

Generational Differences and Organizational Behavior: Mapping Trends, Gaps, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

Generational differences in organizational behavior have become a widely debated topic in both scholarly and managerial contexts, with claims that varying values, attitudes, and workplace behaviors across cohorts significantly influence organizational outcomes. Despite the popularity of generational discourse, the empirical evidence remains fragmented and, at times, inconclusive, leading to persistent misconceptions and gaps in understanding. Addressing this problem, the present study aims to systematically map existing research on generational differences in organizational behavior, critically analyze prevailing trends, identify conceptual and methodological gaps, and propose future directions for inquiry. Using Scopus AI analytics, the study employed an integrative AI-assisted research landscape approach guided by a targeted search string encompassing constructs of generational identity, organizational behavior, motivation, communication, and leadership. The analysis drew on Scopus AI's features, including summary and expanded summary, concept mapping, identification of topic experts, and detection of emerging themes. Findings reveal that while generational cohorts exhibit some differences in work values, job satisfaction, commitment, creativity, and turnover intentions, fundamental motivations remain relatively consistent across age groups. Moreover, gaps persist in the overreliance on Western contexts, underrepresentation of older workers and Generation Z, and limited longitudinal or mixed-methods designs. The study highlights the importance of integrating lifespan development and social constructionist perspectives to enrich the theoretical framing of generational research. Practically, the results suggest that organizations should avoid stereotyping based on generational labels and instead foster inclusive, flexible strategies that accommodate individual and cultural diversity. Overall, the study advances a nuanced understanding of generational dynamics in organizational behavior and charts pathways for future research.

Keywords: Generational differences, Organizational behavior, Work values and attitudes, Multigenerational workforce, Employee engagement

INTRODUCTION

Understanding generational differences in organizational behavior has become increasingly critical in contemporary workplaces characterized by demographic diversity and rapid socio-economic transformation. Organizations today comprise multiple generational cohorts, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, each with distinct values, expectations, and behavioral patterns (Powers & Myers, 2016; Jonck et al., 2017). These variations shape employee attitudes toward work-life balance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, thereby influencing overall workplace dynamics (Westerman & Yamamura,

2007; Yao et al., 2014). As organizations navigate evolving labor markets and shifting cultural expectations, understanding how generational cohorts engage with work becomes a central concern for both scholars and practitioners.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in this area, research on generational differences in organizational behavior remains fragmented and contested. Studies highlight that younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, prioritize self-development, social interaction, and flexible work arrangements, whereas older cohorts often demonstrate higher job satisfaction and stronger organizational commitment (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2017; Boehm & Kunze, 2015). Similarly, leadership and management practices must adapt to these differences, with evidence suggesting that micromanagement universally diminishes job satisfaction, though its effects are more pronounced among younger employees (Kamarudin et al., 2023). However, many of these findings are constrained by methodological inconsistencies and limited theoretical frameworks, restricting the ability to generalize across contexts (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

A further limitation of current scholarship is its heavy reliance on Western-centric studies, which often overlook cultural and contextual variations in shaping generational identities (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2016). For instance, research in Iran demonstrates how cultural norms produce unique generational dynamics not adequately explained by Western frameworks. Moreover, scholars have argued for more comprehensive theoretical integration, suggesting that perspectives from social constructionism and lifespan development theory could advance understanding of generational differences (Nakagawa & Kobayashi, 2024). These gaps highlight the need for interdisciplinary and contextually sensitive approaches that move beyond simplistic generational stereotypes.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to map existing research on generational differences in organizational behavior, critically analyzing trends, identifying conceptual and methodological gaps, and suggesting future directions. Specifically, the study employs a concept mapping approach to synthesize insights across disciplines, engage with expert perspectives, and surface emerging themes in the literature. By systematically organizing knowledge in this field, the study seeks to offer both theoretical clarity and practical insights for organizations navigating generationally diverse workforces.

The contribution of this paper is threefold. First, it provides a comprehensive analysis of how generational differences intersect with organizational behavior, offering an integrative framework that reconciles fragmented findings. Second, it advances theoretical development by highlighting underexplored perspectives and advocating for interdisciplinary approaches. Third, it generates actionable implications for organizational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners, emphasizing tailored strategies to enhance engagement, collaboration, and retention across generational cohorts. The paper is structured as follows: the next section reviews existing literature on generational differences in organizational behavior, followed by the methodology employed to map trends and identify emerging themes. The results and discussion section integrates key findings with relevant theories, while the conclusion outlines practical implications, research gaps, and avenues for future inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on generational differences in organizational behavior has revealed diverse perspectives concerning work values, attitudes, and motivations across cohorts. Kingler and Kumar (2023) observed that Baby Boomers prioritize status and extrinsic rewards, while Generation X and Y emphasize autonomy, collaboration, and flexibility. Similarly, Powers and Myers (2016) highlighted that Millennials place high importance on work-life balance, recognition, and open communication. These differences extend to job satisfaction, as Yao et al. (2014) found that younger cohorts generally exhibit higher satisfaction levels compared to their older counterparts. However, while distinct generational patterns exist, studies such as Jonck, van der Walt, and Sobayeni (2017) caution that contextual and cultural variables may shape how generational values manifest within specific work environments, emphasizing the need for nuanced interpretations rather than broad generalizations.

Generational distinctions also significantly influence organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and engagement levels. Lee, Oh, and Kim (2025) found that Millennials tend to have higher turnover intentions than older employees, with organizational culture playing a more substantial role than compensation in retention

outcomes. Similarly, Redditt, Gregory, and Ro (2019) reported that organizational commitment in the timeshare industry varies across generational cohorts, suggesting that customized HR strategies are necessary to maintain employee loyalty. Engagement-related studies reinforce these findings, with Akhavan Sarraf et al. (2017) demonstrating variations in vigor, dedication, and absorption across generations. Nonetheless, Sulphrey (2024) argued that generational identity does not strongly moderate the relationship between behavioral antecedents (e.g., self-efficacy, organizational commitment) and creativity, indicating that while engagement levels differ, core motivational drivers may remain relatively consistent across age groups.

At the organizational level, managing a multigenerational workforce demands adaptive leadership and tailored HR practices. Johnson and Lopes (2008) emphasized that traditional management assumptions must be re-evaluated to accommodate evolving generational expectations. Effective leadership approaches, such as minimizing micromanagement and fostering trust, have been shown to enhance job satisfaction across generations (Kamarudin et al., 2023). Additionally, research conducted in non-Western contexts, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, reveals that generational characteristics are mediated by cultural and social norms (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2016; Sulphrey, 2024). Collectively, these studies underscore that while generational differences in work behavior exist, their impact is context dependent. Organizations that integrate generational awareness into leadership, communication, and HR strategies are better equipped to cultivate engagement, reduce conflict, and strengthen overall organizational performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed Scopus AI Analytics as its primary methodological approach, with the analysis conducted on 2nd October 2025. The aim was to map existing research on generational differences in organizational behavior by critically analyzing prevailing trends, identifying conceptual and methodological gaps, and suggesting future directions. The use of Scopus AI enabled a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the research landscape by integrating multiple analytical outputs, including Summary, Expanded Summary, Concept Map, and Emerging Themes (see Fig. 1). This multifaceted approach ensured that the findings were both rigorous and aligned with contemporary AI-assisted research landscape standards.

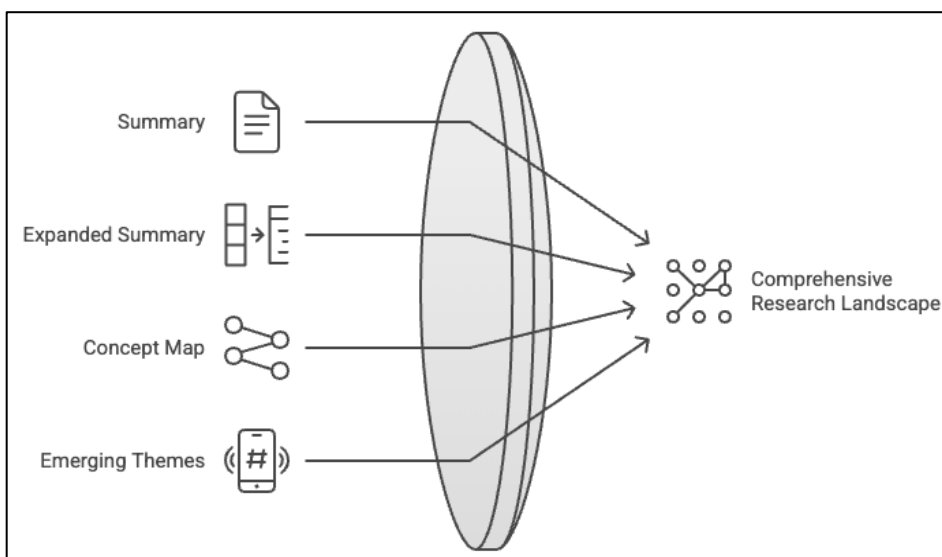


Fig. 1 Scopus AI's Analytical Integration

The first stage involved constructing a carefully designed search string to capture the breadth of scholarship on generational differences in organizational behavior. The query was formulated as follows: ("generational" OR "age" OR "cohort" OR "demographic") AND ("differences" OR "variations" OR "divergences" OR "disparities") AND ("organizational behavior" OR "workplace behavior" OR "employee behavior" OR "work behavior") AND ("motivation" OR "engagement" OR "satisfaction" OR "performance") AND ("communication" OR "collaboration" OR "interaction" OR "teamwork") AND ("leadership" OR "management" OR "supervision" OR "guidance"). This strategy ensured both inclusivity and specificity, balancing broad coverage with targeted relevance.

The Summary provided by Scopus AI offered a high-level overview of the field, highlighting how research has increasingly focused on intergenerational variations in work values, engagement, and leadership responses. The Expanded Summary offered deeper granularity by disaggregating insights into themes such as methodological inconsistencies, cultural contextualization, and the practical implications of managing generationally diverse workforces. The Concept Map visually structured these insights, enabling the identification of relational linkages between key domains, such as the interaction of leadership practices with motivational outcomes across cohorts. Through this, the study was able to map conceptual overlaps and divergences, illustrating how themes such as communication and collaboration cut across multiple disciplinary boundaries. The Emerging Themes feature was particularly critical in surfacing novel directions for inquiry, including the role of digital technologies in shaping generational engagement, the integration of non-Western perspectives, and the call for qualitative explorations of generational dynamics. This ensured that the study not only synthesized existing knowledge but also illuminated underexplored areas that could inform future research trajectories.

By combining these analytical outputs, the methodology provided a comprehensive mapping of the literature that aligns with the study's objectives: to critically analyze trends, identify conceptual and methodological gaps, and highlight directions for future inquiry. The approach ensured that the findings were systematic, reproducible, and rooted in the most recent AI-assisted research landscape advances, thereby contributing both methodological rigor and practical value to the field of organizational behavior.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of this study are structured around the integrated outputs generated through Scopus AI Analytics, which provided a multidimensional overview of the research landscape on generational differences in organizational behavior. The outputs, comprising the Summary and Expanded Summary, Concept Map, and Emerging Themes, collectively provide a multi-dimensional perspective that not only synthesizes established knowledge but also highlights areas of contestation, intellectual leadership, and emerging directions for inquiry.

Summary and Expanded Summary

The analysis of the Summary and Expanded Summary generated highlights several important trends, persistent gaps, and critical directions in the study of generational differences and organizational behavior. Current research demonstrates a strong consensus that generational cohorts differ in their values, attitudes, and behaviors, particularly in relation to work motivation, engagement, and satisfaction. For example, Millennials have been consistently shown to place greater emphasis on work–life balance and career freedom compared to Baby Boomers, who are more likely to value job stability and extrinsic rewards (Kinger & Kumar, 2023; Powers & Myers, 2016). Similarly, differences in job satisfaction and organizational commitment have been identified, with older employees often reporting higher satisfaction than younger counterparts, highlighting the need for organizations to adopt differentiated strategies to sustain engagement across cohorts (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007; Yao et al., 2014). These findings confirm that generational diversity significantly shapes organizational behavior outcomes, thereby requiring adaptive management approaches.

The expanded synthesis also highlights that generational differences manifest not only in values but also in work-related attitudes such as turnover intention, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behaviors. For instance, Millennials are reported to have higher turnover intentions, with organizational culture exerting a stronger effect on their retention compared to other groups (Lee et al., 2025). Moreover, evidence suggests that these differences extend to how employees approach engagement, communication, and collaboration, with younger cohorts placing greater importance on self-development and social interaction (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2017). However, some meta-analyses indicate that generational differences in workplace behavior may be moderate to small, suggesting that organizational context, professional age, and workplace socialization may override generational distinctions in shaping employee behavior (Costanza et al., 2012; Widén et al., 2020).

Despite these insights, the review reveals several persistent gaps. Methodological inconsistencies continue to hinder the generalizability of findings, with many studies relying on cross-sectional surveys and lacking coherent theoretical grounding (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Rathi & Kumar, 2023). Cultural limitations are also apparent, as much of the literature remains Western-centric, with limited exploration of generational dynamics in non-

Western contexts such as Asia and the Middle East (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2016). This creates an incomplete picture of how local norms and values shape generational behavior. Additionally, there remains insufficient integration of lifespan development and social constructionist theories, which could help move beyond descriptive categorizations of cohorts toward a more nuanced theoretical framework (Nakagawa & Kobayashi, 2024).

Future directions identified in the expanded summary emphasize the need for interdisciplinary and contextually grounded research. Scholars argue that generation should be understood as a social force rather than merely a demographic variable, requiring studies that integrate psychological, sociological, and cultural perspectives (Koles & Nagy, 2014). Moreover, qualitative approaches are increasingly recommended to uncover mediators and moderators of generational influences on work outcomes (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Practical implications are equally significant: organizations must recognize the heterogeneity within and across generational cohorts to design leadership practices, communication strategies, and retention policies that foster intergenerational collaboration and minimize conflict (Lub et al., 2024; Boehm & Kunze, 2015).

In sum, the summary and expanded review demonstrate that while generational differences remain a salient factor in organizational behavior, their explanatory power is complex and contingent upon methodological rigor, cultural context, and organizational dynamics. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to more holistic frameworks that not only theorize generational diversity but also guide organizations in developing inclusive strategies for managing multigenerational workforces.

Concept map

The concept map generated provides a structured visualization of the intellectual landscape surrounding research on generational differences in organizational behavior. At its core, the map organizes the field into three primary clusters, trends, gaps, and future directions, each reflecting distinct yet interconnected dimensions of scholarly inquiry.

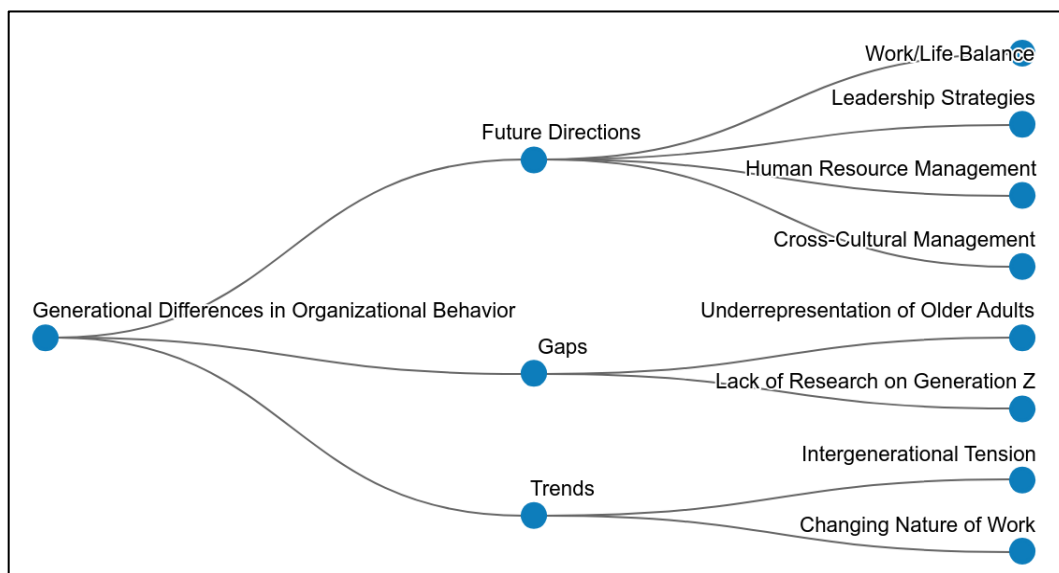


Fig. 2 Conceptual framework of generational differences in organizational behavior

The future directions in the study of generational differences in organizational behavior

The results of this review highlight that future directions in the study of generational differences in organizational behavior demand stronger theoretical integration. While existing studies have described work values and attitudes across generational cohorts, scholars stress the importance of advancing theoretical underpinnings. Nakagawa and Kobayashi (2024) argue that integrating the social constructionist and lifespan development perspectives offers a promising framework to understand how generational identities are socially shaped while simultaneously influenced by developmental processes. This integration would help scholars move beyond descriptive accounts toward a more comprehensive theory of generational dynamics in organizations.

At the same time, reviews of the field emphasize the need for more nuanced and theoretically informed agendas. Lyons and Kuron (2014) note that much of the research has remained fragmented, focusing primarily on differences in work values or satisfaction without embedding these within broader organizational or societal contexts. By deepening theoretical foundations, future research could clarify whether observed differences reflect true generational effects, life-stage variations, or broader sociohistorical influences. Such clarification is essential to avoid oversimplification and stereotyping of generational cohorts in organizational practice.

Another important direction lies in understanding the practical implications of generational diversity for organizational outcomes. Westerman and Yamamura (2007) show that aligning generational preferences with work environment fit contributes to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, highlighting how generational characteristics directly influence employee retention and leadership development. This finding suggests that future studies should continue exploring how values and preferences differ across cohorts while also identifying organizational strategies that can foster inclusive environments tailored to multiple generational needs.

Despite the popularity of generational research, meta-analytic evidence indicates that the strength of these differences may be smaller than often assumed. Costanza et al. (2012) found that relationships between generational membership and work-related attitudes are generally moderate to small. This suggests that while generational identity plays a role, organizations should avoid overemphasizing its impact at the expense of other factors such as personality, organizational culture, or professional tenure. Future research should therefore adopt a balanced approach, recognizing both the symbolic importance of generational categories and the limitations of their explanatory power in predicting behavior.

Finally, recent studies suggest that heterogeneity within generational cohorts must be taken into account. Egerová et al. (2021) demonstrate that employment expectations among Generation Y and Generation Z differ not only across generations but also within them, influenced by gender, geography, and social context. This highlights a critical research agenda: moving beyond monolithic representations of generations to examine how intersecting factors shape workplace attitudes and behaviors. Addressing this complexity will enable organizations to design more equitable and context-sensitive human resource strategies, ensuring that generational research remains relevant in increasingly diverse and globalized workplaces.

The gaps in generational differences and organizational behavior

The exploration of generational differences in organizational behavior has gained prominence, particularly as workplaces become increasingly diverse in terms of age and values. Despite widespread assumptions regarding distinct generational traits, much of the discourse remains influenced by popular beliefs rather than clear empirical evidence. Cody, Green, and Lynch (2012) emphasized that the notion of generational gaps in workplace behavior is often overstated, as many studies fail to provide consistent evidence supporting these claims. This highlights the need to critically assess whether observed differences are genuinely generational or instead shaped by contextual factors such as career stage, socioeconomic background, or organizational culture. The persistence of misconceptions highlights a fundamental gap in understanding the nuanced dynamics of generational diversity.

Research has, however, identified certain differences in work values and attitudes that carry implications for organizational outcomes. For example, King and Kumar (2023) demonstrated that Baby Boomers in India tend to prioritize status and extrinsic values more strongly than Generation X and Generation Y, a divergence that can influence productivity, workplace morale, and team cohesion. These findings suggest that while not all generational stereotypes are valid, there remain meaningful distinctions in value systems that can affect employee motivation and performance. The generational composition of the workforce, therefore, requires managers to develop strategies that accommodate varying expectations around recognition, rewards, and career progression.

Another area where generational differences manifest is in the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance. Ibrahim et al. (2024) found significant generational variations in Malaysia, where younger employees perceived empowerment differently than older counterparts, influencing both their performance and

organizational commitment. Similarly, Shragay and Tziner (2011) highlighted that the positive effects of job involvement on organizational citizenship behavior were more pronounced among Generation X than Generation Y. These findings point to the possibility that generational identity mediates the link between psychological drivers and behavioral outcomes, thereby requiring managers to adopt differentiated approaches to fostering engagement and discretionary effort across generational cohorts.

Technology use and adaptation present another critical dimension in generational differences. Choudhary et al. (2024) noted that technological practices diverge substantially across generations, contributing to gaps in motivation, communication, collaboration, and productivity. Older employees may face challenges in adapting to rapid technological change, while younger employees are often expected to lead digital transformation. Such divides highlight the need for organizational policies that integrate training, mentoring, and inclusive technology adoption strategies to prevent intergenerational friction. Similarly, Akhavan et al. (2017) showed generational disparities in job engagement within an industrial setting in Iran, reinforcing the utility of generational analysis as a segmentation criterion in workforce management and organizational behavior research.

Taken together, the literature reveals both trends and gaps in the study of generational differences in organizational behavior. While evidence suggests that values, attitudes, and technology adoption vary across cohorts, there is still insufficient clarity on whether these differences stem from generational identity or broader socio-contextual factors. The current body of work points toward the importance of tailoring human resource practices to accommodate diverse motivational drivers, work attitudes, and technological needs. Future research should move beyond descriptive comparisons to examine mechanisms that explain why and how generational differences matter, employing longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to disentangle generational effects from age-related or contextual influences. Such efforts will advance theoretical understanding and provide practical guidance for managing intergenerational workplaces in an era of rapid demographic and technological change.

The trends in generational differences and organizational behavior

The examination of generational differences in organizational behavior has revealed several trends that shape contemporary workplace dynamics. Despite the widespread discourse on generational distinctions, empirical research suggests that fundamental motivations across generations are not as divergent as often portrayed. Johnson and Lopes (2008) argued that intergenerational variations in organizational behavior are less pronounced than assumed, with age cohorts sharing similar core motivations and workplace expectations. This challenges the stereotypical view of sharp divides between generations and highlights the importance of considering organizational context, role expectations, and life stages alongside generational identity.

Nevertheless, studies consistently report variations in work values and attitudes that influence behavior within organizations. Shragay and Tziner (2011) found that generational identity moderates the link between job involvement and organizational citizenship behavior, with Generation X showing stronger positive effects compared to Generation Y. Similarly, research has identified differences in work centrality, work ethic, and job satisfaction across cohorts (Powers & Myers, 2016; Kingler & Kumar, 2023). These distinctions suggest that while fundamental motivations may align across age groups, generational experiences shape value systems and attitudes that affect engagement and discretionary workplace behaviors.

Generational differences also extend to employee engagement, organizational commitment, and intention to stay. For instance, Redditt, Gregory, and Ro (2019) found that variations in commitment across generational groups influenced turnover intentions within the hospitality sector. Similarly, Sulphrey (2024) highlighted that generational traits can shape behavioral antecedents of employee creativity, thereby influencing innovative capacities within organizations. These findings indicate that generational dynamics not only affect traditional organizational outcomes such as commitment but also extend to emerging concerns such as creativity and innovation in rapidly changing workplaces.

Trends further point to generational disparities in turnover intention and the moderating role of organizational culture. Lee, Oh, and Kim (2025) reported that Millennials exhibit higher turnover intention than other cohorts, though hierarchical organizational cultures tend to mitigate this effect. This suggests that generational differences interact with organizational structures, making culture a crucial factor in managing generationally diverse

employees. In parallel, workplace systems that align cultural values with generational expectations may reduce attrition risks while enhancing employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Interestingly, not all assumed generational gaps hold true. Bidian, Evans, and Frissen (2022) demonstrated that preferences for knowledge sharing and ICT modalities show no significant generational differences, implying that perceptions of technological divides may be overstated. This highlights an emerging trend where generational differences are sometimes more a matter of perception than reality. Taken together, these studies reveal that while there are observable differences in values, attitudes, and behavioral outcomes across generations, many workplace similarities persist. Understanding these nuanced dynamics can help managers leverage generational diversity without reinforcing stereotypes, while future research should disentangle perceived differences from empirically grounded patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the landscape of research on generational differences in organizational behavior, with a focus on identifying prevailing trends, conceptual and methodological gaps, and directions for future inquiry. The findings suggest that while generational cohorts do display variations in work values, attitudes, and behaviors, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, creativity, and turnover intention, fundamental motivations across age groups remain relatively stable. Moreover, perceived generational divides, particularly in relation to technology use and knowledge sharing, often lack robust empirical support, raising questions about the extent to which generational differences are socially constructed rather than deeply embedded. Theoretically, this study contributes by highlighting the need to integrate lifespan development and social constructionist perspectives into a more nuanced framework for understanding generational phenomena. Existing literature demonstrates both the persistence of shared organizational behaviors across cohorts and the contextual influence of life stage, organizational culture, and broader societal trends. This calls for a reframing of generational research to move beyond essentialist assumptions and instead situate generational identity within broader organizational and socio-cultural contexts. Such an approach can enrich organizational behavior theories by acknowledging both commonalities and diversity within and across generational groups. From a practical standpoint, the findings emphasize the importance for organizations to avoid overgeneralizing or stereotyping employees based on generational identity. Instead, management strategies should focus on leveraging individual strengths, aligning organizational culture with employee needs, and fostering inclusivity that transcends generational labels. Human resource practices, particularly in relation to retention, engagement, and leadership development, can benefit from recognizing areas where generational differences may influence outcomes, such as work values and turnover intention, while avoiding unfounded assumptions in areas like ICT use. Ultimately, organizations should emphasize flexibility and personalization in management approaches to maximize the contributions of a multigenerational workforce. Despite these contributions, the study is not without limitations. Much of the evidence on generational differences is drawn from self-reported survey data and cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to establish causality or capture long-term dynamics. Furthermore, the reliance on predefined generational categories (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z) risks reinforcing rigid boundaries that may not fully capture the heterogeneity within cohorts. Geographic and cultural biases also constrain the generalizability of findings, as the majority of existing studies originate from Western contexts, with relatively fewer contributions from Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to capture the evolution of work attitudes and behaviors across the lifespan, while also adopting intersectional approaches that consider gender, socio-economic status, and cultural context alongside generational identity. Comparative cross-cultural studies would be particularly valuable in determining the extent to which generational effects are global versus context-specific. Moreover, experimental and mixed-methods research could provide richer insights into the mechanisms linking generational identity with organizational outcomes. Such efforts will help to move the field beyond descriptive analyses toward more theoretically grounded and practically meaningful contributions.

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