Generation Z Communication Styles and Organisational Culture: A Comparative Cross-Sectional Study of the Agricultural Finance Corporation and the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z employees now make up a growing share of public-sector workforces in Kenya, bringing digital, informal, and feedback-seeking communication habits that often sit uneasily alongside established institutions' hierarchical communication norms. This study examined the association between Generation Z communication styles and organisational culture at the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) and the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO). Guided by Social Identity Theory and Schein's Organisational Culture Theory, the study used a comparative, cross-sectional, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design; because the design is cross-sectional, every relationship reported below describes association and covariation observed at a single point in time, not a causal effect. Quantitative data were collected from 254 Generation Z, non-Generation Z, and management employees (78.2% response rate) via a structured questionnaire, and qualitative data were drawn from 15 management interviews and four focus group discussions. Digital communication preferences were significantly associated with employee engagement at AFC ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and KALRO ($r = .44$, $p < .001$); informal communication was associated with collaboration and teamwork at AFC ($r = .38$, $p < .001$) and KALRO ($r = .29$, $p = .004$); and feedback-oriented communication was associated with organisational values and norms at AFC ($r = .49$, $p < .001$) and KALRO ($r = .41$, $p < .001$). Leadership style adaptability significantly moderated the association between Generation Z communication style and organisational culture at both institutions ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .010$ at AFC; $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .041$ at KALRO), while communication policy's moderating effect was weaker and only marginally significant. Qualitative findings indicated that supervisor behaviour, rather than written policy, most strongly shaped whether digital-first communication was accepted in practice. The study concludes that Generation Z communication styles are significantly associated with organisational culture in Kenya's agricultural parastatals, with leadership adaptability the more consequential moderator, and recommends that institutions formally recognise digital communication channels, introduce lightweight continuous-feedback mechanisms, and update communication policies to match current digital practice.

Keywords: Generation Z, communication styles, organisational culture, employee engagement, leadership style adaptability, cross-sectional design

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, the cohort born between 1997 and 2012 [36], has grown up immersed in digital technology and has developed communication habits that favour immediacy, informality, and real-time interaction, in contrast with the more structured, textual communication that characterised earlier workplace practice [3]. Globally, this generation now represents roughly 27 to 30 percent of the workforce and is the fastest-growing cohort of workers worldwide [9, 23], reshaping workplace relationships and leadership practices built on traditional, hierarchical communication.

This shift is acutely visible in Kenya's public sector, where the Public Service Commission of Kenya [38] reported that over 60 percent of newly recruited public servants were under 30 years of age. The Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) and the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO), both headquartered in Nairobi, exemplify this tension. AFC, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development providing affordable credit to farmers and agribusinesses since its inception in 1963,

has built a formal, hierarchical communication culture over decades, while a growing cohort of Generation Z employees at entry and junior professional levels brings markedly more digital communication preferences [1]. KALRO, established under the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Act, 2013 (Act No. 44 of 2013) to promote, coordinate, and regulate agricultural and livestock research nationally, has cultivated a culture grounded in scientific rigour and structured knowledge-sharing, offering a partially contrasting comparative site.

Communication is the principal vehicle through which organisational culture, the constellation of shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape an institution's collective working life, is enacted and revised [27, 30]. As Generation Z's presence grows at AFC and KALRO, its communication habits both challenge and extend the formal modes these institutions have relied on, with the risk, if left unmanaged, of miscommunication, disengagement, and intergenerational friction [27].

Existing scholarship on Generation Z workplace communication remains concentrated in Western and private-sector settings, leaving Kenya's state-owned agricultural institutions largely unexamined, and no identified study has compared this relationship across a financing institution and a research institution within the same sector. This study addresses that gap. Framed by Social Identity Theory and Schein's Organisational Culture Theory, it was guided by the general objective of establishing the association between Generation Z communication styles and organisational culture at AFC and KALRO, disaggregated into four specific objectives: (i) to examine the association between digital communication preferences and behaviours of Generation Z employees and employee engagement; (ii) to assess the association between informal communication styles and collaboration and teamwork; (iii) to determine the association between feedback-oriented communication practices and organisational values and norms; and (iv) to examine the moderating role of leadership style adaptability and organisational communication policy in the relationship between Generation Z communication styles and organisational culture, all at AFC and KALRO, Nairobi, Kenya. Consistent with the study's cross-sectional design, these objectives are framed throughout in terms of association and covariation rather than causal influence; the conceptual framework in Figure 1 makes this framing explicit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on two complementary theories. Social Identity Theory [46] explains how group membership, including generational affiliation, shapes individuals' identities, communication behaviours, and organisational dynamics, producing in-group and out-group distinctions that influence how communication norms are received, negotiated, or resisted. Haslam et al. [16] show that organisations which actively recognise and accommodate diverse social identities are more likely to build cultures of engagement, innovation, and genuine collaboration, a dynamic directly relevant to how AFC and KALRO absorb Generation Z's more informal, digitally mediated communication preferences.

Schein's Organisational Culture Theory [42] complements this view by explaining how culture operates across three levels: visible artifacts (including communication practices), espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Because culture is continuously communicated and recreated through everyday habits of meeting, messaging, giving feedback, and holding discussions, shifts in communication behaviour reach beyond surface practice into the assumptions and values that anchor organisational identity. Together, the two theories allow this study to examine both the social dynamics of generational communication difference and the institutional mechanisms through which that difference is associated with cultural change.

Operationalising Generation Z: Disentangling Cohort, Age, Career Stage, and Position

This study operationalises Generation Z as employees born between 1997 and 2012 [36], placing them between roughly 14 and 29 years old during the data collection period. Respondents were classified into the Generation Z stratum using a self-reported birth-year bracket recorded on the questionnaire's classification sec-

tion, rather than by job grade or informal impression, so that generational classification did not default to 'anyone who seems young' or 'anyone in an entry-level role.' Respondents were asked for a birth-year bracket rather than an exact date of birth or other personal identifier, which was sufficient to assign generational status while limiting the personal information collected and reducing the likelihood that participants would feel singled out on the basis of age.

Because generational cohort, chronological age, career stage, technological competence, and organisational position covary strongly in most workplace samples, the interpretation of 'Generation Z effects' requires explicit caution. Cohort effects, in the strict sense, refer to shared formative experience: growing up with smartphones, social media, and constant connectivity as a normal condition of adolescence, which Generation Z shares as a birth-year group regardless of current job [6]. Age effects instead reflect maturation, the possibility that an employee in their twenties, of whichever generation, communicates more informally and digitally simply because they are young, and would communicate differently a decade later regardless of cohort membership. Career-stage and organisational-tenure effects reflect the possibility that newly hired staff of any age communicate more informally and seek more frequent feedback than long-serving staff, purely because they are new to the institution and still learning its norms; Yusof et al. [50], reviewing the generational-differences literature, argue that many studies attributing distinctive communication or work-value patterns to 'generation' have not adequately separated this tenure-and-career-stage explanation from a genuine cohort explanation. Technological competence is a further confound: Generation Z's fluency with digital tools plausibly reflects differential lifetime exposure and access to connectivity rather than an innate generational trait, so that an older employee with comparable digital exposure could display similar communication preferences. Finally, organisational position matters because, in this sample as in most public institutions, Generation Z employees cluster disproportionately in junior, non-managerial grades (Table 1), so that what appears to be a generational communication pattern could partly reflect norms attached to junior positions rather than to birth cohort as such.

The study's three-stratum sampling design addresses part of this confound directly by treating Generation Z, non-Generation Z (Millennials and Generation X), and management as mutually exclusive strata: staff occupying a management position were classified under Management regardless of their birth year, while the Generation Z and non-Generation Z strata were drawn only from non-management staff. Management is therefore an organisational-position stratum rather than a generational cohort, and comparisons involving management are interpreted throughout this study as positional rather than generational comparisons. Sampling records indicated that management staff at both institutions were overwhelmingly non-Generation Z by tenure; even so, because some managers could theoretically fall within the Generation Z birth-year range, and the analysis did not statistically control for this possible overlap, the Management group should not be read as a third age cohort directly comparable to the other two. The qualitative interviews reinforced this positional framing by deliberately including managers who supervise Generation Z staff without themselves belonging to that cohort. Beyond this structural safeguard, the study did not statistically control for respondent age, tenure, or an independent measure of technological competence as covariates in the regression models reported below, and readers should therefore treat 'Generation Z communication style' as a cohort-associated pattern observed in this sample rather than as an effect cleanly isolated from age, career stage, or organisational position; this constraint is revisited in the Limitations section.

Generation Z Digital Communication and Employee Engagement

Generation Z's dependence on mobile-first, instant communication breaks from the hierarchical patterns of conventional office correspondence [12], and this fast, interactive, feedback-rich mode is preferred, if not expected, by this generation as it navigates the workplace [51]. In Africa, Aswani and Otiende [3] find that

social media and collaborative platforms streamline work coordination for Generation Z employees in Kenyan parastatals while also disrupting traditional communication methods, and Mothobi and Gillwald [25] report that mobile messaging has displaced more formal modes of workplace interaction across urban sub-Saharan Africa. What remains under-examined is how these digital preferences are associated with engagement outcomes specifically within Kenya's state-owned agricultural institutions, where formal, paper-accountable structures still predominate.

Informal Communication and Collaboration/Teamwork

Generation Z employees favour brief, informal exchanges and prefer to resolve work issues online rather than through direct conversation [47], an approach that can strengthen cohesion in flexible organisations but that Giles et al. [14] caution may not suit cultures where formality carries significant institutional weight, as in the hierarchical structures of AFC and KALRO. Njoroge [31] argues that many Kenyan public institutions maintain a "culture of silence" that discourages the open-ended, participatory interaction Generation Z workers prefer, though Aswani and Otiende [3] find that Kenya's public institutions are nonetheless shifting toward more horizontal, transparent internal communication as Generation Z's presence grows. Informal communication is also understood as essential to the speed and flexibility of information sharing within organisations, though in high-power-distance contexts common among African parastatals, Hofstede [18] warns that informality can conflict with entrenched expectations about junior-senior relationships.

Feedback-Oriented Communication and Organisational Values and Norms

Feedback delivered promptly, in detail, and through digital channels adds meaningful value for Generation Z engagement and motivation [43], though Peredy et al. [35] caution that continuous feedback cycles require organisations to reevaluate formal, periodic review systems accordingly. In East Africa, Mothobi and Gillwald [25] find that a quick message through a chat application is often preferred over a scheduled appraisal, while Muchiri et al. [27] identify a common tension in Kenyan organisations between slow-paced, hierarchically cascaded assessment processes and Generation Z's expectation of dialogic, back-and-forth appraisal conversations. In Kenya's public sector more broadly, institutional culture predisposes organisations toward good or poor performance in strategy implementation and service delivery, with values such as professionalism, accountability, and teamwork enacted daily and either reinforced or gradually undermined through everyday conversation.

Leadership Style Adaptability, Organisational Communication Policy, and Organisational Culture

Leadership style significantly shapes whether Generation Z's preference for interactive communication is embraced or suppressed. Kenya's public sector has traditionally operated through rule-based, hierarchical leadership in which communication flows predominantly from the top down, in tension with Generation Z's expectations of open communication, regular feedback, and authentic participation in decision-making. Transformational and participative leadership models have gained increasing support under Kenya's public service reform agenda [39], and when leaders adopt digital tools, actively seek feedback, and promote psychological safety, they establish norms that support Generation Z employees' constructive contribution to organisational learning [32, 44]. Two recent studies reinforce the centrality of leadership, rather than formal structure, to this process: Andrilla and Saputra [2] found that adaptive leadership shaped Generation Z employees' adoption of workplace culture independently of formal organisational systems, while Kimonyo [20] found that Generation Z employees responded more strongly to leaders' inclusive, participative style than to documented policy. Organisational communication policies establish the regulatory boundaries within which this occurs: Motsamai and Onyenankeya [26] find that policies restricting informal digital platforms create friction that leads employees toward unsanctioned parallel channels, while Muthoni and Waiganjo [29] find that Kenyan public institutions' communication systems remain tightly governed by centralized policies favouring formal email over instant, collaborative platforms, a direct mismatch with Generation Z's conversational style.

Organisations with strong collaborative norms tend to promote cross-functional support and shared responsibility [10], and cultures that encourage collaboration are associated with greater shared learning, collective accountability, and psychological safety [11, 40]. At the level of values and norms, cultural foundations are sustained and conveyed through leaders' behaviour, internal communication, and the socialisation of new members [19, 24], making communication one of the principal channels through which cultural change occurs.

Research Gaps

Research on Generation Z and workplace communication continues to grow globally, but significant gaps remain for the East African public sector. Few published studies examine this area directly within Kenya [3, 34], and no identified study has compared how Generation Z communication styles are associated with organisational culture across two institutions of differing institutional character within Kenya's state-owned agricultural sector. This study addresses that gap as one of the few institution-based comparative empirical studies of its kind in Kenya.

Two further limitations of the reviewed literature bear noting, as they shape how it is used here. First, a meaningful share of the available evidence on Generation Z's workplace communication preferences originates from consultancy and polling reports rather than peer-reviewed empirical research [9, 12, 23, 36]; such sources are drawn upon in this review only for broad demographic and definitional claims, such as generational birth-year cutoffs and labour-market composition, while the study's substantive claims about communication, engagement, and organisational culture are grounded in peer-reviewed sources, the majority published since 2020. Second, much of the peer-reviewed generational-differences literature itself originates from Western, high-income-country settings and relies on single-point-in-time, self-report survey designs similar to the one used here [6, 43]; the handful of Kenyan and African studies available [3, 25, 27, 31] provide valuable context but remain few enough, and methodologically varied enough, that firm generalisation to Kenya's state-owned agricultural sector specifically was not yet possible before the present study.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical review above, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. The independent variable, Generation Z communication styles, comprises three dimensions: digital communication preferences and behaviours (frequency, information sharing, instant messaging, and digital platform use), informal communication style (casual language use and reduced hierarchy language), and feedback-oriented communication (continuous feedback, open expression, and real-time responses). These three dimensions converge on the study's dependent variable, organisational culture, encompassing employee engagement, collaboration and teamwork, and organisational values and norms. Leadership style adaptability and organisational communication policy are positioned as moderating variables acting on this relationship, consistent with the view in the literature that how communication is led and governed, rather than the communication style alone, shapes whether it is associated with a strengthened or strained organisational culture [2, 20, 26, 29]. For Objectives One to Three, each communication-style dimension is tested independently against its corresponding facet of organisational culture; for Objective Four, the three dimensions are combined into a single composite Generation Z communication-style score and tested against the composite organisational culture construct, with leadership style adaptability and organisational communication policy entered as separate moderators, mirroring the two-level analytical strategy described under Data Analysis. Consistent with the study's cross-sectional design, every arrow in Figure 1 represents a hypothesised statistical association or moderating effect estimated at a single point in time, not a claim of causal sequence.

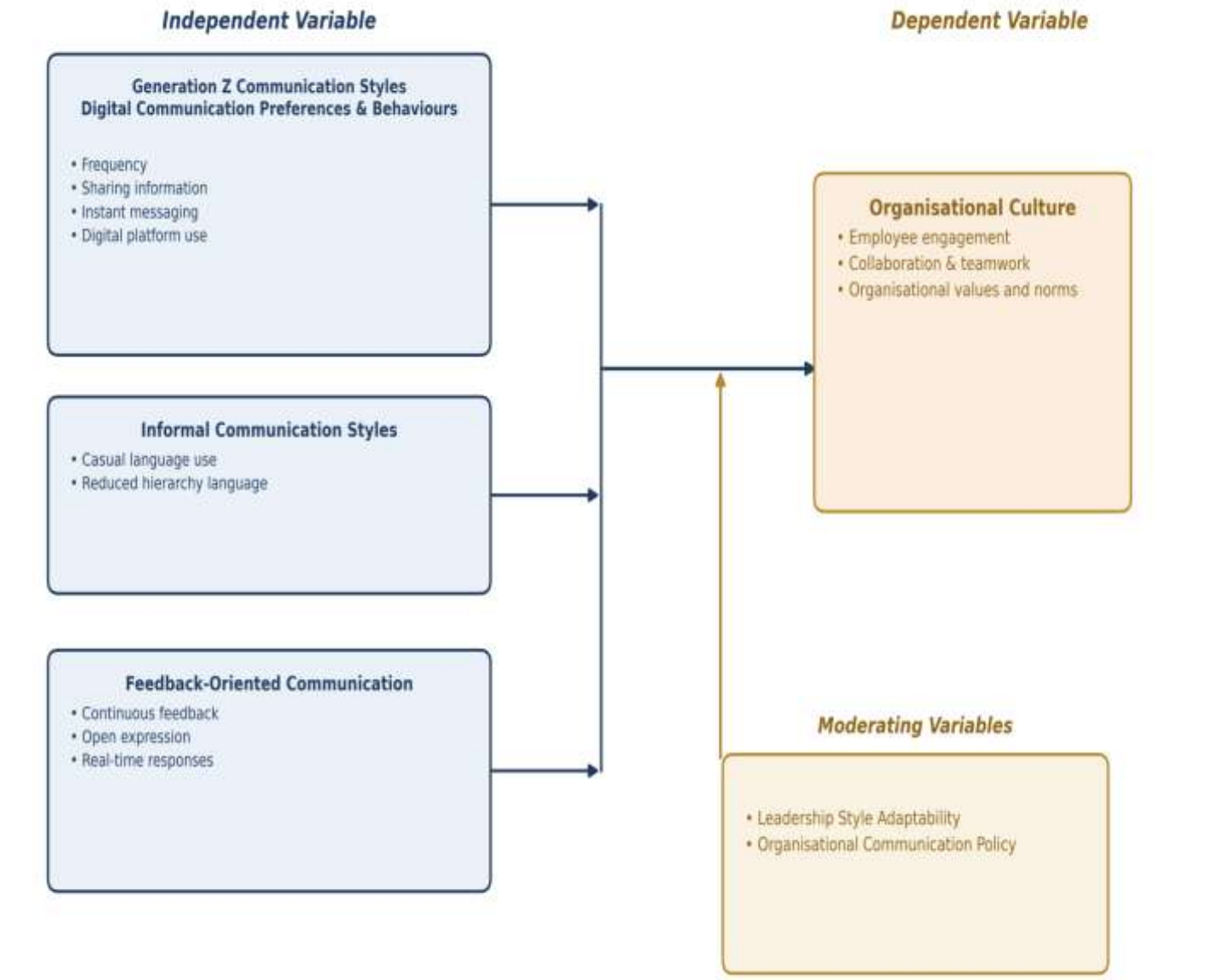

Figure 1: Conceptual framework linking Generation Z communication styles to organisational culture, moderated by leadership style adaptability and organisational communication policy (adapted from the author's thesis conceptual framework, Figure 2.1).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a comparative, cross-sectional, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design [7]: quantitative data were collected first, and the findings were then used to shape the content of the qualitative instruments administered in a second phase, so that management interview and focus group questions targeted the specific patterns, statistical ambiguities, and constructs the survey data could not explain on its own. This sequencing let the study first establish generalisable associations and then interpret them in institutional context. Although the moderated and simple regression models reported under Results and Discussion describe the strength and direction of association between variables, the cross-sectional collection of both predictor and outcome data at a single point in time means that none of the statistical relationships reported in this study should be interpreted as evidence of causal direction; longitudinal or experimental designs would be required for that inference [7].

Target Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised Generation Z employees, non-Generation Z employees (Millennials and Generation X), and management personnel at the Nairobi headquarters of AFC (approximately 300 staff) and KALRO (approximately 250 staff); staff at regional and branch offices were excluded from the sampling frame to hold institutional headquarters context constant across the two comparator sites, a scope decision revisited in the Limitations section. The sampling frame for each institution was drawn from the human resource nominal roll current at the start of data collection, stratified into the three cohorts shown in Table 1 using recorded date of birth (Generation Z: born 1997-2012) and current job grade (management versus non-management).

The quantitative sample size was determined using Yamane's [48] formula, $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, at a 0.05 margin of error, yielding a target of 171 respondents at AFC (from a population of 300) and 154 at KALRO (from a population of 250), for a combined target of 325. This target was allocated proportionally across the three cohort strata at each institution in proportion to each stratum's share of the institutional population (Table 1); for example, KALRO's non-Generation Z stratum of 80 staff, 80/250 of the KALRO population, was allocated 80/250 x 154 ≈ 49.28 of the KALRO sample. Because proportional allocation rarely produces whole numbers, fractional allocations were rounded to the nearest integer, and any resulting shortfall or surplus against the derived target was resolved by adding or subtracting the difference from one stratum's rounded figure until each institution's stratum totals summed exactly to its target sample size; this is why, for instance, KALRO's non-Generation Z stratum appears in Table 1 as 50 rather than the unrounded 49.28. Within each stratum, respondents were then selected by simple random sampling: employees on the stratum's nominal roll were numbered, and the required number of names was drawn using a random-number generator, giving every employee within a stratum an equal probability of selection. Eligibility was restricted to staff who were on active duty at the relevant headquarters throughout the data collection window; staff on long-term leave, and casual or short-term contract staff not on the substantive establishment, were excluded from the sampling frame because their limited continuous exposure to the institution's day-to-day communication practice would have made them poor informants on institutional communication culture.

This sample size was derived from Yamane's [48] formula rather than from a formal a priori power analysis, and was not intended to guarantee a specific statistical power level. As a post-hoc adequacy check, the achieved usable sample of 254 exceeds the conventional minimum thresholds cited in the social-science literature for detecting medium effect sizes ($r \approx 0.30$) in correlation and multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 significance level [5], lending reasonable, though not formally guaranteed, confidence in the study's ability to detect associations of the size reported under Results and Discussion.

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Distribution at AFC and KALRO

Stratum (Cohort)	AFC Population	AFC Sample	KALRO Population	KALRO Sample
Generation Z	200	114	150	92
Non-Generation Z	80	46	80	50
Management	20	11	20	12
Total	300	171	250	154

Questionnaires were administered using the drop-and-pick method. Confidentiality assurances, generous completion time, and follow-up reminders through internal communication channels were used to limit non-response bias, with an institutional return rate of 70% or above targeted, consistent with convention in the social sciences [28, 7]. No random replacement of non-responding sampled staff was used; the 78.2% overall response rate achieved (AFC 80.1%: 171 sampled, 143 returned, 137 usable; KALRO 76.0%: 154 sampled, 122 returned, 117 usable) reflects the proportion of the original stratified sample who returned a usable questionnaire, for an achieved analytic sample of 254. The gap between returned and usable questionnaires (six at AFC, five at KALRO) was attributable mainly to incomplete responses in the Likert-scale sections and was addressed by excluding those instruments from analysis rather than through imputation. Response rates

also varied by cohort: combined across both institutions, Generation Z employees returned the highest proportion of usable questionnaires (83.0%), followed by non-Generation Z employees (74.0%), with management recording a markedly lower response rate (52.2%); this pattern, and its implications for non-response bias, is revisited in the Limitations section.

Qualitative participants were selected purposively rather than randomly, consistent with the study's aim of explaining, rather than merely generalising, the quantitative patterns. The 15 management interviewees (eight at AFC, seven at KALRO) were purposively selected to provide managerial perspectives on Generation Z communication practices and organisational culture; semi-structured interview guides were developed from patterns that emerged during the quantitative phase, and, with informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and coded for thematic analysis. The four focus group discussions (two per institution, ten participants each) were purposively sampled to include Generation Z employees from various departments, roles, and genders per group; the researcher moderated every session with the assistance of a note-taker, each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and, with participants' permission, sessions were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The total number of focus groups held was determined by data saturation rather than fixed in advance, a pragmatic criterion consistent with Guest et al.'s [15] finding that thematic saturation in relatively homogeneous purposive samples is typically reached within a comparable range of interviews. All research instruments were pilot-tested before main data collection with 33 respondents, about 10% of the total targeted quantitative sample, at the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) [41]. KEPHIS was selected because, as a Kenyan parastatal with a structured communication culture and a workforce spanning multiple generations, it was similar enough to AFC and KALRO to yield meaningful pre-test results while being structurally distinct enough to avoid contaminating the primary data; piloting served both to test instrument clarity and timing and to contribute to the validity evidence described next.

Research Instruments

Three data collection instruments were used, a structured questionnaire, a management interview guide, and a focus group discussion guide, all three structured around the study's four objectives to ensure a clear link between data collection and analysis. The questionnaire comprised five core sections: respondent demographics (Section A); digital communication preferences and employee engagement (Section B); informal communication and collaboration (Section C); feedback-oriented communication and organisational values (Section D); and organisational culture outcomes (Section E), consistent with the item counts reported in Table 3, together with further sections capturing the two moderating constructs, leadership style adaptability and organisational communication policy, using the same five-point Likert-scale format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Item wording was refined through the expert review and pilot procedure described under Validity below.

The semi-structured management interview guide comprised open-ended questions, developed from patterns that emerged during the quantitative phase, designed to elicit managers' interpretations of how each communication dimension shaped their institution's culture; because the study used an explanatory sequential design, this meant the guide could target the specific patterns the quantitative phase could not explain on its own, for example the reversal observed between AFC and KALRO on feedback frequency versus values alignment (see Results and Discussion). The focus group discussion guide used discussion questions focused on the same four objectives to elicit collective perspectives from Generation Z employees.

Validity of the Research Instruments

Validity, whether an instrument actually measures the variable it was designed to assess [17], was addressed through three complementary procedures rather than a single test, summarised in Table 2. Content validity was established by having the items reviewed by academic supervisors and academics in communication and organisational behaviour [6], and items identified as ambiguous, redundant, or poorly aligned with their intended construct were revised or dropped before the instrument was finalised. Construct validity was assessed by examining how well each item aligned with the theoretical constructs underlying the study, in particular Social Identity Theory and Schein's Organisational Culture Theory, and is further supported by the

internal-consistency evidence in Table 3, where all four core constructs reached a Cronbach's alpha at or above the conventional 0.70 threshold [45], indicating that items within each construct cohered as a common underlying factor rather than measuring unrelated content. Face validity was assessed through the KEPHIS pilot test (n = 33) [41], in which items were revised based on pilot respondents' feedback before deployment in the main study [21]. Beyond these three procedures, the study also drew on convergent evidence consistent with mixed-methods best practice: because the explanatory sequential design used the qualitative phase specifically to probe patterns identified in the quantitative phase, the consistency between the two data sources, for example the independently coded qualitative theme that supervisor behaviour rather than written policy governs digital-communication acceptance converging with the quantitative finding that leadership style adaptability moderated the relevant relationship while communication policy's moderating effect was weaker and only marginally significant (p = .062), provides triangulated evidence that the quantitative instrument was capturing the constructs it was intended to capture.

Table 2: Summary of Validity Evidence for the Quantitative Instrument

Validity Type	Procedure Used	Evidence / Outcome
Content validity	Review of item relevance, clarity, and construct coverage by academic supervisors and communication/organisational-behaviour academics prior to piloting	Ambiguous, redundant, or poorly aligned items revised or dropped before finalisation
Construct validity	(a) Theoretical alignment of each item to Social Identity Theory or Schein's model; (b) internal-consistency (Cronbach's alpha) analysis	All four core constructs reached alpha ≥ 0.70 (Table 3), indicating items cohere within their intended construct
Face validity	KEPHIS pilot test (n = 33) with respondents' feedback used to revise item wording before the main study	Ambiguous or poorly structured items clarified
Convergent / triangulated validity	Comparison of quantitative associations against independently coded qualitative themes from the explanatory sequential design	Quantitative and qualitative evidence converged (e.g., leadership adaptability, not policy, as the operative moderator)

These procedures fall short of a full psychometric validation: no formal item-total correlation analysis, and no confirmatory or exploratory factor analysis, was conducted on the achieved dataset, and readers seeking that level of evidence should treat the validity forms reported here as complementary, practice-based safeguards appropriate to a survey of this scale rather than as a substitute for factor-analytic validation. This is noted explicitly as an opportunity for further methodological strengthening in the Limitations section.

Reliability of the Research Instruments

The questionnaire's Likert-scale sections were assessed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha [8], with a coefficient of 0.70 taken as minimally acceptable, 0.80 as good, and 0.90 or above as excellent [45]. Any item found to depress a construct's coefficient below 0.70 during piloting was revised or removed before the main data collection. All four core constructs met or exceeded the minimum threshold in the main survey, two reaching the 'good' band (Table 3).

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients by Construct

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Verdict
Digital Communication Preferences & Employee Engagement	5	0.81	Good
Informal Communication & Collaboration	5	0.76	Acceptable

Feedback-Oriented Communication & Organisational Values	5	0.85	Good
Organisational Culture Outcomes	5	0.79	Acceptable

Qualitative Rigour and Trustworthiness

Interviews with management respondents were audio-recorded with participants' consent, while focus group discussions were video-recorded with participants' permission and supported by a note-taker; both sets of recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed thematically in NVivo [4], with data systematically coded and a documented audit trail maintained throughout the coding process, consistent with established criteria for trustworthy thematic analysis [33]. Emergent themes were compared across the two institutional sites to identify points of convergence and divergence in how Generation Z communication practices interacted with organisational culture in each setting; for example, a theme of selective code-switching by generation and audience emerged alongside evidence of generational friction that was more pronounced at KALRO than at AFC. Consistent with recommended qualitative practice, the number of focus groups held at each site was guided by data saturation rather than fixed in advance [15].

Trustworthiness was addressed using Lincoln and Guba's [22] four criteria. Credibility was supported through triangulation undertaken during the interpretation phase, in which qualitative themes were systematically compared against the quantitative associations reported for the same construct to corroborate, elaborate, or explain patterns in the data. Transferability was supported by the study's comparative two-institution design combined with thick description of each institution's structure, history, and communication context [22], an approach consistent with Yin's [49] argument that case-based designs, including comparative cases, can yield analytical generalisations beyond the immediate research context when their theoretical and contextual basis is made explicit; in the Kenyan context, Aswani and Otiende [3] similarly demonstrate that findings from a single parastatal study can generate insights applicable to comparable state corporations. Dependability was supported by the study's explanatory sequential design [7], in which the interview and focus group guides were developed only after the quantitative phase, specifically to build on its findings, and by the documented audit trail of coding decisions maintained in NVivo. Confirmability rested on that same audit trail, which recorded the rationale for coding and thematic decisions and allows the analytic process to be traced; because coding was undertaken by a single researcher without a second, independent coder or a member-checking stage, this represents a limitation of the qualitative strand, addressed further below.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed in SPSS 29. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) profiled respondents and identified broad trends. The analytical strategy then proceeded in two steps. First, each communication-style dimension was evaluated individually against its corresponding proximal outcome for Objectives One to Three, digital communication preferences against employee engagement, informal communication against collaboration and teamwork, and feedback-oriented communication against organisational values and norms, using Pearson correlation and simple linear regression, estimated separately for AFC and KALRO. Formally, these per-dimension models took the form $Y = \beta0 + \beta1X + \varepsilon$, where Y is the proximal outcome and X is the corresponding communication-style dimension. Second, for Objective Four, an aggregated moderated regression model of the form $OC = \beta0 + \beta1(CS) + \beta2(MOD) + \beta3(CS \times MOD) + \varepsilon$ was estimated on the composite constructs, where OC is the composite Organisational Culture score, CS is the composite Generation Z communication-style score, and MOD is leadership style adaptability or organisational communication policy, entered as two separate moderators rather than jointly; a statistically significant β3 (interaction) coefficient was taken as evidence of moderation. The composite CS score was calculated as the mean of the digital, informal, and feedback-oriented communication subscale scores, and the composite OC score as the mean of its constituent items, with higher scores representing stronger endorsement of Generation Z communication practices and more positive perceptions of organisational culture, respectively. Differences between the AFC and KALRO cohorts were analysed using independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA where relevant [13]. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and thematically analysed using NVivo as described

above, with findings triangulated against the quantitative results to identify points of convergence and divergence between the two institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Because all data were collected at a single point in time, the statistical relationships reported in this section describe the strength and direction of association between variables, not the direction of causal effect; qualitative findings are used throughout to interpret, rather than to establish causal sequence for, the quantitative patterns.

Digital Communication and Employee Engagement

Digital communication preferences were positively and significantly correlated with employee engagement at both institutions: $r = .52$, $p < .001$ at AFC and $r = .44$, $p < .001$ at KALRO. Simple linear regression indicated that digital communication statistically accounted for 27% of the variance in engagement scores at AFC ($R^2 = .27$, $\beta = .52$, $p < .001$) and 19% at KALRO ($R^2 = .19$, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). Generation Z employees recorded the highest digital communication and platform-adoption scores of the three respondent groups at both sites, and qualitative data indicated that WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams use runs parallel to, and increasingly ahead of, official channels, with Generation Z employees interpreting rapid digital response as professionalism and inclusion rather than informality. This pattern is consistent with Social Identity Theory's account of in-group communication norms [46]: Generation Z employees appear to treat fluent, fast digital exchange as a marker of belonging and competence within their own cohort, which qualitative participants described translating into visible engagement, rather than treating it as a breach of professional norms as some supervisors initially assumed.

Informal Communication and Collaboration/Teamwork

Informal communication style correlated positively with collaboration and teamwork at AFC ($r = .38$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$, $\beta = .38$) and, more weakly, at KALRO ($r = .29$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .08$, $\beta = .29$). AFC scored significantly higher than KALRO on tolerance for informality ($t(252) = 4.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.49$). Qualitative findings revealed a pattern of selective code-switching by generation and audience, and identified generational friction, particularly at KALRO, as a more binding constraint on collaboration than informality itself. The weaker association at KALRO is consistent with Hofstede's [18] observation that informality can sit uneasily with entrenched senior-junior expectations in high-power-distance settings; KALRO's scientific, credential-based culture plausibly carries a stronger power-distance norm around who may communicate informally with whom than AFC's more transactional, client-facing environment, though the present cross-sectional data cannot establish this mechanism directly and it is offered as an interpretation consistent with the qualitative theme of generational friction reported above.

Feedback-Oriented Communication and Organisational Values and Norms

Feedback-oriented communication correlated positively with perceived alignment to organisational values at AFC ($r = .49$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .24$, $\beta = .49$) and at KALRO ($r = .41$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$, $\beta = .41$). AFC led on feedback frequency while KALRO led on perceived values alignment, an apparent reversal explained qualitatively by Generation Z's preference for immediate over ceremonial feedback and by KALRO's more structured culture providing a clearer, if less frequently reinforced, frame of reference for accountable communication. Read through Schein's [42] three-level model, this reversal is not necessarily contradictory: feedback frequency operates largely at the level of visible artifacts, the everyday habit of messaging and checking in, while values alignment sits closer to espoused values, the institution's stated standards for accountability and professionalism, and the two levels need not move in lockstep, particularly across institutions with different underlying cultural emphases.

Moderating Effects of Leadership Style Adaptability and Communication Policy

Moderated regression showed a significant interaction between Generation Z communication style and leader-

ship style adaptability in predicting organisational culture outcomes at AFC ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $\beta = .22$, $p = .010$) and at KALRO ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\beta = .15$, $p = .041$); at both sites, the positive association between Generation Z communication style and favourable culture outcomes was strongest where leadership style adaptability was high and weakest where it was low, indicating that leadership style adaptability buffers potential friction arising from generational communication differences. The moderating effect of organisational communication policy was weaker and only marginally significant in the combined sample ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\beta = .14$, $p = .062$). Qualitative data help explain this asymmetry: interviewees at both institutions consistently named supervisor behaviour, rather than the written policy manual, as the operative factor, and both institutions' written policies were described as predating current digital practice. An AFC manager summarised the gap directly: "There is no policy that tells you what is acceptable on WhatsApp for official communication. Everyone is guessing, and that inconsistency is where most of the friction comes from." This asymmetry between leadership adaptability and formal policy as moderators is consistent with recent evidence that adaptive leadership behaviour, more than documented policy, governs how younger cohorts take up digital work culture [2, 20]: Andrilla and Saputra [2] similarly found that adaptive leadership shaped Generation Z employees' culture adoption independently of formal organisational systems, while Kimonyo [20] found that Generation Z employees responded to leaders' inclusive, participative style rather than to formal structures per se. The qualitative finding that both institutions' written communication policies were described as predating current digital practice suggests that the weak moderating effect of policy observed here may reflect the specific state of these two policies at the time of data collection rather than the inherent irrelevance of policy as a moderator; a more current or more actively enforced policy could plausibly moderate the relationship more strongly, a hypothesis this cross-sectional design cannot test.

Table 4: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Decisions

Hypothesis	Statistical Finding	Decision
H01	Digital communication preferences significantly associated with employee engagement at AFC (r = .52) and KALRO (r = .44)	Reject H01; Ha1 supported at both institutions
H02	Informal communication significantly associated with collaboration and teamwork at AFC (r = .38) and KALRO (r = .29)	Reject H02; Ha2 supported at both institutions
H03	Feedback-oriented communication significantly associated with organisational values and norms at AFC (r = .49) and KALRO (r = .41)	Reject H03; Ha3 supported at both institutions
H04	Leadership style adaptability significantly moderates the Generation Z communication-organisational culture association at AFC ($\Delta R^2 = .05$) and KALRO ($\Delta R^2 = .03$); communication policy's moderating effect was weaker and only marginally significant ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .062$, combined sample)	Partially reject H04; Ha4 supported for leadership style adaptability only

Cross-Institutional Synthesis

Although AFC outperformed KALRO on every individual communication predictor, digital communication, informal communication, and feedback frequency, the two institutions converged closely on organisational culture itself (composite means of 3.78 at AFC and 3.84 at KALRO), the narrowest institutional gap of any construct examined. KALRO's advantage on leadership style adaptability and communication-policy clarity (composite mean 3.48 versus 3.25 at AFC) helps account for why it recorded a similar overall culture outcome despite weaker communication scores, while AFC's own managers' description of a gap in formal digital-communication guidance is consistent with its stronger communication scores not translating into a correspon-

dingly larger culture advantage. Read together, the pattern suggests two distinct institutional pathways to a broadly similar culture outcome: a communication-led pathway at AFC and a leadership-and-policy-led pathway at KALRO.

This divergence plausibly reflects the two institutions' underlying character rather than communication practice alone. AFC, a client-facing credit institution whose day-to-day work involves negotiating with farmers and processing time-bound financial transactions, may have organically developed the fast, informal, digitally mediated communication habits that its Generation Z staff also favour, producing high communication scores as an institutional trait quite apart from generational composition, consistent with Denison's [10] argument that organisational culture is shaped by the operational demands an institution routinely faces. KALRO, a scientific research organisation whose institutional legitimacy rests on rigour, peer accountability, and structured knowledge production, may instead have built stronger leadership and policy infrastructure around communication precisely because its scientific culture places a premium on documented process, which would explain its advantage on leadership adaptability and policy clarity even though its raw communication scores trail AFC's. An alternative, non-institutional explanation cannot be ruled out with the available data: because Generation Z staff at AFC and KALRO may differ in average tenure, career stage, or role seniority even within the Generation Z stratum, some of the AFC-KALRO gap in communication scores could reflect these confounds rather than a difference between a 'financing' and a 'research' institutional character as such, echoing the broader caution about disentangling generation from career stage and position raised earlier [50]. Distinguishing between these institutional-character and compositional explanations would require the kind of longitudinal, covariate-adjusted design flagged elsewhere in this study as an important direction for future research.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, these findings extend Social Identity Theory [46] and Schein's Organisational Culture Theory [42] beyond their original, largely Western organisational settings into Kenya's state-owned agricultural sector, and suggest a refinement worth testing further: that the two theories operate at different levels of the same process, with Social Identity Theory explaining why Generation Z employees adopt and defend particular communication norms as markers of in-group identity, and Schein's model explaining how those norms, once adopted, work their way from visible artifacts (a WhatsApp group, a quick check-in) toward espoused values and, more slowly and more contested at both institutions, toward underlying assumptions about how work should properly be coordinated. The finding that leadership adaptability moderates this process more strongly than written policy is consistent with Schein's own emphasis on leaders as primary carriers of culture change, and extends it by showing, in a comparative institutional setting, that formal policy can lag so far behind practice that its moderating role weakens to the point of only marginal statistical significance, even where adaptive leadership continues to moderate the same relationship strongly.

Practically, the findings suggest that AFC and KALRO, and by extension comparable Kenyan state corporations, face different priority interventions despite converging on a similar overall culture outcome. AFC's priority is to convert its communication strengths into durable culture gains by closing the policy and leadership-guidance gap its own managers described; KALRO's priority is to build on its stronger leadership and policy foundation by more actively encouraging the digital, informal, and feedback-oriented communication that its Generation Z staff already prefer but have adopted more cautiously than their AFC counterparts. Both priorities point toward the same practical lever identified throughout this study: supervisor behaviour and structured feedback practice, more than the communication policy manual, are where institutional effort is likely to yield the most immediate culture returns.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that Generation Z communication styles, digital, informal, and feedback-oriented, are significantly and positively associated with organisational culture outcomes at both AFC and KALRO, with associations consistently stronger at AFC than at KALRO across all three communication dimensions. Leadership style adaptability significantly moderates this association at both institutions, while organisational

communication policy's moderating effect is weaker and only marginally significant, with qualitative evidence indicating that supervisor behaviour outpaces written policy in shaping how digital-first communication is received in practice.

Four recommendations follow. First, the Human Resource departments of AFC and KALRO should formally recognise existing WhatsApp-based coordination by integrating it into documented information-flow procedures, with appropriate data-protection safeguards. Second, Human Resource departments and line managers should introduce structured, lightweight continuous-feedback mechanisms, such as brief monthly digital check-ins, to complement rather than replace existing formal annual appraisals. Third, Human Resource and Training/Leadership Development units should train supervisors in digital communication responsiveness and multigenerational team leadership, and institute structured mentorship pairing between senior and junior staff. Fourth, the Public Service Commission and comparable state corporations should adopt a fixed policy-review cycle of one to two years for internal communication policy frameworks, so that policy currency does not again lag behind digital practice.

LIMITATIONS

Six limitations qualify these findings and should guide their interpretation.

First, and most fundamentally, the design is cross-sectional: predictor and outcome data were collected from the same respondents at a single point in time, so the associations reported here, however strong and statistically significant, cannot establish the direction, sequence, or causal status of the relationships examined; a respondent's communication style and their perception of organisational culture were measured simultaneously, and it is equally plausible on this data alone that perceived culture shapes reported communication preferences as the reverse. Accordingly, statistical terms used in the Results and Discussion, such as 'predicts,' 'explains variance,' and 'is associated with,' denote patterns of statistical prediction and association observed within this sample, not demonstrated causal mechanisms. Longitudinal or panel research, following the same respondents across at least two time points, would be needed to confirm the direction and stability of these associations.

Second, all four core constructs and the two moderators were measured entirely through self-report Likert items completed by the same respondents, creating two related risks. Self-report bias means that responses reflect respondents' perceptions and self-presentation rather than independently observed behaviour; a Generation Z respondent's report of their own digital communication or engagement may be inflated or deflated by social desirability, self-image, or recall effects that an external observer would not reproduce. Common method bias compounds this risk: because predictor and outcome items were drawn from the same instrument, completed by the same person, in the same sitting, part of the observed correlation between constructs may reflect shared method variance rather than a genuine relationship between the underlying constructs [37]. Anonymity, neutral item wording, and separation of construct sections within the questionnaire (see Ethical Considerations) were used to reduce this risk at the design stage, but no formal statistical test for common method variance, such as Harman's single-factor test or an unmeasured latent-method-factor model, was conducted on the achieved dataset; future replications of this design should incorporate such a test, and where feasible should supplement self-report engagement and collaboration measures with independently observed or supervisor-rated indicators.

Third, the two institutions were purposively selected rather than randomly sampled from the population of Kenyan state corporations, and data collection was confined to their Nairobi headquarters; AFC and KALRO were chosen specifically because they offered a financing-institution/research-institution contrast within the same agricultural parastatal sector, which supports the comparative logic of the study but means the findings cannot be assumed to generalise to other state corporations, to private-sector organisations, to county-level public bodies, or to these same institutions' regional and branch offices, which were excluded from the sampling frame.

Fourth, time constraints limited the depth of qualitative engagement with some participants, particularly mana-

gement staff, whose availability for extended interviews was restricted by operational responsibilities; consequently, some contextual insight from this group may not have been captured in full. Coding of the qualitative data was also undertaken by a single researcher, without a second, independent coder or a member-checking stage with participants, as noted under Qualitative Rigour and Trustworthiness above.

Fifth, generational classification presented a related methodological challenge. Generation Z and Non-Generation Z were defined as age-based cohorts, whereas Management represented an organisational position rather than an age category; although sampling records indicated that management respondents at both institutions were overwhelmingly Non-Generation Z by tenure, some managers could theoretically fall within the Generation Z age range, and the analysis did not statistically control for this overlap.

The Management group should therefore be interpreted as an organisational-position comparison group rather than a third age cohort directly comparable to the other two, and more broadly, generational cohort, chronological age, career stage or tenure, technological competence, and organisational position covary strongly in this sample; the patterns attributed here to Generation Z as a communication-style cohort should be read as cohort-associated patterns observed in this sample rather than as effects cleanly isolated from these confounds.

Sixth, non-response was not replaced during data collection, and while the achieved response rate was acceptable overall (78.2%), it was uneven across cohorts: Generation Z employees returned the highest proportion of usable questionnaires (83.0%), followed by non-Generation Z employees (74.0%), with management recording the lowest response rate (52.2%).

If non-response was systematically related to communication style, engagement, or seniority, for example if the busiest management respondents were also the least likely to complete and return the questionnaire, the achieved associations, particularly those involving the Management comparison group, could be somewhat biased relative to the true population relationship; this study's design does not permit a direct test of the reasons for these differential response rates.

Future research could extend this comparative approach longitudinally, and to regional offices, other parastatals, and private-sector organisations with different institutional contexts and communication cultures, while incorporating age and tenure as covariates, targeting improved management response rates, and adding independent or supervisor-rated behavioural measures alongside self-report.

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Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical clearance from Multimedia University of Kenya and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), together with written institutional permission from the management of AFC and KALRO. All participants were briefed on the study's purpose and voluntary nature and provided informed consent prior to data collection; responses were anonymised using participant codes, and records were held in locked cabinets or, where electronic, password-protected storage. In accordance with Kenya's Data Protection Act (2019), all data will be retained for five years after completion of the study.

Conflict of Interest: One author is affiliated with the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF), which has a working relationship with AFC. This was disclosed to participants and supervisors prior to data collection, and had no bearing on data collection, analysis, or interpretation. The authors declare no other conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available, owing to the confidentiality assurances given to participating institutions and respondents, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request and subject to institutional approval.

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