

Multigenerational workplace and the demands placed on the leader resulting from it

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: As demographic shifts lead to an increasingly aged population, workplaces are becoming sites of interaction among multiple generational cohorts, each characterised by distinct values, expectations, and communication styles. These differences frequently give rise to misunderstandings and interpersonal tensions, necessitating managerial intervention to mediate conflicts and foster cohesion. Such dynamics place heightened demands on leadership, requiring managers to navigate generational complexities while aligning team outcomes with organisational goals.

OBJECTIVES: This paper examines the phenomenon of the multigenerational workforce, exploring its advantages, inherent challenges, and implications for organisational leadership. The primary objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of how generational diversity influences workplace attitudes and managerial practices.

METHODS: To support this aim, the study synthesises data from existing empirical sources.

RESULTS: The main results obtained in this paper are that due to EU population aging and rising retirement ages, workplaces are increasingly multi-generational, where four generations need to coexist.

CONCLUSION: Findings underscore the importance of integrating general knowledge about generational cohorts with an individualised understanding of team members to effectively manage intergenerational dynamics and enhance organisational performance

Keywords: Generation, Leader, Multigenerational, Skill, Workplace

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1. Introduction

Contemporary demographic trends indicate a steady ageing of the global population, including within Europe. As a consequence, the retirement age is progressively increasing, resulting in the coexistence of four, and occasionally five, generational cohorts within the workplace. This generational diversity introduces a range of challenges, as each cohort possesses distinct expectations, communication styles, and attitudes toward work-related issues. These differences often lead to misunderstandings and interpersonal tensions, thereby placing additional demands on organisational leaders.

Managers are increasingly required to foster intergenerational collaboration and maintain workplace cohesion, despite divergent values and limited mutual understanding among employees. This paper explores the complexities of the multigenerational workforce and the implications for leadership, with particular emphasis on the evolving competencies required to manage generational dynamics effectively.

2. Multigenerational workforce and workplace

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As various authors mention, each generation has different views on work, ways of communicating, opinions on policies and procedures, approaches to working collaboratively, and career advancement expectations [1]. Employees of various ages frequently share common values and aspirations, such as a desire for meaningful work, career progression, work-life balance, and workplace fairness, notwithstanding generational variances [2]. Managing a multigenerational workforce means understanding the transitions, life events and roles, and activating employees' diverse skills and experiences at different stages across the life course [3]. When we speak about a multigenerational workforce and workplace, first, we need to know the meaning of the generations. When we look at some definitions, we can see that generations are defined as "an 'age cohort' that shares unique formative years' experiences and teachings (roughly the first 20 to 23 years of their lives) and thus develop unique core values and attitudes that are different from other generations". Life experiences directly influence members of each generation during critical development stages and significantly affect the values and beliefs a person carries with them throughout their life [4]. The generational cohorts typically span 15 to 20 years [5], and generational differences may mean pluses and minuses in terms of organisational performance. Pluses include more diverse ideas, more creative problem-solving, better decision-making and a better reflection of an organisation's customer base. Minuses include higher levels of tension and conflict, different approaches to and preferences for leadership, valuing different rewards, and different views on change and the role and use of new technologies [6]. When we speak about a multi-generational workforce, we speak about personnel comprised of people from several generations, where the presence of multiple generations expands the pool of available talent and shifts its demographics [7]. So understanding these generational archetypes can provide insights into how motivation factors differ among generations. When different generations become the major workforce, organisations need to adjust their strategies and management practices to motivate employees. [8]. The generations that are currently in the workforce are: Baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z [9]. Where each of these generations has its skillsets, experiences, motives, career expectations and also communication styles. Based on this, every company needs to develop an understanding and adopt the best leadership style, so everyone can benefit from the talents employed by the company. As it is known, a multigenerational workforce enables knowledge sharing, skills transfer, and diverse ideas, leading to a more dynamic and creative workplace. It is also known that in today's intergenerational workforce, knowledge does not cascade downward like a waterfall. Instead, it spreads out and flows in all directions, like a network of canals linking all the neighbourhoods in a city [10].

As illustrated in Figure 1, each generational cohort currently active in the workforce exhibits distinct attitudes not only toward work but also toward technology. Baby Boomers and Generation X tend to demonstrate lower levels

of technological proficiency compared to Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, and they generally favor face-to-face communication. In contrast, Millennials and Generation Z are more technologically adept and typically prefer digital modes of interaction, such as online communication platforms. In terms of career orientation, Baby Boomers and Generation X often prioritise job stability and long-term employment. Millennials, however, display greater flexibility and are more inclined to pursue varied career paths throughout their professional lives. Generation Z, characterised by a high capacity for multitasking, tends to approach work as a series of projects. This cohort is generally comfortable with frequent job changes, often transitioning between roles every few years.

Boomers 1946 - 1964	Gen-X 1965 - 1980	Millennials (Gen-Y) 1981 - 1996	Gen-Z 1997 - 2012
Dedicated to work Committed Team orientated Experimenta l Public recognition Opportunity to leave their mark	Open-minded Appreciate diversity Work-life balance Competitiv e Continuous learning	Career is determined by switching roles often Tech-savvy Team environment Socially vocal	Career multi-taskers Technology is intuitive High expectation s Coached, not managed

Figure 1. Definition of the generations that are currently in the workforce [11]

2.1. Benefits and challenges of a multigenerational workforce and workplace, and their management

A multigenerational workforce is essential to the growth of an organisation. The benefits of working in a multigenerational workplace surpass the challenges involved [15]. The positive impacts of a multigenerational workforce can lead to increased productivity among the employees and ultimately a successful company. A successful multigenerational workplace also understands the dynamics and challenges of generational differences and can design a workspace that empowers effective communication and transfer of knowledge across the generations [16].

One of the key advantages of a multigenerational workforce lies in the diversity of skill sets and accumulated experience across age cohorts. Knowledge sharing, Enhanced creativity, Better customer understanding, Improved employee engagement, Effective succession planning, Broader talent pool, Increased innovation, Flexible problem-solving, Adaptability to change, Stronger team dynamics, and Cultural competence [17]. Other benefits that are brought to

an organisation and its culture by a multigenerational workforce are Diverse Perspectives, Balanced Strengths, Mentorship Opportunities, Enhanced Customer Understanding, and Increased Employee Engagement [18]. Some specific benefits that accrue within a multigenerational workplace are Multiple perspectives, Problem-solving abilities, Learning and mentoring opportunities, Knowledge transfer and retention, and Unique relationships [19]. By the benefits of a multigenerational workforce, we can also mention Cognitive diversity, which leads to enterprise agility, Innovation fueled by diverse perspectives, and Talent attraction, engagement, retention, and more [20].

Conversely, the challenges associated with managing a multigenerational workforce can be categorized into four thematic areas: Generational differences, Communication, Work tasks, and External Influences (such as health issues, stress levels, personal issues and spousal issues, first-time parents and single parents, language barrier, living far from work and travelling, office structure, and load-shedding and the internet) [21]. We can also encounter challenges like Communication differences, Generational stereotypes, Technology divide, Different work values, Conflict resolution, Knowledge transfer, Leadership transition, Diversity and inclusion challenges, Adapting to change, Flexibility in work arrangements, and Bridging cultural divides [22]. Other challenges that are a part of the multigenerational workplace, are Stereotypes and discrimination, Shifting needs, and (Mis)communication [23]. Challenges of managing a multigenerational Workforce are Communication Styles, Technological Adaptability, Work-Life Balance Expectations, Motivational Factors, Change Management, Training and Development, Leadership Styles, Career Expectations, Benefits and Incentives, and Inter-generational Conflicts [24]. Another workplace issue that is important to keep in mind is the more frequently occurring personality disorders, especially in the gen-z, f. e., narcissistic disorders [25].

Managing a multigenerational workforce entails a distinct set of challenges that necessitate a strategic, flexible, and context-sensitive leadership approach. The varying communication styles, work preferences, and perspectives of different generations can lead to misunderstandings and conflict if not properly addressed [26]. They can also lead to assumptions and discrimination. Hence, to manage the multigenerational workforce, the leader must accept differences as assets, value inclusion, give no room for stereotypes, leverage all generations' skills and capabilities, and be a leader to all generations [27]. It can be inferred that managers overseeing multigenerational teams should actively mitigate generational stereotyping, enhance communication strategies, and implement innovative training programs to foster measurable improvements in team performance and cohesion. All generations want to feel respected and appreciated, and if managers are successful in making their workforce feel this way, productivity will improve and increase [28]. It is so because optimising the benefits of a multigenerational workforce increases productivity (i.e. raises the value added per worker of the firm). Building a

multigenerational workforce also yields a stronger pipeline of talent, increases resilience and improves workforce continuity, stability and the retention of know-how [29].

While a multigenerational workforce offers numerous advantages, it also presents significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure organisational effectiveness. Resolving these issues requires a comprehensive understanding of the generational differences among employees—including their values, behavioural tendencies, and motivational drivers. Such insight enables the implementation of leadership strategies that are both inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of the workforce.

3. Methodology

This study examines the role of a multigenerational workforce and its associated benefits for organisations. It further explores the managerial approaches required to effectively lead such diverse teams. The primary objective is to analyse the impact of generational diversity on workplace dynamics, with particular attention to how it transforms traditional leadership models and influences organisational outcomes.

To address this research objective, a multi-faceted methodological approach was adopted. First, a review of existing literature was conducted, encompassing studies, surveys, and statistical analyses related to the multi-generational workforce and the benefits and challenges for management resulting from such a diverse workforce. This review included works examining the various generations, their motives and attitudes towards the work and the leaders. A comparative analysis was employed to evaluate and synthesise the perspectives of multiple scholars and practitioners specialising in this domain. These experts provided insights into the practical use of the insights of every generation, which can be used for effective management and what should be avoided when managing them. Furthermore, a critical evaluation of statistical trends from global sources was undertaken. This involved analysing quantitative and qualitative datasets of retirement ages and employment by generation, and the attitudes of different generations towards work and working conditions. Attention was given to the benefits and challenges of this workforce, with comparative metrics highlighting distinctions between the generations. This methodological framework provides a comprehensive basis for understanding the complex interplay between generations in the workplace, as well as the benefits and challenges of the multigenerational workforce for management. The findings aim to contribute to a foundational understanding that can guide future research and inform strategies for addressing challenges posed by the management of this workforce.

4. Results

It is well established that the European population is undergoing a demographic shift characterised by progressive ageing. This is reflected in the steadily increasing retirement age. We can also see it in the next Table 1, where the range of retirement age in various EU countries varies from 62 years and 6 months in France to the upper limit of flexible retirement of 70 years in Ireland. At the same time, there is a trend towards a gradual increase in this limit (for example, until 2030 in Belgium, the growth from 65 to 67 years; in France, from 62+ to 64 years in 2032).

Table 1. Retirement ages in different EU countries [30].

EU-country	General retirement age (2024):
Netherlands, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Denmark	67
Germany, Portugal, Spain	66/ 66+
Ireland	66-70
Belgium, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Hungary	65
Estonia, Czech, Malta, Lithuania, Latvia	64/ 64+
Finland	64 yrs 6 mos–69 yrs
Slovakia	63/ 63+
Sweden	63-69
France	62+

Given these demographic trends, the likelihood of multiple generational cohorts coexisting within the same workplace is expected to rise. While this diversity can offer significant advantages for organisations—such as a broader range of skills, perspectives, and experiences—it also presents challenges in managing employees with differing age profiles, professional backgrounds, and motivational drivers.

Figure 2 indicates that in 2020, the most powerful group of employees by generation were the Gen-X and Gen-Y employees, both at 35%. Baby Boomers employees were in decline (just 6%) because there were just employees from the latest years of these cohorts. Gen-Z, with 24% are on the rise because in 2020, there were just the youngest because, in 2020, only younger generations entered the labour market.

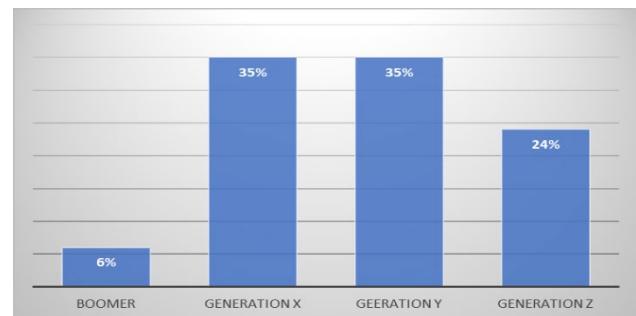


Figure 2. Employment worldwide by 2020, by generation [31]

The forecast of employment by generations for the next years can be seen in Figure 3. As already mentioned, there will be the rise of Generation Z, which is more technology-oriented, prefers online communication, and values mentoring, recognising leaders based on their merits rather than their status. This will lead to a different approach on the part of leaders soon, as the traditional approach to authority figures is no longer valid for Generation Z and the next generations.

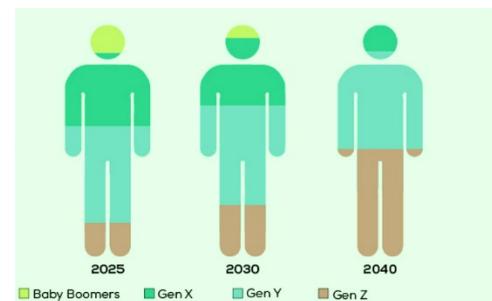


Figure 3. Employment by generation – forecast to 2040 [32]

Also, according to Deloitte's 2022 survey:

- Gen Z is more likely to receive therapy or mental health treatment than any other generation.
- 38 % of Gen-Z have entered the workforce.
- 30 % of Gen-Z feel financially insecure.
- 40 % of Gen-Z plan on leaving their jobs within the next two years.
- Work-life balance is the top factor for Gen-Z when choosing an employer.
- 63 % of Gen-Z prefer hybrid or remote work arrangements [33].

When we look further into the statistics, we will find that:

- 10,000 Baby Boomers reach retirement age every day [34].

- By 2028, Gen Xers will outnumber Baby Boomers [35].
- 75% of the global workforce will be made up of Millennials by 2025.
- Just 57% of Millennials are satisfied with their pay, and just 29% of Millennials are engaged at work.
- 21% of Millennials have changed jobs within a year, and 28% of Millennials are hoping to stay for more than 5 years with their current company
- 35% of Millennials quit because they receive a better opportunity, and 75% of Millennials believe that organisations are focused on their own good [36].
- 67% of Gen Zers want to work at companies where they can learn skills to advance their careers.
- 58% of Gen Z report they have two or more unmet social needs, such as “income, employment, education, food, housing, transportation, social support, and safety,” according to McKinsey.
- According to LinkedIn, 87% of Gen-Z said they’d be willing to leave their current job if they could work for another company with values that aligned more closely with theirs.
- According to surveys from Adobe, 70% of Gen Zers would leave their current role for better technology, compared to 52% of Gen Xers and 37% of Baby Boomers.
- 36% of Gen Z prefer messaging tools like team chat, compared to 51% of millennials. Gen X and Baby Boomers prefer to communicate via email (35% and 42%, respectively) [37].

As shown in Figure 4, Gen-Z and Millennials (Gen-Y) have the same preferences due to hybrid or remote work arrangements and flexibility in work (75% and 94%). Baby Boomers and older members of Generation X, having matured in a pre-digital era, tend to place greater value on conventional workplace structures, hierarchical systems, and established professional norms.

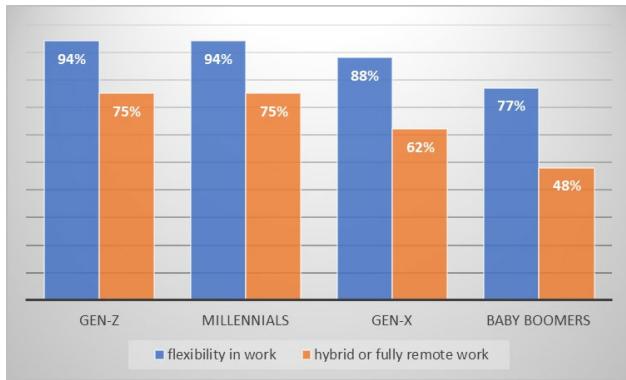


Figure 4. Work arrangements preferences by generations (in %) [38]

Figure 5 illustrates the contrast in preferred communication styles between the youngest generational cohort (Generation Z) and the oldest (Baby Boomers)

within the multigenerational workplace. Generation Z, having grown up in a digitally connected environment, demonstrates a strong preference for online communication and instant messaging in daily interactions. In contrast, Baby Boomers tend to favour face-to-face communication, reflecting their inclination toward building interpersonal relationships, including those formed within professional settings.

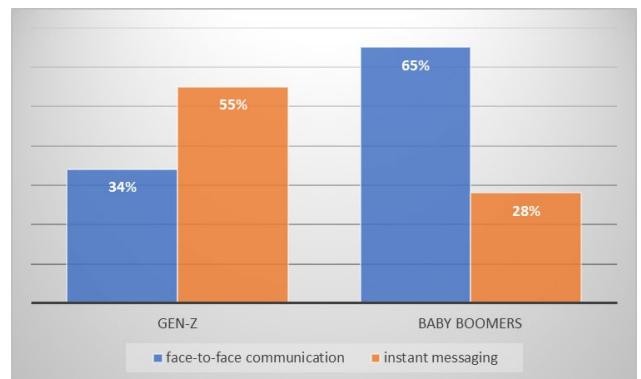


Figure 5. Comparison of the preferred communication between Baby Boomers and Gen-Z (in %) [38]

As the literature review shows, each generation cohorts weigh its priorities differently. Similar considerations apply when individuals evaluate job offers. Key factors influencing this decision include organisational culture, the clarity of the company's mission, and the extent of investment in employee development and training. Survey data indicate that 45% of Baby Boomers prioritise working in environments that foster a positive company culture, followed closely by Generation X at 43%. Generation Z and Millennials also demonstrate strong preferences in this regard, with 42% and 41%, respectively, valuing a supportive and engaging workplace culture [37]. These findings suggest that across generational cohorts, a positive organisational climate is consistently regarded as essential—not only for job satisfaction but also for overall employee well-being.

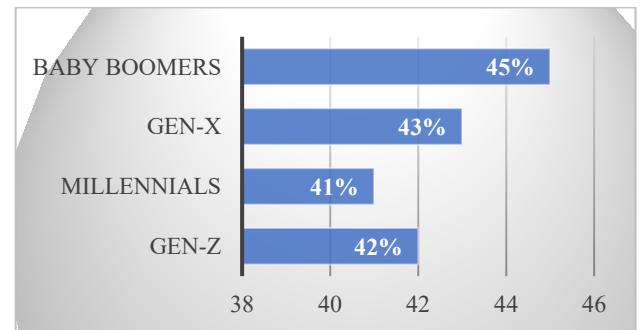


Figure 6. The Importance of a Positive Work Culture [39]

As the analysed data shows, individual generations have different work preferences. Gen-Z is characterised by a strong focus on technology, prefers online communication, hybrid or remote working methods, and values a balance between work and private life. Millennials, or Gen Y, also lean toward hybrid work and often change jobs if a better opportunity arises. Baby Boomers and older members of Gen-X prefer traditional working models and face-to-face communication. However, all generations emphasise a positive corporate culture, which is key for them when deciding whether to accept a job offer.

These generational attitudes often present significant challenges for organisational leaders, who must facilitate effective collaboration among employees from diverse age cohorts. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the defining characteristics, preferences, and perspectives of each generation, as well as consideration of individual employees' professional competencies and life experiences. Targeted training and development programs—particularly those aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence, active listening, and interpersonal communication skills—can serve as valuable tools for managers seeking to foster a cohesive and inclusive work environment.

5. Conclusions

The persistence of multiple generational cohorts within the workplace is largely attributable to the progressive increase in retirement age across many regions. While such demographic diversity offers notable advantages—including a broader spectrum of perspectives, an expanded talent pool, and enhanced potential for innovation—it simultaneously presents complex challenges for organisational leadership. To effectively harness the benefits of a multigenerational workforce, leaders must navigate substantial differences in values, expectations, and behavioural norms. These differences can be particularly pronounced between cohorts such as older Baby Boomers and younger members of Generation Z.

Effective leadership in this context requires the ability to identify and cultivate shared goals, interests, and motivational drivers across generational lines. By doing so, managers can foster cohesion and maximise the positive impact of generational diversity on organisational performance. A competent leader must not only be capable of motivating team members but also of supporting their individual development and enabling them to reach their full potential.

The complexity of managing a multigenerational workforce stems not only from individual variability but also from generational distinctions in workplace preferences and attitudes. It is therefore essential for managers to possess a dual awareness: a general understanding of the defining characteristics of each generational cohort, and a nuanced sensitivity to the unique needs and aspirations of individual employees. Generational identity is shaped by formative experiences

during the first two decades of life, as well as by the prevailing values of preceding generations transmitted through upbringing and socialisation.

A key limitation of this research lies in the contextual variability of generational experiences across geographic and cultural boundaries. For instance, the Baby Boomer generation in Eastern Europe was influenced by historical events such as socialism and World War II, whereas their counterparts in the United States were shaped by the Cold War and the countercultural movements of the 1960s. These divergent formative experiences underscore the importance of contextualising generational analysis within the sociohistorical framework of each region.

Therefore, effective management of a multigenerational workforce requires an integrative approach—one that combines general insights into generational characteristics with individualised understanding of employees' backgrounds and experiences. This approach enables leaders to address the inherent challenges of generational diversity while fully leveraging the unique contributions of each team member.

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