



From Gen Z to Boomers: Motivational drivers shaping Industry 5.0 and the future of work

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ABSTRACT

The rise of Industry 5.0 (I5.0)—with human-centricity as its defining pillar, complemented by sustainability and resilience—coincides with an unprecedented moment in workforce history: the simultaneous presence of four generations, including the emerging Generation Z. Human-centricity in this paradigm emphasizes well-being, purpose, and meaningful work as critical elements in reconfiguring organizations. Despite its centrality, there is still limited scholarly understanding of how generational motivations align or diverge in shaping this human-centered future of work. This study addresses that gap by exploring work-related motivators across Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y, and Z, aiming to inform foresight-driven organizational strategies. Using an inductive, two-phase approach—a Generation Z-focused workshop followed by a global multigenerational survey—we applied Correspondence Analysis to map value clusters among the generations. Findings reveal that Gen Y and Z converge on priorities like work-life balance, career development, and non-monetary incentives, while Gen X shares Z's sense of purpose, albeit with more organizational and societal framing. Baby Boomers diverge most, valuing stability, creativity, and structured environments. Theoretically, the study contributes to futures scholarship by conceptualizing generational values as *foresight variables*—early signals of paradigm shifts in leadership, purpose, and motivation that reinforce and extend the human-centric vision of I5.0. Practically, we offer recommendations for designing inclusive, foresight-informed HR strategies that leverage generational diversity as a foundation for socially just and future-resilient organizations.

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1. Introduction

The business world is highly globalized and experiences significant workforce turnover. In the Digital Age, characterized by Industry 4.0 (I4.0) and Industry 5.0 (I5.0), globalization is accelerating (Salvadorinho, Ferreira, et al., 2024), while the workforce is becoming more diverse, encompassing four generations (Malik & Shahid, 2024).

The workforce currently consists of four generations, each presenting unique challenges for human resources management. The latest generational labels are Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (Gen X) (1965–1980), Generation Y (Gen Y) (1981–1994), and Generation Z (Gen Z) (1995–2012) (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Giachino et al., 2023; Tutar et al., 2022). Different generations bring diverse motivations and perspectives on the world (Collinson & Hodin, 2023). Generation Z, the latest to join the job market, is particularly notable for its high turnover rate (Bińczycki et al., 2023; Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). Managers are increasingly experiencing difficulties in managing the careers of Gen Z employees (Robinson, 2024). Therefore, managers need to be well-versed in the characteristics of different generations to effectively manage their motivations. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to prioritize organizational well-being and employee motivation. Understanding the motivations of a multigenerational workforce is crucial for fostering engagement and, consequently, retaining employees.

This study adopts a foresight-oriented lens to explore how generational motivational profiles are evolving in response to complex socio-technical transformations, with a particular focus on Gen Z as a potential harbinger of future workforce values. Rather than treating generations as static demographic categories, we examine them as dynamic cohorts shaped by—and responding to—emergent conditions defining the Future of Work. Our central objective is to assess whether preceding generations (Gen X, Y, and Baby Boomers) share converging motivational drivers with Gen Z or whether fundamental divergences are emerging that may signal a paradigm shift in workforce engagement. To do so, we first identified core motivational factors for Gen Z through a structured foresight workshop with managers from six globally recognized organizations actively engaging with this cohort. These insights informed the development of a diagnostic questionnaire, subsequently deployed in a second workshop involving a diverse, multigenerational and multinational sample. We gathered 184 responses from participants across Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Australasia. Using Correspondence Analysis and descriptive statistical methods, we investigated intergenerational patterns in both motivational values and preferred leadership attributes, with a view toward anticipating how organizations must adapt their cultures and structures to remain future-fit. The guiding research question asks: *What are the distinctive motivational and leadership indicators of Generation Z in contrast to Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers, and how might these generational differences signal deeper transformations in workforce engagement under the human-centric paradigm of Industry 5.0?*

Existing research has examined generational work values (Cogin, 2012; Suomäki et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020), turnover challenges among Gen Z (Bińczycki et al., 2023), and multigenerational management (Owen et al., 2022). However, these studies tend to be sector-specific, retrospective, or limited to two or three cohorts. This study addresses that gap by holistically examining the coexistence of four generational cohorts under the emerging I5.0 paradigm. This study advances the field by integrating generational motivational data within a futures framework—treating generations not merely as demographic categories but as signals of evolving socio-technical and value systems. By empirically comparing Gen Z with Gen X, Y, and Baby Boomers, we address an urgent need for anticipatory insight into whether Gen Z's emerging motivations reflect continuity or disruption in workforce engagement. Positioned at the nexus of digital transformation, values-based leadership, and human-centric innovation, this research offers one of the first multigenerational diagnostic tools that can inform strategic foresight, organizational resilience, and inclusive future-oriented work cultures.

This paper is structured as follows: the first section, following the introduction, provides a theoretical background focused on future literature, workforce dynamics in the digital age and discusses the motivators of the four generations currently in the workforce (Gen Z, Y, X, and Baby Boomers). The second section outlines the objectives and methodology, defining the research design, data collection and data analysis methods, and the obtained sample. The third section presents the results of the Correspondence Analysis, along with the findings regarding the leadership characteristics prioritized by each generation. The fourth section discusses the results. The fifth section presents conclusions and offers management recommendations based on the research findings. Finally, the sixth section concludes with limitations and proposes future research directions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Mapping age cohort trends in future literature

Recent futures-oriented scholarship on the evolving world of work increasingly foregrounds the convergence of technological acceleration, distributed work structures, and shifting value systems in reshaping workforce dynamics. Davis and Blass (2007) were early to anticipate this trajectory, projecting a workplace that would become not only more digitally integrated and globally networked but also more reliant on interpersonal leadership and trust-based coordination. Yet, despite such prescient insights, the intergenerational implications of these shifts—particularly as they relate to emerging motivational architectures—remain insufficiently explored. This is especially salient in the case of Gen Z, whose entry into the labor market may mark not just a demographic transition, but a systemic inflection point in how work is conceptualized, pursued, and valued.

Studies by Haeger and Lingham (2014) and Arslan et al. (2022) underscore the extent to which generational cohorts diverge in their relationships with technology, definitions of meaningful work, and engagement with life–work integration. The transition from work–life balance to *work–life fusion*, the declining emphasis on traditional success markers (e.g., job permanence or property

ownership), and the rise of values-driven entrepreneurship signal a destabilization of legacy motivational models. In parallel, [Randle et al. \(2017\)](#) have documented intensifying existential and psychological pressures among younger cohorts, suggesting that motivational systems are being restructured by deeper emotional, cognitive, and sociocultural shifts. These dynamics point to the urgent need for generational analysis to move beyond descriptive profiling toward anticipatory frameworks.

[Inayatullah's \(2008\)](#) six pillars of futures studies provide a useful scaffolding for such a move: by linking mapping and anticipation to broader processes of questioning and alternative world-building, his framework highlights how generational analysis can extend beyond surface-level comparison to engage with underlying epistemes, metaphors, and narratives of change. Similarly, [Miller's \(2018\)](#) work on anticipatory coherence—as further elaborated in the UNESCO volume on futures literacy—reminds us that groups orient themselves toward the future through patterned ways of making sense of emerging disruptions. Generational cohorts, when examined as anticipatory communities, may therefore serve not simply as demographic categories but as sensemaking collectives whose orientations can signal broader socio-technical transitions.

[Berry's \(2014\)](#) research on Generation Y's professional engagement within public service communication surfaces tensions between personal creativity and institutional constraints. However, it remains sector-specific and temporally bounded, excluding the perspectives of Gen Z and earlier generations—thereby limiting its utility for systemic foresight and strategic planning. In contrast, [Deepika and Chitranshi's \(2021\)](#) exploration of Gen Z's leadership readiness in VUCA environments reflects the generation's growing capacity for ambiguity navigation, emotional self-regulation, and values-driven leadership. Yet, even this analysis stops short of integrating broader environmental variables such as climate anxiety, digital hyperconnectivity, and economic instability—forces which may fundamentally alter how motivation and identity are formed across generational lines.

While [Jorgensen's \(2003\)](#) critique offers a necessary caution against reductive generational determinism, its emphasis on the continuity of value transmission may be insufficient for grappling with the accelerating pace and scale of change now confronting the workforce. From a foresight perspective, factors such as algorithmic governance, planetary instability, and institutional distrust are not merely background variables—they represent generative pressures capable of producing qualitatively different generational orientations toward work, purpose, and collective futures. Building on [Miller's \(2018\)](#) concept of *anticipatory coherence*—the patterned ways in which groups construct and sustain images of the future—and on [Candy and Dunagan's \(2017\)](#) articulation of *anticipatory artefacts* as embodied expressions of those orientations, this study introduces the notion of **foresight variables**. By foresight variables, we mean *observable social patterns, narratives, and practices that embody anticipatory sensemaking and can serve as indicators of emerging socio-technical transitions*. In this framing, generational profiles are not reified as fixed demographic categories but are repositioned as interpretive entry points into the evolving architectures of motivation, identity, and collective meaning. By interrogating the motivational profiles of Gen Z in contrast to Gen X, Y, and Baby Boomers, we seek to detect emergent patterns that may function as early warnings of structural transformations in how labor, identity, and well-being are configured. Positioned within the I5.0 paradigm—which emphasizes human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience—this research contributes to a growing futures agenda that interrogates the changing nature of workforce engagement through a multigenerational lens.

2.2. Navigating a multi-workforce dynamics in the digital age

The concept of I4.0, introduced at the Hanover Fair in 2011, encompasses the emergence of Cyber-Physical Production Systems (CPS) ([Salvadorinho et al., 2020](#)). I5.0 advances upon the milestones of I4.0, enhancing human-machine collaboration by leveraging human intellect rather than supplanting it, while I4.0 concentrates on achieving digital transformation and optimizing processes using digital technologies ([Leon, 2023](#)). The goal is to integrate human strengths—creativity, problem-solving, and adaptive intelligence—with advanced technologies to create more sustainable and inclusive production systems, without compromising the precision and reliability provided by advanced machines ([Kovari, 2024](#); [Piccarozzi et al., 2024](#); [Szelągowski & Berniak-Woźny, 2024](#)). Therefore, I5.0 emphasizes sustainable decisions that consider economic, environmental, and social impacts ([Xu et al., 2021](#)). This paradigm is, therefore, founded on three interrelated pillars: human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience ([Erp et al., 2024](#)). Human-centricity emphasizes the role of people in technological advancement, ensuring that innovation serves human needs, enhances well-being, and fosters meaningful work ([Salvadorinho et al., 2025](#)). Sustainability focuses on minimizing environmental impact and promoting long-term ecological and social responsibility within industrial systems ([Kumar et al., 2024](#)). Resilience refers to the capacity of organizations and technologies to adapt to disruptions, uncertainties, and evolving societal demands, thereby ensuring continuity and stability in production and value creation ([Latino, 2025](#)). As I5.0 re-centers the human element, understanding how different generations shape and experience work becomes critical for the successful integration of human capital in future workplaces.

2.2.1. Generational motivations and work orientations

There is ongoing debate about whether different generations truly have distinct perspectives on life, and emerging research suggests that they do. For instance, a study by [Singh et al. \(2020\)](#) highlights that work values vary across generations, particularly emphasizing the importance of intrinsic work values. Similarly, [Cogin \(2012\)](#)'s research reveals generational differences in work priorities: Baby Boomers value 'hard work', Generation X prioritizes 'asceticism,' and Generation Y places the highest importance on 'leisure.' Additionally, the research conducted by [Suomäki et al. \(2019\)](#), which focused on Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, suggested that knowledge-intensive companies should consider generational differences to enhance work engagement. These findings further underscore the variations in generational outlooks. In order to find a quick solution for organizations to assess their multigenerational workforce cohesion, a tool is designed in Owen et al.'s work (2022) to help companies assess whether their multigenerational workforce is truly integrated. It provides a quick check on age inclusiveness across three key areas: inclusion, discrimination, and development opportunities. Unlike previous, more detailed assessments focused on older workers, AIWEI applies

to employees of all ages, making it useful for diverse workplaces and national benchmarking efforts.

Most research exploring the multigenerational landscape tends to focus primarily on Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials (Gen Y), often overlooking Gen Z. As a generation that is only beginning to enter the workforce, there is still limited understanding of their characteristics and behaviors (Bińczycki et al., 2023). This omission poses a critical blind spot for future-oriented organizational strategies, as Gen Z represents a potentially transformative force in reshaping work values, structures, and expectations. Understanding the dynamics of younger generations, particularly Millennials (Gen Y) and Gen Z, is crucial as they rapidly take over many job roles. Millennials are projected to lead around 75 % of the world's businesses (Hassan et al., 2019). Unlike Baby Boomers and Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z exhibit less loyalty to their employers, comparing to Baby Boomers and Gen X, since they are prioritizing personal happiness over company allegiance (Bińczycki et al., 2023; Chala et al., 2022). This frequent job-switching trend poses a potential risk to organizational knowledge retention (Salvadorinho et al., 2023). I5.0 emphasizes the need to harness the strengths of its two core components: human beings and technology. Therefore, it is crucial to foster collaboration and integration of human capital within organizations. These trends contribute to high turnover rates and workforce instability, significantly impacting organizations' competitive edge (Salvadorinho & Teixeira, 2023). Employee departures and disengagement result in a loss of organizational knowledge, as their tacit expertise⁷ either exits with them or fails to integrate into the company's processes and culture, thereby diminishing potential value (Kuzior et al., 2022; Salvadorinho, Pintor, et al., 2024). This volatility in human capital negatively impacts the implementation of I5.0, which aims to centralize the human element amidst ongoing technological evolution.

Comparative research shows that work motivation is not homogeneous across age groups but reflects shifting socio-cultural priorities and economic conditions. To synthesize the literature on generational dynamics, four key areas of analysis were created: work values and motivations, leadership expectations, well-being purpose and retention, and implications for I5.0.

Work values and motivations: Research highlights clear generational differences in how work motivation is constructed. Baby Boomers tend to equate career success with material wealth, long hours, and professional sacrifice, with job satisfaction linked to stability, long-term contracts, and participatory management (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Cogin, 2012; Silva et al., 2015). In contrast, Generation X views work more instrumentally—primarily as a means of securing economic resources—while prioritizing personal responsibility, high compensation, and leisure time trade-offs (Cogin, 2012). Millennials (Gen Y) shift further toward seeking meaning in work, emphasizing values alignment, social contribution, and work–life balance over monetary gain alone (Cogin, 2012; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014; Ohlrich, 2015). Generation Z takes this trajectory further, emphasizing personal passions, life goals, and meaningful work as central motivational anchors, often choosing to leave jobs that fail to deliver happiness or development opportunities (Bińczycki et al., 2023; Kirchmayer & Fratricová, 2018; Kuzior et al., 2022).

Leadership expectations: Across cohorts, expectations of leadership reveal both continuity and divergence. Baby Boomers value recognition and respect for their experience, favoring participatory styles (Cogin, 2012; Silva et al., 2015). Gen X resists micro-management and thrives under a coaching approach that balances independence with recognition (Cogin, 2012). Gen Y places high value on modest, compassionate, and coaching-based leadership that provides guidance while supporting autonomy (Barkhuizen, 2014; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). Gen Z's expectations amplify these trends, with strong preferences for mentoring, constant feedback, and supervisor support as conditions for job satisfaction (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). These findings suggest a long-term shift toward relational, supportive, and developmental leadership models across generations.

Well-being, purpose, and retention: Baby Boomers often frame well-being around stability, long-term contracts, and recognition for their loyalty and experience, with purpose tied to material success and professional sacrifice. Their retention is strengthened by job security, participatory management, and acknowledgement of expertise, but weakened in volatile or digitally disruptive environments (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Cogin, 2012; Silva et al., 2015). Generation X emphasizes independence, resource security, and clear boundaries between work and personal life, locating meaning in responsibility and results-oriented achievement. Their retention hinges on autonomy, fair compensation, and the absence of micro-management, as they show little attachment to organizational identity (Cogin, 2012). For Millennials, well-being is inseparable from flexibility and work–life integration, while purpose is increasingly defined by values alignment, social contribution, and meaningful impact. Their retention depends less on monetary incentives and more on opportunities for rapid growth, coaching-based leadership, and organizational alignment with personal values (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014; Ohlrich, 2015). Generation Z amplifies these dynamics, linking well-being to mentoring, feedback, and flexible arrangements, while framing purpose around passions, social responsibility, and fluid career trajectories. Their retention is fragile when organizations fail to provide development, innovation, or meaningful engagement, as they are more willing to leave roles that compromise personal or ethical alignment (Bińczycki et al., 2023; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021; Salvadorinho, Hines, et al., 2024).

Implications for I5.0: Existing research on generational differences is often retrospective, sector-specific, or confined to two or three cohorts, leaving two important gaps: the lack of an integrative view across all four principal cohorts (Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z), and the absence of a foresight lens that interprets generational orientations as signals of broader socio-technical change. Addressing these gaps is especially crucial in the context of I5.0, which places human-centricity at its core. Beyond technological efficiency, I5.0 emphasizes well-being, purpose, and sustainability as defining features of the future of work (Salvadorinho et al., 2025). Understanding how different generations construct meaning, pursue motivation, and negotiate leadership is therefore not a peripheral HR concern but a foundation for designing organizations that are resilient, inclusive, and human-centered. This study responds by repositioning generational work values as foresight variables—observable anticipatory patterns that signal how the

⁷ Knowledge can be explicit or tacit. Tacit knowledge resides in the minds of individuals, making it challenging to articulate, share, or document. Conversely, explicit knowledge is typically well-structured and easily accessible, often stored in repositories, and embedded in documents, organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms (Nonaka et al., 2006).

human dimension of I5.0 may evolve.

Although, concerning the main generations already explored (Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y), these are some highlights for which actions to conduct in a multigenerational company:

1. **Attraction and Retainment:** To attract and retain employees across generations, organizations should offer competitive, tailored compensation packages. Baby Boomers value health and retirement benefits, Generation X prioritizes paid leave and work-life balance, and Generation Y seeks technology access, diverse teams, and continuous learning. Baby Boomers, especially males and those with diplomas, are highly satisfied with extrinsic rewards and possess valuable experience, making them ideal mentors for millennials. Incentives like paid vacations can encourage Baby Boomers to mentor younger employees, who crave learning opportunities (Nnamboozee & Parumasur, 2016).
2. **Leadership:** Organizations should ensure diverse leadership by including leaders from different generations. This balance fosters inclusive policies that benefit the entire workforce. Besides, for Baby Boomers and Generation Y, perceived support and appreciation from superiors are crucial, indicating that traditional hierarchical management is ineffective; instead, managers should act as supportive coaches (Suomäki et al., 2019).
3. **Work environment:** Generational differences shape work environment perceptions. Baby Boomers find their work more motivating due to their experience, while millennials and Generation X thrive on meaningful, challenging tasks and involvement in decision-making. Flexibility and efficiency are crucial for Generation Y (Nnamboozee & Parumasur, 2016), while Generation X highly values work-life balance (Viterouli et al., 2024). Strategies like flexible schedules, remote work, and family leave can enhance satisfaction across generations (Nnamboozee & Parumasur, 2016). Also, in this matter, and to foster an inclusive work environment, organizations should establish clear and transparent communication channels across generations. Encouraging regular dialogue through listening sessions, forums, and feedback loops allows employees to share ideas, experiences, perspectives, and concerns (Malik & Shahid, 2024). Besides, workplace fun is universally desired, with all generations valuing team building, celebrations, and recognition events to boost motivation. For Generation Y, collaboration is key—engaging them through team-work, joint projects, or interactions with customers and stakeholders is essential (Suomäki et al., 2019). However, learning and diversity show generational gaps, with millennials craving more growth opportunities than Baby Boomers. Collaborative structures and reverse mentoring—where older and younger employees learn from each other—can bridge this gap and foster mutual development (Malik & Shahid, 2024; Nnamboozee & Parumasur, 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This paper aims to address the following research question: *What are the distinctive motivational and leadership indicators of Generation Z in contrast to Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers, and how might these generational differences signal deeper transformations in workforce engagement under the human-centric paradigm of Industry 5.0?* To achieve this objective an inductive methodology was applied to assess the empirical industry world. In the first part of the study, a workshop was conducted with representatives from six globally recognized companies. During the workshop, managers who oversee Generation Z identified the motivational factors pertinent to this generation. The workshop was organized into three phases: initially, participants wrote down the motivators for Generation Z based on their professional experiences, using green post-its. This was followed by a presentation of relevant literature and the incorporation of additional predictors, noted on pink post-its. In the final phase, participants categorized and ranked the post-its according to their perceived importance. The second part of the study involved the development of a survey based on 30 identified motivators and the organization of a second workshop with managers from various manufacturing companies. This workshop, open to the broader community, included participants who had been part of the study. The survey enabled an exploratory analysis of the differences between the motivators of Generation Z and those of other generations. Its objective was to determine the extent to which approaches to managing multigenerational employees need to be differentiated. The data was analysed using a multivariate data analysis technique called correspondence analysis. Correspondence Analysis (CA) is a multivariate analysis technique based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA). While PCA is used with numerical data, CA is particularly effective for analysing nominal or qualitative data and operates using contingency tables as input (Abdi & Valentin, 2007). CA was employed to examine both motivational and leadership indicators across generational cohorts, using Gen Z's identified predictors as a reference point. This analytical approach enables the mapping of intergenerational convergence and divergence, offering anticipatory insights into how Gen Z's emergent values may disrupt, reshape, or realign prevailing models of leadership and motivation within the human-centric paradigm of I5.0.

To structure the empirical investigation, the paper will first present the methodology of the initial workshop, detailing its design, participant composition, and the process used to identify and prioritize Generation Z's motivational factors. This will be followed by a description of the survey, which was developed based on the outcomes of the workshop and administered to capture generational differences in motivation and leadership preferences. Finally, the paper will present the application of correspondence analysis to the survey data, illustrating the relationships between generational cohorts and their associated motivational and leadership indicators.

3.2. Workshop

In the workshop, participants (from 6 global companies – see Table 1) initially wrote down the motivation indicators of Generation Z on 63 green post-its. After jointly analyzing literature-based indicators, some participants added 3 pink post-its to the existing green

ones. The post-its were then grouped into 30 relevant categories by the participants. Moderation by two researchers/authors of this paper was essential to achieve consensus during this categorization process.

To organize the 30 motivators identified in the workshop, the researchers implemented a two-stage verification process for cross-referencing, resulting in 6 distinct groups. In line with Sætre and Van De Ven (2021), the initial stage involved the first three co-authors independently categorizing the predictors based on the Self-Determination Theory psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), while also incorporating additional elements such as purpose, balance, and progress/achievement. Following this, a discussion was held to reach a consensus, after which authors 4 and 5 conducted a double validation. The second stage of verification required unanimous agreement among all authors. To assess the level of consensus among the first three authors, an inter-reliability index, known as Fleiss Kappa, was calculated.

3.3. Survey

An online questionnaire (Appendix A), based on the 30 motivational predictors gathered, was distributed to workers across companies worldwide. This questionnaire aimed to ascertain the extent of variation among remaining generations (Baby Boomers, Gen X and Y) of Gen Z concerning intrinsic motivators, and whether distinct groups with shared predictors can be identified.

The questionnaire was structured into three main sections:

- 1) The first section aimed to gather demographic information such as generation, gender, global region, leadership level, duration in the current organization, duration in the current position, and number of promotions received by the respondents.
- 2) For each predictor, a question was included in the questionnaire to gauge its importance to the responding employee. The rating scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "Not important at all" and 5 indicated "Extremely important."
- 3) In the third section, respondents were asked to prioritize characteristics from a list that they considered most important in their direct manager, ranking them as their number 1 priority, number 2 priority, and number 3 priority.

The questionnaire was administered through an online form, and respondents were informed of their data protection rights and provided their consent for the use of their data.

3.3.1. Sample

A total of 184 responses were obtained, with 52 % from Generation X, 23 % from Generation Y, 16 % from Generation Z, and 9 % from Baby Boomers (See Fig. 1). Additionally, 67 % of respondents are from Europe, 16 % from Australasia, 9 % from North America, 7 % from Asia, and 1 % from South America (See Fig. 2). In terms of gender distribution, 74 % of respondents are male, 25 % are female, and 1 % preferred not to disclose their gender.

3.3.2. Correspondence analysis

CA allowed to determine which motivators were preferred or opposed by different generations at level 5 (considering that the scale used to assess the importance of motivators ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Additionally, the questionnaire included three questions to identify the top three leadership characteristics prioritized by each generation. Descriptive statistical techniques were used for this analysis.

Specifically, CA was used on two-way cross-tabulations and its goal was to create a map where each row and column was depicted as a point. This technique defined the total variance of the table and optimally decomposed it along "principal axes." Ideally, a large percentage of this variance was captured by the first two principal axes, allowing the table to be visualized in two dimensions (Abdi & Valentin, 2007).

4. Results

Table 2 shows the result of the grouping carried out for the 30 motivators that emerged from the workshop with the 6 global companies. The Kappa statistic is the result of the consensus reached between the three co-authors when classifying the predictors according to needs. The last two authors then carried out a double validation of the cross-check. The value of the Fleiss Kappa inter-reliability index was calculated, which resulted in 0.7176 to determine the level of general agreement. According to Landis and Koch (1977), this is a value that reveals substantial agreement between observers (> 0.6).

Table 1
Companies summary.

Company	Headquarters	No. of Employees	No. countries	Company Sector
Company A	Switzerland	16,000	125	Trading of high technology components
Company B	United Kingdom	2400	5	Instrumentation
Company C	United Kingdom	200	1	Pharmaceutical
Company D	United Kingdom	40,000	2	Automotive research, development and engineering
Company E	Finland	3300	19	Labeling materials
Company F	United Kingdom	5000	3	Construction

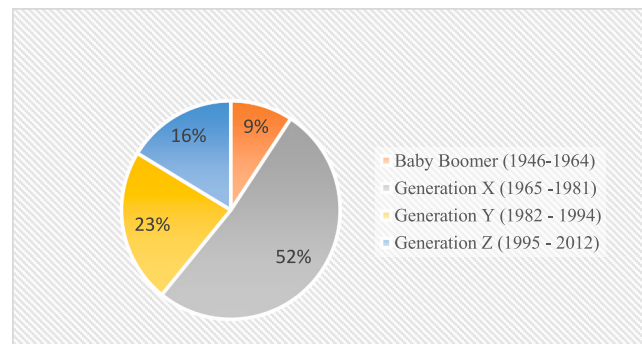


Fig. 1. Generations distribution.

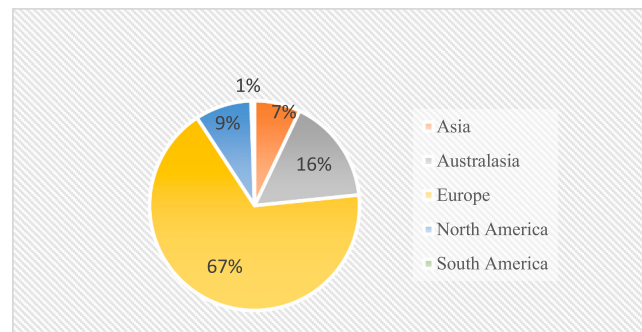


Fig. 2. Global location distribution.

Table 2

Motivational predictors grouping results.

Psychological needs	Motivational predictors
Relatedness	Transparency leadership
	Leadership support
	Multicultural environment
	Social exposure
	Mentoring and Coaching leadership skills
	Leader with kind communication
	Leader who communicates constructively and frequently
	Human interaction
	Innovative and creative environment
Balance	Work-life balance
	Monetary Safety
	Challenge
	Have fun
	Work-life time separation
Progress/Achievement	Personal life goals prioritization
	Tendency to change jobs
	Recognition
	Career Progression
	Non-monetary incentives
Purpose	Opportunities for professional development
	Make a difference
	Meaningful work
	Corporate social responsibility
	Alignment with companies' values
	Sustainability
Autonomy	Pursue passions and hobbies
	Flexible and remote working
Competence	Autonomy in decision-making
	Digital enablers
	Being good at work

Table 3 presents the contingency table for the six groups of motivators.

In the biplot for all groups (Fig. 3), Dimension 1 is the most significant, interpreting 84.9 % of the data, while Dimension 2 accounts for only 13.7 %. Gen Z and Y are aligned with Progress/Achievement and Gen Y is also close to Balance. Generation X is more closely associated with Competence and Purpose. Baby Boomers show a negative association with Autonomy.

4.1. Relatedness

Regarding the predictor Relatedness, this biplot does not provide enough information. More specific analyses are required. We will now proceed with a more focused analysis of the Family-Relatedness predictors.

In the biplot for Family-Relatedness (Fig. 4), Dimension 1 represents 63.2 % of the data, while Dimension 2 accounts for 27.9 %. Gen Z is more associated with the need for social exposure and frequent, constructive communication from leadership. Gen Y requires leadership with coaching and mentoring skills, along with a preference for a multicultural and inclusive environment. They seek leaders who communicate in a friendly and compassionate manner. Gen X shows a need for transparent leadership that provides support. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are linked to innovative and creative environments but completely oppose the need for human interaction. This finding appears counterintuitive, as existing literature consistently associates this generation with a preference for face-to-face communication and a general resistance to remote or highly flexible work arrangements. One possible explanation is that Baby Boomers may interpret “human interaction” in this context as involving increased engagement with younger colleagues—particularly those from Gen Z—whose values, communication styles, or work expectations they may perceive as difficult to relate to or understand. In this sense, human interaction could be associated less with meaningful interpersonal connection and more with generational friction or the need to adapt to unfamiliar dynamics. Alternatively, they may prioritize task autonomy and efficiency at this stage in their careers, viewing frequent interpersonal demands as distractions. This divergence between prior assumptions and our findings suggests a nuanced shift in how Baby Boomers perceive relatedness in the contemporary workplace.

4.2. Balance/flow state

Next, we will analyse the **Balance/Flow State** family of predictors.

Dimension 1 of the biplot for Family-Balance/Flow State (Fig. 5) accounts for 60.3 % of the data, while Dimension 2 accounts for 37.5 %. The data reveals three distinct groups: Generations Y and Z are closely situated in the lower left corner, Gen X stands alone near the center top, and Baby Boomers are isolated in the lower right corner. Gen Y and Z prioritize monetary safety and work-life balance, reflecting the work climate during the COVID-19 era, where mental health and balance became critical concerns. This period also saw the phenomenon known as the *Great Retirement*, with a significant number of Baby Boomers retiring (Low, 2024), making these factors potentially less critical for this age group. Baby Boomers are more inclined towards seeking enjoyment in their lifestyle, which they also expect in their work environment. Gen X expresses a desire for challenges, prioritizing life goals with an emphasis on personal life, and requires a clear separation between work and personal life. Conversely, Gen Z does not feel the need to separate work from personal life. This generation, which largely has not yet started families, may not perceive the need for such separation to maintain balance.

4.3. Progress/achievement

We will now proceed with a more focused analysis of the Family-Progress/Achievement predictors.

Dimension 1 of the biplot for Family-Progress/Achievement (Fig. 6) represents 80.7 % of the data, while Dimension 2 accounts for 13.5 %. Gen X seeks recognition and opportunities for professional development. Baby Boomers oppose the idea of changing job positions, a predictable outcome given their late career stage. Gen Y and Z are strongly associated with career progression and non-monetary incentives.

4.4. Purpose

Next, we will analyse the **Purpose** family of predictors.

Dimension 1 is the most representative, accounting for 84.7 % of the data, while Dimension 2 accounts for 11.1 %. According to Fig. 7, Gen Z is committed to having a job with purpose. Gen Y is significantly concerned with sustainability issues, being more focused

Table 3
Contingency table.

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Relatedness	75	327	184	157
Balance	43	254	150	115
Progress/Achievement	16	118	85	76
Purpose	50	258	109	76
Autonomy	13	86	52	36
Competence	15	80	35	27

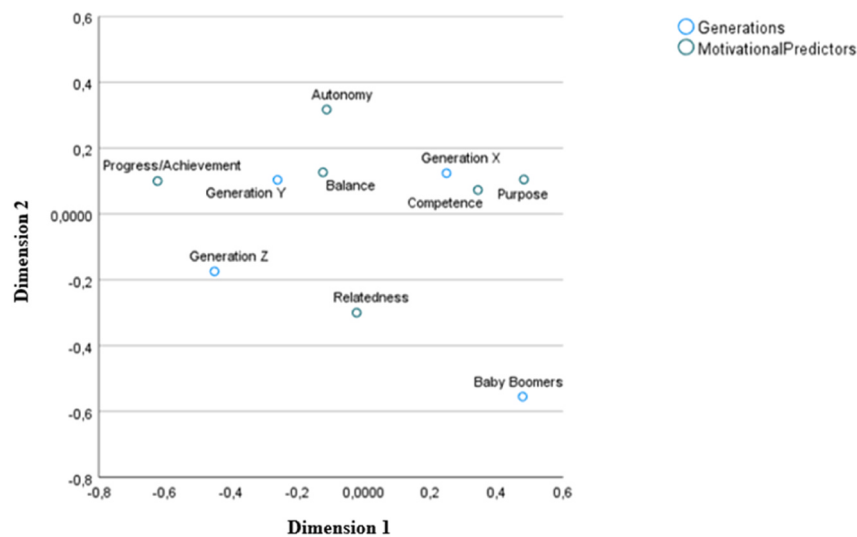


Fig. 3. Biplot for all groups.

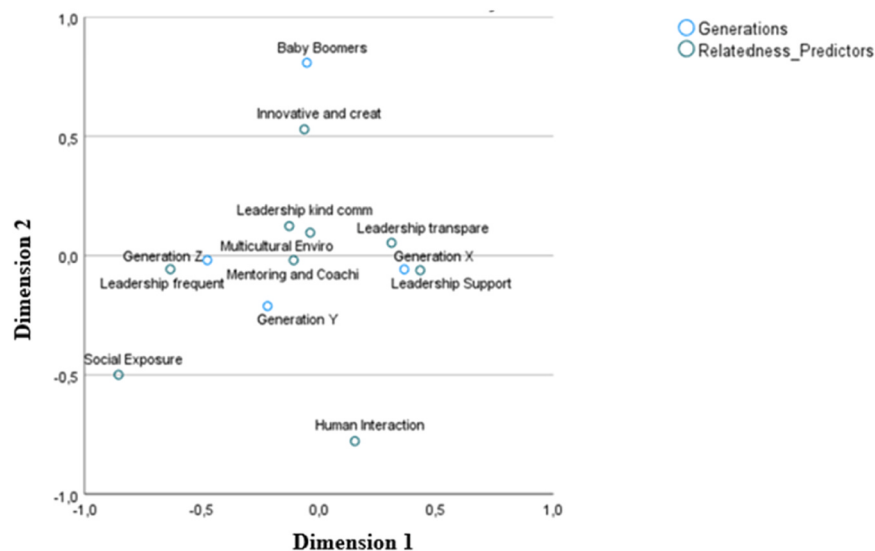


Fig. 4. Biplot for family-relatedness.

on society, than on individual purpose. Gen X highly values having a role that allows them to make a difference, beyond organizational goals, such as impacting society. They also seek alignment between their values and those of the organization, with an emphasis on fostering corporate social responsibility (CSR). This desire to make a societal impact aligns with CSR, as it reflects the organization's efforts to contribute to the surrounding community. Additionally, there is an observed opposition between pursuing personal passions and hobbies and aligning with organizational values. This suggests that individuals who prioritize alignment with the organization may place less importance on personal passions and hobbies, raising the question of whether individuals are aligning more with organizational values or vice versa. It appears to be more the former. Furthermore, considering Dimension 1, the data suggests that Baby Boomers are positioned midway between having an individual purpose, as seen with Generation Z, and valuing making a difference and corporate social responsibility (as observed with Generation X). This reveals that individual purpose for Baby Boomers may be closely tied to exercising influence within their surrounding community.

4.5. Autonomy and competence

To facilitate data interpretation, the Autonomy and Competence families were ultimately combined. Retaining only two predictors for each table would have prevented the creation of a biplot.

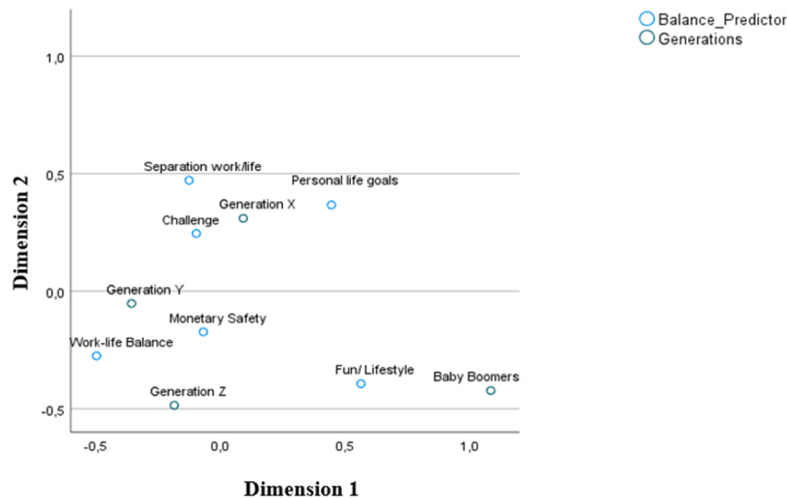


Fig. 5. Biplot for family-balance/flow state.

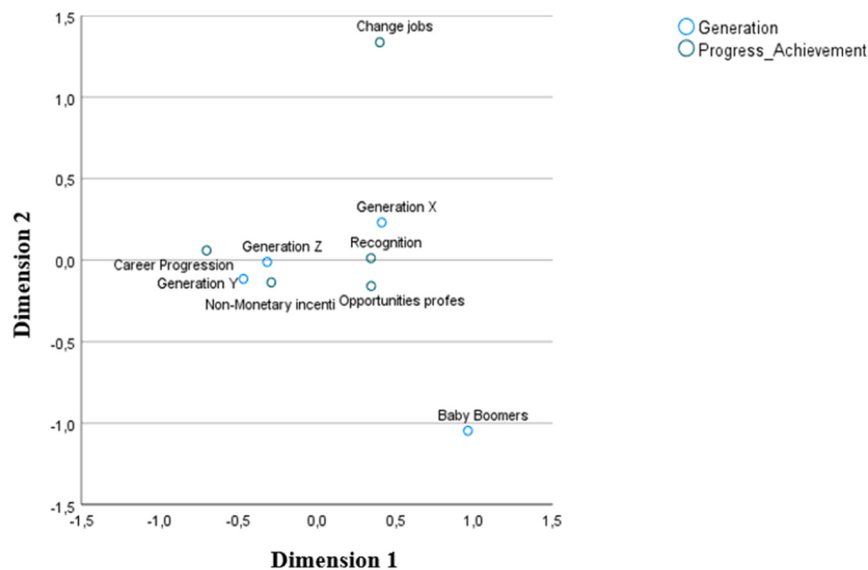


Fig. 6. Biplot for Family- Progress/Achievement.

Dimension 1 is the most significant, accounting for 93.7 % of the data, while Dimension 2 represents only 6.3 %. In this biplot (Fig. 8), predictors for Autonomy and Competence were combined to enhance data readability. Retaining only two predictors for each table would have made it impossible to generate a biplot. The biplot shows that Gen Z is closely associated with a preference for flexible and remote work, while Baby Boomers oppose this preference. Gen Y does not prioritize being digital enablers. In contrast, Gen X values proficiency in their work and autonomy in decision-making, and actively seeks to be digital enablers.

Analysing the results for the prioritized leadership characteristics, we find that the preferences are largely consistent across generations, with differences observed in only three traits about Gen Y, X, and Z. These findings are depicted in Fig. 9.

Collaborative and Communicative traits are valued across all generations, indicating a general importance placed on prosperous relationships with leaders. Additionally, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Z commonly value the Mindful trait, showing a need for leaders who are self-regulated and environmentally aware. For Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y, the Humble and Trustworthy trait is important, highlighting the significance of ethics, loyalty, and humility in leadership. Notable generational differences include a preference for Process-oriented thinking in Gen X and Y, Focus on results in Gen X, and a priority on Professional development in Gen Z.

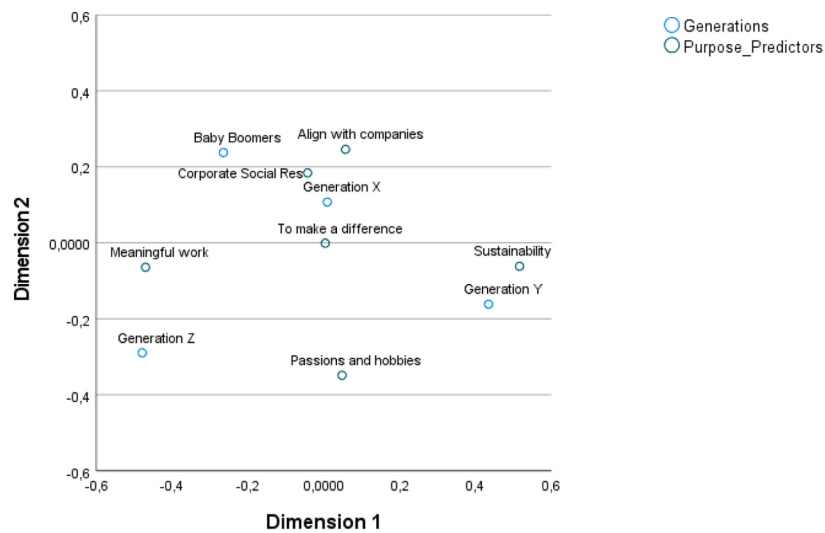


Fig. 7. Biplot for family- purpose.

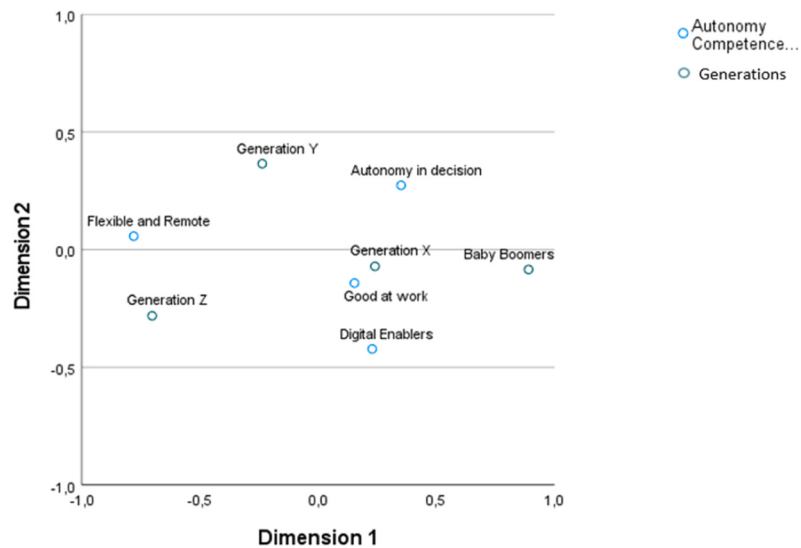


Fig. 8. Biplot for families- autonomy and competence.

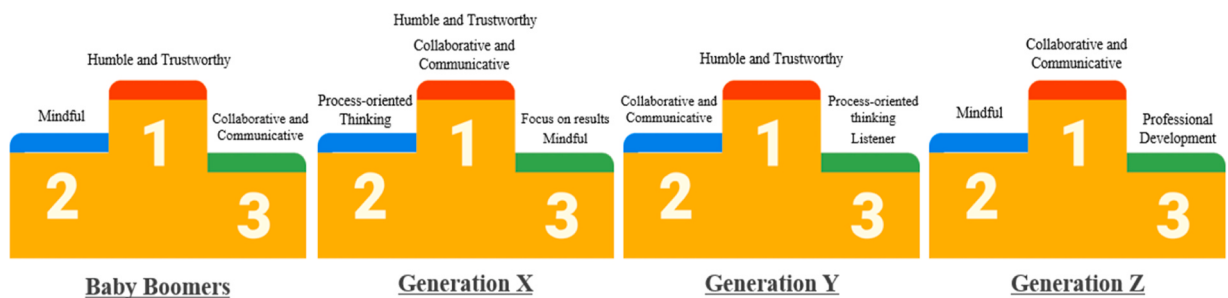


Fig. 9. TOP 3 leadership characteristics for each generation.

5. Discussion

5.1. Generational value shifts: understanding what drives different age cohorts

According to the research, Gen Y is the closest to Gen Z, although some differences exist (see Fig. 10). Beginning with similarities, both generations prioritize monetary safety, work-life balance, career progression, and non-monetary incentives.

Monetary Safety for these generations is primarily tied to their base salary, while continuous motivation and engagement is driven by non-monetary incentives. These findings align with Barkhuizen's (2014) research on Gen Y, indicating that a competitive base salary, supplemented by non-monetary incentives and fringe benefits, is essential for securing Gen Y's engagement. Generation Z includes the same motivators in their engagement criteria, with Tarigan et al.'s (2022) research highlighting that this generation prioritizes non-monetary incentives over monetary ones, being also more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated (Mahmoud, Fuxman, et al., 2021; Mahmoud, Reisel, et al., 2021).

Regarding work-life balance, Gen Z tends to focus on pursuing personal passions and goals over traditional career success (Bińczycki et al., 2023). In contrast, Gen Y emphasizes societal contribution, effective parenting, and maintaining a fulfilling, well-rounded life (Cogin, 2012). These results from other studies are reinforced by this research, which through multivariate analysis was able to prove in the specific theme "Purpose" that Generation Z seeks a more individual purpose, while Generation Y wants to contribute to a more societal context, through sustainability.

In addition, and in line with career progression results, the global workforce landscape offers numerous job opportunities. As younger generations seek rapid career advancement, they frequently achieve this by transitioning between companies, leading to increased volatility in their employment patterns (Queiri et al., 2015).

Gen Z emphasizes having a purposeful job and does not necessarily feel the need to separate personal life from work. In the view of the researchers of this paper indicate two potential scenarios: either the desire for meaningful work aligns with Confucius's adage, "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life," or many Zoomers simply have not yet started families or had children, and thus do not feel the need for such separation. The findings align with Bińczycki et al. (2023), Chala et al. (2022) and Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018) studies, showing that this generation prioritize happiness, family, and the ability to pursue their passions over labour market concerns. Furthermore, results show that Gen Z prioritizes flexible and remote work arrangements and the social recognition (social exposure) they can gain from their company (by being a great place to work). Regarding leadership, this generation seeks frequent and constructive feedback. Conversely, Gen Y prioritizes leadership with coaching and mentoring skills, in addition to fostering friendly communication with their team members. Based on the literature, both Gen Z and Gen Y place high importance on supportive leadership that provides guidance and coaching. Gen Z prioritizes mentoring, feedback, and flexibility (Achmad et al., 2023), while Gen Y values modest and compassionate leadership (Barkhuizen, 2014; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014), which is aligned with the results discovered.

While Gen Z prefers a purpose-driven job, which is more individualistic, Gen Y is heavily focused on Sustainability and expects this theme to be reflected in their organization. In terms of workplace environment, Gen Y prioritizes a multicultural and inclusive environment.

Gen Z and Gen X share similarities in their need for professional development and new challenges, albeit at different levels. Gen X holds the highest number of senior positions, whereas Gen Z predominantly occupies front-line worker roles (where no one reports to them). Fig. 11 illustrates these leadership differences across the generations. Based on this, Gen X seeks to make a difference in their work, driven significantly by Corporate Social Responsibility. Therefore, their values should align closely with those of the organization, which is expected at such a senior leadership level.

Additionally, Gen X distinguishes itself from Gen Z in their need to excel in their roles and receive recognition for it, their desire for autonomy in the workplace (given their more strategic positions), and their focus on remaining as Digital Enablers. Given that Gen Y and Z are the most digital-native and typically not in strategic positions, it is assumed that being a digital enabler is already inherent for them in the researchers' view. However, for Gen X, who was born and grew up before the digital era and holds strategic positions within organizations, maintaining this capability remains crucial. This is particularly important as the current context sees successive Industrial Revolutions unfolding rapidly, without allowing companies to fully implement each one.

Furthermore, concerning leadership, Gen X values transparency and support, given their decision-making roles. In contrast, Gen Z, as front-line workers, seek constant and frequent feedback on their performance, to develop themselves. Unlike Gen Z, Gen X prioritizes separating work and personal life, likely influenced by the contextual factors in which each generation grew up. Gen X is accustomed to commuting to work and returning home, whereas Gen Z prefers blending work and home environments. Research is in line with this thought, showing that Gen X primarily views work as a means of securing financial resources, maintaining a distinct separation between their professional and personal lives (Cogin, 2012).

Considering Baby Boomers, the results indicate notable differences between this generation and Gen Z. Baby Boomers generally resist flexible and remote work arrangements and even do not prioritize human interaction. In contrast, Gen Z prioritizes flexible and remote work opportunities. Not only is Gen Z the most educated generation to date, but their predominantly white-collar roles also facilitate remote and hybrid working arrangements.

Another interesting finding is that Baby Boomers do not prioritize autonomy. The researchers suggest two main reasons for this. First, many Baby Boomers have been with their organizations for a long time and already possess autonomy in their roles, making them less likely to value it. Second, this generation may be experiencing "Silent Retirement", linked with "Quiet Quitting," where, nearing the end of their careers, they lack motivation to add value to the company. Despite often holding crucial tacit knowledge, they may no longer seek to enhance their contributions. Thus, aligning with the previous point, Baby Boomers are seeking enjoyment in their daily

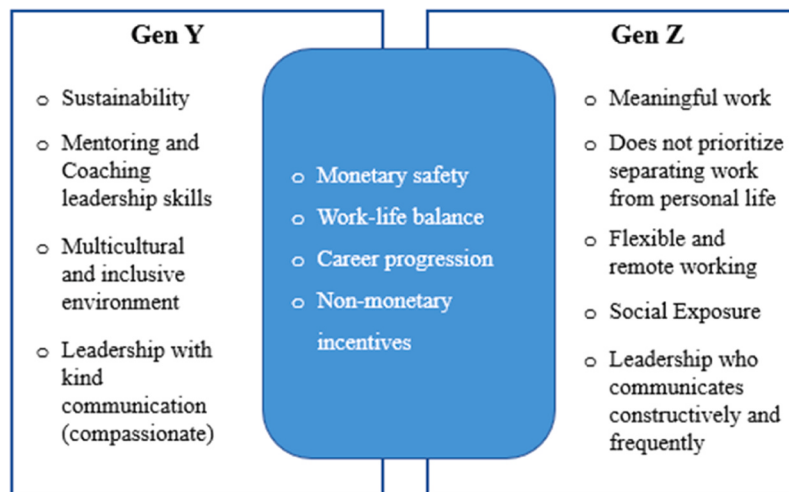


Fig. 10. Similarities and differences between Gen Y and Gen Z.

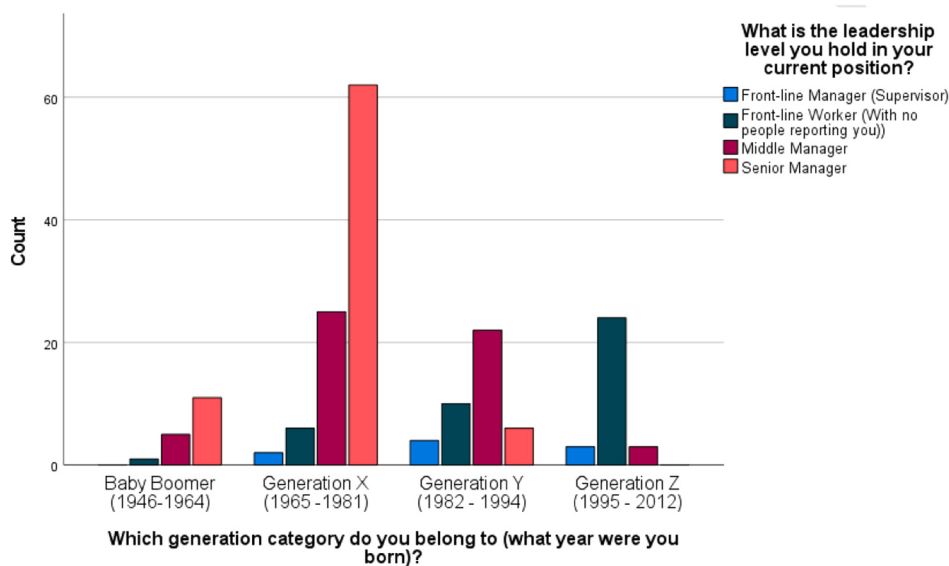


Fig. 11. Leadership level vs generations.

work-related lifestyle. They also look for innovative and creative environments that can potentially enhance this sense of fun.

These results diverge significantly from expectations in the existing literature. Traditionally, this generation has been associated with dedication to conventional work models that emphasize hard work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). However, the findings indicate that their current priority is enjoying a fun and balanced lifestyle. Despite this shift, the literature aligns on one point: this generation remains resistant to flexible work arrangements (Cogin, 2012).

Table 4 shows the summary of the findings.

Despite the differences in motivations, the priority leadership traits across the four generations are largely consistent: being **Collaborative and Communicative**, **Mindful and Peaceful**, and **Humble and Trustworthy**. This suggests that they all seek leaders who regularly communicate, remain actively engaged with the team and organization, understand and adapt to their context while assisting others in adapting as well (physically and emotionally), and uphold a humble, transparent, and ethical demeanour.

The differences are evident in Gen X, Y, and Z. The preference for **Process-oriented thinking** among Gen X and Y reflects their adaptation to the Lean methodology, which became more prominent in the Western world during the 1990s (Abbadi et al., 2020; Glass et al., 2016).

GenX respondents also highlight **Focus on results** as a key leadership trait, aligning with research by Cogin (2012) indicating that Gen X prioritizes outcomes over the processes involved in achieving them. The novel insight here is that, for this generation, the priority has shifted: **Process-oriented thinking** is now ranked second, with **Focus on results** coming in third, contrary to earlier

Table 4
Summary of motivators prioritization findings (based on each group).

Groups	Motivators	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Autonomy	Flexible and remote working	+			-
	Autonomy in decision-making			+	
Competence	Digital Enablers			+	
	Being Good at work			+	
Relatedness	Transparency leadership			+	
	Leadership support			+	
	Multicultural environment		+		
	Social exposure	+			
	Mentoring and Coaching leadership skills		+		
	Leader with kind communication		+		
	Leader who communicates constructively and frequently	+			
	Human interaction				-
	Innovative and creative environment				+
Purpose	Make a difference			+	
	Meaningful work	+			
	Corporate social responsibility			+	
	Alignment with companies' values			+	
	Sustainability		+		
	Pursue passions and hobbies				
Balance	Work-life balance	+	+		
	Monetary Safety	+	+		
	Challenge			+	
	Have fun				+
	Work-life time separation	-		+	
	Personal life goals prioritization	+			
Progress/ Achievement	Tendency to change jobs				-
	Recognition			+	
	Career Progression	+	+		
	Non-monetary incentives	+	+		
	Opportunities for professional development			+	

+ - Highly Prioritize
 - - Not a priority.

assumptions (results being priority over process).

Gen Z prioritizes **Professional development**, consistent with the generational traits outlined by Achmad et al. (2023). Fig. 11 shows that Gen Z has the lowest leadership level compared to other generations, making their desire for growth understandable. This development often involves changing roles across different companies, reinforcing their reputation for volatility (Queiri et al., 2015).

5.2. Generations as foresight variables: rethinking work, leadership, and motivation in I5.0

This study affirms the notion that generational cohorts, especially Gen Z and Gen Y, are not merely defined by static preferences but act as living indicators of broader socio-technical transitions. These patterns gain significance when contextualized within the I5.0 paradigm, which centers human agency, sustainability, and emotional intelligence as key levers of transformation.

The data reveal partial convergence between Gen Z and Gen Y around core motivational anchors—monetary safety, work-life balance, and career progression—yet this similarity belies deeper structural shifts. Gen Z's prioritization of non-monetary incentives, frequent feedback, social exposure, and work-life fusion signals a fundamental reframing of work not as a transactional duty but as a relational, meaningful, and identity-congruent practice. This echoes Salvadorinho et al. (2025), who argue that human-centricity in I5.0 rests on purpose, well-being, and meaningful work as core elements of *Human Capital 4.0*. Our findings suggest that generational cohorts, particularly Gen Z and Gen Y, are actively shaping these elements in practice: younger generations are not merely responding to human-centric systems but pushing them forward by infusing new expectations around relational leadership, value congruence, and work-life fluidity. This alignment also resonates with recent foresight literature suggesting a paradigmatic shift from externally imposed motivation structures (e.g., hierarchy, control) to internally aligned ecosystems of purpose, well-being, and adaptive feedback (Haeger & Lingham, 2014; Randle et al., 2017). Gen Z is not simply seeking “better” working conditions but represents a broader cultural reimagining of what “work” should be—fluid, meaningful, and ethically aligned. Such orientations resonate with the human-centric, ethically conscious ethos of I5.0, which calls for systems where technology augments—not replaces—human values and where purpose, well-being, and sustainability are not peripheral but central. From a foresight perspective, these patterns may represent more than generational preferences—they may point toward structural transformations in how labor is conceived: from duty-bound, hierarchical roles to participatory, purpose-driven, and emotionally integrated models of engagement. As I5.0 aims to re-center human agency within techno-industrial systems, Gen Z's priorities—including feedback-intensive leadership, social exposure, and blurred work-life boundaries—and Gen Y's preference for coaching and mentorship, could signal not just what motivates them, but how human-centricity itself is being redefined. This reframing prompts a deeper questioning: Are we witnessing a paradigmatic shift in the future of leadership, where authority is not inherited through hierarchy but constructed through relational trust, emotional intelligence, and iterative dialogue? And if so, what institutional redesigns are needed to cultivate such leadership in socially and ecologically just ways?

In this light, Gen Z's individualistic search for purpose does not represent narcissism or disengagement, but rather the emergence of a new ontological architecture of work. As Deepika and Chitranshi (2021) argue, Gen Z is displaying enhanced capacity for navigating VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) contexts—a trait increasingly critical in anticipatory leadership. Their fluid boundaries between personal and professional life, their digital embeddedness, and their emphasis on value congruence over job permanence can thus be adaptive strategies for surviving and thriving in polycrisis-era labor markets. Furthermore, the leadership preferences of Gen Z—frequent feedback, coaching, and socially recognized contributions—signal a departure from hierarchical authority toward relational, transparent, and developmental leadership styles. This aligns with futures thinking that sees leadership not as command-and-control but as facilitative, dialogic, and reflexive—qualities increasingly necessary in uncertain, multi-crisis environments.

While Gen Z's motivations often diverge from those of Gen X and Baby Boomers, these gaps offer opportunities for intergenerational dialogue as a foresight method. For example, Gen X's emphasis on autonomy, CSR, and results-based leadership reflects a synthesis of industrial-era rationalism and post-industrial ethics. Their bridging position between analog and digital systems—described here as “digital enablers”—marks a transitional role that is critical to institutional memory, digital transformation, and value continuity. Yet, as Randle et al. (2017) caution, structural and emotional fatigue among mid-career professionals could become a bottleneck in realizing inclusive futures. While “quiet quitting”⁸, has predominantly been discussed in the context of Gen Z and Millennials (Gallup, 2022), some research suggests that late-career disengagement among Baby Boomers may take subtler forms—often linked to lack of recognition, insufficient challenge, or diminished purpose (Frøylund & Terjesen, 2020). If Baby Boomers are increasingly experiencing passive withdrawal or “silent retirement” (Hennekam, 2015), the failure to meaningfully include them in future-oriented workforce planning could erode tacit knowledge, institutional memory, and cross-generational trust. This challenge invites organizations to explore dignity-driven workforce futures that respect the temporalities of meaning across life stages.

These trends converge with futures literature advocating for *anticipatory coherence* (Miller, 2018)—a condition in which social groups or organizations align their practices with emerging images of the future rather than clinging to legacy logics. That all generations in our study value leaders who are collaborative, humble, and communicative suggests the existence of a latent consensus on what “future-fit” leadership could look like: relational rather than hierarchical, ethical rather than performative, and developmental rather than directive. At the same time, the differences in expectation intensity and granularity—particularly Gen Z's heightened emphasis on performance validation and social recognition—signal the need for institutional redesign capable of accommodating

⁸ Quiet quitting is when employees do only what their job requires—no extra effort or unpaid tasks—often to protect their well-being or push back against overwork (Atalay & Dağistan, 2023).

diverse motivational ecologies.

Through this lens, the findings support three important futures inquiries:

1. **Pluralizing future imaginaries of work:** Who defines meaningful work, and for whom? Gen Z's purpose may seem individualistic, but it could reflect a shift toward personalized, ethical work configurations that current systems are not yet prepared to accommodate.
2. **Designing intergenerationally just futures:** How do organizations construct futures that are inclusive of diverse temporalities of life—where younger workers seek fluidity and self-expression, while older ones seek security and dignity? I5.0 must address these tensions not as HR challenges, but as *cultural negotiations* with futures implications.
3. **Reconfiguring leadership for anticipatory coherence:** All generations prioritize ethical, humble, communicative leadership—suggesting that despite their motivational differences, a common anticipatory horizon exists. Future organizations may benefit from designing leadership pipelines not around tenure or authority, but around emotional intelligence, adaptive communication, and participatory foresight.

This study suggests that motivation, leadership, and purpose are not individual traits but components of a shared cultural infrastructure—one that is rapidly being reconfigured under the pressures of I5.0, digital acceleration, ecological crisis, and institutional distrust. Echoing critical futures theorists like Inayatullah (2008), we argue that work must now be viewed as a site of cultural negotiation, where generational temporalities, technological imaginaries, and socio-emotional desires collide and coevolve. In this context, intergenerational differences are not obstacles to manage, but signals to heed—pointing toward alternative ways of structuring labor, value, and identity. For instance, Gen Z's blend of flexibility-seeking and passion-pursuing may reflect not immaturity, but a response to a world where legacy systems no longer guarantee economic security or moral alignment. Similarly, Baby Boomers' new focus on creativity and enjoyment may not be escapism but a recalibration of late-life agency in a post-growth world.

6. Final remarks

6.1. Theoretical implications

Answering to the main research question, our findings reveal that Gen Z distinctly prioritizes purpose-driven work, psychological safety, relational leadership, and emotional intelligence, contrasting with previous generations' more transactional and hierarchical models. While Gen Y shares some of these emergent values, Gen X and Baby Boomers emphasize strategic pragmatism and institutional memory respectively, with Boomers also showing a late-career shift toward creativity and enjoyment. These generational motivational and leadership indicators collectively reflect an ongoing cultural transition from conventional, individualistic work paradigms toward integrated, identity-based engagement and distributed leadership structures.

Existing literature often treats generational traits as backward-looking sociological descriptions. This study contributes to foresight theory by repositioning these traits as **foresight variables**—symbolic and behavioral expressions that embody how groups imagine and orient toward the future. In this sense, generational patterns function as more than demographic profiles: they can be interpreted as *anticipatory signals* of deeper socio-technical transitions. This reframing aligns with Miller's (2018) concept of *anticipatory coherence* and Candy & Dunagan's (2017) work: the motivational and leadership preferences observed across generations reflect patterned ways of sustaining future imaginaries. For example, the convergence on ethical, humble, and communicative leadership illustrates a shared anticipatory horizon of what "future-fit" leadership may require.

Methodologically, our study sits at the early signal identification and sensemaking stage of foresight practice. Instead, our contribution is to surface generational orientations as inputs that can enrich those later processes. Inayatullah's (2008) six pillars remind us that such signals matter not only descriptively but also as entry points into deeper cultural negotiation—challenging assumptions, revealing alternative worldviews, and expanding the imaginative repertoire of futures inquiry. By treating generational differences as foresight variables, we extend the conceptual toolkit of foresight: enabling both scholars and practitioners to see intergenerational dynamics as early warnings of socio-technical change. The emerging cross-generational convergence on themes such as ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, and feedback culture may thus be read as signals of a nascent shared imaginary around the "soft infrastructures" of I5.0—those intangible but critical elements (trust, empathy, care) that undergird the reconfiguration of work and society.

While I5.0 scholarship typically foregrounds technological and structural transformations, this study contributes a cultural and generational dimension to its core pillars: human-centricity, sustainability, and resilience.

- **Human-centricity:** Building on Salvadorinho et al. (2025), who identify purpose, well-being, and meaningful work as central dimensions of Human Capital 4.0 and I5.0, our findings show how generational cohorts are actively enriching the notion of human-centricity. Younger cohorts (Gen Y and Gen Z) emphasize purpose, psychological safety, and relational leadership, signaling a shift from transactional models of work toward identity-driven engagement. At the same time, Baby Boomers—often overlooked in foresight scholarship—demonstrate an evolving preference for creativity and enjoyment in later-stage careers. Taken together,

this suggests that human-centric paradigms are not confined to younger generations but manifest across the life course, with each cohort contributing distinct values to the ongoing reconfiguration of work in I5.0.

- Sustainability, particularly in its social and organizational dimensions, is extended through evidence of value alignment across generations. While Gen Y expresses this through organizational ethics and corporate social responsibility, Gen Z seeks personal congruence with institutional purpose. Interestingly, Boomers' emerging interest in meaningful and joyful work experiences points to an understudied facet of post-growth values and late-career well-being as sustainability mechanisms.
- Resilience is reconceptualized as an emergent property of intergenerational diversity. Each cohort contributes distinct adaptive capacities: Gen Z's emotional agility, Gen Y's integrative thinking, Gen X's strategic pragmatism, and Boomers' institutional memory. Rather than viewing these cohorts in opposition, we propose that their complementarities constitute a distributed resilience system, capable of buffering organizational futures against volatility and disruption.

This research also contributes to the theoretical integration of leadership foresight which, in this framing, is not merely positional but relational and anticipatory—a site where collective imaginaries about fairness, empathy, and empowerment converge and evolve. The shift in leadership expectations documented across cohorts reflects an underlying move toward distributed, affective, and trust-based authority structures, aligning with emerging foresight literature on post-heroic and regenerative leadership models. Finally, our cross-generational analysis contributes a novel methodological lens for foresight practitioners by treating generational perspectives as both drivers and diagnostics of system change. This dual role enables the development of more culturally attuned foresight processes that leverage intergenerational dialogue as a source of innovation, norm critique, and future literacy. Theoretically, this supports a move from linear generational typologies toward relational, values-based futures frameworks that accommodate complexity, multiplicity, and co-evolution.

6.2. Practical implications

This study offers both strategic foresight insights and human resource management recommendations aimed at enhancing organizational adaptability in the context of I5.0 and the Future of Work.

The **first recommendation** of this research is that rather than viewing generational preferences as static demographic traits, organizations and foresight practitioners should interpret them as anticipatory artefacts—ongoing expressions of deeper transitions in work ethics, institutional trust, and purpose. These values constitute “weak signals” and “soft data” that can enrich scenario building, visioning, and policy prototyping in workforce futures.

The **second recommendation** specifies that generational engagement cannot be reduced to age-related preferences alone—it must also reflect life-stage motivations and evolving notions of purpose. For instance:

- **Gen Z** thrives in purpose-aligned roles with flexible boundaries between work and life.
- **Gen Y and Gen X** seek roles embedded in broader organizational and societal missions, often occupying strategic positions that emphasize impact and CSR alignment.
- **Baby Boomers**, though divergent in some motivational drivers, increasingly value joy, creativity, and meaning, highlighting opportunities for second-act careers and knowledge transfer initiatives.

Tables 5–7 outline actionable recommendations for HR practices tailored to each generation, covering themes like autonomy, career development, recognition, and work-life integration.

The **third recommendation** relies in leadership development, which should reflect the value heterogeneity across generations, fostering intergenerational coherence and system-level resilience. An anticipatory approach to leadership in I5.0 requires this type of approaches:

- **Purpose-driven leadership** for Gen Z, aligned with individualized passions and meaningful impact.
- **Sustainability-anchored leadership** for Gen Y, reflecting their demand for corporate responsibility.
- **Autonomy-supportive leadership** for Gen X, emphasizing decision latitude and recognition.
- **Creativity- and stability-oriented leadership** for Baby Boomers, allowing for fulfillment and legacy-building.

Table 5

Recommendations for Gen Z and Gen Y management.

Monetary Security	Action: Ensure competitive base salaries and financial stability. Rationale: Provide economic security, which is crucial for both generations' engagement and commitment
Work-life Balance	Action: Promote policies and practices that support work-life integration. Rationale: Recognize the importance these generations place on balancing personal and professional lives.
Non-monetary incentives	Action: Offer benefits such as flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and recognition schemes. Rationale: Enhance motivation and job satisfaction through non-financial rewards aligned with their values.
Career Progression	Action: Facilitate opportunities for growth and development through varied job experiences and learning opportunities. Rationale: Acknowledge their propensity for career mobility and desire for continuous advancement.
Supportive and collaborative Leadership	Action: Cultivate a leadership style that is supportive, mentoring, and focused on individual development. Rationale: Align leadership practices with their preference for collaborative and inclusive work environments.

Table 6

Gen X management recommendations.

Emphasize Autonomy and Challenging Projects	Action: Provide opportunities for independent decision-making and complex project assignments. Rationale: Generation X values autonomy and enjoys challenges that allow them to leverage their skills and expertise.
Maintain Clear Work-Life Boundaries and Offer Professional Development	Action: Implement policies that promote work-life balance and provide avenues for continuous professional growth. Rationale: Recognize the importance of maintaining distinct boundaries between work and personal life while supporting ongoing career development.
Recognize Achievements and Incorporate Traditional Work Structures	Action: Establish formal recognition programs and maintain traditional organizational hierarchies. Rationale: Generation X appreciates recognition for their contributions and values the stability provided by traditional work environments.

Table 7

Baby Boomers management recommendations.

Create Innovative, Enjoyable Work Environments	Action: Foster a workplace culture that encourages creativity, innovation, and enjoyment. Rationale: Baby Boomers appreciate environments that stimulate their creativity and provide opportunities for enjoyable work experiences.
Offer Job Stability and Traditional Work Arrangements	Action: Provide stable job roles with clear expectations and predictable work schedules. Rationale: Address Baby Boomers' preference for stability and structure in their careers, offering traditional work arrangements that align with their expectations.

Table 8

Consistent Leadership traits across generations.

Consistent Leadership Traits Across Generations	Collaborative and Communicative Leadership	Action: Foster teamwork and open communication channels Rationale: Ensure leaders engage actively with teams, enhancing cohesion and idea exchange.
	Mindful and Peaceful Leadership (for Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Z)	Action: Promote a calm and mindful approach to decision-making. Rationale: Help leaders adapt to various contexts while supporting emotional and physical well-being.
	Humble and Trustworthy Leadership (for Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y)	Action: Cultivate transparency, integrity, and humility in leadership practices. Rationale: Build trust and ethical standards within the organization.

Table 9

Generation-specific recommendations for leadership traits.

Generation-Specific Recommendations for Leadership Traits	Generation X	Focus on Results	Action: Emphasize achieving tangible outcomes and goals. Rationale: Responds well to clear objectives and measurable achievements.
	Generations X and Y	Process-Oriented Thinking	Action: Support structured processes and efficiency improvements. Rationale: Values systematic approaches and procedural clarity.
		Purpose-Driven Leadership	Action: Align leadership with organizational and societal values. Rationale: Seeks meaning and impact in their work roles.
		Purpose-Driven Leadership	Action: Aligning leadership with employees' values and personal passions. Rationale: Seeks meaning and impact in their work roles.
	Generation Z	Professional Development	Action: Provide continuous learning opportunities and career growth paths. Rationale: Prioritizes personal and professional growth amidst career mobility.

Tables 8 and 9 detail consistent and generation-specific leadership traits, reinforcing the need for adaptive and inclusive leadership archetypes.

Instead of treating generational diversity as a source of tension, the **fourth recommendation** is that organizations should leverage it as a strategic asset for institutional anticipatory learning. Initiatives such as reverse mentoring, co-creation labs, and multi-generational innovation teams foster cross-generational empathy and futures literacy, aligning with I5.0's human-centricity and resilience pillars.

As a **fifth recommendation** a foresight-informed incentive model must be created to reflect the declining centrality of purely financial rewards, especially among younger cohorts. Instead, organizations should invest in:

- **Non-monetary incentives** such as wellness programs, flexible scheduling, and public recognition.
- **Professional development architectures** that facilitate continuous growth and support career mobility.
- **Culture-building practices** that embed trust, empathy, and care—the “soft infrastructures” of I5.0.

This shift aligns incentives with emergent values around self-actualization, contribution, and relational work, fostering a purpose-driven, resilient workforce across all generations. Our findings suggest a growing orientation across generational cohorts toward post-material values—trust, care, contribution, autonomy, and collective wellbeing. Rather than narrowly optimizing for retention or engagement, organizations must cultivate futures of contribution that are aligned with: Narratives of care over extraction; Co-creation over competition, and Long-termism over short-term output. Such reorientations challenge extractive and individualist models of organizational success and support the creation of soft infrastructures vital to I5.0—empathy, adaptability, trust, and shared purpose.

6.3. Limitations and future work

This study offers initial insights into generational work values as anticipatory signals of broader shifts in work and leadership. However, several limitations highlight opportunities for future foresight-oriented inquiry.

First, the predominantly European sample (N = 184) limits cultural and epistemic diversity. Future research should engage more geographically and culturally varied populations, incorporating non-Western and Indigenous perspectives to pluralize understandings of the future of work.

Second, while Generation Z's motivators served as a useful analytical lens, this risks normativity. Subsequent research should empirically surface values across all cohorts without defaulting to a singular generational benchmark, supporting more emancipatory and reflexive futures thinking.

Lastly, findings remain largely conceptual. Future work should explore practice-based applications—through case studies, foresight interventions, or organizational labs—to test how generational insights inform more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful work futures in line with I5.0 principles.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Maneesh Kumar: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Leonor Teixeira:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Carlos Ferreira:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Peter Hines:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Juliana Salvadorinho:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Survey

You and Your Career

In this section, we want to ask you for information about yourself and your career. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond with the first thing that comes to mind; we are solely interested in your opinion.

Which generation category do you belong to (what year were you born)? *

- ☐ Baby Boomer (1946-1964)
- ☐ Generation X (1965 -1981)
- ☐ Generation Y (1982 - 1994)
- ☐ Generation Z (1995 - 2012)

What is your gender? *

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

In which global region do you work (considering your current organization)? *

- ☐ North America
- ☐ South America
- ☐ Africa
- ☐ Europe
- ☐ Australasia
- ☐ Asia

What is the leadership level you hold in your current position? *

- ☐ Senior Manager
- ☐ Middle Manager
- ☐ Front-line Manager (Supervisor)
- ☐ Front-Line Worker (With no people reporting to you)

How long have you worked to your current organization? *

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ Between 1-3 years
- ☐ Between 3-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

How long have you been in your current position? *

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ Between 1-3 years
- ☐ Between 3-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

How many times have you been promoted or moved roles in your current organization? *

- ☐ 0 - this is the only role I have held
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times
- ☐ Four times
- ☐ Five times
- ☐ More than five times

Motivation Predictors - What motivates you at work? (Part 1/3)

Here, we invite you to share what motivates you at work. There is no right or wrong answer. Please respond with the first thing that comes to mind; we are solely interested in your opinion.

*

	1- Not important at all	2- Not important	3- Neutral	4- Important	5- Extremely important
How important is it for you to change jobs?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is leadership support for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is a multicultural and inclusive environment for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it for you to make a difference at the workplace?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How important is it for you to have option of flexible and remote working?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is recognition for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is career progression for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is work-life balance for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is monetary safety for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is social exposure for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Motivation Predictors - What motivates you at work? (Part 2/3)

Here, we invite you to share what motivates you at work. There is no right or wrong answer. Please respond with the first thing that comes to mind; we are solely interested in your opinion.

*

1- Not important at all 2- Not important 3- Neutral 4- Important 5- Extremely important

How important is it for you to be a digital enabler (People with digital skills that support and develop a company's potential and provide a useful competitive advantage)?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

How important is it for you to have a meaningful work (with a purpose that benefits not just you, but also society for example)?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

How important is it for you to be good at work?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it for you to be challenged in your work?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it to you that your organization is concerned with corporate social responsibility?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it for you to have fun in your lifestyle?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it for you to be aligned with your companies' values?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it to you that your organization is concerned with sustainability?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How important is it for you to receive non-monetary incentives?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is it for you to separate work time from personal time?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Motivation Predictors - What motivates you at work? (Part 3/3)

Here, we invite you to share what motivates you at work. There is no right or wrong answer. Please respond with the first thing that comes to mind; we are solely interested in your opinion.

★

1- Not important at all 2- Not important 3- Neutral 4- Important 5- Extremely important

How important is it for you to prioritize your life goals (considering your personal life)?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

How important is it for you to pursue your passions and hobbies (above career)?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

How important is it for you to have a leadership with mentoring and coaching capabilities?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

How important
is it for you to
have autonomy
in decision-
making in your
job?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it to you that
your boss is
kind in the way
he/she
communicates
with you?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it to you that
your boss
communicates
constructively
and frequently
with you?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it for you to
have
opportunities
for professional
development?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it for you to
have leadership
that promotes
transparency,
genuineness
and honesty?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it for you to
work in an
innovative and
creative
environment?

☐☐☐☐☐

How important
is it for you to
have the human
interaction
during work
time?

☐☐☐☐☐

Identify the Priority Number 1 characteristic you value most in your direct manager. *

Escolher ▼

Identify the Priority Number 2 characteristic you value most in your direct manager. *

Escolher ▼

Identify the Priority Number 3 characteristic you value most in your direct manager. *

Escolher ▼

Humble and Trustworthy

Collaborative and Communicative

Focus on people professional development

Risk-taker

Empathetic

Focus on people's intrinsic motivation (personal development)

Listener

Mindful (leaders that observe what is happening around them with the intent to pause and stay calm) and Peaceful

Makes powerful questions (that challenge beliefs)

Focus on results

Innovative

Focus on the customer

Process-oriented thinking

Rule-follower

Focus on extrinsic motivation (rewards and punishments)

Upbeat

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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