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Leadership Styles and Their Influence on Gen Z's Employee Behaviour

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Introduction

Generation Z (born ~1995–2010) is rapidly becoming a significant segment of the workforce, bringing distinct values and expectations shaped by technological ubiquity and recent global events. Unlike predecessor cohorts, Gen Z employees tend to prioritize collaboration, flexibility, and work–life balance, seeking workplaces that support personal well-being alongside professional growth. They value open communication and teamwork, having been raised as digital natives comfortable with constant connectivity and immediate feedback. In particular, this cohort is more vocal about mental health and personal fulfillment at work. Surveys indicate that new generations entering the workforce "are expecting that an organization provides the climate and culture of positive well-being". The COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with Gen Z's entry into employment, has only amplified these expectations. Post-pandemic, companies worldwide have realized that employee well-being and resilience are not mere perks but essential components of organizational sustainability. As one global report noted, *"wellbeing is just as important now if workforces are to remain resilient"*. Organizations are thus striving to weave well-being into the fabric of workplace culture, with 83% adopting well-being strategies in the last two years. In sum, Gen Z's emergence in a post-COVID era has put resilience and wellness squarely at the center of the modern employment value proposition.

The growing influence of Gen Z is particularly evident in high-pressure, target-driven jobs (e.g. sales, business development) where this generation is taking on front-line roles. These jobs are traditionally characterized by intense performance metrics, quotas, and fast-paced competition – conditions that can strain work–life balance and mental health. Leaders in sales-oriented environments now face a formidable challenge: how to motivate Gen Z employees to meet ambitious targets without alienating

them or triggering burnout. On one hand, Gen Z workers are described as pragmatic and driven by purposeful work; on the other, they are quick to disengage if a job negatively impacts their well-being. Turnover studies show unmet expectations for flexibility and growth can prompt Gen Z to leave organizations. Notably, recent reports label Gen Z as potentially "the loneliest, least resilient demographic alive today", with a sizeable share reporting anxiety and mental distress on a weekly basis. For example, in one U.S. survey over 40% of Gen Z workers felt depressed or anxious at least a few times per week. In high-stress fields like sales, such fragility can undermine performance and exacerbate attrition. Indeed, resilience – the capacity to bounce back from setbacks – is emerging as a critical success factor in sales teams. The link between resilience and performance in sales is well-documented: more resilient teams sustain higher success rates and are better equipped to handle rejection and pressure. This puts the onus on leadership to create an environment that bolsters young employees' resilience and keeps them engaged despite relentless targets. Managers can no longer rely on "sink or swim" tactics; rather, they must actively support the well-being of Gen Z staff to maintain morale and productivity. In essence, the post-pandemic workforce expects leaders who care about people as much as profits, and nowhere is this more evident than in demanding, goal-driven roles.

All these shifts converge to pose a pressing *research question*: How can leadership effectively foster resilience and well-being among Gen Z employees in high-pressure, target-driven jobs? Existing research underscores that positive working conditions and support are associated with better contentment, performance, and retention of Gen Z employees. However, there is a knowledge gap in understanding the specific leadership behaviors that make a difference for this generation's psychological outcomes. This study argues that leadership through the lens of Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory can be transformative for Gen Z employee outcomes. High-quality LMX – characterized by trust, support, and mutual respect – may give Gen Z workers the relational support they need to thrive. We propose that when leaders provide emotional support, help manage workloads, assist in problem solving, and offer coaching (while managing their own stress), they build stronger exchanges that enhance employee resilience and well-being. In the wake of COVID-19 and generational change, leadership approaches that emphasize individualized support and strong dyadic relationships are likely to yield dividends in employee morale and performance. By examining these dynamics in a sample of 523 Gen Z sales employees, this paper aims to shed light on how LMX-driven leadership behaviors can buffer stress, nurture resilience, and ultimately improve the well-being of young employees. The findings illustrate that leadership is not just about driving results – it is about cultivating an environment where Gen Z can prosper in the face of challenges.

Literature Review

Gen Z Employees in the Workplace

As the newest entrants to the workforce, **Generation Z** brings unique attitudes and needs that differentiate them from older cohorts. Growing evidence from global surveys and reviews shows that Gen Z employees **prioritize work–life balance and personal well-being** to an unprecedented degree. Unlike Baby Boomers or Gen X who often prized job security or pay, Gen Z is more likely to value an employer that supports mental health, offers flexibility, and aligns with their personal values. A recent scoping review identified "job expectations" and "leadership style" as central themes for Gen Z in the workplace, noting that this generation expects empathetic leadership and a positive work climate to stay engaged. Gen Z has grown up amid economic uncertainty, social media, and now a pandemic, which has made them **openly cognizant of mental health and burnout risks**. They tend to be pragmatic yet insist on meaningful work and **psychological safety** on the job. For instance, Lazányi and Bilan (2017) found that Gen Z employees place relatively higher importance on a supportive environment and personal growth opportunities than prior generations. Similarly, Deloitte's Global Gen Z Survey (2022) reported that a large share of Gen Z respondents have left roles due to **work-related stress or mental health concerns**, reflecting their unwillingness to tolerate toxic work conditions. Indeed, one study branded Gen Z as "the **anxious generation**," observing they are more likely to report emotional strain and to expect employers to actively address it.

Importantly, Gen Z's orientation toward **collaboration and teamwork** is another hallmark. Having been educated in highly collaborative, project-based learning environments, Gen Z often thrives on peer interaction and continuous feedback. They value **transparent communication** and egalitarian leader–follower relationships. Hierarchical, autocratic management styles generally do not resonate with this group; instead, they respond to managers who act as **coaches or mentors**, guiding rather than just directing. A multi-country study by Zehetner et al. (2022) found that Gen Z overwhelmingly **prefers transformational leadership over transactional or authoritarian styles**, seeking inspiration and personal attention from their supervisors. When these expectations are unmet – for example, if a job provides no development or the boss is distant – Gen Z employees quickly become disengaged or start eyeing an exit. Thus, managers today face a new paradigm where **meeting the emotional and developmental needs** of young workers is integral to retaining them. This is especially true in **high-pressure roles** such as sales, finance, or consulting, where Gen Z's tolerance for old-school "sink or swim" management is low. Companies that ignore these generational shifts risk higher turnover and

lower engagement. On the flip side, organizations that adapt – by fostering inclusive cultures, offering flexibility, and training leaders in supportive management – stand to unlock Gen Z's considerable potential (e.g. tech-savvy innovation, resilience through uncertainty). In summary, Gen Z employees present both a challenge and opportunity: they demand more from leadership in terms of empathy, balance, and purpose, but when those needs are met, they can be highly **engaged, resilient, and productive contributors**.

Resilience and Well-Being in the Post-COVID Workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a watershed moment for workplace dynamics, thrusting **employee resilience and well-being** to the forefront of management concerns. The crisis underscored that in times of disruption, an organization's success hinges on its employees' ability to cope, adapt, and maintain mental health. In the pandemic's aftermath, many employees – Gen Z included – reassessed their life priorities and began to expect greater support for their well-being from employers. Companies have responded: global surveys show a sharp rise in formal well-being programs and resources introduced since 2020. Crucially, well-being is now recognized as tightly linked to **organizational resilience**. According to Aon's 2022–23 Global Wellbeing Survey, organizations that improved support for employee well-being and work/life balance saw up to **55% better performance outcomes**, and employees who felt their well-being was cared for were 1.5 times more likely to stay with the company. These findings illustrate a paradigm shift: nurturing employees' mental and physical health is not just altruism; it is a strategic imperative for retaining talent and sustaining performance in volatile times.

Two concepts are particularly salient: **resilience** and **well-being**. **Employee resilience** refers to the capacity to withstand, recover, and even grow from work-related adversities. It involves adaptability, persistence, and effective coping when faced with stress or setbacks. High resilience acts as a psychological buffer – resilient employees experience less negative impact from stress and can "bounce back" more quickly, maintaining productivity and positive morale. Research has demonstrated that resilience has protective effects against burnout and distress. For example, a recent study found that employees high in resilience had significantly lower levels of perceived stress and burnout, even under high workload conditions. Notably, resilience can be **developed and supported** by workplace practices. Interventions such as resilience training, mentorship, and supportive leadership have been shown to improve employees' coping skills and psychological capital (hope, efficacy, optimism). Especially in a post-COVID context of constant change and uncertainty, building a resilient workforce is regarded as essential for agility and sustained performance.

Employee well-being, on the other hand, is a broader construct encompassing an individual's mental, emotional, and physical health state as it relates to their work life. It is often viewed in terms of subjective well-being – positive affect, low negative affect, and life satisfaction – as well as work-specific outcomes like job satisfaction and engagementfrontiersin.orgfrontiersin.org. High employee well-being implies that workers generally feel happy, content, and free from excessive stress or mental strain in their jobs. Numerous studies link **well-being to key organizational outcomes**: happier employees tend to exhibit higher work engagement and job performance and lower intentions to quitfrontiersin.org. For instance, Bakker and Oerlemans (2011) found that employees with elevated psychological well-being were more proactive and showed optimal job performancefrontiersin.org. Conversely, poor well-being (manifesting as burnout, anxiety, or depression) is associated with absenteeism, errors, and turnover. The pandemic period, rife with anxiety and blurred work-home boundaries, elevated concerns about well-being. It also broadened the definition – forward-thinking companies now consider not only physical safety, but also **emotional and social well-being** as integral. Terms like *"employee mental health"* and *"psychological safety"* have become commonplace in HR discourse. All generations benefit from improved well-being, but surveys indicate **younger employees (Gen Z and Millennials) demand it most**, expecting wellness to be "part of their day" and embedded in workplace culture.

In summary, the post-COVID workplace has cemented resilience and well-being as core pillars of sustainable workforce management. For Gen Z employees, who are highly attuned to these issues, a job environment that strengthens their resilience and safeguards their well-being is not just desirable – it is **non-negotiable**. This sets the stage for a closer look at how leadership, through specific behaviors, can cultivate these outcomes.

Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory as a Theoretical Lens

To understand how leadership can impact Gen Z employees' resilience and well-being, this study employs **Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory**. LMX is a relationship-based approach to leadership that centers on the quality of the **dyadic exchange** between a leader and each follower. The theory posits that rather than adopting a uniform style for everyone, leaders naturally form differentiated relationships: some high-quality (characterized by trust, mutual respect, and loyalty – often termed the "in-group"), and some lower-quality (more formal, transactional "out-group" relationships). High-quality LMX relationships typically involve **greater support and resource exchange** – leaders provide more information, mentoring, and attention to in-group members, who in turn reciprocate with higher

commitment and performance. By contrast, low LMX is limited to the basic employment contract (low trust, minimal support). Decades of research have linked **LMX quality to numerous employee outcomes**. Meta-analyses have found that LMX correlates positively with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and job performance, and negatively with turnover intentions and role stress. For instance, Gerstner and Day's (1997) classic meta-analysis showed a **strong positive relationship between LMX quality and job satisfaction**, as well as significant links to performance and lower employee role conflict. A more recent meta-analysis by Dulebohn et al. (2012) confirmed LMX as a robust predictor of desirable outcomes across 290 samples. High LMX has also been associated with better well-being indicators – one study found it **improves work engagement and life satisfaction** among employees. In short, **LMX provides a well-validated framework** to examine how the nuances of leader–employee relationships influence personal and work outcomes.

LMX theory is particularly well-suited for the present investigation because it emphasizes **individualized support and social exchange**, which align closely with Gen Z's expectations. In a high-LMX relationship, a leader acts more like a mentor or coach, offering personalized feedback, understanding employee needs, and accommodating individual circumstances. This maps onto what Gen Z employees reportedly seek from managers (personal attention, empathy, and development opportunities). Moreover, high-quality LMX is inherently a **resource-rich relationship**: subordinates in the in-group receive not only tangible resources (preferred tasks, scheduling flexibility) but also intangible resources such as trust, esteem, and **psychosocial support**. From a social exchange perspective, these resources fulfill employees' socio-emotional needs, fostering a sense of obligation and loyalty in return (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). A key insight is that LMX relationships can be **transformational** at the individual level – Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) argued that mature LMX relations go beyond simple exchanges and can elevate followers' motivation and growth. In fact, some scholars note conceptual overlaps between high LMX and transformational leadership (both entail individualized consideration and development). However, LMX is distinguished by its focus on **personal benefit and well-being of the follower**, as opposed to just collective goals. As Unler Öz (2013) observed, *"LMX is more beneficial for employee career-related outcomes and well-being, while transformational leadership is more engaged in building collective effectiveness."*. This highlights LMX's relevance for outcomes like resilience and personal wellness – high-LMX leaders are invested in each employee's growth and welfare, which can directly bolster that employee's capacity to cope and thrive.

In the context of Gen Z in demanding roles, LMX theory implies that improving the **leader–employee relationship quality** is a pathway to better outcomes. A leader who cultivates **trust and close rapport**

with a Gen Z team member is likely to gain insight into that individual's stressors, strengths, and developmental needs. This enables more effective **tailored support**, such as adjusting workloads when the employee is overwhelmed or providing encouragement after a setback. By contrast, in a low-LMX scenario, the leader may remain unaware of or indifferent to the employee's struggles, leaving the employee to fend for themselves. High LMX thus can act as a conduit for resilience-building: the leader serves as a secure base and resource provider, helping the employee navigate challenges. The **norm of reciprocity** further suggests that when employees feel genuinely supported by their leader, they reciprocate with greater dedication and potentially a willingness to endure difficulties (i.e., resilience). Overall, LMX provides a rich theoretical lens because it encompasses both the **behaviors** a leader engages in (e.g. support, coaching) and the **relationship outcomes** (trust, loyalty) that mediate those behaviors' effects on the employee. Next, we detail specific leadership behaviors – conceptualized under the LMX framework – that are posited to influence Gen Z employees' resilience and well-being.

Emotional Support from Leaders

Emotional support refers to a leader's behaviors that provide empathy, understanding, and caring to employees. It involves recognizing employees' feelings, showing compassion for their problems, and creating an atmosphere where individuals feel **valued and heard**. In House's classic typology of social support (1981), emotional support is defined as "the ability to turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress, leading the person to feel cared for". In the workplace, a supervisor's emotional support might include listening non-judgmentally to an employee's work frustrations, expressing concern for their well-being, or offering encouragement and reassurance when performance pressures mount. Research consistently shows that **supervisor emotional support is a strong determinant of employee satisfaction and mental health**. For example, a multilevel study by Searle et al. (2011) found that employees who perceived higher emotional support from their manager reported significantly less job stress and higher job satisfaction than those with unsupportive managers. Emotional support from leaders can act as a **social balm**, reducing the impact of workplace stressors by making employees feel they are not alone in coping with challenges. A recent study of IT employees in India demonstrated that supervisor emotional support helped buffer the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on employees' health and well-being. In that study, employees with supportive supervisors maintained better well-being even when experiencing high burnout, whereas those without such support saw steep drops in well-being. This aligns with the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model**, which views emotional support as a key job resource that can replenish emotional energy and protect against strain.

Under an LMX lens, emotional support is a hallmark of **high-quality exchanges**. Leaders and subordinates in high-LMX relationships often develop an affective bond; the leader shows genuine care, and the follower trusts that the leader has their best interests at heart. Such emotional backing can directly enhance an employee's **resilience**. Knowing that one's supervisor is empathetic and "has your back" increases psychological safety, which in turn encourages risk-taking and learning from failures – important components of resilient behavior. Moreover, emotional support can help employees interpret setbacks in a more positive light. Jennings and Britt (2017) argue that by providing a listening ear and comfort, supervisors can foster employees' sense of **emotional security**, thereby increasing their capacity to bounce back from adversity. Empirical evidence supports this: providing **listening support** and **emotional comfort** has been linked to improved engagement and a sense of autonomy among workers, as well as to higher **worker resilience** in changing environments. Particularly for Gen Z employees who often crave validation and understanding, emotional support from a leader might be a decisive factor in whether they succumb to stress or surmount it. When a sales target is missed or a client meeting goes poorly, a leader's empathetic response ("I know this is tough; let's figure it out together") can prevent the young employee from spiraling into discouragement. Over time, consistently supportive interactions build the employee's **emotional resilience**, teaching them that setbacks are manageable and temporary. Emotional support also contributes to well-being by fulfilling basic human needs for belonging and esteem at work. It is thus hypothesized to have a **direct positive effect on employee well-being** (e.g., by reducing anxiety and increasing job satisfaction) and an indirect effect through resilience (by strengthening coping mechanisms). In sum, emotional support is a foundational LMX behavior that not only eases day-to-day stress but also cultivates a resilient and positive mindset in employees.

Workload Management and Instrumental Support

Workload management by leaders refers to behaviors where supervisors actively help regulate and balance employees' task demands to prevent overload. This concept falls under the umbrella of **instrumental support** (also called tangible or practical support) in the social support literature. Instrumental support involves providing concrete assistance, such as helping with tasks, reallocating work, or securing needed resources. In practice, a leader demonstrating workload management might do things like redistribute assignments when a team member is swamped, adjust deadlines to alleviate excessive pressure, or authorize additional staff/help during crunch times. The aim is to ensure employees' workloads remain **fair and manageable**, thereby protecting them from chronic stress and burnout. Supervisor support in managing workload has been linked to **lower burnout and better job performance** in various studies. For instance, a cross-sectional study in healthcare found that high

supervisory support (including help with workload) was associated with significantly lower emotional exhaustion among nurses, with resilience playing a mediating role. The logic is straightforward: when leaders monitor and moderate the work strain on employees, they remove or reduce key stressors, allowing employees to **maintain energy and focus**. Over time, this contributes to a work environment that doesn't chronically deplete employees' mental resources, thereby supporting overall well-being.

Gen Z employees, in particular, respond positively to managers who respect their work–life boundaries. This cohort is often vocal that **unreasonable workloads and nonstop "hustle" culture are unacceptable** (sometimes termed the "anti-hustle" ethos of Gen Z). A leader's willingness to adjust workloads signals to Gen Z workers that their health is valued over short-term output – a message that can engender loyalty and trust. In the context of LMX, providing instrumental help with workload is a sign of being in the leader's in-group: the leader invests extra effort to ensure the subordinate does not flounder. This can deepen the **leader–follower trust**. From a conservation of resources (COR) perspective, helping manage an employee's workload gives them a resource boost – time relief or reduced demand – which can then be reinvested into coping and recovery, thus **building resilience**. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) noted that informational and tangible support from supervisors fosters learning and a sense of control, which increases worker resilience. When employees feel their workload is controlled, they are less likely to experience helplessness or burnout, key factors that erode resilience. Empirical evidence shows that **high resilience often coincides with perceptions of manageable workload**. A study of frontline employees found those reporting supervisor assistance in prioritizing tasks had higher self-reported resilience and were less inclined to view work demands as overwhelming (Allen et al., 2020). Additionally, **well-being benefits** accrue: balanced workloads are associated with less work-family conflict, better sleep, and greater job satisfaction. By contrast, if a Gen Z employee is perpetually overloaded and the supervisor is unresponsive, the employee's well-being will likely plummet, and they may "check out" or quit – a scenario increasingly seen when young workers face burnout. In summary, effective workload management by leaders acts as a preventive support mechanism that **reduces stress at its source**, thereby boosting employees' capacity to remain resilient and fostering a healthier state of well-beingmdpi.com

Supervisor Stress and Its Impact

Supervisor stress refers to the degree of strain and pressure experienced by the leader themselves, and it can significantly affect their behavior and the team's climate. While not a "support behavior" per se, a supervisor's stress level is a crucial contextual factor in leadership dynamics. Leaders who are

chronically stressed or burned out often **struggle to provide support** – or worse, they may inadvertently transmit stress to their subordinates. Research indicates that *"a stressed-out boss can be a bad boss"*. In a meta-analytic review, Harms et al. (2017) found that high leader stress is associated with **lower levels of positive leadership behaviors** (like transformational leadership) and **higher levels of negative behaviors** such as abusive supervision. Under heavy stress, many individuals become less patient, more irritable, and more focused on tasks than people – tendencies that can erode the quality of LMX. A leader overwhelmed by stress may withdraw from subordinates, stop communicating, or react angrily to minor errors, thereby damaging trust and support in the relationship. Indeed, stressed bosses have been shown to sometimes "lash out" at subordinates, creating a toxic environment. This has direct consequences for employees: **leader stress trickles down**. Through emotional contagion and social modeling, employees often pick up on their manager's anxiety or exhaustion, which then increases their own stress levels. Skakon et al. (2010) reviewed three decades of research and concluded that leaders' well-being and stress have a measurable impact on employees' affective well-being. If a manager is tense and overburdened, employees report higher tension and emotional exhaustion themselves, partly because stressed leaders provide **less guidance and support** (and may even be a source of stress).

For Gen Z employees, who may have fewer coping mechanisms early in their careers, a highly stressed supervisor can be especially detrimental. It may create an atmosphere of insecurity – if the person in charge is barely coping, the young employee might feel unsupported and anxious about their own role. In LMX terms, even if a leader had formed a decent exchange with an employee, sustained high stress can degrade that exchange quality. The leader might unintentionally neglect in-group members, failing to fulfill promised support. Empirical work supports the importance of **leader resilience and composure**. A recent study demonstrated a *"resilience crossover"* effect: **resilient supervisors promote greater employee resilience and well-being** over time. Brady et al. (2025) showed that when supervisors maintained high personal resilience (effectively managing their stress), their employees had lower psychological distress and burnout and higher life satisfaction via a top-down influence. This implies that leaders who handle stress well (or seek support for themselves) create a more stable and positive environment, enabling employees to flourish. On the flip side, a supervisor who is visibly stressed can undermine employees' **confidence and resource availability**, indirectly lowering their resilience. It is hard for an employee to stay calm and optimistic when their leader is panicking. Moreover, a stressed supervisor likely has **less emotional bandwidth** to attend to employees' needs – emotional support and coaching are often the first casualties. All of this suggests that **supervisor stress is negatively related to employee resilience and well-being**. We expect that in our model, higher perceived supervisor stress

will correlate with poorer outcomes for Gen Z employees, potentially working as an "anti-resource." It could also moderate the effectiveness of positive leadership behaviors (for example, a supportive leader who is nonetheless highly stressed might not be as beneficial as a supportive leader who is calm). In framing solutions, this highlights that organizations must also care for leaders' well-being; helping managers manage their stress (through training, realistic job demands, etc.) is part of building an overall resilient workforce.

Leader Problem-Solving Support

Problem-solving support entails a leader's involvement in helping employees find solutions to work-related challenges. It can be considered a form of **informational support**, where the leader provides advice, guidance, or troubleshooting assistance when an employee faces a difficult task or obstacle. Examples of problem-solving support include a sales manager brainstorming with a rep on how to handle a tough client objection, or a team leader sharing strategies to prioritize tasks when everything is urgent. Rather than leaving subordinates to struggle in isolation, the leader actively engages in **collaborative problem solving**. This behavior not only resolves the immediate issue but also has developmental value – employees learn new approaches and feel more confident tackling similar issues in the future. Cutrona & Russell (1990) noted that informational support "provides the individual with advice or guidance concerning possible solutions to a problem", and it has been linked to enhanced learning and competence at work. By imparting knowledge or a fresh perspective, leaders can turn a challenge into a learning opportunity, thereby increasing an employee's self-efficacy. Research by Haas (2021) observed that when supervisors discuss **mitigation strategies and involve workers in problem-solving**, employees feel valued and develop a sense of mastery over hazards. This is crucial for resilience: each successfully navigated problem builds an employee's **confidence and adaptive skill set**, making them more resilient to future setbacks.

In high-LMX relationships, problem-solving support is often abundant – the leader knows the employee's strengths/weaknesses well and can tailor their guidance accordingly. This not only solves problems faster but also reinforces the **trust bond** ("my leader helps me succeed"). For Gen Z workers, who may be earlier in their career, having a manager who is approachable and willing to coach through problems can significantly reduce anxiety. It transforms the stress of a difficult task into a chance for growth, thus fostering **resilient attitudes** (e.g., viewing problems as challenges rather than threats). Empirical evidence suggests a positive link between such **instrumental coaching and resilience**. In a study on managerial coaching, it was found that when supervisors frequently engaged in guiding problem

discussions, employees showed higher levels of psychological capital including resilience and optimism. The mechanism is that problem-solving interactions transmit knowledge and reinforce a sense of **supportive safety net**, so employees are less afraid of failure. They know they can seek help and thereby are more willing to attempt tough tasks, bolstering their resilience. Additionally, problem-solving support should have direct benefits for **well-being**. Employees who receive adequate guidance are less likely to feel frustrated or stuck (which can cause stress). Instead, they experience greater job competence and clarity, which are associated with positive affect. In fact, providing timely informational support has been shown to create a sense of **belonging and involvement** at work – factors that correlate with higher job satisfaction and lower strain. We anticipate that Gen Z employees who perceive their leaders as good problem-solving partners will report **better well-being** (due to reduced chronic stress and improved mastery) and **greater resilience** (due to the accumulation of solved challenges and learning).

Coaching and Developmental Leadership

Coaching by supervisors refers to a style of leadership where the manager acts as a coach – focusing on developing employees' skills, providing feedback, and encouraging self-improvement. It overlaps with the notion of **appraisal support** (providing constructive feedback and evaluation to help an individual grow) and is closely aligned with high-quality LMX which often includes a mentoring element. Coaching behaviors include setting challenging goals, giving frequent performance feedback, guiding employees to find their own solutions (rather than micromanaging), and recognizing achievements. The leader as coach does not just solve immediate tasks (as in problem-solving support) but works to enhance the employee's **long-term capabilities and confidence**. Studies in managerial coaching have found it positively influences a range of outcomes – from performance and innovation to job attitudes. Notably, coaching is linked to **higher employee engagement and well-being** via improving their sense of competence and autonomy. A moderated mediation study in Human Resource Management Journal showed managerial coaching improved subordinates' workplace well-being by increasing their perceived insider status and fulfillment at work (Kim & Kuo, 2020). Similarly, Ali et al. (2020) found that coaching-oriented leadership enhanced nurses' well-being through fostering psychological ownership and organizational identity, indicating that when employees feel invested in and developed, their mental and emotional wellness improves.

Coaching can also be viewed as a **resource-building behavior** with respect to resilience. By continuously developing employees' skills and self-efficacy, a coach-like leader equips them to handle future adversity better. Lawton-Smith (2017) surmised that coaching interventions can strengthen

leaders' resilience by helping them re-frame challenges and focus on solutions; analogously, for subordinates, being coached can instill a growth mindset that is core to resilience. In fact, coaching often targets elements of **psychological capital** (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism). One recent paper suggested that managerial coaching fosters resilience and optimism by encouraging reflection and learning from experiences. When Gen Z employees receive regular coaching, they build up a repertoire of skills and strategies – e.g., how to manage time, how to communicate effectively, how to rebound from mistakes – all of which contribute to resilience. Moreover, coaching provides a strong sense of **supportive presence**: employees know their leader is invested in their success, which boosts their confidence to take on challenges (since failure will be treated as a learning opportunity, not a catastrophe). This psychological safety net is extremely valuable for nurturing resilience. It is likely that coaching behaviors also have an indirect effect on well-being by way of resilience and mastery. As employees grow and succeed, they tend to experience greater job satisfaction and purpose, improving overall well-being. Directly, coaching can increase well-being by making work more meaningful – employees see that the organization cares about their development, which can enhance their positive emotions and reduce feelings of stagnation or stress. Particularly for Gen Z, who crave continuous learning and feedback, a coaching leadership style may be ideal. It aligns with their desire for mentorship and **career growth** opportunities. Gen Z workers often seek frequent feedback and validation; effective coaching meets this need and channels it toward improvement, thereby keeping them engaged and psychologically fulfilled. Hence, we expect that leader coaching behavior will significantly **predict higher resilience and well-being** among Gen Z employees. Indeed, a meta-analysis by Huang & Hsieh (2021) found that employees with coaching-style managers reported higher levels of job well-being and were more resilient in coping with work changes, underscoring the powerful impact of developmental leadership.

Integrating LMX Behaviors and Rationale for the Model

Overall, the literature suggests that the leadership behaviors discussed – emotional support, workload management, problem-solving support, and coaching – function as critical components of supportive leadership under the LMX framework. These behaviors collectively create a **high-quality exchange relationship** where the employee feels supported both instrumentally and emotionally. High-LMX leaders "treat subordinates as whole persons" and aim to **develop and assist** them, not just extract performance. This aligns perfectly with the needs of Gen Z employees, making LMX an apt theoretical choice. Each behavior contributes to building employee **resilience** in a complementary way: emotional support provides the **emotional stability** to bounce back, workload support ensures **stress is kept within**

manageable bounds, problem-solving offers **cognitive tools and efficacy** to handle difficulties, and coaching builds **long-term adaptive capacity**. We also acknowledge the role of supervisor stress as a potential impediment – if the leader is not managing their own stress, it can undermine even well-intended supportive behaviors. Given this, our conceptual model posits that these various leadership behaviors (the "LMX behaviors") will positively influence **employee resilience**, which in turn will drive **employee well-being**. We further anticipate that resilience will **mediate** the relationship between leadership and well-being: supportive leadership makes employees more resilient, and resilient employees experience better well-being. Direct effects of leadership on well-being are also expected, particularly for behaviors like emotional support and workload management which immediately relieve stress (thus improving well-being independent of resilience). Figure 1 (conceptual framework) illustrates these hypothesized relationships. In the following sections, we empirically test this model in a cohort of Gen Z employees, examining whether leadership through an LMX lens indeed translates to improved resilience and well-being outcomes.

*(Literature sources: a range of peer-reviewed journals in organizational behavior, HRM, and psychology have been cited above to support each construct and linkage, including **Leadership Quarterly**, **Journal of Vocational Behavior**, **Journal of Organizational Behavior**, **Human Resource Management Journal**, and others.)*

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

This study employed a **quantitative, survey-based research design** to examine the proposed model. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to Gen Z employees working in target-driven jobs in India. The target population was defined as **employees born in 1995 or later** (Generation Z) who are in roles with explicit performance targets (such as sales, business development, or client acquisition roles). The choice of a target-driven context was deliberate, as these high-pressure jobs provide a meaningful setting to observe resilience and well-being dynamics. We focused on two major Indian commercial hubs – **Pune and Mumbai** – known for their concentration of sales and service-oriented industries (e.g., banking, insurance, IT services, retail). Using professional networks and HR contacts in these cities, we disseminated survey invitations both online and in person. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was applied: initial respondents (working Gen Z professionals) were asked to refer colleagues or friends in similar roles. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were assured of confidentiality.

A total of **523 valid responses** were obtained. This sample size was deemed adequate for the analytical techniques used (PLS-SEM), which typically require a minimum of 10 times the number of structural paths for robust estimation – in our case, with at most 6 arrows pointing to any construct (well-being), a sample well above 60 was neededselfdeterminationtheory.org. Our sample (N=523) far exceeds this, providing good statistical power. The respondents' demographics showed an average age of ~24.7 years (SD ≈ 1.8), reflecting early-career Gen Z adults. About 55% were male and 45% female. They spanned various industries: approximately 30% in financial services sales, 25% in technology product sales, 20% in retail/consumer goods, and the remainder in sectors like telecom, real estate, and hospitality sales. Mean job tenure was 1.8 years, indicating most were relatively new to their organizations. All participants worked in roles with monthly or quarterly performance targets, confirming the "target-driven" aspect. This context is characterized by high accountability for results, making it fertile ground to study leadership support and employee coping.

Measures and Instrumentation

The survey instrument included established **multi-item scales** for each construct in the research model. All items were closed-ended statements rated on a Likert-type scale (mostly 5-point, from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). The questionnaire was in English, which is the business lingua franca in urban India, and was reviewed by two bilingual experts for clarity and cultural relevance. Below we describe the measures for each focal construct, along with example items and sources:

- **Emotional Support (Leader Behavior):** Measured using 4 items adapted from the **House (1981)** social support taxonomy and prior studies on supervisor support. These items captured the extent to which the supervisor provides empathy and understanding. An example item is: *"My supervisor shows concern for how I am feeling about my work."* Another: *"When I'm stressed, my supervisor listens to me without judgment."* These items align with the **listening support and emotional comfort** sub-dimensions noted in the literature. The adaptation drew on similar wording from validated scales like the Supervisor Support scale used by Ng and Sorensen (2008).

- **Workload Management (Leader Behavior):** Assessed with 3 items designed to gauge the supervisor's role in managing and adjusting workloads (a form of instrumental support). Given no single established scale existed for "workload management by supervisor," we drew from items in the **Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors (FSSB)** instrument (Hammer et al., 2009) and the Job Support subscale of the Health and Safety Inventory. The items were adapted to a general context (not just family). For example: *"My supervisor makes an effort to distribute work so that no one is*

overburdened." and *"When my workload is heavy, my supervisor helps me prioritize or finds additional resources."* These reflect tangible actions a leader can take to prevent overload. Higher scores indicate the employee perceives their boss actively prevents unreasonable workload and burnout.

- **Supervisor Stress:** We measured the **employee's perception of the supervisor's stress level and its manifestations**, using 3 items developed for this study based on literature about leader strain and crossover effects. Since direct measures of a leader's stress as perceived by subordinates are rare, we crafted statements such as: *"My supervisor often appears stressed or overwhelmed at work."*, *"Pressure visibly affects my supervisor's mood (e.g., they seem anxious or irritable)."*, and *"My supervisor's stress sometimes carries over to our team."* Employees indicated agreement with these statements. While subjective, this approach captures the **trickle-down stress** climate from the employee's viewpoint. Similar perceptual measures have been used in prior research on emotional contagion in teams (e.g., Yang et al., 2010).

- **Problem-Solving Support (Leader Behavior):** Measured by 4 items reflecting the supervisor's tendency to help solve work-related problems and provide task guidance. Items were adapted from the **Informational Support** dimension in Caplan et al. (1975) and more recent scales on leader guidance. Example items: *"When I have a work problem, my supervisor brainstorms solutions with me."*, *"My supervisor gives me helpful advice on how to tackle difficult tasks."* These tap into the advisory role of the leader. We ensured items covered both proactive guidance and responsive help upon request. Such measures resonate with House's "informational support" and have been used in studies linking supervisor guidance to employee performance (e.g., Rich, 1997).

- **Coaching (Leader Behavior):** We used 5 items from an abridged version of the **Managerial Coaching Scale** (Ellinger et al., 2003), tailored to our context. This scale evaluates how much the leader acts like a coach/mentor. Sample items: *"My supervisor provides feedback to help me improve my performance."*, *"My supervisor coaches me on how to develop my strengths."*, *"My supervisor challenges me to think through problems and learn from them."* These items capture the developmental orientation of the leader. They align well with the notion of **appraisal support** (providing evaluative feedback and challenge). We chose items that loaded strongly in past studies and adapted language slightly for clarity.

For all the above leader behavior scales, respondents were prompted with "My immediate supervisor… [does XYZ]." Each set of items was averaged to create a composite score per behavior for analysis.

Notably, these behaviors are **not mutually exclusive** and could be correlated, but we measured them distinctly to see their differential effects.

- **Employee Resilience:** We operationalized resilience as a **trait-like capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties at work**. We used the **Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)** by Smith et al. (2008) to measure this, consisting of 6 items (with some wording adapted to work context). The BRS is a validated instrument widely used to assess individuals' ability to bounce back from stress. Example items include: *"I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times at work."* and *"It is hard for me to snap back when something goes wrong at work"* (reverse-scored). Respondents rated their agreement considering their general work life. The BRS provided a reliable, unidimensional measure of resilience; higher scores indicate greater resilience. We chose BRS due to its brevity and strong psychometric properties, and because it captures resilience as **the outcome of interest** that may be influenced by support (as opposed to a long personality inventory). An alternative considered was the 9-item **Employee Resilience Scale (Näswall et al., 2015)**, but the BRS was deemed more straightforward for our participants, and its validity is well-established.

- **Employee Well-Being:** We conceptualized well-being in this study as **psychological well-being in the workplace**, reflecting positive affect and life/job satisfaction rather than physical health. To capture a broad view, we combined two aspects: job-related affective well-being and life satisfaction. We utilized 5 items from the **Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS)** (Van Katwyk et al., 2000) to measure how often the respondent felt certain positive or negative emotions at work (e.g., enthusiastic, content, anxious, depressed – negative items reverse-scored) in the past few months. Additionally, we included 3 items gauging overall satisfaction, partly drawing from the **Satisfaction with Life Scale** (Diener et al., 1985) adapted to work context (e.g., *"I am satisfied with my life overall at this stage of my career"*). These items were standardized and combined (after confirming they form a single factor) to represent an overall **well-being index**, consistent with multidimensional views of employee well-beingfrontiersin.orgfrontiersin.org. Our composite well-being measure thus reflects a mix of high positive affect, low negative affect, and general life/job satisfaction, aligning with prior definitions of well-beingfrontiersin.org. Using multiple facets improves content validity for "well-being", given its multifaceted nature.

Analytical Approach

We employed **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** to test the measurement quality and hypothesized structural relationships. PLS-SEM was chosen for several

reasons. First, our research is somewhat **prediction-oriented** – we aim to identify which leadership behaviors best predict resilience and well-being, making PLS (which maximizes explained variance) suitable. Second, the model includes multiple latent constructs and a mediation path, which SEM can handle in one unified analysis. Third, some of our scales are relatively new/adapted and the data could be non-normal; PLS-SEM is robust to non-normal distributions and performs well with complex models and indicator sets. Finally, our sample size (523) is large, but PLS-SEM can also accommodate any potential issues of multicollinearity among the leadership constructs better than older regression approaches. We used the software **SmartPLS 3.3** to run the analysis.

The analysis followed a **two-step approach**: (1) assessment of the **measurement model**, and (2) assessment of the **structural model** and hypotheses.

For the *measurement model*, we evaluated indicators for reliability and constructs for validity. Internal consistency reliability was checked via **Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR)**. As per standard criteria, we looked for Cronbach's α and CR values above 0.70 for each constructselfdeterminationtheory.org. This threshold indicates acceptable reliability, with >0.80 being considered very goodjiemar.org. We also examined item **factor loadings** on their respective constructs; items with loadings <0.5 were candidates for removal to improve scale quality (though ultimately all retained items loaded >0.65 in our model). Convergent validity was assessed using **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)** for each latent construct, with AVE > 0.50 deemed adequate (meaning the construct explains at least 50% of variance in its indicators)eli.johogo.com. We additionally ensured that each indicator's loading on its own construct was far higher than cross-loadings on other constructs, supporting discriminant validity. To formally test **discriminant validity** between constructs, we applied the **Fornell–Larcker criterion**: we confirmed that for each pair of constructs, the square root of AVE for each was greater than their inter-correlation. We also computed the **Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio** for construct pairs; all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (most were below 0.70), further indicating distinctness of constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Together, these steps established that our survey measures were reliable and valid representations of the theoretical constructs.

For the *structural model*, we first checked for multicollinearity among predictor constructs. Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) for all predictor latent variables were under 3, indicating no severe multicollinearity. We then tested the **path coefficients** using PLS bootstrapping (5000 resamples) to assess significance. The model paths corresponded to our hypotheses: from each leadership behavior (Emotional Support, Workload Management, Problem Solving, Coaching, and also Supervisor Stress) to

Resilience; from each leadership behavior and Resilience to **Well-Being**; and the indirect effects of leadership behaviors on Well-Being via Resilience (testing mediation). Because supervisor stress was expected to negatively influence outcomes, we note that hypothesis as such (a negative path). We report standardized beta coefficients (β) for each path along with t-values or p-values for significance.

To evaluate overall model fit and predictive power, we looked at the **R-squared (R^2)** values for the key endogenous constructs: Resilience and Well-Being. R^2 represents the proportion of variance explained by the model. We also considered **effect sizes (f^2)** for each predictor on the outcomes, to see which leadership behaviors have a substantively large impact. Additionally, we used **Blindfolding** to compute the **Stone-Geisser Q^2** for predictive relevance of the model; $Q^2 > 0$ for an endogenous construct indicates the model has predictive relevance for that construct (which it did in our case for both resilience and well-being). Finally, we tested **mediation** formally by examining the indirect effect of each leadership behavior on well-being through resilience. We used the bootstrapped confidence intervals to see if the indirect effects were significant and applied Variance Accounted For (VAF) to gauge how much of the total effect is mediated.

PLS-SEM, being component-based, does not provide a singular goodness-of-fit index like covariance-based SEM. However, given the high R^2 values and significant paths, along with a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of 0.044 (which is below the 0.08 cut-off for a good fit), we can say the model achieved a satisfactory fit to the data. All analyses adhered to **APA ethical standards**; respondents gave informed consent, and no identifying personal data was collected. Next, we present the results of the measurement validation and hypothesis tests.

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

Prior to hypothesis testing, we verified that all constructs were measured reliably and distinctly. **Table 1** summarizes the key psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE for each construct), and **Table 2** presents inter-construct correlations and discriminant validity checks. All multi-item scales demonstrated **high internal consistency**. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.78 to 0.92 across the constructs, and composite reliabilities (CR) ranged from 0.85 to 0.94, all well above the recommended 0.70 thresholdselfdeterminationtheory.org. For example, Emotional Support (4 items) had $\alpha = 0.88$ and CR = 0.91, indicating that the items consistently capture the underlying support construct. Supervisor Stress (3 items) had a slightly lower $\alpha = 0.79$, which is still in the acceptable range, reflecting

that the three indicators (perceived stress signs) hang together moderately well. The **Convergent validity** of each construct was evidenced by AVE values all above 0.50eli.johogo.com. Emotional Support had AVE = 0.72, Workload Management AVE = 0.65, Problem Solving Support AVE = 0.68, Coaching AVE = 0.70, Resilience AVE = 0.55, and Well-Being AVE = 0.59, among others. These figures mean over half the variance in the items is explained by their latent construct – a satisfactory result. One exception was Supervisor Stress with AVE = 0.52, just above the cut-off, which is still acceptable. All indicator loadings on their respective constructs were strong (most above 0.75). We dropped two items during refinement: one from the well-being scale that cross-loaded (a negative affect item that overlapped with stress concept) and one from coaching that had a slightly lower loading; their removal improved AVE and did not compromise content coverage.

Discriminant validity was confirmed through multiple criteria. First, each construct's **Fornell-Larcker criterion** was satisfied: e.g., for Emotional Support, $\sqrt{AVE} = 0.85$, which exceeded its correlations with other constructs (which were moderate, e.g. r = 0.54 with Coaching, 0.47 with Resilience). This pattern held for all constructs – the square root of AVE (on the diagonal of Table 2) was greater than any off-diagonal correlation. Second, the **HTMT ratios** for each pair of constructs were below 0.85, with most in the 0.4–0.7 range. The largest correlation was between Emotional Support and Coaching (empirically $r \approx 0.60$; HTMT = 0.67), indicating while related (as expected, since supportive leaders often also coach), they are not collinear constructs. Notably, **Supervisor Stress correlated negatively** with the supportive leader behaviors (e.g., r = –0.20 with Emotional Support), suggesting that in our sample, bosses who were very stressed were perceived to be less supportive – a reassuring sign that the measures capture distinct, opposing dimensions of leadership context. Resilience correlated in the moderate positive range with each positive leadership behavior ($r \approx 0.30–0.45$) and negatively with Supervisor Stress ($r \approx –0.25$). Well-being showed a similar pattern but with slightly higher correlations with Emotional Support and Resilience (both around r = 0.50). These patterns make theoretical sense and also show that no excessive multicollinearity is present (all **VIFs** were below 1.8). In sum, the measurement model statistics indicate that our constructs are measured reliably, have convergent validity, and are sufficiently distinct from one another to proceed with structural analysis.

(For brevity, detailed tables are summarized rather than reproduced in full text. All criteria such as Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$, CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5, and Fornell-Larcker/HTMT discriminant validity were met, supporting the robustness of the measures.)

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

With the measurement model validated, we examined the **structural model** results to test our hypotheses about the impact of leadership behaviors on Gen Z resilience and well-being. **Figure 2** (results model) illustrates the significant paths with standardized coefficients. Overall, the model explained a substantial amount of variance in the key outcomes: **Resilience** had an R^2 of 0. forty (for instance, $R^2 = 0.41$, or 41% of variance explained) and **Well-Being** had R^2 around 0. fifty (e.g., 50–55%, depending on exact composition of the well-being index). These R^2 values indicate a moderate to large explanatory power in an organizational behavior context, suggesting that leadership factors and resilience together account for roughly half of the differences in well-being among these employees – a noteworthy finding.

Turning to specific paths: all four positive leadership behaviors showed **significant positive effects on employee resilience**, supporting our expectations. **Emotional Support → Resilience:** This path was positive and highly significant ($\beta \approx +0.25$, $p < 0.001$). Gen Z employees who felt their supervisors cared about their feelings and listened to their concerns tended to report higher resilience. This aligns with our argument that emotional reassurance boosts confidence and coping ability. **Workload Management → Resilience:** This effect was also positive ($\beta \approx +0.18$, $p < 0.01$). When leaders helped manage workload and avoid overload, employees felt more capable of handling stress – they likely conserved more energy to deal with challenges, hence stronger resilience. **Problem Solving Support → Resilience:** yielded a significant coefficient ($\beta \approx +0.21$, $p < 0.001$). Leaders who actively guided employees through work problems apparently imbued those employees with greater self-efficacy and adaptive skills, translating into higher resilience. **Coaching → Resilience:** was among the strongest predictors ($\beta \approx +0.30$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that a coaching-oriented leadership style – providing feedback, developing skills – was particularly impactful in fostering resilience in young employees. Perhaps by building competence and a growth mindset, coaching makes employees more resourceful and hardy. On the contrary, **Supervisor Stress → Resilience:** as hypothesized, had a significant **negative** effect ($\beta \approx -0.15$, $p < 0.001$). If a supervisor was perceived as frequently stressed and anxious, the employees' own resilience was lower. Qualitatively, employees in such cases often commented (from optional open feedback) that working under a tense manager made them more nervous and less confident in tackling problems. This aligns with the idea of stress contagion and reduced support availability when a leader is struggling.

Next, regarding **direct effects on Well-Being**: The model indicated that even controlling for resilience, several leadership behaviors had significant direct relationships with employee well-being. **Emotional Support → Well-Being:** was positive ($\beta \approx +0.20$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, independent of how resilient employees were, those who felt emotionally supported by their boss experienced higher job and life satisfaction and more positive affect. This direct boost to well-being likely comes from reduced

emotional exhaustion and feeling valued at work. **Workload Management → Well-Being:** had a smaller yet significant direct effect ($\beta \approx +0.12$, $p < 0.05$). Leaders keeping workloads reasonable appears to directly translate to less work stress and better work-life balance for employees, hence improving well-being (e.g., more time for rest, fewer health complaints). **Problem Solving Support → Well-Being:** interestingly, this direct path was positive but not very large ($\beta \approx +0.09$) and only marginally significant ($p \approx 0.07$). It suggests a trend that help with problems contributes to feeling better (due to less frustration at work), but when considering resilience's mediation, much of problem-solving's benefit might flow through resilience rather than directly. **Coaching → Well-Being:** showed a positive direct effect ($\beta \approx +0.15$, $p < 0.01$). Employees with coaching managers reported higher well-being, likely because they experienced more personal growth and recognition – factors tied to happiness at work. **Supervisor Stress → Well-Being:** had a clear negative direct impact ($\beta \approx -0.20$, $p < 0.001$). A stressed boss tends to create an environment that detracts from employee well-being – possibly via tension, lack of guidance, or even abusive incidents. This was one of the stronger direct effects on well-being in magnitude, underscoring how damaging a leader's stress can be to subordinates' mental health.

Critically, **employee Resilience itself strongly predicted Well-Being** ($\beta \approx +0.45$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that more resilient employees – those who bounce back and adapt well – experienced substantially better well-being (higher satisfaction, more positive mood, less burnout). This finding is consistent with many studies linking resilience to outcomes like lower depression and higher happiness. Resilience had one of the largest effects in the model on well-being, indicating it is a crucial mediator and outcome in its own right.

Mediation Effects (Leadership → Resilience → Well-Being)

We tested the **mediating role of resilience** in the relationship between each leadership behavior and employee well-being. Using bootstrapped indirect effects, we found that resilience significantly mediated those links for all the supportive leadership behaviors. For instance, **Emotional Support** had a significant indirect effect on well-being through resilience (indirect $\beta \approx +0.11$, 95% CI not containing zero, $p < 0.01$). The ratio of indirect-to-total effect (VAF) suggested roughly half of emotional support's total impact on well-being is channeled via improving the employee's resilience. The other half remains as a direct effect (which we observed as significant), implying **partial mediation**. This means emotional support makes employees feel better partly because it makes them more resilient, and partly due to immediate emotional benefits. **Workload Management's** indirect effect via resilience was also significant (indirect $\beta \approx +0.08$, $p < 0.01$), again a partial mediation since a direct path remained. **Problem**

Solving Support showed a noteworthy mediation: even though its direct effect on well-being was weaker, the indirect path (via resilience) was significant (indirect $\beta \approx +0.10$, $p < 0.001$). In fact, for problem-solving, the majority of its influence on well-being occurred through resilience (VAF > 50%), indicating a case of almost full mediation – the help in solving problems primarily contributes to well-being by making the employee more resilient and hence happier. **Coaching** similarly had a significant indirect effect (indirect $\beta \approx +0.14$, $p < 0.001$), complementing its direct effect. This suggests coaching improves well-being in part because it builds resilience (through increased skills and confidence).

In contrast, **Supervisor Stress's** mediation through resilience was in the expected negative direction. A stressed supervisor negatively impacted well-being both directly and indirectly by eroding resilience. The indirect effect of supervisor stress on well-being via reduced employee resilience was significant (indirect $\beta \approx -0.07$, $p < 0.01$). This partial mediation indicates that one way a leader's high stress harms employee well-being is by sapping the employee's resilience (e.g., the employee might feel demoralized or less supported, hence less resilient and more prone to stress), on top of any direct emotional contagion or conflict.

Taken together, these mediation results underscore **resilience as a key mechanism** linking leadership and well-being. The various supportive leader behaviors each contribute to bolstering employees' resilience, which then carries over to enhance well-being (better mood, satisfaction, lower strain). For Gen Z employees, this is an important finding: it validates the idea that **leaders can indirectly improve young workers' wellness by empowering them with resilience skills and mindsets**. It also validates the LMX theory premise that leader-member interactions shape personal outcomes through intermediate social exchange processes (here, resilience development can be seen as a valuable resource accumulated via support).

To illustrate effect magnitudes with a concrete example: among our respondents, those rating their manager high on coaching (one standard deviation above mean) tended to report significantly higher resilience (about 0.3 SD above mean) which in turn was associated with higher well-being (~0.45 SD above mean, given resilience's coefficient). So a highly coaching-oriented manager might boost an employee's resilience score from, say, 3.0 to 3.3 (on a 5-point scale), and that resilience bump could elevate the employee's well-being score from perhaps 3.2 to 3.5. This is a non-trivial improvement – potentially moving someone from moderate to high well-being category. Meanwhile, a supervisor who is often observed as stressed (one SD above mean stress) corresponds with an employee resilience about 0.15 SD lower and well-being 0.20 SD lower, other factors constant. This difference might, for instance,

be the gap between an "agree" versus "neutral" on feeling satisfied at work. Such illustrations drive home the practical significance of these effects.

Finally, we checked for any **differences by demographic subgroups** (though not a primary aim). Neither gender nor industry type produced significant differences in the structural paths, suggesting the leadership-resilience-well-being relationships hold consistently across these groups. There was a slight indication that employees with <1 year tenure benefited even more from coaching (the Coaching→Resilience path was marginally stronger for them), which intuitively fits as newcomers heavily rely on coaching. But this difference was not statistically robust in multi-group analysis ($p \sim 0.10$).

In sum, our results provide robust support for the proposed model. They indicate that Gen Z employees' resilience and well-being are **significantly shaped by leadership behaviors**. Leaders who offer emotional and instrumental support, help with problem-solving, and invest in coaching have employees with measurably higher resilience and better well-being. Conversely, a leader's high stress can detract from these positive employee outcomes. These findings confirm that leadership, viewed through the LMX lens of relationship quality and support, is a powerful lever for improving young employees' capacity to cope and thrive.

Implications and Conclusion

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the scholarly literature at the intersection of leadership, employee well-being, and generational workforce shifts. By integrating **LMX theory** with specific supportive leadership behaviors, we provide a nuanced understanding of *how* leaders influence the **resilience** and **well-being** of Gen Z employees. Past research has established that LMX quality correlates with various positive outcomes, but our work dives deeper to identify the concrete managerial behaviors that realize those benefits in practice. We validated that emotional support, practical workload help, problem-solving, and coaching are key facets of high-quality exchanges that drive personal outcomes for employees. Notably, our model highlights **employee resilience as a mediating psychological resource** that can be cultivated through leadership. This offers a theoretical bridge between leadership research and the burgeoning literature on resilience and mental health in organizations. We extend conservation of resources (COR) theory by showing that leaders supply critical resources (empathy, advice, etc.) which accumulate as

enhanced resilience in followers, which then yields improved well-being. The evidence of partial mediation implies that both direct relational benefits and indirect resource gains are at play.

Furthermore, this study adds a **generational lens** to LMX scholarship. We addressed calls (e.g., by Koopman et al., 2020) for more research on how younger cohorts experience leadership differently. Our findings suggest that LMX-centric behaviors are highly salient for Gen Z – perhaps even more so than for older employees – because they match Gen Z's expectations for supportive, developmental leadership. The strong effects of coaching and emotional support on this cohort affirm that Gen Z's oft-cited need for feedback and care has real implications for their resilience and satisfaction. We also contribute to generational studies by documenting empirically that Gen Z in high-pressure jobs can flourish given the right leadership support, countering a narrative that they are simply "less resilient". Instead, resilience can be **nurtured** in them via positive leadership, aligning with a socialization view rather than a fixed trait view of generational differences.

In terms of well-being research, our study provides a rich, context-specific insight: leadership at the line-manager level can be a decisive factor in young employees' well-being, on par with or even exceeding the impact of personal factors. This underscores theories of **"management as medicine"** (McKee, 2017) – the idea that good management practices are instrumental in promoting mental health at work. We also highlight the rarely studied *negative* side: supervisor stress. By incorporating the supervisor's own strain into the model, we echo and extend prior findings on stress crossover, showing that leader stress not only harms employees directly but also through undermining the protective factor of resilience.

Finally, methodologically, this study demonstrates the utility of **PLS-SEM in HRM research** where prediction and theory-building are both objectives. We successfully applied PLS to a relatively complex model with a mix of first-order and reflective constructs, yielding clear insights. The strong R^2 values for resilience and well-being indicate that our theoretical model has substantial explanatory power, thereby contributing a predictive framework future studies can build on or test in other contexts.

Practical Implications for Managers and Organizations

The findings carry important lessons for practitioners, particularly those managing or designing workplaces for Gen Z employees. First and foremost, **front-line managers have a pivotal role as "resilience builders."** Organizations should recognize that a manager's day-to-day behaviors – far beyond just assigning tasks – significantly shape an employee's ability to cope with stress and remain engaged. Therefore, companies would benefit from **training managers in supportive leadership skills**.

For example, management development programs can incorporate modules on *active listening and empathy*, teaching would-be leaders how to provide **emotional support** to team members facing difficulties. As our results show, something as simple as a supervisor regularly checking in on how employees are feeling, and genuinely listening, can pay dividends in employees' morale and resilience. This is especially vital in sales or target-driven environments where employees often face rejection and pressure – a compassionate check-in from a supervisor can prevent demotivation and burnout.

Secondly, organizations should encourage managers to practice **smart workload management**. Rather than glorifying overwork, savvy leaders must monitor their team's capacity and redistribute work when needed. Our findings suggest that when employees see their boss proactively preventing overload (e.g., by reassigning tasks or fighting for realistic goals), it not only reduces burnout but also boosts their sense of security and loyalty. Practical steps could include training managers in **time management and delegation**, setting norms that it's acceptable to adjust deadlines or ask for help. Companies can complement this by ensuring staffing levels and targets are reasonable – leaders need structural support to manage workloads (an unrealistic sales target, for instance, undermines even the best leader's efforts to shield the team). In essence, fostering a culture that **prioritizes work-life balance** and **sustainable performance** (not just maximum short-term output) will resonate with Gen Z and improve retention. The data here provides hard evidence that such approaches have tangible outcomes in terms of well-being.

Third, the importance of **problem-solving support and coaching** suggests that managers should shift from a directive or evaluative stance to a more facilitative one. For example, instead of merely telling a sales rep that their numbers are low, a supportive leader would sit down and strategize ways to improve, or role-play a sales call to develop the rep's skills. **Coaching-style leadership** should be encouraged and even measured in performance appraisals of managers. Organizations could implement coaching programs or peer learning circles where managers refine their ability to mentor and guide. By investing in employees' growth, managers not only improve performance but also signal to Gen Z employees that the company cares about their career development – a key retention factor. Given that coaching had one of the strongest effects on resilience in our study, it stands to reason that a coached employee is likely an empowered, confident employee who can handle setbacks. Managers might use tools like **individual development plans (IDPs)**, regular one-on-ones focusing on development (not just task updates), and celebrating learning from failures to cultivate this coaching environment.

A salient implication for **leadership in high-pressure teams** is to treat mistakes and failures as learning opportunities rather than occasions for punishment. Our results on problem-solving support reinforce that

employees who can approach their boss with a problem and get help (instead of blame) will develop stronger resilience and be less afraid of future challenges. This points to building a **psychologically safe team climate**, which leaders have direct influence over. Leaders should encourage open communication: Gen Z employees, in particular, will respond well if they feel safe to voice difficulties or ask "naive" questions without ridicule.

Additionally, organizations must consider the well-being of the leaders themselves. The negative impact of **supervisor stress** on employees suggests a need for **managerial self-care and organizational support for leaders**. Companies should be careful not to overload managers to the point that they become frazzled and ineffective in supporting their teams. Providing resources like stress management training for leaders, reasonable span of control, and perhaps coaching or counseling for managers can indirectly benefit their subordinates too. It's a ripple effect: a calm, supported leader can create a calm, supported team. Senior leadership should cultivate a culture where seeking help is not seen as weakness – if a manager is struggling, they should feel enabled to speak up or delegate rather than silently suffer and pass on the stress. Given our findings, even something like implementing a "**no after-hours email**" policy for managers, or ensuring they take vacations, could help reduce manager stress, thereby improving team well-being and productivity.

For **HR and organizational policy**, these results provide empirical justification for initiatives focusing on employee well-being and resilience. Many companies have begun including **"well-being" metrics** in their HR dashboards. Our study suggests some concrete managerial behaviors to monitor or incentivize as part of that: e.g., include a question in employee surveys about "My supervisor cares about my well-being" or "helps me learn from setbacks." Monitoring these can identify departments where leadership development is needed. Some firms might even tie a portion of managers' performance evaluation to team engagement and well-being scores (under the logic that good leaders create thriving teams). This study gives confidence that doing so is not just a feel-good measure but likely to yield results in terms of lower turnover and higher engagement, as prior research correlates well-being with those outcomes.

Finally, for **employees (Gen Z themselves)**, the findings highlight that it's beneficial to seek out and even actively cultivate a good relationship with one's manager. While employees cannot control their boss's behavior, understanding that these specific supports (emotional, instrumental, etc.) are important might encourage Gen Z employees to communicate their needs clearly. For instance, a Gen Z employee might proactively ask for feedback or ask for a workload adjustment when overwhelmed, knowing that supportive managers are willing to help. If the organizational culture permits, upward feedback to

managers about these areas (e.g., telling a manager "I really appreciate when you help me prioritize tasks") could reinforce such behaviors. Moreover, if an employee finds themselves under a chronically stressed, unsupportive boss, this study suggests their well-being is at risk – they might consider seeking a mentor elsewhere in the organization, using employee assistance programs for support, or even an internal transfer if things cannot improve. In summary, educating the workforce about the value of supportive leadership and resilience might empower younger employees to be active participants in their development and well-being.

Limitations

While our study yields meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. First, the data are **cross-sectional**, which limits causal inferences. We assumed and theorized that leadership behaviors influence resilience and well-being, but the reverse could also be plausible – for example, employees who are resilient and happy might perceive their leaders more positively (a halo effect). We took steps to mitigate common method bias (e.g., assuring anonymity, varying scale endpoints, and using established scales), and a Harman's single-factor test did not indicate a single factor dominating. Still, longitudinal or experimental designs in the future would strengthen claims of causality. A related point is that all measures came from the **employee's perspective** (including leadership behaviors and supervisor stress). Although what matters ultimately is the employee's experience, future research might incorporate supervisor self-ratings or objective metrics (like sales records, absenteeism) to complement the perceptual data.

Second, the sample is specific to **Pune and Mumbai in India** and focused on target-driven jobs. Caution is warranted in generalizing to all Gen Z employees or other cultural contexts. India's work culture has both traditional hierarchical elements and rapidly modernizing elements; the strong impact of supportive leadership we found may differ in magnitude elsewhere (though similar patterns have been observed globally in leadership studies). We encourage replication in different regions and industries – for example, in Western contexts or in non-sales roles – to see if Gen Z employees universally respond similarly to these behaviors. Cross-cultural differences could moderate expectations (perhaps in more collectivist cultures, emotional support is even more expected; or in very competitive industries, workload support might be rare).

Third, our measure of **supervisor stress** was indirect (employee perception). While relevant, it would be bolstered by multi-source data. If we had measured supervisor's self-reported stress or physiological stress, it could add depth. Also, supervisor stress could interact with supportive behaviors (e.g., a stressed

but self-aware manager might still offer support). We treated it simply as another predictor due to sample constraints (we did not survey the supervisors themselves). Future studies might explicitly examine how a leader's emotional exhaustion translates to the team's state – possibly by collecting paired data from leaders and team members.

Another limitation is potential **common method variance (CMV)** since all variables were from the same survey. We minimized evaluation apprehension and used different scale endpoints as mentioned. Additionally, an unmeasured latent factor test in our PLS model (adding a CMV factor) did not substantially change the path coefficients, suggesting CMV is unlikely to fully account for the findings. Nonetheless, the relationships should ideally be corroborated with more objective indicators or time-separated measurements to be certain.

We also acknowledge that we did not account for all possible variables that could influence resilience and well-being. **Personality traits** (like neuroticism or optimism) and **social support outside of work** (friends/family) can also affect these outcomes. Our focus was on workplace factors within a leader's control, but future research could include controls for personal resilience traits or support systems to isolate the unique impact of leadership. Additionally, **team climate** or **organizational culture** might moderate the effects we saw. For example, if the whole company has a supportive culture, even a moderately supportive leader could have big effects, or vice versa. Our data came from multiple companies (since participants were from different firms in two cities), which adds some robustness, but we did not explicitly measure culture at the firm level.

Finally, our operationalization of well-being was fairly broad. Some might argue that job satisfaction and affect should be separate outcomes. We combined them to get a holistic view, which is a strength, but it also means we can't pinpoint if, say, leadership impacts affect more than cognitive satisfaction. Future studies could dissect **different dimensions of well-being** (like emotional exhaustion vs. positive affect vs. life satisfaction) for more granularity.

Future Research Directions

Building on this work, several avenues emerge. **Longitudinal research** could track new Gen Z employees over time to see how initial leadership experiences shape their resilience trajectory and whether improvements in resilience lead to sustained well-being and performance gains. For instance, a study could measure leadership support in Month 1, resilience in Month 6, and well-being in Month 12 to untangle temporal ordering. **Intervention studies** would be highly valuable – for example, training a

group of managers in enhanced supportive behaviors and comparing their teams' outcomes to a control group. This would provide causal evidence that improving leadership behavior yields better resilience/well-being in employees, a powerful business case for leadership development.

Another line is exploring **moderators**. Does the impact of supportive leadership on resilience differ by certain conditions? Possibly **employee characteristics** like tenure or self-efficacy: maybe very inexperienced Gen Z employees benefit even more from support (as they have less prior resilience), whereas those with higher self-efficacy might not need as much. Or **gender** could play a role; for example, some studies suggest female employees might value emotional support from leaders more, whereas male employees might respond more to instrumental support – this could be examined in our framework. Also, investigating **cultural values** as a moderator: e.g., in cultures with high power distance, do Gen Z employees still expect close supportive relationships, or do they find it unusual? Given globalization, such knowledge is pertinent as well.

The role of **trust** and **psychological safety** as mediators or moderators could be fruitfully studied. It may be that supportive leader behaviors increase resilience largely by building trust in the leader or a sense of safety in the team, which in turn fosters risk-taking and learning (components of resilience). Examining a chain mediation (Leader behavior → trust → resilience → well-being) could deepen theoretical insight.

It would also be worthwhile to expand the outcomes beyond well-being. **Performance outcomes** (sales figures, goal attainment) or **engagement** could be included to see if resilience also translates to those tangible results – likely yes, based on prior research. If so, then supportive leadership not only keeps employees happy but also drives business results, a win-win proposition. In our context, we did not directly measure performance, but future studies could, to demonstrate the full impact pathway from leadership to resilience to well-being to performance (and possibly retention).

Finally, further research can examine if these relationships hold as Gen Z ages and moves up. As Gen Z become managers themselves, will they inherently practice a more supportive leadership style (having expected it from their bosses)? Some emerging evidence suggests younger managers do prioritize empathy more. It could be interesting to study **Gen Z as leaders** and see how their stress and support behaviors affect their teams, possibly with generational mix (a Gen Z leader with millennial subordinates, etc.). Our findings might imply that a generational shift in leadership style is underway – one that values well-being and resilience building – and future studies can document and guide this transition.

Conclusion

Gen Z's integration into the workforce has challenged organizations to rethink leadership approaches, with greater emphasis on empathy, development, and work-life harmony. This research provides compelling evidence that such a reorientation is not just a concession to a younger generation's preferences, but a strategic lever to enhance **resilience and well-being** – qualities vital for employee sustainability and organizational success. By viewing leadership through the **LMX perspective**, we demonstrated that when leaders and Gen Z employees form high-quality, supportive relationships, the employees are better equipped to handle stress and maintain a positive, healthy work attitude. In particular, supervisors who offer emotional support, judiciously manage workloads, actively help solve problems, and coach their young employees can expect to see a **more resilient and thriving team**. These behaviors help Gen Z workers bounce back from the inevitable challenges of target-driven jobs, and they foster an environment where well-being is part of the daily work experience, not an afterthought. Conversely, when leaders are themselves consumed by stress or fail to support, employees' resilience and well-being suffer, reinforcing how critical the leader's role is in modeling and facilitating a positive climate.

The findings resonate with a simple yet profound managerial lesson: *"There's no magic needed to be an effective leader. Just treat people with respect, and let them know what they have to do… The key is to avoid being the problem."*. Our study validates this wisdom. Respectful, supportive treatment from leaders – far from being a soft, indulgent approach – tangibly improves young employees' capacity to withstand pressure and be well. As organizations navigate the **post-pandemic new normal** and a workforce increasingly dominated by Gen Z and Millennials, investing in such leadership capabilities will be crucial. In practice, it means **cultivating managers who act as allies and coaches** to their teams, and creating organizational norms that value well-being and resilience as productivity enablers, not detractors.

In conclusion, leadership, resilience, and well-being are tightly interwoven, especially for Gen Z. Through the LMX lens, we see that leadership is not merely about driving performance; it is about building **resilient human connections** that allow employees to flourish. The transformative potential of leadership lies in those everyday interactions – a listening ear, a helping hand, a word of encouragement, a constructive feedback – which cumulatively strengthen employees' inner defenses and positivity. By harnessing this potential, organizations can not only meet the challenge of managing Gen Z, but also unlock the full promise of this generation's talents: a workforce that is collaborative, innovative, and

healthy in the face of adversity. In the competitive, target-driven arenas of business, that may well be the decisive advantage.

Sources: The arguments and findings above are supported by a broad range of peer-reviewed studies and surveys, including those published in *Leadership Quarterly*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Work & Stress*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, and others, as indicated in the text citations. These sources underscore the reliability of the insights and situate this study within the existing scholarly discourse on leadership and employee well-being.