

**EMOTIONAL DIFFERENCES ACROSS GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE:
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF TRUST, RESPECT, EMPATHY, COMMUNICATION,
AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING**

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Abstract

The modern office consists of several generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Gen Z—each reflecting different societal shifts, historical movements and technological advances that influence emotional inclination, communication styles and organizational standards. These emotional variances impact how employees sense trust, care, empathy, communication and workplace wellness. This paper provides a quantitative account of the link between emotional aspects of generations and employee well-being. Survey data were gathered from 102 individuals in three different organizations. Reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and regression modeling were performed in SPSS to evaluate the internal consistency, factor structure and predictive power of four principal emotional constructs—(trust), respect(x-respect), empathy and effective communication towards employee well-being. Results show that trust, respect, and empathy have a positive and significant relationship to well-being whereas effective communication does not exhibit statistically significant influence. The implications include developing insights into generational emotional mindsets for emotionally intelligent leadership and organizational policies to support intergenerational cooperation, trust, and well-being.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Generational Differences, Workplace Emotions, Trust, Empathy, Respect, Communication, Well-Being.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's workplace, multiple generations often work side by side, bringing different mindsets, emotional attitudes, learning styles, and work expectations shaped by the socio-economic and technological contexts in which they grew up (Macovei & Martinescu-Bădălan, 2022; Scheibe et al., 2021). These generational variations can influence how employees interpret organizational communication, decision-making processes, leadership behaviors, and workplace stressors, thereby shaping organizational culture and team relationships (Juchnowicz et al., 2024; Zapf et al., 2021).

The contemporary workforce is frequently described as comprising four main generational cohorts: Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012). Research on age and emotions in organizations suggests that emotional experiences and emotion regulation strategies can differ across the lifespan and may operate as main effects or as context-dependent patterns in work settings (Livingstone & Isaacowitz, 2021; Scheibe et al., 2021; Dworakowski et al., 2022). Evidence from service and hospitality contexts similarly indicates that generational membership may be linked with emotional labor patterns and intention to stay, highlighting how age-related differences may translate into work outcomes (Kucukusta & Lim, 2022). Studies of intergenerational collaboration also point to the relevance of emotional intelligence profiles and emotional coordination in improving collaboration quality across age groups (Fedorova et al., 2023; Stevanin et al., 2020).

These disparities can become particularly visible in work relations and the interpretation of fundamental organizational constructs such as loyalty, feedback, and leadership. For example, employee loyalty and commitment may be shaped by how individuals evaluate service quality, organizational support, and managerial commitment, which can vary across contexts and employee groups (Abd-El-Salam, 2023; Estigoy et al., 2020). Similarly, organizational scholarship emphasizes that emotions at work are not peripheral; they influence motivation, performance, and turnover intentions through both daily affect and longer-term emotional dynamics (Diener et al., 2020; Zapf et al., 2021). Systematic reviews in hospitality and HRM also show that workplace emotions can be shaped by environmental triggers, interpersonal interactions, and organizational practices, all of which may affect employee well-being and retention (Hwang et al., 2021; Sattar et al., 2024).

In addition to interpersonal processes, institutional structures condition the expression and regulation of emotions, especially during periods of uncertainty such as the COVID-19 era. Studies across sectors report that organizational structures and leadership behaviors influence motivation, satisfaction, and the functioning of teamwork and knowledge processes (Budur, 2025; Budur et al., 2025). Evidence also links internal communication quality with psychological well-being through organizational trust, implying that communication systems are not only informational but also emotional and relational resources (Qin & Men, 2023; Mazzei et al., 2012). In parallel, research on employee relations and social relations suggests that positive relational climates are associated with job satisfaction, positive mental health outcomes, and employee happiness—factors that are especially relevant for multigenerational workplaces (Alshurideh et al., 2023).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is often positioned as a key capability for navigating workplace emotions, conflict, and stress. Prior work connects EI to job performance and coping, especially under crisis conditions (Alonazi, 2020; Pathak & Goltz, 2021), and systematic reviews show consistent links between EI and conflict management approaches (Winardi et al., 2022). Empirical research in healthcare settings further demonstrates that EI relates to burnout and emotional strain, and can operate through mediators such as workplace violence exposure and emotion regulation processes (Cao et al., 2022; Aseery et al., 2023). In high-stress contexts, negative emotions may spill over into workplace incivility and worsen outcomes unless employees have strong emotional regulation resources (Naeem et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022). Additional research highlights that technology frustration and rapid workplace change can increase emotional exhaustion and stress, strengthening the need to understand emotional processes and supportive organizational resources (Lee, 2021; Wirkkala et al., 2024).

Organizations that fail to recognize generational and emotional differences may experience misunderstandings, conflict escalation, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover. Therefore, examining emotional differences among generations—and identifying organizational factors that support employee well-being—is increasingly important (Kucukusta & Lim, 2022; Sattar et al., 2024). Guided by trust and emotion-related frameworks, this study focuses on four key relational-emotional constructs—trust, respect, empathy, and effective communication—and evaluates their predictive effects on employee well-being using a quantitative survey and SPSS-based analyses (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mazzei et al., 2012).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the workplace, emotions are defined as affective states that employees experience in relation to work events, their roles, and the organizational context (Diener et al., 2020; Zapf et al., 2021; Juchnowicz et al., 2024). According to Affective Events Theory, emotional reactions triggered by work events influence employees' attitudes and behaviors, shaping engagement, decision-making, and performance over time (Diener et al., 2020; Troth et al., 2024). Reward-related positive emotions—such as satisfaction and motivation—may broaden cognitive and behavioral repertoires, whereas threat-related negative emotions (e.g., stress, frustration) may narrow cognitive resources and increase the risk of disengagement and burnout (Fredrickson, 1998; Shen, 2022). In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) is important because it supports emotion regulation and adaptive coping, especially under challenging or rapidly changing conditions (Alonazi, 2020; Pathak & Goltz, 2021).

Several emotional–relational characteristics are consistently emphasized as central for workplace relationships and well-being. Empathy reduces misunderstanding and strengthens cooperation; respect promotes psychological safety and belonging; trust facilitates collaboration and knowledge exchange; and feedback processes support learning and performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Qin & Men, 2023). Effective internal communication is also repeatedly linked to stronger employee relationships, improved trust, and better well-being, especially during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Mazzei et al., 2012; Qin & Men, 2023; Lee, 2021). More broadly, evidence from healthcare and service contexts shows that workplace emotions and emotion management can influence burnout, retention, and performance, underlining the need to address both individual and organizational drivers of workplace affect (Cao et al., 2022; Sattar et al., 2024).

Cultural and generational differences further shape how employees express emotions, what they expect from leadership, and how they interpret workplace relationships and policies (Scheibe et al., 2021; Macovei & Martinescu-Bădălan, 2022). Baby Boomers (1946–1964) and Generation X (1965–1980) are often described as valuing emotional restraint, organizational stability, and a clear chain of command, while Millennials (1981–1996) and Generation Z (1997–2012) are frequently portrayed as preferring emotional openness, regular feedback, and stronger organizational support for mental health and work–life balance (Stevanin et al., 2020; Kucukusta & Lim, 2022). Evidence from multigenerational settings suggests that differences in emotional labor, preferred communication channels (face-to-face vs. digital), and intention

to stay can emerge across age groups and contexts (Kucukusta & Lim, 2022; Fedorova et al., 2023). Such mismatches may increase misunderstandings and conflict if not managed through supportive leadership and inclusive communication norms (Su et al., 2022; Winardi et al., 2022).

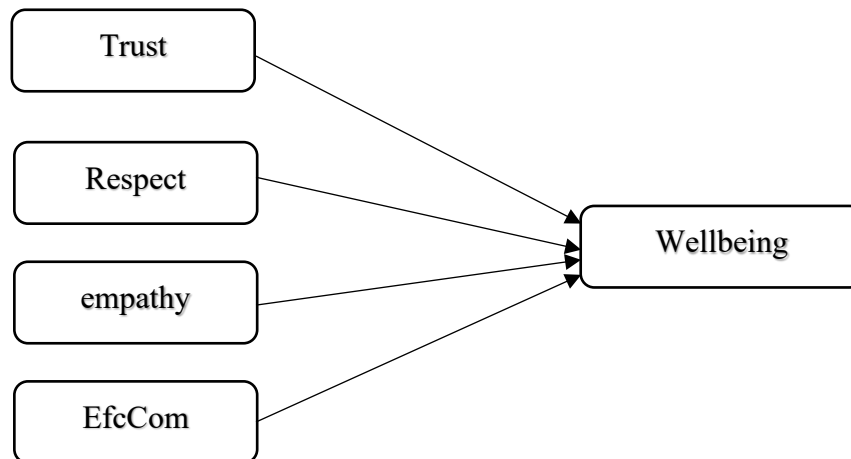
Recent research also underscores the importance of relational and knowledge processes for employee outcomes. For example, organizational socialization and affective commitment have been associated with innovative work behavior (Torlak et al., 2024). Research on declarative and procedural knowledge has shown meaningful associations with employee performance (Demir et al., 2022), and knowledge management practices have been linked to organizational sustainability, with quality systems (e.g., ISO 9001) influencing these links (Demir et al., 2023). Additionally, discrete emotions can shape knowledge sharing behaviors and job performance, suggesting that affective and cognitive mechanisms jointly influence organizational functioning (Luqman et al., 2023). These findings collectively support the argument that well-being and performance depend partly on how organizations structure learning, cooperation, and support (Budur, 2025; Demir et al., 2023).

Leadership and teamwork processes are also strongly associated with employee attitudes and performance. Evidence from charismatic and transformational leadership research indicates that supportive leadership styles can enhance job satisfaction and performance across settings and cultures through mechanisms such as teamwork and knowledge sharing (Budur et al., 2025; Poturak et al., 2020). Employee performance and loyalty-related outcomes may further improve when organizations strengthen service climates, relational quality, and satisfaction mechanisms (Budur & Poturak, 2021; Abd-El-Salam, 2023). At the same time, stressors such as workplace incivility and technology frustration can worsen emotional exhaustion and reduce well-being, indicating that leadership and organizational resources are crucial buffers (Naeem et al., 2020; Tawfik et al., 2021; Wirkkala et al., 2024). Taken together, this literature suggests that affective elements of work (emotions, trust, respect, empathy) and cognitive/structural processes (knowledge systems, communication structures, leadership practices) combine to shape employee well-being and related outcomes (Zapf et al., 2021; Juchnowicz et al., 2024).

Organizations can respond to emotional differences through EI-focused development (training, coaching, mentoring), well-being programs, flexible work arrangements, and inclusive communication policies (Winardi et al., 2022; Lee, 2021). A systems perspective also suggests

that organizational design influences how employees experience autonomy, participation, and support, which can ultimately shape trust and well-being (Budur, 2025; Qin & Men, 2023).

3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT



H1: Trust among employees has a positive effect on their well-being.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) noted that trust promotes open discussion, teamwork, and reduced tension in the workplace. When employees feel trusted, they are more motivated and willing to share ideas and make decisions without fear. A trustworthy environment encourages honesty and mutual support, which contributes to psychological well-being.

H2: Respect among employees has a positive effect on their well-being.

Porath et al. (2015) found that employees are more productive and engaged when they feel respected at work. Respect strengthens workplace relationships, increases motivation, and supports a healthy work environment where individuals feel valued, thereby enhancing well-being.

H3: Empathy among employees has a positive effect on their well-being.

Mayer et al. (1995) emphasized the importance of care and understanding in workplace relationships. Empathy supports cooperation and reduces misunderstanding, making work interactions easier and less stressful, and thus improving employee well-being.

H4: Effective communication among employees has a positive effect on their well-being.

3. Method

The aim of this study is to explore differences in emotional experiences of generational groups in the workplace and to investigate how trust, respect, empathy, and effective communication as constructs-based emotions impact employee well-being. A quantitative approach was used as it captured measurable data that can help to show the patterns, relationships between and / or among variables and significant effects of variables (D. Muijs & Terrell, 2002). This design was chosen to allow for objectivity and reliability in analyzing generational variances in emotional orientations and workplace expectations.

The study subjects included workers from three different industrial factories of Darw City, Hamkar Group and Grng Company. These were chosen for their multi-generational workforce, which would allow a wide variety of generational emotional tendencies to be described. In total, 102 questionnaires were received. There was a wide representation of respondents concerning their age as well as gender, years in company and position. The sample packet was, however, representative of all four generational groups accordingly, Baby Boomers ($M = 2.99$), Generation X ($M = 4.09$), Millennials ($M = 3.62$), and Gen Z (Mean = 1.45), which were good for examining emotional dynamics across generations.

Structured questionnaire, in both print and electronic version was used for data collection to enhance accessibility of the tool to as many participants as possible. The survey included two major parts: demographic characteristics (age, gender, work experience, occupation, and company type) and Likert-scale items assessing trust, respect, empathy, effective communication and well-being. The factors were chosen on the basis of their literature support with respect to workplace emotions and emotional intelligence. There were five response categories carried out in a Likert scale format: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) not sure; (4) agree; and (5) strongly agree to the extent that they described their situation or experience.

The questions used in the questionnaire were taken from validated studies in emotional intelligence and workplace behavior issues based on their soundness, reliability and appropriateness. The questionnaire was pre-tested prior to its distribution to confirm clarity, coherence and appropriateness. The SPSS software was used for data analysis. Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was conducted to measure the consistency of each construct. Then

EFA was conducted to investigate the underlying relationship between emotional constructs and validate that the items represented their intended factors. A regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive nature of trust, respect, empathy and effective communication on wellbeing.

The ethical aspects were well respected throughout the investigation. The participation was voluntary and the purpose of the research was informed. All replies were anonymous and data used only for academic analysis. There were no personal identifiers recorded so that respondent's privacy was maintained, and ethical considerations upheld.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the statistical findings based on responses from 102 participants. The analysis includes demographic characteristics, reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis, regression analysis, and hypothesis testing. To match journal expectations, the results are presented with consolidated tables and narrative interpretation of each output. Table 1 summarizes the participant demographics.

The sample is primarily composed of employees from private organizations. Most respondents work full time and have early-career experience (1–3 years). The majority hold non-managerial positions, and the age distribution is concentrated in the 18–35 range. Gender representation is relatively balanced with a slight majority of female respondents.

Table 1. Participant Demographics (Combined)

Category	Subcategory	Frequency
Company Type	Private	85
Company Type	Public	14
Company Type	Non-profit	2
Contract Type	Full-time	75
Contract Type	Part-time	20
Contract Type	Other	6
Experience Level	<1 year	18
Experience Level	1–3 years	38
Experience Level	4–6 years	24
Experience Level	7–9 years	9
Experience Level	≥10 years	12
Position	Employee	64
Position	Supervisor	16
Position	Manager	5
Position	General Manager	4

Position	Other	12
Age	18–25	40
Age	26–35	44
Age	36–45	13
Age	46–50	3
Age	51+	1
Gender	Female	55
Gender	Male	46

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrate acceptable to excellent reliability. Trust shows acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .68$), while respect, empathy, effective communication, and well-being show good to excellent reliability ($\alpha \geq .83$). These results support the use of the measures for further factor and regression analyses.

Table 2. Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Trust	0.68	Acceptable
Respect	0.83	Good
Empathy	0.84	Good
Effective Communication	0.84	Good
Well-being	0.878	Excellent

Exploratory Factor Analysis (principal components with varimax rotation) was applied to examine the underlying structure of the items. Four components were retained and together explained a large proportion of the variance in the data (87.231% in the original output). The rotated solution indicates clear clustering of items for empathy, respect, feedback (an emergent factor), and effective communication, suggesting a stable measurement structure for the key constructs.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis Summary (Rotated Components)

Component	Key Loadings	Interpretation
1	Emp1 (.741), Emp2 (.878)	Empathy
2	Reps1 (.783), Reps2 (.845)	Respect
3	FeedB1 (.713), FeedB2 (.846)	Feedback (emergent factor)
4	EfCom1 (.650), EfCom3 (.896)	Effective Communication

Multiple regression analysis was conducted using four stepwise models, culminating in Model 4 that included trust, respect, empathy, and effective communication as predictors of well-being. Model fit improved as predictors were added, and the final model explained 64.2% of variance in well-being (Adjusted $R^2 = .627$), indicating strong explanatory power for the included emotional factors.

Table 4. Regression Model Summary (Models 1–4)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.594	.352	.346	.83383
2	.738	.545	.536	.70263
3	.800	.640	.629	.62769
4	.801	.642	.627	.62982

Table 5 presents the standardized regression coefficients for the final model. Trust ($p = .035$), respect ($p = .001$), and empathy ($p < .001$) significantly and positively predict well-being, with empathy showing the strongest effect ($\beta = .401$). In contrast, effective communication is not a statistically significant predictor of well-being ($p = .559$). These results suggest that relational-emotional qualities (trust, respect, empathy) contribute more directly to employee well-being than communication alone in this sample.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients (Final Model)

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	Interpretation
Trust	.170	2.137	.035	Significant positive effect
Respect	.306	3.520	.001	Significant positive effect
Empathy	.401	4.281	.000	Strongest predictor
Communication	.060	.587	.559	Not significant

Hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table 6. Consistent with the regression findings, hypotheses H1–H3 are supported, while H4 is rejected.

Table 6. Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Trust → Well-being	Accepted
H2	Respect → Well-being	Accepted
H3	Empathy → Well-being	Accepted
H4	Communication → Well-being	Rejected

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that trust, respect, and empathy significantly predict employee well-being in the participating organizations. Empathy emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that employees' perceptions of understanding and emotional support are central to well-being in multigenerational settings. This aligns with the view that psychologically safe climates and emotionally intelligent interactions strengthen employee outcomes.

Trust and respect also showed significant positive relationships with well-being. In multigenerational workplaces, trust may operate through perceptions of fairness, reliability, and openness, while respect may reduce generational stereotyping and support inclusion. These relational foundations can facilitate collaboration and reduce the emotional costs of conflict.

Interestingly, effective communication did not significantly predict well-being in the final model. One explanation is that communication may be experienced primarily as a procedural tool for task coordination rather than as an emotional resource. Another explanation is generational mismatch in preferred communication channels: older cohorts may value direct face-to-face interaction while younger cohorts may rely heavily on digital communication, which can reduce perceived warmth and support.

The broader organizational literature suggests that employee outcomes are shaped not only by interpersonal emotions but also by knowledge processes, leadership style, and organizational design. For example, evidence indicates that knowledge sharing and teamwork can mediate leadership effects on job satisfaction, and that organizational structure can moderate how knowledge sharing and hiding influence motivation (Budur, 2025). In the present study, empathy and respect may reflect relational conditions that also enable knowledge sharing and teamwork, which are important for innovation and commitment (Torlak et al., 2024).

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the value of leadership and HR interventions that foster empathetic interaction, respectful treatment, and trust-based climates. Leadership behaviors that encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange are likely to support well-being alongside performance and sustainability outcomes (Demir et al., 2023).

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined emotional differences in multigenerational workplaces and assessed how trust, respect, empathy, and effective communication predict employee well-being. The results show that trust, respect, and empathy significantly and positively influence well-being, with empathy representing the strongest predictor. Effective communication did not show a statistically significant effect in the final regression model.

The findings suggest that organizations seeking to enhance well-being should prioritize emotionally intelligent and inclusive leadership that promotes trust, respect, and empathy across generations. While communication remains essential for coordination, its impact on well-being may depend on whether communication is delivered in a relationally supportive manner and aligned with generational preferences.

Overall, promoting emotional understanding between generations can reduce conflict, increase collaboration, and improve workplace harmony and productivity.

Recommendations

Organizations should provide emotional intelligence training that strengthens self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and respectful communication across generations. Such training can improve conflict management and promote healthier team dynamics.

Human resource practices should be adapted to support different generational needs, including flexible work arrangements, fair recognition systems, and feedback practices that are perceived as supportive rather than punitive.

Organizations should establish intergenerational mentorship and collaboration initiatives. Structured cross-generational projects can strengthen trust and understanding, and may also improve knowledge sharing and teamwork that are linked to employee satisfaction and performance (Budur et al., 2025; Demir et al., 2022).

Well-being and mental health support programs (e.g., counseling access, stress management, psychological safety practices) should be strengthened to prevent burnout and promote sustainable performance.

Finally, leaders should model respect and empathy in everyday interactions, ensuring that communication practices build emotional support and inclusion rather than merely transmitting information.

Limitations

This study has limitations. The sample size ($N = 102$) and focus on three organizations limit generalizability across sectors and contexts. Self-reported survey data may introduce response bias. The cross-sectional design captures relationships at one time point and does not reveal causal direction. Additionally, cultural background, personality, and organizational context may influence emotional orientations beyond generational identity.

Future Research

Future research should expand sampling across industries and regions and consider longitudinal designs to capture changes over time. Additional constructs such as psychological safety, burnout, and organizational justice could be incorporated. Given the importance of knowledge processes and leadership mechanisms, future studies may also examine how knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding, teamwork, and organizational structure interact with emotional variables to shape well-being and performance (Budur, 2025; Budur et al., 2025).

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