

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT LEVELS ACROSS GENERATIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Ishwarya M¹, Dr. S Ramachandran²

¹*Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies and Research, Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology. Coimbatore. Email ID: abishwarya2015@gmail.com*

²*Research Supervisor, Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies and Research, Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology. Coimbatore.*

Abstract—Employee engagement is a key driver of organizational success, impacting productivity, job satisfaction, and retention. However, engagement varies across generations due to differences in attitudes, expectations, and work values. This study examines engagement levels among Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, highlighting their distinct preferences and commonalities. The findings reveal that Generation X values stability and autonomy, engaging more when given independence and opportunities for growth. Millennials prioritize purpose-driven work, collaboration, and inclusivity, thriving in innovative and supportive environments. Generation Z favors flexibility, digital tools, and mental health support, with their engagement shaped by organizations' commitment to social and environmental causes. Despite these differences, shared drivers like recognition, meaningful work, and clear communication influence all generations. By addressing these generational nuances, organizations can create targeted strategies to enhance engagement across a diverse workforce, fostering collaboration, motivation, and overall performance. This research offers actionable insights for leaders and HR professionals.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Generational difference, Multigenerational workforce, Workforce motivation.

Introduction

Employee engagement has emerged as a critical factor in organizational success, with its influence extending across productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention. Defined as the emotional commitment an employee has to their organization and its goals, engagement reflects the degree to which employees are motivated to contribute their best work. However, the workforce of today is marked by significant generational diversity, encompassing Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Each generation has distinct values, preferences, and expectations shaped by the socio-economic, cultural, and technological environments of their formative years.

In this context, understanding employee engagement levels across generations has become imperative for organizations aiming to foster an inclusive and high-performing workplace. While Baby Boomers are often characterized by their loyalty and work ethic, Generation X values autonomy and work-life balance. Millennials prioritize purpose-driven work and opportunities for growth, whereas Generation Z brings a strong preference for digital communication and flexibility. These generational differences pose both challenges and opportunities for employers striving to design strategies that resonate with a multigenerational workforce.

This study seeks to provide a comparative analysis of employee engagement levels across generations, exploring the factors that drive engagement and the potential gaps in existing practices. By delving into the unique characteristics and expectations of each generation, this research aims to offer actionable insights for organizations to enhance engagement and leverage the strengths of a diverse workforce. Through this analysis, the study contributes to the broader discourse on generational dynamics in the workplace and underscores the importance of tailoring engagement strategies to meet the evolving needs of employees.

Literature review

A successful organization is one that fosters employee engagement through innovative strategies, ensuring employees feel valued and appreciated. This study defines employee engagement based on **Schaufeli's (2002)** explanation, describing it as a motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work. Employee engagement levels vary among individuals, particularly across different generational cohorts. The purpose of this research is to explore and compare the levels of employee engagement among Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Employing a comparative descriptive design with a quantitative approach, data was collected through online questionnaires. A sample of 170 respondents was obtained, comprising 32 participants from Generation X, 98 from Generation Y, and 40 from Generation Z. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, inferential analysis, and a one-way ANOVA test to identify differences between the groups. The findings revealed significant differences in employee engagement levels across the three generations. While engagement levels between Generations X and Y showed no significant differences, Generation Z exhibited significantly different levels of engagement compared to both Generations X and Y.

Muselman, Claire C. 2021. This study examines the relationship between work engagement and mobile learning across generations, highlighting significant differences in both. Using quantitative research tools like the "Individual Innovativeness Scale" (**Hurt, Joseph, & Cook, 1977**) and the "Mobile Learning Scale" (**Fatima et al., 2017**) based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), data from 231 employees across four generations in Lithuanian organizations were analyzed using two-way ANOVA. The findings revealed that Generation X and Generation Y exhibited higher work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) compared to Generation Z, while Generation Z showed a stronger inclination toward mobile learning than the older generations. Baby Boomers were the least likely to adopt mobile learning. The study concludes that encouraging mobile learning among Generation Z employees could improve their work engagement levels.

Kurniawati, Nurul Imani. (2022) The study of generational differences in the workplace has become a focal point for many researchers, as, for the first time in history, organizations are composed of workers from multiple generations working side by side. Understanding how employees from each generation interact with and contribute to their organizations remains a compelling area for exploration. However, research specifically investigating employee engagement among Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y in transportation and logistics delivery services is still limited. This study aims to address this gap by examining the differences in employee engagement among these generational cohorts within transportation and logistics companies in Semarang. Workers were categorized by generation based on their age or year of birth, and their levels of employee engagement were measured. Comparative tests were then conducted to determine the significance of the differences across generations. The findings from the statistical analysis revealed clear generational differences in employee engagement. It was statistically confirmed that employee engagement levels vary significantly between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y.

Objective of the Study:

1. To analyze the levels of employee engagement among Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, identifying generational differences and similarities.
2. To explore the unique factors that drive engagement for each generation, such as work values, attitudes, and expectations.
3. To examine the role of organizational practices, including flexibility, digital tools, and inclusivity, in shaping engagement across generations.
4. To identify shared drivers of engagement, such as recognition, meaningful work, and effective communication, that resonate with all generational cohorts.
5. To provide actionable insights and recommendations for leaders and HR professionals to develop targeted strategies for enhancing engagement within a multigenerational workforce.

Statement of the Problem:

Employee engagement is essential for organizational success, impacting productivity, job satisfaction, and retention. However, fostering engagement in a multigenerational workforce is challenging due to differences in attitudes, expectations, and work values. Generation X values stability and autonomy, Millennials prioritize purpose-driven work and collaboration, while Generation Z prefers flexibility and digital tools. Despite these differences, all generations share common engagement drivers like recognition, meaningful work, and clear communication. A lack of understanding of

these generational needs makes it difficult for organizations to create effective strategies, potentially lowering motivation and performance. This study aims to explore these differences and similarities to provide actionable insights for improving engagement across generations.

Methodology:

Quantitative analysis for statistical validity and **Qualitative analysis** for contextual depth, this study delivers a holistic understanding of generational differences in employee engagement and offers actionable recommendations for organizations.

Employee engagement functions in a company

Employee engagement functions within a company must adapt to the unique traits, values, and preferences of each generation—Generation X, Y (Millennials), and Z—to ensure a productive and harmonious workplace. Generation X, known for their independence and loyalty, value straightforward communication methods such as emails and in-person meetings, structured feedback, and flexible work arrangements that support work-life balance. Engagement strategies for this cohort should focus on providing clear updates, mentoring opportunities, and tangible rewards tied to long-term performance. Millennials, on the other hand, thrive in collaborative environments, preferring frequent and informal feedback facilitated through tools like Slack or Zoom. They value continuous learning, career development opportunities, and purpose-driven work that aligns with their values. Organizations can engage Millennials by fostering innovation, public recognition of achievements, and wellness initiatives that support work-life integration. Generation Z, as digital natives, seek instant communication, real-time feedback, and experiential learning experiences enabled by advanced technologies like gamification and AR/VR. They prioritize flexibility, inclusivity, and authenticity, favoring workplaces that align with their strong sense of social responsibility and provide cutting-edge tools to enhance productivity. By tailoring engagement functions—such as communication, learning and development, recognition, work-life balance, and alignment with organizational values—to these generational preferences, companies can foster a supportive, collaborative, and innovative culture. This not only improves motivation and job satisfaction but also strengthens retention and overall organizational success.

The Three Key Elements of Employee Engagement

1. A Strong Organizational Culture

A supportive and inclusive organizational culture is foundational to employee engagement. Leaders who demonstrate care, empathy, and recognition foster trust and a sense of belonging among employees. This culture encourages open communication, collaboration, and mutual respect, creating an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute.

2. A Sense of Purpose

Employees are more engaged when they understand how their work connects to the organization's overall mission and success. A clear sense of purpose provides meaning and motivation, inspiring employees to go beyond routine tasks. When employees see the impact of their contributions, they are more likely to feel invested in the organization's goals.

3. Opportunities for Personal and Professional Growth

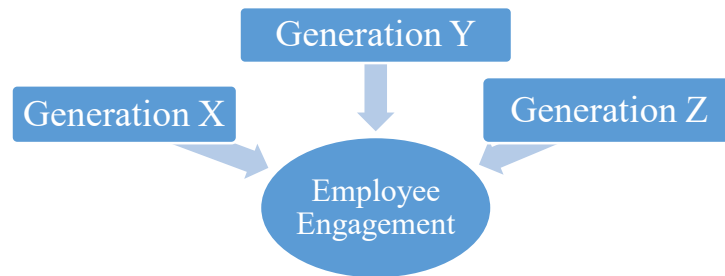
Continuous learning and development opportunities are critical for engagement. Employees who have access to training, mentorship, and career advancement pathways feel empowered to reach their potential. Organizations that prioritize growth foster loyalty and enhance productivity by aligning individual aspirations with organizational objectives.

Relationship between Employee Engagement with Generation X, Y, and Z

To effectively engage a multigenerational workforce, organizations must implement tailored strategies that address the unique preferences and work styles of Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z. Customizing communication is key, as Gen X tends to prefer email, Millennials thrive on collaborative tools, and Gen Z gravitates toward instant messaging. Cross-generational mentorship can further enhance engagement by facilitating knowledge-sharing between experienced Gen X employees and tech-savvy Gen Z workers, fostering mutual learning and collaboration. Personalizing recognition is equally important, with private praise resonating more with Gen X, while Millennials often appreciate public acknowledgment, especially through social platforms. Leveraging technology is another critical strategy, offering modern tools and platforms to meet the expectations of Millennials and Gen Z, while

Employee Engagement Levels Across Generations: A Comparative Analysis

providing adequate training to ensure Gen X employees are comfortable with technological advancements. Lastly, building inclusive workplace policies that accommodate diverse work styles and life priorities ensures a supportive environment where all generations can thrive and contribute meaningfully.



A comparative analysis of employee engagement across different generations—Gen X, Gen Y (Millennials), and Gen Z

A comparative analysis of employee engagement across different generations—Gen X, Gen Y (Millennials), and Gen Z—reveals distinct preferences and priorities regarding work values, motivation, and engagement strategies. **Work values and priorities** differ significantly, with Gen X emphasizing stability, loyalty, and work-life balance, Millennials valuing purpose-driven work, collaboration, and career growth, and Gen Z focusing on flexibility, inclusivity, and personal development. When considering **work-life balance**, Gen X prioritizes it highly, seeking flexible schedules to manage family responsibilities, while Millennials prefer work-life integration with wellness programs, and Gen Z favors autonomy through hybrid or shorter workweeks.

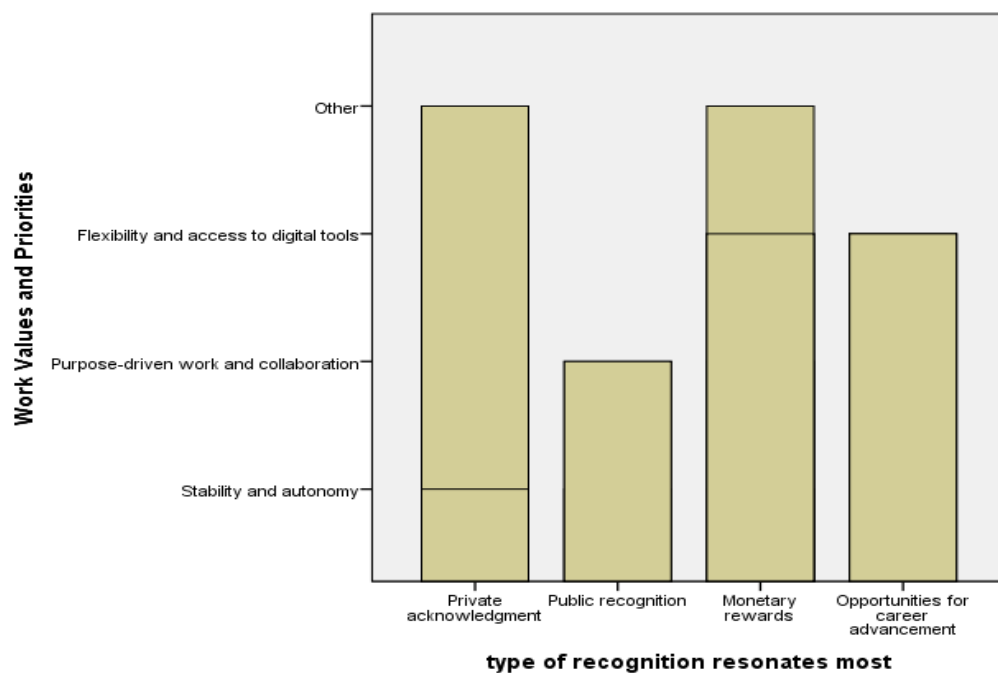
Motivation in the workplace also varies: Gen X is motivated by job security, meaningful contributions, and respect for their experience; Millennials thrive on career advancement, learning opportunities, and alignment with organizational values; and Gen Z finds motivation in real-time feedback, skill development, and ethical workplace practices. In terms of **communication methods for work-related discussions**, Gen X prefers formal communication like emails and structured meetings, Millennials lean towards collaborative tools like Slack and Teams, and Gen Z favors instant messaging and digital-first platforms.

Comfort with new workplace technologies reflects generational adaptation, with Gen X requiring training to embrace advanced tools, Millennials being highly tech-savvy and eager to adopt new platforms, and Gen Z, as digital natives, seamlessly integrating emerging technologies. Regarding **recognition**, Gen X values private and tangible rewards like bonuses or promotions, Millennials prefer public acknowledgment and professional growth opportunities, and Gen Z appreciates authentic recognition tied to their skills, often favoring experiential rewards.

When it comes to **workplace initiatives to improve engagement**, Gen X values mentorship and wellness programs, Millennials seek innovation-driven projects and social impact initiatives, while Gen Z prioritizes inclusivity, gamified training, and mental health support. The **most preferable work environment** for Gen X is structured and stable, for Millennials it's collaborative and dynamic, and for Gen Z, it's flexible and inclusive. Adapting to **changes in the workplace** is easiest for Millennials, who thrive on innovation, followed by Gen Z, who seek modern approaches, while Gen X may take longer due to their preference for stability.

Finally, **learning opportunities** are best tailored as structured programs for Gen X, interactive and collaborative experiences for Millennials, and gamified, tech-driven learning for Gen Z. By understanding these generational differences, organizations can craft tailored engagement strategies to create a supportive, motivated, and productive multigenerational workforce.

Data Interpretations



ANOVA

Work Values and Priorities

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.867	3	.956	.707	.568
Within Groups	14.867	11	1.352		
Total	17.733	14			

The graph highlights the relationship between work values and the preferred types of recognition among employees. Private acknowledgment strongly resonates with those prioritizing stability and autonomy, while public recognition appeals to individuals valuing purpose-driven work and collaboration. Monetary rewards are favored by employees emphasizing flexibility and access to digital tools, whereas opportunities for career advancement are significant for those seeking long-term growth and purpose-driven roles. The "Other" category suggests unique preferences that may not align with conventional recognition methods.

Findings

- The F-value of **0.707** and a significance level (Sig.) of **0.568** indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in work values and priorities across the different types of recognition. This suggests that preferences for recognition types may not strongly depend on employees' work values and priorities in this dataset.
- While distinct patterns are visible in the graph, the lack of statistical significance in the ANOVA analysis implies that these differences may not be robust enough to generalize. This might be due to a small sample size (df = 11 for within groups) or minimal variation between groups. Further investigation with a larger dataset could yield more conclusive results.

Actionable Recommendations

To enhance employee engagement across generations, organizations should adopt tailored strategies: provide flexible work schedules and mentorship programs for Gen X, fostering stability and work-life balance; create opportunities for career advancement, innovation-driven projects, and purpose-driven initiatives for Millennials, leveraging their collaborative nature; and implement gamified training, inclusive policies, and mental health support for Gen Z, aligning with their need for flexibility, inclusivity, and digital tools. Additionally, organizations should ensure communication methods suit generational preferences, offer recognition in diverse forms (private for Gen X, public for Millennials, and authentic for Gen Z), and prioritize adaptive technologies with proper training for all generations. These targeted approaches can build a cohesive, motivated, and productive workforce.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fostering employee engagement in a multigenerational workforce requires a nuanced understanding of generational differences and commonalities. Generation X thrives on stability, autonomy, and structured growth opportunities, while Millennials are driven by purpose, collaboration, and innovation. Generation Z, as digital natives, seeks flexibility, inclusivity, and mental health support. Despite these distinct preferences, shared drivers such as recognition, meaningful work, and effective communication remain universal. By adopting tailored engagement strategies—offering flexible schedules and mentorship for Gen X, innovation-driven opportunities and purpose for Millennials, and gamified learning and inclusivity for Gen Z—organizations can create a supportive environment that boosts motivation, collaboration, and overall productivity. These targeted efforts ensure a cohesive and high-performing workforce, meeting the diverse needs of all generations.

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