processes. According to research, effective digital leadership can improve organizational performance and employee job satisfaction.

### **Work Engagement**

Work engagement is defined as a positive motivational state characterized by passion, dedication, and absorption in work. Employees who have high work engagement tend to show high energy, deep involvement, and full concentration in their tasks. Research shows that effective career development can increase employee work engagement.

### **Career Commitment**

Career commitment refers to the extent to which individuals are determined and oriented towards achieving their career goals. It includes loyalty to the profession, desire to grow, and readiness to invest in self-development. Studies show that good career development can increase workers' perceptions of organizational support, motivation, and affective commitment. (Muchtadin, 2023)

### **Relationship between Digital Leadership and Career Commitment**

The relationship between digital leadership and career commitment is rooted in how leadership influences employee motivation, engagement, and alignment with organizational goals. Digital leadership, characterized by leveraging digital tools and strategies to guide and inspire teams, plays a critical role in fostering an environment conducive to career commitment.

1. **Empowerment through Technology:** Digital leaders facilitate the adoption of technology, enabling employees to perform their tasks more efficiently and innovatively. This empowerment fosters a sense of accomplishment and alignment with organizational goals, increasing career commitment (Avolio et al., 2014).
2. **Vision and Direction:** Digital leaders often provide a clear vision for digital transformation, which can inspire employees to see long-term career opportunities within the organization. A clear sense of purpose enhances employees' commitment to their career paths (Larjovuori et al., 2018).
3. **Support for Development:** By utilizing digital tools, leaders can provide personalized training and career development opportunities, which are critical for fostering career growth and commitment. Employees who perceive strong support for their development are more likely to commit to their careers (Zhang et al., 2020).
4. **Building Trust and Engagement:** Digital leadership fosters open communication and collaboration through digital platforms, which builds trust and engagement among team members. Engaged employees are more likely to commit to their professional goals and the organization (Sheninger, 2014).
5. **Alignment with Organizational Strategy:** Digital leaders align individual career aspirations with organizational digital strategies, making employees feel valued and integral to the company's success. This alignment strengthens career commitment (Haque et al., 2021).

### **The Relationship Between Digital Leadership And Work Engagement**

The relationship between digital leadership and work engagement is grounded in the ability of leaders to leverage digital tools and foster a work environment that motivates employees, encourages collaboration, and enhances job satisfaction. Digital leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping work engagement by ensuring employees feel valued, supported, and aligned with organizational objectives.

1. **Enhanced Communication and Collaboration:** Digital leaders use advanced communication tools to promote transparency and seamless interaction among team members. This fosters a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, which are critical components of work engagement (Xie et al., 2020).

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2. **Empowerment through Digital Tools:** By providing access to digital resources and training, leaders empower employees to excel in their roles. This empowerment enhances employees' intrinsic motivation, a key driver of work engagement (Avolio et al., 2014).
3. **Innovation and Challenge:** Digital leadership encourages a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Employees are more likely to engage with their work when they perceive it as meaningful, challenging, and aligned with their skills and aspirations (Van Zyl et al., 2021).
4. **Supportive Leadership Behavior:** Digital leaders foster a supportive work environment by addressing individual needs and promoting work-life balance through flexible digital solutions. Supportive leadership is positively associated with higher levels of work engagement (Larjovuori et al., 2018).
5. **Recognition and Feedback:** Digital tools enable leaders to provide real-time feedback and recognition. Frequent and constructive feedback boosts morale and strengthens employees' engagement with their tasks (Sheninger, 2014).

### **The Relationship Between Work Engagement and Career Commitment**

The relationship between work engagement and career commitment is strongly interconnected, as work engagement fosters a positive emotional and psychological state that enhances employees' dedication to their careers. Employees who are highly engaged in their work are more likely to experience satisfaction and alignment with their career goals, leading to stronger career commitment.

1. **Emotional Investment:** Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, reflects an employee's emotional investment in their work. This emotional connection translates into a deeper commitment to their career aspirations and professional growth (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).
2. **Perception of Career Opportunities:** Engaged employees are more proactive and optimistic about their career development. They perceive greater opportunities for advancement and align their efforts with long-term career goals, which reinforces their career commitment (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007).
3. **Motivation and Resilience:** Work engagement boosts motivation and resilience, enabling employees to overcome career-related challenges. This resilience strengthens their determination to stay committed to their career paths, even during difficult times (Salanova et al., 2005).
4. **Job Satisfaction and Career Alignment:** Engaged employees often experience higher job satisfaction, which aligns with their career aspirations. This alignment fosters a sense of purpose and commitment to achieving long-term career success (Christian et al., 2011).
5. **Supportive Work Environment:** Organizations that promote work engagement often provide supportive environments that align with employees' career goals. Such environments encourage employees to invest in their careers, enhancing career commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006).

### **The Relationship Between Digital Leadership and Career Commitment through Work Engagement**

The relationship between digital leadership and career commitment through work engagement highlights how effective digital leadership fosters an engaging work environment that, in turn, strengthens employees' dedication to their careers. This mediation suggests that work engagement acts as a key mechanism through which digital leadership influences career commitment.

#### **Digital Leadership Enhances Work Engagement**

Digital leaders use technology to foster open communication, provide real-time feedback, and create opportunities for learning and development. These actions lead to higher levels of work engagement, as employees feel supported, empowered, and motivated to perform their roles effectively (Xie et al., 2020).

#### **Work Engagement Drives Career Commitment**

Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, boosts employees' emotional connection to their roles and aligns their efforts with career goals. Engaged employees are more likely to be committed to their long-term career paths (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

#### **Mediating Role of Work Engagement**

Digital leadership positively impacts career commitment through work engagement by creating a work environment where employees feel valued and integral to the organization's success. The combination of a supportive leadership style and high engagement fosters stronger career commitment (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007).

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## Addressing Gaps in Interpersonal Connection

While digital leadership emphasizes efficiency and innovation, it may reduce interpersonal interactions. However, when digital tools are used to enhance engagement, this gap can be mitigated, ensuring that employees remain committed to their careers (Haque et al., 2021).

## Digital Leadership → Work Engagement → Career Commitment

- Digital leadership fosters work engagement by providing resources, recognition, and support.
- Work engagement enhances employees' dedication, aligning personal goals with career aspirations.

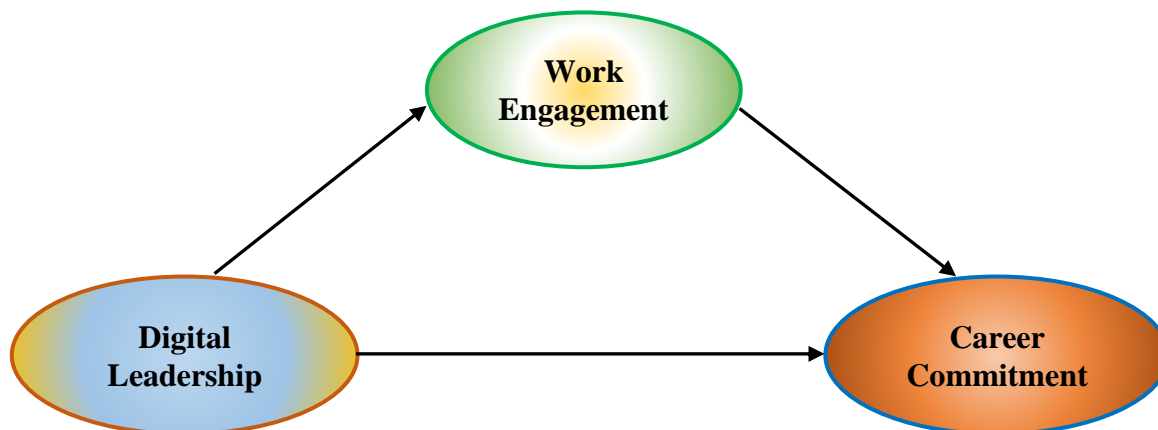


Figure 1. Research Model

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the following hypothesized relationships:

- H1: Digital Leadership significantly influences Career Commitment.
- H2: Work Engagement significantly influences Career Commitment.
- H3: Digital Leadership significantly influences Career Commitment through Work Engagement

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Sample and data collection

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach, with the aim of measuring and understanding the causal relationship between variables. The population of this study were employees in the hospitality industry who were members of the PHRI (Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association) membership of 125 respondents. The sample size was selected 125 respondents using the slovin approach. Data collection was carried out by survey method by distributing questionnaires to respondents. The final number of questionnaires returned and used for data processing was 125 questionnaires because all respondents provided complete answers. Following the recommendation of Sekaran and Bougie (2010) that when questionnaire items are missed or when the questionnaire includes values that are not part of the original questionnaire, this questionnaire is rejected.

A sample of 125 is considered relevant according to Hair et al. (2010), and Kline (2015). This study used a cross-sectional questionnaire survey for data collection by distributing questions via google form and email. The consent form assured participants that their responses would be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

## RESULTS

### Respondent Profile

The profile of respondents in this study is mostly female as much as 70%, then 62% of all respondents are graduates of the Tourism Diploma then with the most age in the range of 26 - 32 years as much as 62%. And respondents who have contributed to work the most for 3 - 4 years with a percentage of 45%.

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**Table. 1. Profile Respondents**

| Demographic            | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------|-------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>          |       |            |
| Male                   | 38    | 30%        |
| Female                 | 87    | 70%        |
| <b>Education</b>       |       |            |
| High School            | 12    | 10%        |
| Diploma                | 78    | 62%        |
| Bachelor               | 35    | 28%        |
| <b>Age</b>             |       |            |
| 18 – 25 years          | 18    | 14%        |
| 26 – 32 years          | 78    | 62%        |
| 33 – 40 years          | 29    | 23%        |
| <b>Work Experience</b> |       |            |
| 1 – 2 years            | 16    | 13%        |
| 3 – 4 years            | 56    | 45%        |
| >5 years               | 53    | 42%        |

Source: Data in process, 2024

## Indicator Measurement

Indicator measurement (Outer Model) is carried out to see whether the indicators used can measure a latent variable validly and reliably. Table 1 shows that the outer loading value on all indicators meets the acceptance criteria with a value > 0.700 and the Average Variance Extracted value on all measurement indicators meets the acceptance criteria with a value greater than 0.50. With the achievement of the outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted values, it can be said that the measurement indicators are valid in measuring latent variables. From table 1 it is also known that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values on all indicators meet the acceptance criteria with a value greater than 0.70, meaning that all indicators can be said to be reliable to be used as measuring instruments in this study. The measurement parameters can be seen in the following table.

**Table 1. Validity and Reliability Measurement**

| Variabel           | Indikator | Outer Loadings | Average Variance Extracted | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Career Commitment  | CA1       | 0,766          | 0,514                      | 0,778            | 0,806                 |
|                    | CA2       | 0,741          |                            |                  |                       |
|                    | CA3       | 0,776          |                            |                  |                       |
|                    | CA4       | 0,762          |                            |                  |                       |
| Digital leadership | DL1       | 0,735          | 0,630                      | 0,834            | 0,871                 |
|                    | DL2       | 0,709          |                            |                  |                       |
|                    | DL3       | 0,883          |                            |                  |                       |
|                    | DL4       | 0,834          |                            |                  |                       |
| Work Engagement    | WE1       | 0,885          | 0,711                      | 0,791            | 0,880                 |
|                    | WE2       | 0,880          |                            |                  |                       |
|                    | WE3       | 0,758          |                            |                  |                       |

## Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination test aims to determine how much influence or role of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. In this test, the coefficient of determination on Career Commitment is 0.483. This means that Work Engagement

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and Digital Leadership can affect Career Commitment by 48.3%. While the coefficient of determination for Work Engagement is 0.257, meaning that Work Engagement can be influenced by Digital Leadership by 25.7%. The coefficient of determination for the causal relationship between exogenous variables and endogenous variables can be seen in the following table.

**Table 2. Coefficient of Determination**

| Variable          | R-square |
|-------------------|----------|
| Career Commitment | 0,483    |
| Work Engagement   | 0,257    |

### Model Causality Test

The hypothesis can be accepted when the t statistics value is greater than the t table. With a degree of freedom of 122 and a significance level of 5%, the t table value is 1.9796. In this test, all alternative hypotheses can be accepted because they have a t statistical value greater than the t table. For more clarity, the test data is presented in the following description:

1. Work Engagement variable has a positive effect on Career Commitment with a coefficient value of 0.392. Significance is indicated by the value of t count or t statistic greater than t table.
2. The Digital Leadership variable has a positive effect on Career Commitment with a coefficient value of 0.408. Significance is indicated by the t value or t statistic greater than the t table.
3. The Digital Leadership variable has a positive effect on Work Engagement with a coefficient value of 0.507. Significance is indicated by the t value or t statistic greater than the t table.

**Table 3. Model Causality Test**

| Model Causality                         | Original Sample | T Statistics | P Values |
|---|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| Work Engagement --> Career Commitment   | 0,392           | 4,211        | 0,000    |
| Digital Leadership--> Career Commitment | 0,408           | 5,045        | 0,000    |
| Digital Leadership--> Work Engagement   | 0,507           | 6,710        | 0,000    |

### Mediator Variable Test

This test is conducted to determine the role of mediator variables in providing a mediating effect for the causal relationship between exogenous variables and endogenous variables. From the research results, it is found that the Work Engagement variable can be a mediator that has a significant effect on the relationship between Digital Leadership and Career Commitment, this can be seen from the sobel test value of 3.563 which is greater than z table 1.96 with a probability value of 0.000 smaller than 0.05.

**Table 4. Specific Indirect Effects**

| Variabel  | Specific Indirect Effects | Sobel Test Statistics | p     |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Digital Leadership--> Work Engagement --> Career Commitment | 0,199                     | 3,563                 | 0,000 |

Based on these findings, it can be seen that Work Engagement can play a significant role as an intervening variable or mediator variable in the relationship between Digital Leadership and Career Commitment with a significance level of 5%. The measurement Model in this study is shown in Figure 1 as follows.

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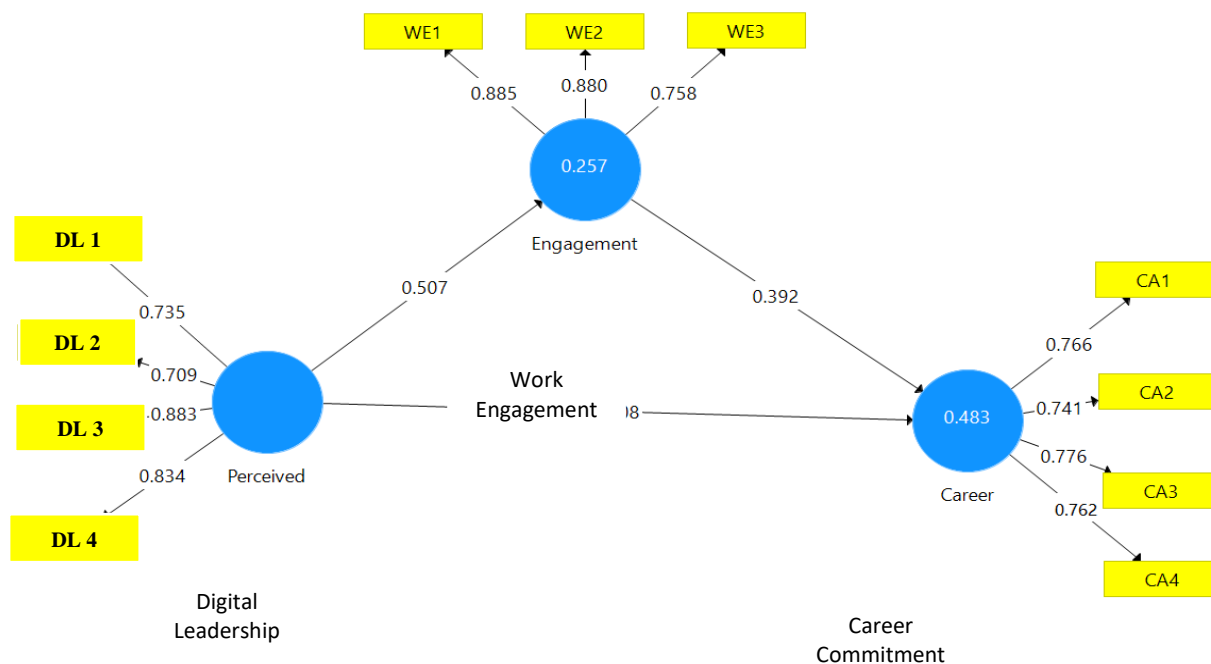


Figure 1. Research Model

## DISCUSSION

Specifically, this study aims to examine the relationship between digital leadership, work engagement, and career commitment among digital start-up employees in West Java Province. The results of hypothesis testing indicate that all hypotheses proposed are accepted. First of all, the researcher looks at the role of digital leadership as an antecedent of work engagement and career commitment. The findings show that Digital Leadership variables affect work engagement and career commitment, both with positive and significant values (H1 and H2 accepted). This shows that the presence of Digital Leadership perceived by employees will make them increase work engagement and career commitment.

In digital leadership, employees build perceptions of the organization's treatment of them during work. When employees feel that they are valued and respected in the organization, they will reciprocate this by showing positive behavior characterized by work engagement and career commitment. Employees will show passion, dedication, and earnestness in doing their work. In addition, employees will also have a higher commitment to their career in the organization itself. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Eisenberger et al. (2020; Imran et al., 2020; Stinglhamber et al., 2020).

Furthermore, researchers tested the direct effect of work engagement on employee career commitment. The results of hypothesis testing indicate that there is a positive and significant effect of work engagement on career commitment (H3 accepted). Therefore, it can be understood that the presence of work engagement in employees will increase their career commitment. When employees have an attachment to their work, they will have positive emotions such as happiness, interest, enthusiasm, inspiration, and contentment at work. This will make individuals able to develop themselves, including achieving higher careers, thus having commitment to their careers.

Finally, the results of testing the fourth hypothesis regarding the mediating role of work engagement also indicated significant results (H4 accepted). In this case, work engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between Digital Leadership and career commitment. This mediating effect is included in partial mediation, because perceived organizational is able to affect career commitment directly. Support from the organization felt by employees will make them have positive emotions towards work, and be able to have commitment to their careers.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of hypothesis testing and discussion, this study shows that digital start-up employees who belong to generation Z and millennials will have commitment to their careers when they feel supported by the organization and attached to their work. This support from the organization makes them feel valued, inspired, passionate and dedicated at work, and motivated to be committed to their careers in that organization. In addition, employees who have attachment to their work will also show seriousness in doing their work, completing the tasks assigned, and developing themselves to achieve a higher career

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level. For this reason, companies need to provide full support for employees to develop their potential which leads to career commitment, because in the long run this will also have a positive impact on the sustainability of the company.

This study has several limitations. First, regarding the research sample, this research was conducted on digital start-ups in West Java with a sample size of 125 respondents. Although this number has met the requirements for hypothesis testing, a larger sample size from a more diverse range of companies will make the results more robust and comprehensive. It will also ensure the generalizability of the research results. Furthermore, this study has also not considered certain conditions that might weaken or strengthen the influence between the variables tested. Future researchers are advised to use moderating variables to better understand the context that affects employee career commitment.

### **FINDINGS**

This study highlights that organizational support and work attachment are key factors influencing career commitment among Generation Z and millennial employees in digital start-ups. Employees who feel valued, inspired, passionate, and dedicated as a result of organizational support are more motivated to commit to their careers. Additionally, employees who are strongly attached to their work exhibit greater seriousness in performing tasks, achieving goals, and striving for career advancement. The findings suggest that companies should prioritize providing full support for employees' development, as this not only fosters career commitment but also positively impacts the organization's long-term sustainability.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This research is subject to several limitations. First, the study's sample was restricted to digital start-ups in West Java, comprising 125 respondents. While this sample size satisfies the requirements for hypothesis testing, expanding the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of companies would enhance the robustness and generalizability of the results. Second, this study did not account for moderating factors that may influence the relationships between variables. Future research is encouraged to incorporate moderating variables to gain deeper insights into the contextual factors affecting employee career commitment.

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