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Abstract

Contemporary organizations face the complex challenge of integrating diverse workplace resources—spanning digital tools, inclusive practices, sustainability initiatives, and well-being programs—into coherent systems that simultaneously support employee flourishing and organizational effectiveness. This theoretical paper develops the concept of Employee Experience Capital (EEC), defined as the integrated configuration of organizational resources that shape employees' holistic work experiences and generate sustainable competitive advantage. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources theory and the Resource-Based View of the firm, this paper identifies seven illustrative dimensions of EEC—digital autonomy, psychological safety climate, sustainability alignment, human–AI collaboration, restorative work design, learning climate, and well-being support systems—and provides systematic theoretical justification for their selection based on Self-Determination Theory's basic psychological needs framework. The paper proposes that EEC influences organizational performance through two empirically distinguishable mediating pathways: work meaningfulness (a cognitive-evaluative pathway) and experienced vitality (an affective-energetic pathway). Specific propositions predict which EEC dimensions more strongly affect each pathway. The framework advances theory by demonstrating how ostensibly disparate organizational practices function as an integrated resource system with emergent properties. The paper acknowledges boundary conditions, engages with competing theoretical perspectives, and discusses potential tensions and dark sides of EEC dimensions. Implications for research methodology and organizational practice are discussed.

Keywords: employee experience; workplace resources; organizational performance; job demands–resources theory; resource-based view; work meaningfulness; vitality; digital transformation; well-being; human resource management

1. Introduction

The contemporary workplace has undergone profound transformation. Digital technologies have fundamentally altered how, where, and when work occurs (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Artificial intelligence and automation are reshaping job content and skill requirements (Autor, 2015). Simultaneously, employees increasingly expect their work to provide meaning, support well-being, and align with personal values around sustainability and social responsibility (Bailey et al., 2019). Organizations thus face the challenge of integrating diverse workplace resources—spanning digital tools, inclusive practices, sustainability initiatives, and well-being programs—into coherent systems that support both employee flourishing and organizational effectiveness.

Despite extensive research on individual workplace resources, theoretical frameworks for understanding how these resources combine and interact remain underdeveloped. High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) research has examined bundles of HR practices (Huselid, 1995;

Jiang et al., 2012), but has focused primarily on traditional practices such as selection, training, and performance management rather than emerging dimensions like sustainability, digital experience, or human–AI collaboration. Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory provides a robust framework for understanding how job characteristics affect well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), yet typically examines resources individually rather than as integrated systems. The Resource-Based View (RBV) explains how organizational resources generate competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), but has given limited attention to the employee experience as a strategic resource.

This theoretical paper addresses these gaps by developing the concept of Employee Experience Capital (EEC). EEC is defined as the integrated configuration of organizational resources that shape employees' holistic work experiences and generate sustainable competitive advantage. The framework makes several contributions to theory and practice.

First, the paper provides systematic theoretical justification for identifying EEC dimensions, using Self-Determination Theory's basic psychological needs framework (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as an organizing principle. This addresses the criticism that workplace resource dimensions are often assembled inductively based on contemporary trends rather than derived deductively from theoretical principles.

Second, the paper proposes two empirically distinguishable mediating pathways linking EEC to performance: work meaningfulness (cognitive-evaluative) and experienced vitality (affective-energetic). Critically, the paper explicitly positions these constructs in relation to existing constructs—particularly work engagement, person–organization fit, and meaningful work—and develops specific propositions about which EEC dimensions more strongly affect each pathway.

Third, the paper engages seriously with boundary conditions, competing theoretical perspectives, and potential dark sides of EEC dimensions. Rather than assuming that EEC universally benefits both organizations and employees, the paper acknowledges tensions, heterogeneity, and conditions under which proposed relationships may not hold, including consideration of reverse causality.

Fourth, the paper addresses construct validity concerns by discussing whether EEC is best specified as a formative or reflective construct, examining potential dimensional overlap, clarifying levels of analysis, and providing guidance for empirical operationalization including illustrative measurement items.

Fifth, the paper explicitly considers generalizability, discussing how the framework applies across different work contexts and cultural settings, and identifying which dimensions are more versus less universally applicable.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews theoretical foundations and develops systematic criteria for dimension selection. Section 3 presents the seven illustrative EEC dimensions with theoretical justification. Section 4 develops construct specification considerations including dimensional relationships and configurational predictions. Section 5 develops the proposed mediating mechanisms. Section 6 presents core propositions including specific predictions about dimension-mediator relationships, discusses boundary conditions, competing predictions, and causal considerations. Section 7 addresses employee well-being as an outcome. Section 8 discusses methodological considerations for empirical investigation. Section 9 discusses implications for practice. Section 10 addresses limitations, generalizability, and future directions.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Job Demands–Resources Theory

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for understanding how workplace characteristics affect employee outcomes. JD-R theory proposes that all job characteristics can be classified as either demands (aspects requiring sustained effort that deplete resources) or resources (aspects that help achieve goals, reduce demands, or stimulate growth) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Job resources are particularly relevant for EEC. According to JD-R theory, resources operate through a motivational process, fostering engagement and enhancing performance. Resources include physical (e.g., equipment), psychological (e.g., autonomy), social (e.g., support), and organizational (e.g., career opportunities) dimensions (Demerouti et al., 2001). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that resources predict engagement, which in turn predicts performance (Christian et al., 2011).

However, JD-R research has typically examined resources individually or in small bundles rather than as integrated systems. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) called for research examining how resources combine, noting that "the effects of job demands and resources are not simply additive" (p. 275). EEC responds to this call by conceptualizing workplace resources as an integrated configuration with emergent properties.

2.2. Resource-Based View of the Firm

The Resource-Based View (RBV) explains how organizational resources and capabilities generate sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) are particularly important for sustained advantage. Human capital—the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees—has been identified as a key strategic resource meeting these criteria (Wright et al., 1994).

Extending RBV logic, this paper argues that the employee experience itself constitutes a strategic resource. When organizations create integrated systems of resources that provide positive work experiences, they develop capabilities that are valuable (enhancing productivity and innovation), rare (not easily replicated), inimitable (embedded in organizational culture and practices), and non-substitutable (not replaceable by alternative resources). This logic parallels Wright and McMahan's (1992) argument that HR systems, rather than individual practices, generate competitive advantage.

2.3. Self-Determination Theory as an Organizing Framework

A key challenge in identifying EEC dimensions is providing systematic theoretical justification for why particular dimensions are included. To address this challenge, this paper uses Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as an organizing framework.

SDT proposes that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the need to experience volition and self-direction), competence (the need to feel effective and capable), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others). When work environments support these needs, individuals experience greater intrinsic motivation, well-being, and performance (Deci et al., 2017). Meta-analytic evidence supports the relationship between need satisfaction and work outcomes (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Importantly, while SDT research generally supports the universality of these three basic needs across cultures, the relative salience of each need and the specific means through which needs are satisfied may vary across cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2015). In individualistic cultures, autonomy satisfaction may be particularly emphasized, while in collectivistic cultures, relatedness satisfaction may be more central to well-being. The framework acknowledges this cultural variation while maintaining that all three needs are relevant across contexts.

Using SDT's three needs as organizing criteria provides a principled basis for dimension selection. Specifically, EEC dimensions should be organizational resources that support one or more of these basic psychological needs. This approach ensures that dimensions are not assembled ad hoc but are theoretically grounded in a well-validated motivational framework.

Table 1 presents the mapping between basic psychological needs and EEC dimensions.

Table 1. Mapping of Basic Psychological Needs to EEC Dimensions.

Basic Need	Definition	EEC Dimensions Supporting This Need
Autonomy	Experience of volition and self-direction	Digital autonomy, Restorative work design
Competence	Feeling effective and capable	Human–AI collaboration, Learning climate
Relatedness	Connection to others and shared purpose	Psychological safety climate, Sustainability alignment, Well-being support systems

This mapping demonstrates that the selected dimensions systematically address all three basic needs. Some dimensions support multiple needs; for example, learning climate supports competence (through skill development) and can support relatedness (through collaborative learning). The framework does not claim that these seven dimensions are exhaustive—other dimensions supporting basic needs could be identified—but provides principled justification for the included dimensions.

2.4. Distinguishing EEC from Related Constructs

Before proceeding, it is essential to distinguish EEC from related constructs that also address workplace resources.

High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS). HPWS refers to bundles of HR practices—typically including selective hiring, extensive training, performance-based compensation, and employee involvement—that enhance organizational performance (Huselid, 1995; Jiang et al., 2012). EEC differs from HPWS in several ways. First, EEC focuses on the employee experience of resources rather than HR practices per se; the emphasis is on what employees perceive and experience, not just what organizations implement. Second, EEC incorporates dimensions absent from traditional HPWS frameworks, including digital experience, sustainability, and well-being support. Third, EEC explicitly theorizes mediating mechanisms (meaningfulness and vitality) rather than treating the HPWS-performance link as a "black box."

Perceived Organizational Support (POS). POS refers to employees' general belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). While POS is a global perception of organizational benevolence, EEC is a multidimensional configuration of specific resource types. POS may function as an outcome of EEC—organizations providing strong EEC may be perceived as more supportive—but the constructs are conceptually distinct.

Organizational Climate. Organizational climate refers to shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures (Schneider et al., 2013). While climate and EEC both concern employee perceptions of the work environment, climate is typically conceptualized as a unitary construct or as focused on a specific domain (e.g., safety climate, service climate), whereas EEC is an explicitly multidimensional configuration.

Job Resources. In JD-R theory, job resources are characteristics of the job that support goal achievement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). EEC is best understood as a higher-order configuration of job and organizational resources that transcends individual resource categories. EEC captures the system-level integration of resources rather than individual resources in isolation.

3. Dimensions of Employee Experience Capital

This section presents seven illustrative dimensions of EEC. These dimensions are not claimed to be exhaustive; rather, they represent a theoretically grounded set of dimensions relevant to contemporary digitally transformed organizations. Each dimension is justified by its relationship to basic psychological needs and supported by existing empirical research. Importantly, the strength of existing empirical support varies across dimensions, which is noted where relevant.

3.1. Digital Autonomy

Digital autonomy refers to employees' perceived control over digital work tools, platforms, and technology-mediated work processes. This dimension extends traditional job autonomy concepts to the digital domain, recognizing that contemporary workers' sense of control is substantially shaped by their relationship with technology.

Digital autonomy supports the basic need for autonomy by enabling employees to experience volition in their technology-mediated work. When employees can choose which tools to use, customize their digital environments, and control when and how they engage with technology, they experience greater self-determination (Gagné & Bhave, 2011).

Research supports the importance of technology-related control. Ayyagari et al. (2011) found that lack of control over technology contributed to technostress, which negatively affected job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Conversely, Tarafdar et al. (2015) demonstrated that technology self-efficacy and control reduce technology-induced strain. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital autonomy as remote work became widespread, with research showing that workers with greater control over their digital work arrangements reported better well-being (Wang et al., 2021).

Empirical support strength: Moderate. Research on technology-related autonomy is growing but less extensive than research on traditional job autonomy.

Potential dark side: Digital autonomy can become problematic when it enables excessive work-home boundary permeability, leading to overwork and inability to disconnect. Organizations must balance digital autonomy with boundary management support.

Generalizability: This dimension is most relevant for knowledge workers and roles involving substantial technology use. For manual labor or roles with limited technology interaction, this dimension may be less applicable or require adaptation (e.g., autonomy over equipment use).

3.2. Psychological Safety Climate

Psychological safety climate refers to shared perceptions that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, including speaking up with ideas, questions, or concerns without fear of punishment or humiliation (Edmondson, 1999). This construct represents the organization-level manifestation of Edmondson's team psychological safety concept.

Psychological safety supports the basic need for relatedness by enabling authentic connection with colleagues. When employees feel psychologically safe, they can bring their full selves to work, share vulnerabilities, and develop trusting relationships. Psychological safety also supports competence by enabling learning from mistakes and feedback-seeking.

Extensive research documents the importance of psychological safety. Edmondson's (1999) seminal work demonstrated that team psychological safety predicted learning behavior and team performance. Subsequent research has linked psychological safety to innovation (Baer & Frese, 2003), knowledge sharing (Siemsen et al., 2009), and employee voice (Morrison, 2011). Meta-analytic evidence confirms robust relationships between psychological safety and performance outcomes (Frazier et al., 2017).

Empirical support strength: Strong. This dimension has the most robust empirical base among the seven dimensions.

Potential dark side: Psychological safety may be difficult to establish when genuine disagreements exist or when the organization faces threats requiring difficult decisions. Additionally, excessive comfort may reduce productive tension.

Generalizability: This dimension is broadly applicable across work contexts, though its manifestation may differ (e.g., physical safety concerns may be more salient in manufacturing than in office settings).

3.3. Sustainability Alignment

Sustainability alignment refers to the degree of congruence between organizational sustainability commitments and employee values regarding environmental and social responsibility. This dimension captures both organizational practices (sustainability initiatives, environmental policies, social responsibility programs) and the perceived authenticity of organizational commitment.

Sustainability alignment supports the basic need for relatedness by connecting individual work to broader social purpose. When employees perceive that their organization genuinely contributes to environmental and social well-being, they experience enhanced meaningfulness and identification with organizational purpose (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Research supports relationships between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee outcomes. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) reviewed 588 studies and found that CSR relates positively to employee attitudes and behaviors. Importantly, employee perceptions of CSR authenticity moderate these effects; when employees perceive CSR as symbolic rather than substantive, positive effects diminish or reverse (Donia et al., 2017). Value congruence regarding sustainability has been linked to organizational identification, job satisfaction, and retention (Jones et al., 2017).

Empirical support strength: Moderate to strong. CSR research is extensive, though research specifically on sustainability value alignment is more limited.

Potential dark side: Sustainability alignment can become problematic when it manifests as "greenwashing"—symbolic commitment without substantive action. Employees may experience disillusionment when organizational rhetoric about sustainability is not matched by authentic practices.

Generalizability: This dimension is broadly applicable but may vary in salience across industries (e.g., more salient in industries with significant environmental impact) and across employee populations (e.g., more important for employees who prioritize sustainability values).

3.4. Human–AI Collaboration

Human–AI collaboration refers to organizational practices that support effective partnerships between human workers and artificial intelligence systems. This dimension encompasses AI tool design that augments rather than replaces human capabilities, training that develops AI literacy, and work design that allocates tasks appropriately between humans and machines.

Human–AI collaboration supports the basic need for competence by positioning AI as a tool that enhances rather than threatens employee capabilities. When employees experience AI as supporting their effectiveness—handling routine tasks while freeing humans for complex judgment—they maintain a sense of capability and contribution (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021).

Research on human–AI collaboration is nascent but growing. Daugherty and Wilson (2018) identified "collaborative intelligence" as the critical capability for organizations integrating AI, emphasizing that value comes from humans and machines working together rather than AI replacing humans. Empirical studies have shown that AI acceptance relates to job security perceptions and trust in organizational intentions (Brougham & Haar, 2018). Effective human–AI collaboration requires clear role boundaries, appropriate training, and work designs that leverage complementary capabilities (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). More recent research has begun to examine how AI augmentation affects worker perceptions of competence and control, finding that successful augmentation depends substantially on implementation quality and worker involvement in design processes (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Empirical support strength: Emerging. This is the newest dimension with the least established empirical base. Theoretical arguments are strong, but empirical validation is limited.

Potential dark side: Human–AI collaboration can become problematic when AI integration leads to job displacement, deskilling, or algorithmic management that undermines worker autonomy. Organizations must manage these tensions explicitly.

Generalizability: This dimension is currently most relevant for organizations actively implementing AI. However, as AI becomes more pervasive, relevance will expand. For organizations not using AI, this dimension may be less applicable.

3.5. Restorative Work Design

Restorative work design refers to the structuring of work processes, schedules, and environments to enable recovery, renewal, and sustainable energy management. This dimension encompasses practices such as recovery time between demanding tasks, micro-break encouragement, workload calibration, and respect for off-hours boundaries.

Restorative work design supports the basic need for autonomy by respecting employees' need for balance and self-regulation. It also indirectly supports competence and relatedness by ensuring employees have the energy resources to perform effectively and maintain positive relationships.

Research on recovery and work design supports this dimension's importance. Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) demonstrated that psychological detachment during non-work time predicts well-being and performance. Trougakos and Hideg (2009) showed that within-workday breaks facilitate resource replenishment. Excessive work intensity without recovery opportunity leads to burnout and diminished performance (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Empirical support strength: Strong. Recovery research is well-established, though research specifically on organizational practices supporting recovery (vs. individual recovery activities) is less extensive.

Potential dark side: Restorative work design may conflict with productivity pressures and may be difficult to implement in high-demand periods. Additionally, some employees may prefer intensive work with extended recovery periods rather than distributed breaks.

Generalizability: This dimension is broadly applicable across work contexts, though its implementation may differ substantially (e.g., shift scheduling in manufacturing vs. meeting-free days in knowledge work).

3.6. Learning Climate

Learning climate refers to shared perceptions that the organization supports continuous learning, experimentation, and skill development. This dimension encompasses developmental opportunities, tolerance for learning-oriented failure, knowledge sharing norms, and investment in employee growth.

Learning climate supports the basic need for competence by providing opportunities for skill development and mastery experiences. It also supports relatedness through collaborative learning and knowledge sharing.

Level of analysis clarification: Learning climate is an organizational-level construct describing the environment that supports learning, not an individual difference variable. This distinguishes it from "learning agility," which is typically conceptualized as an individual trait or capability (De Meuse et al., 2010).

Research supports the importance of learning climate. Organizational learning climate has been linked to innovation (Škerlavaj et al., 2010), knowledge sharing (Bock et al., 2005), and employee development (Tracey et al., 1995). Edmondson's (1999) work on psychological safety emphasized its role in enabling team learning, and subsequent research has confirmed that learning-oriented climates predict adaptation and performance in dynamic environments (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2003).

Empirical support strength: Strong. Learning climate research is well-established with consistent findings.

Potential dark side: Learning climate may create pressure for continuous development that becomes stressful, particularly when learning expectations are not matched by time and resources. Additionally, tolerance for failure may be exploited or may reduce accountability.

Generalizability: This dimension is broadly applicable, though learning content and methods vary substantially across contexts.

3.7. Well-Being Support Systems

Well-being support systems refer to organizational resources that support employee physical, mental, and emotional health. This dimension encompasses wellness programs, mental health resources, work-life policies, and management practices that prioritize employee well-being.

Clarification of construct distinction: It is important to distinguish well-being support systems (an EEC dimension) from employee well-being (an outcome discussed in Section 7). Well-being support systems refer to organizational-level resources and practices—what the organization provides. Employee well-being refers to employees' subjective experience of physical, mental, and emotional health—the individual-level state that results in part from organizational resources. These are related but conceptually and empirically distinct constructs: an organization can invest heavily in well-being support systems, but employees may not experience enhanced well-being if implementation is poor or resources are inaccessible.

Well-being support systems address all three basic needs: autonomy (by respecting work-life boundaries), competence (by ensuring employees have the health resources to perform), and relatedness (by signaling organizational care and enabling positive relationships through reduced stress).

Research documents relationships between organizational well-being support and outcomes. Comprehensive well-being programs have been associated with reduced absenteeism, lower healthcare costs, and improved productivity (Berry et al., 2010). Management practices that prioritize well-being predict engagement and retention (Grant et al., 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizational support for employee well-being became particularly salient, with research showing that perceived organizational support for well-being predicted resilience and performance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Empirical support strength: Moderate to strong. Evidence on wellness programs is mixed (some studies show limited effects), while evidence on management practices supporting well-being is stronger.

Potential dark side: Well-being support systems can become problematic when wellness programs shift responsibility for well-being onto individual employees without addressing structural causes of stress, or when well-being surveillance (through wellness technology) undermines privacy and autonomy.

Generalizability: This dimension is broadly applicable, though the specific resources offered may vary by organizational context, industry norms, and national contexts (e.g., where public healthcare is available vs. employer-provided).

3.8. Summary of EEC Dimensions

Table 2 summarizes the seven dimensions, their definitions, the basic needs they support, empirical support strength, potential dark sides, and generalizability considerations.

Table 2. Summary of EEC Dimensions.

Dimension	Definition	Needs Supported	Empirical Support	Potential Dark Side	Generalizability
Digital autonomy	Control over digital work tools and processes	Autonomy	Moderate	Boundary permeability, overwork	Most relevant for technology-intensive roles

Dimension	Definition	Needs Supported	Empirical Support	Potential Dark Side	Generalizability
Psychological safety climate	Shared perception of safety for interpersonal risk-taking	Relatedness, Competence	Strong	May reduce productive tension	Broadly applicable
Sustainability alignment	Congruence between organizational sustainability practices and employee values	Relatedness	Moderate-Strong	Greenwashing, symbolic commitment	Varies by industry and employee values
Human–AI collaboration	Practices supporting effective human-AI partnerships	Competence	Emerging	Job displacement, deskilling, algorithmic control	Currently limited to AI-adopting organizations
Restorative work design	Work structuring that enables recovery and renewal	Autonomy	Strong	May conflict with productivity pressures	Broadly applicable with context-specific implementation
Learning climate	Shared perception of organizational support for learning	Competence, Relatedness	Strong	Pressure for continuous development	Broadly applicable
Well-being support systems	Resources supporting physical, mental, and emotional health	Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness	Moderate-Strong	Responsibilization, surveillance	Broadly applicable with context variation

4. Construct Specification: How Do EEC Dimensions Combine?

A critical question concerns how the seven EEC dimensions combine to form the overall EEC construct. This question has significant theoretical and methodological implications.

4.1. Formative Versus Reflective Specification

Higher-order constructs can be specified as either reflective or formative. In a reflective specification, the higher-order construct is conceptualized as causing the indicators; the dimensions are manifestations of an underlying latent factor and should be highly correlated and interchangeable (Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000). In a formative specification, the indicators are conceptualized as causing

the construct; the dimensions combine to form the higher-order construct and need not be correlated (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001).

EEC is best specified as a formative construct. The seven dimensions are conceptualized as distinct organizational resources that combine to create the overall employee experience capital, not as interchangeable manifestations of a single underlying factor. An organization could plausibly be high in digital autonomy but low in sustainability alignment; these dimensions are not expected to be highly correlated. Rather, the dimensions combine—potentially in complex ways—to shape overall EEC.

This formative specification has important implications:

1. *No expectation of uniform dimensional intercorrelation.* Unlike reflective indicators, formative dimensions need not correlate with each other. Dimensional independence is not problematic; it may reflect genuinely distinct resource types.

2. *All dimensions contribute uniquely.* In formative models, each dimension contributes unique content to the construct. Dropping a dimension changes the construct's meaning.

3. *Configuration matters.* Formative specification suggests that the pattern or configuration of dimensions may be important. Two organizations with the same overall EEC "score" but different dimensional profiles may have different effects.

4. *Analytical approach.* Formative constructs require different analytical approaches than reflective constructs, including appropriate identification constraints and assessment of indicator validity rather than reliability (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008).

4.2. Dimensional Relationships and Potential Overlap

While formative specification does not require dimensional correlation, some EEC dimensions may empirically overlap. Understanding potential relationships among dimensions is important for construct validity and empirical research design.

Conceptually related dimension pairs:

- *Psychological safety climate and learning climate.* These dimensions are theoretically linked: psychological safety enables learning by reducing fear of failure (Edmondson, 1999). Empirically, these dimensions may correlate substantially. However, they remain conceptually distinct—an organization could have high psychological safety without emphasizing learning, or could emphasize learning in ways that do not require psychological safety (e.g., individual self-directed learning). Research should examine the magnitude of this correlation and whether both dimensions contribute unique variance to outcomes.

- *Well-being support systems and restorative work design.* Both dimensions concern employee health and energy, but they differ in focus. Well-being support systems emphasize resources provided to employees (programs, policies), while restorative work design emphasizes how work itself is structured. An organization might offer robust wellness programs but design work in ways that prevent recovery. These dimensions may correlate moderately but should contribute independently.

- *Digital autonomy and restorative work design.* Digital autonomy enables control over technology use, which may facilitate boundary management and recovery. These dimensions may

correlate, particularly in remote work contexts. However, digital autonomy focuses on control while restorative work design focuses on recovery, representing distinct mechanisms.

Implications for research:

1. Empirical studies should assess intercorrelations among all dimensions and examine whether each dimension contributes unique variance to outcomes.

2. If dimensions correlate very highly (r > .80), researchers should consider whether they are empirically distinguishable or should be combined.

3. Configural analyses (e.g., latent profile analysis) can identify whether certain dimensions tend to co-occur in organizational profiles.

4. Even if dimensions correlate, they may have differential effects on outcomes, warranting separate examination.

4.3. Configurational Possibilities and Predictions

The formative specification opens the possibility that EEC dimensions interact in complex ways. Four configurational perspectives warrant consideration, with specific predictions offered where theoretical grounding permits.

Additive effects. Dimensions may have independent, additive effects on outcomes. More resources across more dimensions lead to better outcomes in a linear fashion. This is the simplest model and provides a baseline for comparison.

Synergistic effects. Dimensions may interact such that combinations produce effects greater than the sum of individual dimensions. Based on theoretical reasoning, the following synergistic interactions are predicted:

- *Human–AI collaboration × Learning climate.* When organizations implement AI tools while also supporting learning, employees can better adapt to AI, develop AI literacy, and discover novel applications. The combination should produce effects exceeding either dimension alone.

- *Psychological safety climate × Sustainability alignment.* When employees feel safe to voice concerns and the organization demonstrates sustainability commitment, employees are more likely to engage in environmental citizenship behaviors and identify sustainability improvements.

Compensatory effects. Strength in one dimension may compensate for weakness in another. An organization weak in digital autonomy might compensate through strong well-being support systems. This suggests that multiple paths to high EEC may exist.

Necessary but not sufficient conditions. Based on Edmondson's (1999) theoretical framework and subsequent research, the following necessary condition is predicted:

- *Psychological safety climate as necessary for learning climate effects.* Without psychological safety, learning climate may not translate into actual learning behavior because employees fear negative consequences of mistakes or questions. Psychological safety may thus function as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for learning climate to enhance competence satisfaction and subsequent outcomes.

Similarly:

- *Restorative work design as necessary for sustained EEC benefits.* Without adequate recovery, the benefits of other EEC dimensions may not be sustainable over time. Even strong learning climate or meaningful sustainability alignment may lead to burnout if work design does not permit recovery.

These configurational predictions suggest that research should examine not only overall EEC levels but also dimensional profiles and interactions. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and latent profile analysis may be valuable analytical approaches alongside traditional regression methods.

4.4. Level of Analysis Considerations

EEC dimensions exist at multiple levels. Organizational policies create the structural context, but employees' experiences of these policies may vary based on implementation, local management practices, and individual differences.

This paper conceptualizes EEC as an organizational-level construct that is experienced at the individual level. This creates a cross-level analytical structure:

- *Level 2 (Organization/Unit):* EEC as implemented—organizational policies, practices, and resource investments

- *Level 1 (Individual):* EEC as experienced—employee perceptions of resources and their accessibility

Research should assess both levels and examine cross-level relationships. Aggregated individual perceptions can indicate shared climate, while variance in perceptions within organizations can indicate implementation inconsistency or individual differences in experience.

5. Mediating Mechanisms: Work Meaningfulness and Experienced Vitality

This section develops two mediating mechanisms linking EEC to organizational performance: work meaningfulness (a cognitive-evaluative pathway) and experienced vitality (an affective-energetic pathway). Critically, this section explicitly positions these constructs in relation to existing constructs to address concerns about construct redundancy.

5.1. Work Meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness refers to the degree to which employees experience their work as significant, purposeful, and worthwhile (Steger et al., 2012). This construct captures a cognitive-evaluative assessment of work's meaning.

Relationship to existing constructs: Work meaningfulness is related to but distinguishable from several existing constructs:

- *Meaningful work* (Steger et al., 2012) is essentially synonymous with work meaningfulness as defined here. This paper uses "work meaningfulness" to emphasize the experiential and variable nature of the construct.

- *Person–organization fit* (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) refers to congruence between individual and organizational values. P-O fit is an antecedent of meaningfulness—when values align, work is more likely to feel meaningful—but the constructs are distinct. One can have high P-O fit but low meaningfulness (if aligned values do not translate to experienced significance) or high meaningfulness without high P-O fit (if meaning derives from task significance rather

than value congruence). Empirical studies have shown that P-O fit and meaningful work, while correlated, predict different outcomes (Duffy et al., 2016).

- *Work engagement* (Schaufeli et al., 2002) includes a "dedication" component defined as "being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (p. 74). There is conceptual overlap between meaningfulness and the dedication component of engagement. However, meaningfulness is a cognitive evaluation of work significance, while dedication also includes affective components (enthusiasm, inspiration). Allan et al. (2019) found that meaningful work and work engagement, while related (r = .65), were distinguishable constructs with different antecedents and outcomes.

Why include meaningfulness? Despite overlap with related constructs, work meaningfulness serves an important theoretical function: it captures the cognitive pathway through which EEC resources are translated into performance. When employees experience digital autonomy, psychological safety, sustainability alignment, and other EEC dimensions, they may cognitively appraise their work as more significant and purposeful. This cognitive appraisal then motivates behavior that contributes to performance.

Theoretical mechanism: The meaning-making pathway operates through attribution and evaluation processes. EEC dimensions provide the raw material—experiences of control, connection, purpose, growth—that employees interpret and integrate into an overall sense of their work's meaning. Self-Determination Theory suggests that need satisfaction leads to internalization and meaning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conservation of Resources theory suggests that resources signal value and importance, enhancing meaning perceptions (Hobfoll, 2001).

5.2. Experienced Vitality

Experienced vitality refers to employees' subjective sense of aliveness, energy, and enthusiasm in work contexts. Drawing on Ryan and Frederick's (1997) subjective vitality concept, this construct captures the affective-energetic state that emerges from positive work experiences.

Relationship to existing constructs: Experienced vitality is related to but distinguishable from several existing constructs:

- *Vigor* is the energy component of work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002), defined as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties" (p. 74). Vigor and vitality are highly related. However, vigor as measured in the UWES includes effort investment and persistence, which are behavioral components. Vitality, as conceptualized here, focuses specifically on the subjective experience of energy and aliveness. Shirom (2011) distinguished between vigor as experienced energy and vigor as invested effort, noting these may have different antecedents.

- *Thriving at work* (Spreitzer et al., 2005) combines vitality and learning. The vitality component is essentially equivalent to experienced vitality as defined here.

- *Positive affect* (Watson et al., 1988) is a general affective state characterized by pleasant emotions. Vitality is a specific form of positive affect focused on energy and aliveness rather than all pleasant emotions.

Why include vitality? Experienced vitality serves as the affective complement to the cognitive pathway through meaningfulness. While meaningfulness captures the evaluation of work significance, vitality captures the energetic state that enables sustained effort and performance. Research suggests that vitality is associated with creativity, proactive behavior, and well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

Theoretical mechanism: EEC dimensions function as resources that replenish rather than deplete energy. Restorative work design directly supports recovery. Psychological safety reduces the energy drain of impression management and self-protection. Digital autonomy enables efficient work. Learning climate provides the energizing experience of growth and mastery. These resources accumulate to produce the subjective experience of vitality.

5.3. Distinguishing Meaningfulness and Vitality from Engagement

Given the overlap with engagement components, a critical question is whether proposing separate meaningfulness and vitality mediators adds value beyond simply using engagement.

Several considerations support the distinction:

1. *Theoretical precision.* Separating cognitive (meaningfulness) and affective-energetic (vitality) pathways enables more precise theorizing about mechanisms. EEC dimensions may differentially affect each pathway—for example, sustainability alignment may primarily operate through meaningfulness, while restorative work design may primarily operate through vitality.

2. *Differential effects on outcomes.* Meaningfulness and vitality may have different downstream effects. Meaningfulness may more strongly predict organizational citizenship behaviors and retention, while vitality may more strongly predict productivity and creativity. Spreitzer et al. (2005) found that vitality and learning (components of thriving) had different predictors and outcomes.

3. *Empirical distinguishability.* While meaningfulness overlaps with dedication and vitality overlaps with vigor, they are not identical. Research should assess discriminant validity and determine the degree of overlap. If correlations exceed .85, the constructs may not be empirically distinguishable.

4. *Engagement as alternative.* Future research should compare models using meaningfulness and vitality against models using engagement as a single mediator. If engagement adequately captures the mediating mechanism, the more parsimonious model may be preferred. This paper proposes meaningfulness and vitality as theoretically valuable, but empirical evidence should determine whether the added complexity is justified.

5.4. Parallel Rather Than Sequential Mediation

Meaningfulness and vitality are conceptualized as parallel mediators rather than sequential mediators. Both are proposed to result from EEC and to predict performance, but neither is proposed to cause the other.

This parallel specification contrasts with some models that propose sequential mediation (e.g., resources → engagement → well-being → performance). While meaningfulness and vitality likely correlate with each other, the proposed model does not require that one causes the other.

However, alternative specifications are plausible. Meaningfulness could lead to vitality (meaningful work energizes), or vitality could lead to meaningfulness (energy enables meaning-

making). Future research should empirically test alternative specifications using appropriate methods (e.g., cross-lagged panel models) to assess temporal relationships.

6. Propositions and Boundary Conditions

This section presents core propositions, including specific predictions about dimension-mediator relationships, and discusses boundary conditions, competing predictions, and causal considerations.

6.1. Core Propositions

Proposition 1: EEC dimensions (digital autonomy, psychological safety climate, sustainability alignment, human–AI collaboration, restorative work design, learning climate, and well-being support systems) are positively associated with organizational performance.

Theoretical basis: Each dimension is theorized to support basic psychological needs. Need satisfaction predicts motivation, behavior, and performance (Deci et al., 2017). Aggregated across employees, individual-level benefits translate to organizational-level performance through enhanced productivity, innovation, and retention.

Existing support: Strong evidence supports the general principle that job resources predict performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Individual dimensions have established relationships with performance outcomes. However, evidence for the integrated configuration is limited, making this proposition partially novel.

Proposition 2: The relationship between EEC dimensions and organizational performance is mediated by work meaningfulness.

Theoretical basis: EEC dimensions provide resources that employees interpret as signaling the significance and purpose of their work. This cognitive-evaluative appraisal leads to behaviors—effort, persistence, organizational citizenship—that enhance performance.

Existing support: Moderate. Research links meaningful work to performance outcomes (Allan et al., 2019). The specific mediation pathway proposed here requires empirical testing.

Proposition 3: The relationship between EEC dimensions and organizational performance is mediated by experienced vitality.

Theoretical basis: EEC dimensions provide resources that replenish energy and enable sustainable effort. The resulting affective-energetic state supports productivity, creativity, and sustained performance.

Existing support: Moderate. Vitality predicts performance and creativity (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Spreitzer et al., 2005). The specific mediation pathway proposed here requires empirical testing.

Proposition 4: EEC dimensions have differential effects on work meaningfulness versus experienced vitality.

Building on the general proposition, specific sub-propositions are offered:

Proposition 4a: Sustainability alignment and psychological safety climate have stronger positive effects on work meaningfulness than on experienced vitality.

Theoretical basis: These dimensions primarily support the relatedness need by connecting employees to broader purpose (sustainability alignment) and authentic relationships (psychological safety). Relatedness satisfaction is particularly linked to meaning-making processes—feeling connected to others and to valued social purposes enhances cognitive evaluations of work significance.

Proposition 4b: Restorative work design and well-being support systems have stronger positive effects on experienced vitality than on work meaningfulness.

Theoretical basis: These dimensions directly support energy management and recovery. While they may indirectly support meaning (by signaling organizational care), their primary mechanism is resource replenishment, which manifests as enhanced vitality.

Proposition 4c: Learning climate has stronger positive effects on experienced vitality than on work meaningfulness.

Theoretical basis: Learning and growth experiences are energizing; mastery experiences enhance feelings of aliveness. While learning can contribute to meaning (skill development enhances contribution capacity), the more proximal effect is energetic.

Proposition 4d: Digital autonomy and human–AI collaboration have approximately equal effects on work meaningfulness and experienced vitality.

Theoretical basis: These dimensions support autonomy and competence needs, respectively, which have relatively balanced effects on both cognitive evaluation (meaning) and affective-energetic states (vitality). Control and capability contribute to both pathways.

Existing support for Propositions 4a-4d: Limited. These are novel theoretical predictions requiring empirical investigation.

Table 3 summarizes the core propositions, theoretical bases, and existing empirical support.

Table 3. Summary of Core Propositions.

Proposition	Statement	Theoretical Basis	Existing Support
P1	EEC dimensions are positively associated with organizational performance	JD-R: resources enhance performance; RBV: integrated resources create competitive advantage	Strong for individual resources; Limited for configuration
P2	EEC-performance relationship is mediated by work meaningfulness	SDT: need satisfaction enhances meaning; meaning motivates performance	Moderate
P3	EEC-performance relationship is mediated by experienced vitality	COR: resources replenish energy; vitality enables performance	Moderate
P4a	Sustainability alignment and psychological safety have stronger effects on meaningfulness than vitality	Relatedness supports meaning-making	Limited
P4b	Restorative work design and well-being support have stronger effects on vitality than meaningfulness	Energy management supports vitality	Limited
P4c	Learning climate has stronger effects on vitality than meaningfulness	Mastery experiences are energizing	Limited
P4d	Digital autonomy and human–AI collaboration have balanced effects on both mediators	Autonomy and competence support both pathways	Limited

6.2. Configurational Propositions

Building on Section 4.3, the following configurational propositions are offered:

Proposition 5: Psychological safety climate moderates the relationship between learning climate and competence satisfaction, such that learning climate has stronger effects when psychological safety climate is high.

Theoretical basis: Drawing on Edmondson's (1999) framework, psychological safety enables the risk-taking and vulnerability inherent in learning. Without safety, learning opportunities may not translate to actual learning behavior.

Proposition 6: Human–AI collaboration and learning climate interact synergistically, such that their combined effect on performance exceeds the sum of individual effects.

Theoretical basis: AI implementation requires continuous learning and adaptation. Organizations with strong learning climates enable employees to develop AI literacy and discover novel AI applications, amplifying AI benefits.

6.3. Boundary Conditions

The propositions are advanced with appropriate tentativeness, recognizing boundary conditions under which relationships may be weakened, strengthened, or reversed.

Employee characteristics. Individual differences may moderate EEC effects:

- *Values:* Employees who strongly value sustainability may respond more positively to sustainability alignment, while those who do not prioritize sustainability may be indifferent or perceive it as irrelevant.

- *Technology attitudes:* Employees with positive technology attitudes may respond more favorably to digital autonomy and human–AI collaboration, while those with technology anxiety may not benefit.

- *Growth orientation:* Employees with strong learning goal orientation may benefit more from learning climate.

Implementation quality. EEC effects likely depend on implementation quality. Organizational policies that are not effectively translated into local practice will have weaker effects. Manager behavior is a critical implementation variable.

Authenticity perceptions. Employees must perceive EEC dimensions as authentic rather than symbolic. Perceived greenwashing in sustainability, performative rather than genuine psychological safety, or surveillance-oriented wellness programs may generate cynicism rather than positive outcomes.

Industry and context. Effects may vary by industry and context. In knowledge-intensive industries, learning climate and digital autonomy may be particularly important. In manufacturing, restorative work design may be critical. In industries facing AI disruption, human–AI collaboration may be especially salient.

National culture. Cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) may moderate EEC effects. Autonomy-related dimensions may have stronger effects in individualistic cultures. Relatedness-related dimensions may have stronger effects in collectivistic cultures. Power distance may affect psychological safety climate effects, as speaking up may be more culturally constrained in high power distance contexts.

6.4. Competing Theoretical Perspectives

Strong theoretical papers engage with alternative explanations. Several competing perspectives warrant consideration.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory would explain EEC effects through reciprocity rather than need satisfaction. From this perspective, EEC represents organizational investment in employees, which creates felt obligation to reciprocate through effort and loyalty.

Mediating mechanisms would emphasize felt obligation and affective commitment rather than meaningfulness and vitality.

Response: Social exchange and need satisfaction mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. EEC may operate through both pathways—simultaneously signaling organizational investment (exchange) and supporting psychological needs (SDT). Research should examine both mechanisms. If felt obligation and commitment fully mediate EEC effects, the SDT-based explanation would be weakened.

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973). Signaling theory would emphasize that EEC communicates information about organizational quality. Organizations with strong EEC signal that they are desirable employers, attracting and retaining talent. The mechanism would emphasize attraction and selection rather than motivational processes among current employees.

Response: Signaling effects are likely important for attraction and early retention. However, for incumbent employees, direct effects on need satisfaction and motivation are also likely. Research should examine both signaling (external) and motivational (internal) pathways.

Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory would predict that EEC dimensions function as resource reservoirs that protect against demands and enable investment. From this perspective, EEC is particularly important when demands are high, functioning as a buffering mechanism.

Response: COR provides a complementary perspective emphasizing the protective function of resources. Research should examine whether EEC has stronger effects when demands are high, as COR would predict.

6.5. Causal Considerations and Reverse Causality

The propositions imply causal direction from EEC to outcomes through mediators. However, alternative causal interpretations must be considered.

Reverse causality. High-performing employees and organizations may receive or create more EEC resources:

- *Performance → EEC:* Successful organizations have more resources to invest in employee experience. High-performing employees may receive more developmental opportunities, autonomy, and support.

- *Selection effects:* Organizations with strong EEC may attract employees predisposed to experience meaningfulness and vitality, creating spurious associations.

- *Reciprocal causation:* EEC and outcomes may mutually reinforce, creating virtuous (or vicious) cycles.

Addressing reverse causality in research:

1. *Longitudinal designs* with EEC measured at T1 and outcomes at T2 establish temporal precedence, though they cannot rule out third-variable explanations.

2. *Experimental or quasi-experimental designs* manipulating EEC dimensions provide stronger causal evidence. Field experiments introducing specific practices can assess causal effects.

3. *Instrumental variable approaches* can address endogeneity, though appropriate instruments are difficult to identify.

4. *Panel designs with cross-lagged models* can assess bidirectional effects and distinguish EEC → outcome effects from outcome → EEC effects.

Theoretical acknowledgment: Even if reverse causality operates, the proposed model retains value. If EEC and performance mutually reinforce, organizations can initiate positive spirals by

investing in EEC. The practical implication—that EEC investment is worthwhile—holds under reciprocal causation.

6.6. Potential Null Findings and Alternative Outcomes

Theoretical transparency requires acknowledging conditions under which null findings might occur:

- If EEC dimensions are not perceived as authentic, effects may be null or negative.
- If implementation is poor, organizational-level EEC policies may not translate to employee-level experiences, producing null effects.
- If dimensions are redundant, individual dimensions may not show incremental effects beyond others.
- If employees are already at optimal levels of need satisfaction from other sources, marginal EEC improvements may have diminishing effects.

Furthermore, some EEC dimensions may have curvilinear effects. For example, very high digital autonomy might become overwhelming without structure. Very high learning climate might create pressure for continuous development that becomes stressful. Research should examine curvilinear relationships using polynomial terms and response surface analysis.

7. Employee Well-Being: Outcome Rather Than Moderator

This framework positions employee well-being as a parallel outcome of EEC alongside performance, rather than as a moderator. This positioning is theoretically coherent for several reasons.

First, the literature on workplace resources consistently shows that resources predict both performance and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Positioning well-being as an outcome is consistent with this evidence.

Second, conceptualizing well-being as an outcome rather than moderator avoids problematic overlap with vitality. Vitality is an energetic state that mediates the EEC-performance relationship. Well-being is a broader construct encompassing life satisfaction, positive affect, absence of distress, and flourishing, which is an important outcome in its own right.

Third, this positioning aligns with the "mutual gains" perspective that organizational practices can benefit both organizations (through performance) and employees (through well-being) simultaneously, while acknowledging that gains are not guaranteed and depend on implementation and authenticity.

As noted in Section 3.7, well-being support systems (an EEC dimension) and employee well-being (an outcome) are conceptually distinct. Well-being support systems are organizational-level resources; employee well-being is an individual-level subjective state. Organizations may invest in support systems without achieving well-being improvements if resources are inaccessible or implementation is poor. Conversely, employees may experience well-being from sources unrelated to organizational support systems.

Proposition 7: EEC dimensions are positively associated with employee well-being.

Proposition 8: Work meaningfulness and experienced vitality partially mediate the relationship between EEC dimensions and employee well-being.

These propositions acknowledge that EEC affects well-being, with meaningfulness and vitality as partial mediators. Other pathways (e.g., reduced strain, enhanced recovery) may also operate.

Mutual gains versus trade-offs: While the framework emphasizes potential mutual gains, trade-offs may exist. Some organizations may implement EEC dimensions in ways that benefit performance but not well-being (e.g., learning climate that creates pressure) or that benefit well-being but not

performance (e.g., restorative work design that reduces output). Research should examine conditions under which mutual gains versus trade-offs occur.

8. Methodological Considerations for Empirical Investigation

This section provides guidance for empirical research designed to test the proposed framework.

8.1. Measurement Development

EEC dimensions require validated measurement. Table 4 summarizes measurement recommendations, including existing measures, adaptation needs, key considerations, and illustrative sample items for dimensions requiring new scale development.

Table 4. Measurement Recommendations for EEC Dimensions.

Dimension	Existing Measures	Adaptation Needed	Sample Items (for dimensions requiring development)
Digital autonomy	Work autonomy scales (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)	Technology-specific items required	"I can choose which digital tools to use for my work tasks"; "I have control over when I check and respond to digital communications"; "I can customize my digital work environment to suit my preferences"
Psychological safety climate	Team Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1999)	Adaptation to organizational level	Existing scale available; adapt referent from "team" to "organization"
Sustainability alignment	CSR perception scales (Rupp et al., 2006)	Value congruence items may need development	"My organization's commitment to sustainability reflects my personal values"; "I believe my organization's environmental practices are genuine, not just for show"; "Working here allows me to contribute to environmental and social causes I care about"
Human–AI collaboration	Limited existing measures	New scale development required	"AI tools in my workplace are designed to support rather than replace my contributions"; "I have received adequate training to work effectively with AI systems"; "The division of tasks between me and AI systems makes sense and leverages my unique capabilities"; "I trust that AI is being implemented to help me do my job better"

Dimension	Existing Measures	Adaptation Needed	Sample Items (for dimensions requiring development)
Restorative work design	Recovery experience scales (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007)	Organizational practice focus needed	"My organization structures work to allow adequate breaks and recovery time"; "I am able to fully disconnect from work during off-hours"; "Workloads in my organization are calibrated to be sustainable"
Learning climate	Organizational Learning Climate (Škerlavaj et al., 2010)	Minimal adaptation	Existing scale available
Well-being support systems	Perceived Organizational Support subscales	May need expansion	"My organization provides meaningful resources to support employee mental health"; "Management genuinely prioritizes employee well-being, not just productivity"; "I have access to programs and policies that support my physical and mental health"

Multi-source assessment. EEC can be assessed through employee surveys (perceptions), organizational records (policies and investments), and manager reports. Triangulating across sources strengthens validity and enables examination of perception-reality gaps.

8.2. Mediator Measurement

Work meaningfulness can be assessed using the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012), which measures perceived positive meaning in work, meaning making through work, and greater good motivations.

Experienced vitality can be assessed using the Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) adapted for work contexts.

To examine discriminant validity from engagement, studies should include the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002) and assess:

- Correlation between meaningfulness and dedication

- Correlation between vitality and vigor

- Whether mediators contribute unique variance beyond engagement

8.3. Outcome Measurement

Organizational performance is multidimensional. Studies should assess multiple performance dimensions:

- *Employee-level outcomes:* Individual productivity, job performance ratings, innovative behavior

- *Unit-level outcomes:* Team performance, unit productivity, quality metrics

- *Organization-level outcomes:* Financial performance, customer satisfaction, innovation indicators, retention rates

Different EEC dimensions may more strongly predict different outcome types. Disaggregated analysis is recommended.

8.4. Research Design Considerations

Cross-sectional surveys are appropriate for initial validation and examination of associations but cannot establish causality and are vulnerable to common method bias.

Longitudinal designs are necessary to establish temporal precedence. Time-lagged designs with EEC measured at T1, mediators at T2, and outcomes at T3 enable stronger causal inference but cannot rule out third-variable explanations.

Cross-lagged panel designs enable examination of bidirectional effects, addressing reverse causality concerns. These designs require at least two waves with all constructs measured at each wave.

Experimental and quasi-experimental designs provide the strongest causal evidence. Field experiments introducing EEC interventions (e.g., implementing psychological safety training, introducing restorative work design practices) can assess causal effects.

Multilevel designs are essential given the cross-level nature of EEC. Organizations (or units) are the Level 2 unit, with individual employees nested within. Multilevel structural equation modeling or multilevel path analysis enables appropriate analysis.

Experience sampling methods can examine within-person fluctuations in EEC experiences, vitality, and meaningfulness, providing insight into dynamic processes.

Qualitative research can complement quantitative research by exploring how employees experience and make sense of EEC dimensions, identifying dimensions not included in the framework, and examining tensions and paradoxes.

8.5. Analytical Approaches

Given the formative specification of EEC, appropriate analytical approaches include:

Formative measurement models: Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) accommodates formative constructs more easily than covariance-based SEM. Researchers should assess indicator validity (weights, significance) rather than reliability.

Dimensional analysis: Given uncertainty about optimal aggregation, researchers should examine both individual dimension effects and overall EEC effects. This enables identification of which dimensions are most important.

Configural analysis: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) examines how combinations of dimensions relate to outcomes, capturing configurational complexity. This approach is particularly valuable for examining equifinality (multiple paths to same outcome) and necessary conditions.

Latent profile analysis: Identifies naturally occurring profiles of EEC dimensions, enabling examination of how different configurations relate to outcomes. This approach can reveal whether certain dimensions tend to co-occur.

Polynomial regression and response surface analysis: Enables examination of fit between employee EEC preferences and EEC as experienced, capturing potential misfit effects and curvilinear relationships.

Moderated mediation: Tests boundary conditions by examining whether mediation effects vary by moderator variables (e.g., employee values, implementation quality).

9. Implications for Practice

The EEC framework offers guidance for organizations seeking to enhance employee experience and performance.

9.1. Integrated Approach

Organizations should approach employee experience holistically rather than as disconnected initiatives. Investments in digital tools, sustainability, well-being, and learning should be coordinated to create coherent employee experiences. Fragmented initiatives may be less effective than integrated approaches.

9.2. Assessment and Diagnosis

Organizations can assess their EEC profile across dimensions, identifying strengths and gaps. Table 5 provides a diagnostic framework.

Table 5. Diagnostic Framework for EEC Assessment.

Assessment Question	Dimension	Indicator Examples
Do employees control their digital tools and technology use?	Digital autonomy	Tool choice, customization, timing control
Can employees speak up without fear?	Psychological safety climate	Voice behavior, error reporting, idea sharing
Do employees perceive sustainability commitment as authentic?	Sustainability alignment	CSR perception, value congruence, authenticity beliefs
Is AI positioned as augmenting rather than replacing?	Human–AI collaboration	AI acceptance, role clarity, training adequacy
Does work structure enable recovery?	Restorative work design	Break frequency, workload, boundary respect
Are learning and development supported?	Learning climate	Development opportunities, failure tolerance, knowledge sharing
Are well-being resources available and used?	Well-being support systems	Program availability, utilization, management support

9.3. Authenticity and Implementation

The framework emphasizes that EEC effects depend on authentic implementation. Organizations should ensure that:

- Stated commitments are matched by actual practices
- Policies are effectively translated into local management behavior
- Employee perceptions of EEC match intended EEC investments
- Gaps between espoused and enacted EEC are identified and addressed

9.4. Attention to Dark Sides

Organizations should proactively address potential dark sides of EEC dimensions:

- Establish clear boundaries to prevent digital autonomy from enabling overwork
- Ensure sustainability alignment is substantive, not performative
- Manage AI integration to augment rather than displace human workers
- Support well-being without surveillance or shifting responsibility to individuals
- Ensure learning climate does not create unsustainable development pressure

9.5. Individual Differences and Context Adaptation

Organizations should recognize that employee preferences for EEC dimensions vary. Personalization—to the extent feasible—may enhance EEC effects. Organizations should also adapt

EEC implementation to their specific context, recognizing that dimensions vary in relevance across industries and roles.

10. Limitations, Generalizability, and Future Directions

10.1. Limitations

This paper is a theoretical contribution that has not been empirically tested. The propositions are advanced with appropriate tentativeness, but empirical validation is essential.

The seven dimensions are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Other dimensions supporting basic psychological needs could be identified. Future research should examine construct coverage and potential missing dimensions.

The framework focuses primarily on positive dimensions and outcomes. A more complete model would incorporate demands, negative experiences, and dark side outcomes more fully.

The propositions imply causal direction but are based on theoretical reasoning, not empirical evidence of causality. Reverse causality and reciprocal causation are plausible and require empirical examination.

10.2. Generalizability Across Work Contexts

The framework is developed primarily with knowledge workers in digitally transformed organizations in mind. Generalizability to other contexts requires consideration.

Table 6. Generalizability Considerations Across Work Contexts.

Work Context	Most Applicable Dimensions	Less Applicable Dimensions	Adaptation Considerations
Knowledge work	All dimensions applicable	—	Framework developed for this context
Manufacturing	Psychological safety, Restorative work design, Learning climate, Well-being support	Digital autonomy (may require adaptation), Human–AI collaboration (depends on automation level)	Adapt digital autonomy to equipment/process control
Service work	Psychological safety, Learning climate, Well-being support	Sustainability alignment (varies), Human–AI collaboration (varies)	Consider customer interaction as additional dimension
Gig work	Digital autonomy, Learning climate	Psychological safety (individual work), Sustainability alignment (transactional relationship)	Consider platform design as key factor
Healthcare	All dimensions potentially applicable	Human–AI collaboration (acceptance varies)	High relevance of well-being and restorative design

Core vs. context-specific dimensions: Psychological safety climate, learning climate, and well-being support systems appear broadly applicable across contexts. Digital autonomy and human–AI collaboration are more context-specific, depending on technology use. Sustainability alignment depends on industry and employee values.

10.3 Cultural Generalizability

As noted in Section 2.3, SDT research generally supports the universality of the three basic needs across cultures, but their relative salience and the means through which they are satisfied may vary. In individualistic cultures, autonomy-related dimensions (digital autonomy, restorative work design) may be particularly important. In collectivistic cultures, relatedness-related dimensions (psychological safety climate, sustainability alignment, well-being support systems) may be more central to well-being.

Additional cultural considerations:

- *Power distance:* In high power distance cultures, psychological safety climate may be more difficult to establish because hierarchical norms constrain speaking up. Effects may be weaker, or different antecedents may be required.

- *Uncertainty avoidance:* In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, human–AI collaboration may encounter greater resistance due to discomfort with technological change.

- *Long-term orientation:* Learning climate effects may be stronger in cultures with long-term orientation, where investment in development is culturally valued.

Cross-cultural research is needed to examine these possibilities and identify cultural boundary conditions.

10.4. Future Directions

Empirical validation. The most immediate priority is empirical testing of the propositions. This requires measurement development, sample collection, and appropriate analytical approaches.

Dimensional structure. Research should empirically examine dimensional relationships, including correlations, overlap, and whether some dimensions should be combined.

Configurational research. Research should examine how EEC dimensions combine, testing additive versus synergistic versus compensatory effects using appropriate methods (QCA, latent profile analysis).

Longitudinal and causal research. Research should establish temporal relationships, examine bidirectional effects, and where possible use experimental designs to assess causality.

Dark side research. Research should examine conditions under which EEC dimensions have negative effects, including curvilinear relationships and tensions among dimensions.

Comparative research. Research should compare EEC effects across industries, national cultures, and employee populations to establish boundary conditions and generalizability.

Intervention research. Research should examine whether organizational interventions to enhance EEC dimensions produce expected effects on meaningfulness, vitality, and performance.

Additional dimensions. Research should consider whether additional dimensions are needed, particularly for contexts not well-served by current dimensions.

11. Conclusion

This paper developed the concept of Employee Experience Capital—an integrated configuration of organizational resources that shape employees' holistic work experiences and generate sustainable competitive advantage. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources theory, the Resource-Based View, and Self-Determination Theory, the framework identifies seven illustrative dimensions systematically justified by their relationship to basic psychological needs.

The framework proposes that EEC influences organizational performance through dual mediating pathways: work meaningfulness (cognitive-evaluative) and experienced vitality (affective-energetic). Specific propositions predict differential effects of EEC dimensions on each pathway. These constructs are explicitly positioned in relation to existing constructs, acknowledging overlap while articulating unique contributions.

Critically, the framework acknowledges boundary conditions, engages with competing theoretical perspectives, discusses potential dark sides, and addresses causal considerations including reverse causality. The propositions are advanced tentatively, recognizing that empirical validation is essential.

By demonstrating how ostensibly disparate organizational practices—digital tools, psychological safety, sustainability, AI, work design, learning, and well-being—function as an integrated system supporting fundamental human needs, the framework offers both theoretical insight and practical guidance for organizations navigating the complexity of contemporary work.

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