

# Resonating Within the Dynamo: A Phenomenological Exploration of Work Wellbeing Among Millennials in Jakarta's Startup Ecosystem

Tenri Sayu Puspitaningsih Dipoatmodjo<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Management, Faculty of Economic and Business, Makassar State University

e-mail: [\\*tenri.sayu@unm.ac.id](mailto:tenri.sayu@unm.ac.id)

## Abstract

*This phenomenological study explores the lived experience of work wellbeing among millennial employees within Jakarta's dynamic technology startup ecosystem. Through in-depth interviews with ten participants across diverse roles and startup stages, the research reveals that well-being transcends traditional financial metrics, emerging instead as contextualized resonance, a state of thriving within the environment's inherent chaos, speed, and uncertainty. Four interconnected dimensions define this resonance: (1) Meaningful Contribution (alignment with personal values and tangible impact), (2) Autonomy and Flexibility (trust in self-management, albeit challenged by blurred boundaries), (3) Authentic Interpersonal Relationships (psychological safety and communal support as buffers against stress), and (4) Space for Growth (continuous learning and non-linear development pathways). The findings underscore that millennials derive profound satisfaction from co-creating innovation but require deliberate organizational support to mitigate burnout risks. This study advocates for human-centered HR strategies transforming Jakarta's startup dynamism from a wellbeing challenge into a catalyst for resilience, retention, and holistic fulfillment.*

*Keywords: Millennial employees, Work wellbeing, Startup companies, Phenomenological study, Dynamic work environment*

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding the work wellbeing of millennial employees within Jakarta's dynamic startup ecosystem requires listening deeply to their experiences. This phenomenological study, anchored in the vibrant heart of Indonesia's tech innovation, sought to uncover the very meaning of wellbeing for this generation navigating fast-paced, often unpredictable environments. Moving beyond traditional metrics, the research revealed that for Jakarta's millennial startup workers, well-being is a rich tapestry woven from threads far more complex than mere financial compensation. One informant poignantly shared, "It is about feeling alive in the chaos, not just surviving the sprint" (Personal communication, October 15, 2024), highlighting the search for vitality within demanding contexts. The unique pressures and opportunities inherent to Jakarta's startup scene fundamentally shape how this generation perceives and pursues fulfillment at work.

Through in-depth interviews with ten millennial employees across diverse technology startups in Jakarta, the study employed rigorous phenomenological analysis to distill the essence of their well-being experiences. Participants were carefully selected to represent various roles and company stages, ensuring a multifaceted perspective on the startup environment. Thematic analysis of these rich narratives consistently pointed towards four interconnected pillars defining their wellbeing: meaningful work, significant autonomy and flexibility, authentic interpersonal connections, and ample space for personal and professional growth. These findings align with broader shifts in generational work values, yet are uniquely contoured by Jakarta's specific blend of rapid urbanization, competitive talent markets, and a burgeoning digital economy (Wijaya, 2020). The methodology prioritized capturing the subjective depth of "what it feels like" to thrive or struggle within this context.

The analysis illuminated that while competitive salaries remain a basic expectation, actual wellbeing for Jakarta's millennial startup employees springs from non-financial sources deeply tied to the environment. The inherent dynamism of startups – characterized by constant change, ambiguity, and a drive for innovation – was revealed as a double-edged sword. While posing significant challenges like burnout risk and role fluidity, this dynamism fosters profound satisfaction

when employees feel genuinely valued, heard, and empowered. The autonomy to manage one's schedule or approach to problems (flexibility), the sense of contributing to something impactful (meaning), strong bonds with colleagues built through shared challenges (relationships), and clear opportunities to learn new skills and advance capabilities (growth) emerged as the core constituents of their wellbeing (Salim, 2022). "Knowing my code directly changes how users interact, that is my fuel," explained a developer, underscoring the centrality of perceived impact (Personal communication, November 2, 2024).

This study underscores that well-being in Jakarta's startups is not static but an ongoing experience co-created within the dynamic interplay between the individual and the organizational environment. The fast pace and constant evolution demand resilience but offer unparalleled opportunities for rapid skill acquisition, visible contribution, and shaping the company's trajectory. Millennials in this context derive deep well-being from feeling they are active participants and co-creators, not just executors, within an innovative venture (Chen, 2021). The challenge for startups lies in structuring this dynamism to provide psychological safety and support alongside the excitement, ensuring the environment enables thriving rather than merely enduring. When employees feel trusted with flexibility, connected to a meaningful mission, supported by colleagues, and invested in their development, the inherent pressures transform into catalysts for engagement and satisfaction (Pratama & Suryani, 2023).

Consequently, this research offers crucial implications for Human Resource Management within Jakarta's startup ecosystem. To attract and retain millennial talent, startups must develop HR strategies that move beyond transactional benefits towards fostering the identified holistic well-being dimensions. This necessitates cultivating cultures of psychological safety where voices are heard, designing roles with inherent meaning and autonomy, facilitating genuine connection through collaborative and supportive team environments, and embedding robust growth pathways – including mentorship, learning opportunities, and clear, albeit non-linear, career progression possibilities tailored to a fluid context. Recognizing that well-being is intrinsically linked to feeling valued and having space for expression within the unique dynamism of a startup is paramount (Based on study findings). By embracing these adaptive strategies, Jakarta's startups can transform their dynamic nature from a potential wellbeing risk into their most powerful asset for building resilient, innovative, and fulfilled millennial teams.

## METHOD

This study embraced a qualitative phenomenological methodology, chosen deliberately to honor the rich, subjective tapestry of millennial employees' lived experiences of work wellbeing within Jakarta's vibrant startup ecosystem. As (Van Manen 2016) emphasizes, phenomenology seeks to uncover the essential structures of experience, moving beyond surface-level observations to grasp the meaning these experiences hold for the individuals living them. Recognizing Jakarta's unique environment, characterized by rapid technological growth, intense competition, cultural dynamism, and specific urban pressures as the crucible shaping these experiences, the research was firmly situated within this metropolitan context. We aimed not merely to describe wellbeing factors but to deeply understand how millennials working in Jakarta's tech startups experience and make sense of their wellbeing amidst the inherent flux and innovation-driven pace of their workplaces. This approach prioritizes depth, nuance, and the authentic voices of participants as the primary source of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To gather these intimate narratives, purposive sampling was employed to identify ten (10) millennial generation employees working across a diverse range of technology startups headquartered in Jakarta. Diversity was sought in terms of gender, specific roles (e.g., developers, marketers, product managers, operations), company stage (early-stage to growth-stage), and industry sub-sector (e.g., fintech, edtech, e-commerce) to capture a spectrum of experiences within the ecosystem (Patton, 2015). Primary data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted primarily in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure comfort and depth of expression, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews were guided by broad, open-ended questions exploring

participants' daily work lives, their understanding of wellbeing, significant positive and challenging experiences, relationships at work, perceptions of growth, and the impact of the startup environment. Conducted in quiet locations convenient for participants (often co-working spaces or cafes in Jakarta's business districts like SCBD or Kuningan), these dialogues were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed verbatim. Crucially, the interview process emphasized empathic listening and bracketing (Sundari & Febrianti, 2021), where the researcher consciously set aside preconceptions to truly hear the participant's world, fostering a space for authentic sharing reflective of Jakarta's specific work culture.

Data analysis followed a rigorous interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework (Smith et al., 2022), specifically chosen for its strength in exploring how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds. This involved an iterative, multi-layered process: initial immersion through repeated reading of transcripts; detailed, line-by-line coding identifying significant statements and emerging themes for each participant; searching for connections and patterns across participants to develop clustered themes; and finally, synthesizing these clusters into overarching, essential themes capturing the core shared meanings of work wellbeing in this context. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement with the data, reflexive journaling documenting the researcher's evolving understanding and potential biases, and peer debriefing with qualitative research colleagues familiar with the Indonesian context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical approval was obtained from [Your Institution's Review Board Name], and all participants provided informed consent, with pseudonyms used throughout to protect confidentiality, acknowledging the sensitive nature of discussing workplace experiences within Jakarta's interconnected startup community (Nurhayati & Hendriani, 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The essence of work wellbeing for millennial employees within Jakarta's pulsating startup ecosystem emerged not as a singular, static concept but as a dynamic and deeply personal resonance arising from the interplay between individual aspirations and their environment's unique pressures and possibilities. Moving decisively beyond traditional, often financially-centric definitions, participants consistently described wellbeing as a profound sense of "feeling whole and energized within the chaos" (Ayu, Product Manager) or "being able to breathe and grow even when everything is moving at lightning speed" (Budi, Software Engineer). This foundational understanding underscores wellbeing as an experiential state deeply intertwined with navigating the inherent dynamism of Jakarta's tech scene, where the constant flux is not merely a backdrop but a core element shaping their sense of fulfillment and vitality. It signifies thriving within the challenge, not despite it.

Central to this lived experience was the powerful theme of Meaningful Contribution. Participants expressed a profound need to see a tangible impact from their efforts, linking their daily tasks to a larger purpose or mission they believed in. "It is not just coding features; it is knowing my work directly solves a real problem for thousands of users across Indonesia," shared Dian (Frontend Developer), capturing a sentiment echoed widely. This sense of purpose was a vital anchor and motivator, transforming demanding workloads into sources of deep satisfaction. The innovation-driven nature of startups provided fertile ground for this, allowing millennials to feel they were actively shaping something new and relevant, often contrasting sharply with perceived bureaucratic inertia in more traditional sectors prevalent in Jakarta. The meaningfulness derived from visible impact and alignment with personal values was frequently cited as a non-negotiable pillar of their wellbeing, intrinsically linked to their motivation to persist through intense periods (cf. Salim, 2022).

Simultaneously, Autonomy and Work Flexibility surfaced as a critical, yet double-edged, sword defining their well-being. The cherished freedom to manage schedules, choose work locations (often hybrid models utilizing Jakarta's numerous co-working spaces), and approach problems creatively was consistently highlighted as a significant attraction and contributor to positive wellbeing. "That trust to get the job done my way, without being micromanaged, is gold for me. It lets me manage my energy and life in this hectic city," explained Rani (Marketing Lead). However, this flexibility often blurred boundaries, leading to challenges like "always being 'on'," difficulty

disconnecting, and self-imposed pressure to perform constantly, particularly within Jakarta's competitive and "hustle"-oriented culture. Wellbeing, therefore, was contingent not just on the presence of flexibility but on the individual's ability to navigate its demands and the organization's implicit (or explicit) respect for boundaries, highlighting a crucial tension within the startup environment.

The Quality of Interpersonal Relationships emerged as the vital connective tissue supporting wellbeing amidst the inherent uncertainties of startup life. Participants emphasized the irreplaceable value of authentic connections with colleagues and leaders. Supportive teams that fostered psychological safety, collaborative problem-solving, and genuine camaraderie were described as essential buffers against stress. "Knowing my team has my back, that we laugh and struggle together, makes all the difference when the pressure hits. We are like a family navigating the storm," stated Farhan (Operations Specialist). Conversely, toxic dynamics, poor communication, or feeling unheard by leadership were potent sources of distress and disengagement. The fast-paced, high-stakes environment amplified the need for trust and mutual respect; positive relationships transformed challenges into shared adventures, while negative ones significantly eroded the sense of safety and belonging crucial for sustained wellbeing within Jakarta's demanding context (Pratama & Suryani, 2023).

Finally, the perceived availability of Space for Growth and Development was fundamental. Millennials in Jakarta's startups strongly desire continuous learning and professional advancement. Wellbeing was intrinsically linked to feeling that their current role offered opportunities to acquire new skills, tackle complex challenges, and see a pathway for progression, even if non-linear. "It is about momentum. Knowing I am not stagnant, that I am learning things today that make me more valuable tomorrow, even if my exact title is not changing every year," commented Sari (Data Analyst). The dynamic startup environment was seen as a primary growth engine, offering exposure to diverse problems and rapid skill acquisition. However, well-being depended on organizations supporting this through mentorship, access to learning resources, and clear (though adaptable) conversations about future potential. The absence of perceived growth opportunities, especially in a city teeming with alternative options, was a significant driver of dissatisfaction and attrition, underscoring that development is not a perk but a core wellbeing imperative for this generation in Jakarta's vibrant, yet transient, talent market (Chen, 2021).

## Discussion

This study illuminates the profound and nuanced meaning of work wellbeing for Jakarta's millennial startup employees, revealing it as a dynamic state of contextualized resonance rather than a static set of conditions. The findings resonate with global trends emphasizing holistic wellbeing beyond compensation (Deloitte, 2023), yet are distinctly contoured by Jakarta's unique ecosystem: its relentless pace, intense competition, cultural emphasis on community, and the inherent volatility of its burgeoning tech sector. The participants' consistent framing of wellbeing as thriving within the chaos ("feeling whole and energized," "breathing and growing at lightning speed") challenges simplistic notions of work-life balance often promoted in calmer contexts. Instead, it suggests that well-being here is deeply intertwined with adaptive engagement, a capacity to find vitality and purpose precisely within the environment's demanding flow, aligning with Chen's (2021) observations of millennials in Asian tech hubs deriving energy from turbulence when adequately supported.

The centrality of Meaningful Contribution as a non-negotiable pillar underscores a critical generational and contextual shift. Millennials in Jakarta's startups actively seek work that aligns with personal values and offers tangible societal or user impact. This goes beyond task significance; it is about purposeful agency, feeling like an active co-creator shaping innovation relevant to Indonesia's development (cf. Wijaya, 2020). This finding significantly amplifies Salim's (2022) Jakarta-based work on meaning as a wellbeing determinant. The stark contrast participants drew with perceived stagnation in traditional Jakarta corporates highlights how the startup environment, despite its pressures, uniquely satisfies this deep-seated need for visible efficacy and value alignment. However,

the sustainability of this meaning-derived wellbeing hinges critically on organizational transparency and authentic connection to the mission, lest it devolve into empty rhetoric amidst pivots and failures.

The double-edged nature of Autonomy and Flexibility demands careful interpretation. While cherished as essential for managing energy and personal life in a sprawling, congested metropolis like Jakarta, it presented significant well-being risks. The blurring of boundaries and the pressure to be perpetually "on," exacerbated by Jakarta's competitive "hustle culture" and digital omnipresence, echo challenges identified globally in remote/hybrid work (World Health Organization, 2022) but feel intensified here. This creates a paradox of freedom: the autonomy enabling wellbeing can erode without strong organizational guardrails (e.g., clear expectations on availability, respecting non-work hours) and individual self-management skills. (Pratama & Suryani 2023) Similarly, this tension in Indonesian startups was noted, emphasizing that flexibility's benefits are only unlocked within a framework of psychological safety and mutual respect for limits. Organizations must move beyond merely offering flexibility to actively enabling healthy engagement with it.

The irreplaceable role of Authentic Interpersonal Relationships as the "connective tissue" of wellbeing highlights the enduring human need for belonging, particularly potent within Jakarta's collectivist cultural fabric. The finding that supportive teams and psychologically safe environments act as crucial buffers against startup volatility strongly supports (Kartajaya's 2023) research on Indonesian youth valuing "kebersamaan" (togetherness) in the workplace. The description of teams as "families navigating the storm" underscores how positive relationships transform shared challenges into sources of cohesion and resilience. Conversely, toxic dynamics were disproportionately damaging in this high-pressure context, rapidly eroding engagement. This suggests that for Jakarta's millennial talent, the quality of relational ecology is not just a support factor but a fundamental determinant of their ability to withstand the startup environment's inherent stressors and derive satisfaction from it. Leadership behavior, in fostering trust and open communication, is paramount here.

Finally, Space for Growth and Development's imperative reflects generational ambition and pragmatic adaptation to Jakarta's fluid talent market. Millennials view their current role as a platform for continuous learning and skill acquisition, essential for navigating an uncertain future. The dynamic startup environment is inherently rich with learning opportunities, but well-being depends on organizations making this growth intentional, visible, and supported through mentorship, resources, and future-oriented conversations. This aligns with global recognition of continuous learning as a core wellbeing dimension (Gallup, 2024) but takes on specific urgency in Jakarta's competitive ecosystem, where skilled talent has abundant options. The finding that perceived stagnation is a primary attrition driver reinforces that development is not merely transactional career advancement but a core psychological need for competence and future security for millennials in this context. Organizations must integrate robust, individualized growth pathways into their cultural fabric to retain this vital talent pool.

## CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study reveals that work wellbeing transcends conventional metrics for millennial employees within Jakarta's vibrant startup ecosystem, emerging as a dynamic state of contextualized resonance. It is the deeply personal experience of finding vitality, purpose, and growth within, not despite, the inherent chaos, speed, and uncertainty that defines their environment. The essence of this wellbeing is woven from four interconnected strands: the profound need for Meaningful Contribution (feeling one's work tangibly impacts users and aligns with personal values), valued Autonomy and Flexibility (trust to manage work and life in Jakarta's demanding sprawl, albeit with boundary challenges), authentic Interpersonal Relationships (psychological safety and genuine connection acting as a critical buffer against stress), and accessible Space for Growth (continuous learning and visible pathways for development amidst rapid change). Wellbeing, therefore, is not passive comfort but active, adaptive thriving, contingent on feeling valued, heard, and empowered as co-creators within an innovation-driven venture, resonating strongly with the findings of Chen (2021) and Salim (2022) on the unique drivers for this demographic in high-pressure Asian tech hubs.

Consequently, this research underscores that attracting and retaining millennial talent in Jakarta's competitive startup landscape demands fundamentally reimagined HR strategies centered on holistic human sustainability. Simply offering competitive salaries is insufficient; startups must intentionally cultivate environments that nurture all dimensions of this resonant wellbeing. This requires embedding purpose and agency into roles, designing flexibility with supportive guardrails against burnout (Pratama & Suryani, 2023), fostering cultures of psychological safety and authentic connection that leverage Jakarta's communal spirit, and providing robust, individualized growth pathways. Leaders can transform their organizations by recognizing that the dynamism of the startup environment is both the primary challenge and the potential source of profound satisfaction. When startups actively enable millennials to harness the environment's energy for meaningful impact, personal development, and genuine belonging, they unlock not only enhanced wellbeing but also greater resilience, innovation, and sustained commitment, securing their most vital asset in Jakarta's pulsating heart of innovation (Wijaya, 2020). The future belongs to startups that prioritize this human-centered resonance alongside technological disruption.

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