# Generational differences in communication preferences and their impact on employee engagement.

*MALAVIKA MANOJ*

2 MSW HRDM
Christ Deemed to be University

**ABSTRACT:**

This study explores generational differences in communication preferences between Millennials and Generation Z within the Indian IT sector and examines how these preferences influence employee engagement. With the increasing presence of both generations in today's workforce, understanding their unique and shared communication styles is critical for fostering engagement, collaboration, and organizational performance. Employing semi-structured interviews with IT professionals, the research delves into preferred communication channels, frequency, formality, and the impact of real-time versus formal communication on workplace dynamics. Findings indicate that both generations prefer digital platforms for quick, informal exchanges, though each adjusts for formality with senior leaders or clients. Millennials often favor a balanced approach with structured feedback, while Gen Z leans towards real-time, flexible communication. Recognizing these preferences, the study offers recommendations for organizations to enhance engagement by embracing flexible communication strategies and fostering open dialogue. This approach can bridge generational gaps, enhance productivity, and contribute to a cohesive, engaged workplace culture.

## INTRODUCTION :

The modern workplace is shaped by a diverse blend of generations, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, each bringing unique experiences, values, and communication styles. While this diversity fosters innovation and creativity, it also poses challenges, particularly in communication. One critical area where these challenges emerge is in the impact of generational communication preferences on employee engagement, a key factor for organizational success (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021). Understanding and addressing these differences is essential for enhancing organizational performance and creating a more cohesive work environment.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a positive work culture. When employees feel heard, valued, and well-informed, their engagement and productivity tend to rise (Meng, Reber, & Rogers, 2020). Conversely, miscommunication can lead to frustration, disengagement, and a decline in overall performance (Chawla, Dokadia, & Rai, 2017). Research suggests that generational differences in communication styles can exacerbate these issues. Younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, often prefer digital communication methods like emails and instant messaging, whereas older generations may gravitate towards more traditional forms of interaction (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021; Meng et al., 2020).

Research on generational diversity indicates that these communication differences are not universally understood and may even be overstated (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021). While younger generations tend to be more comfortable with technology and leaner communication media, the extent to which these differences lead to workplace conflict is debated. Some studies argue that understanding communication practices across generations can improve workplace dynamics and facilitate better intergenerational collaboration (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021). In addition, it is important to recognize that these generational differences may not be as pronounced in all contexts, especially in non-Western workplaces, where research on communication preferences remains limited (Chawla et al., 2017).

Recognizing and adapting to generational communication preferences is crucial for fostering collaboration and unlocking the full potential of the workforce. For instance, Millennials tend to seek autonomy and flexibility in communication while still desiring clear guidance and well-defined goals (Meng et al., 2020). Generation Z, having grown up immersed in digital technology, often prefers using instant messaging and social media for workplace interactions (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021). However, how well these generational preferences translate into the workplace in the Indian context remains an open question. Furthermore, the impact of these preferences on employee engagement within organizations is a critical area that requires exploration.

This study aims to investigate the communication preferences of Millennials and Generation Z in the workplace and their influence on employee engagement. By examining these dynamics, we propose strategies that organizations can implement to bridge generational communication gaps, fostering a more engaged and collaborative workforce. Ultimately, these strategies can enhance both organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Chawla et al., 2017; Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2021).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

In today's diverse workplaces, understanding generational differences in communication preferences is crucial for enhancing employee engagement. Research on these dynamics reveals that while generational disparities exist, there are also important areas of convergence. Woodward and Vongswasdi (2020) challenge the prevalent view that different generations have radically distinct communication preferences. Through an analysis of data from 191 executives, they highlight similarities between Baby Boomers and Millennials, suggesting that both generations prefer certain communication formats, such as digital and face-to-face methods. This convergence emphasizes that organizational leaders need to navigate these preferences by balancing traditional and digital communication tools to foster engagement across all age groups.

Within the Indian context, Arora and Dhole (2022) explore Generation Y's expectations and preferences in the workplace, stressing the importance of aligning organizational policies with their aspirations. Generation Y, characterized by its inclination towards career development and work-life balance, seeks clear and effective communication, which plays a crucial role in job satisfaction and engagement. Their findings underline the need for HR practitioners to craft strategies that address generational needs, especially as this generation becomes a dominant force in the workforce.

Walden, Jung, and Westerman (2017) further extend the conversation by examining the link between communication, job engagement, and organizational commitment among Millennials. Their research highlights how consistent internal communication enhances engagement, which in turn strengthens organizational loyalty and reduces turnover. By ensuring frequent feedback and clear communication channels, organizations can foster deeper commitment among younger employees, who are often more mobile and inclined to seek new opportunities when engagement is low.

Meng and Reber (2020) also focus on Millennials but within the corporate communication sector, where generational expectations regarding independence and flexibility are particularly pronounced. Their study reveals that Millennials thrive in environments that offer autonomy but also clear guidance and feedback. For organizations seeking to retain young talent, it is essential to leverage structured communication practices that provide both freedom and support.

Basic (2021) adds another dimension by exploring generational differences in engagement practices among HR professionals in higher education. While differences in communication styles across generations are evident, Basic's findings suggest that engagement practices often converge, with all generations appreciating clear career advancement paths and opportunities for professional development. This challenges the notion that generational differences necessarily hinder employee engagement and retention, advocating for practices that cater to universal needs while still addressing unique generational preferences.

Chawla, Dokadia, and Rai (2021) delve into multigenerational differences in career and reward preferences in Indian organizations, revealing significant differences in how generations engage with their work. While Generation Y, for example, seeks meaningful, flexible work environments, older generations may prioritize stability and traditional reward structures. Interestingly, they found no significant generational differences in reward preferences, suggesting potential areas of alignment across age groups that can be leveraged to improve engagement.

Research conducted by Majid, Zia, and Ahmad (2019) at Feroze1888 Mills Ltd. also underscores the importance of understanding generational preferences in engagement enablers. Their study highlights that Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials each value different aspects of engagement, such as recognition, feedback, and career development. Tailoring communication and engagement strategies to these preferences can improve overall workforce satisfaction and retention.

In a study on organizational communication and job satisfaction, Mehra and Nickerson (2021) examine how generational differences impact job satisfaction among managers in India. They found that communication style and frequency directly influence job satisfaction, with Gen Y managers, in particular, favoring open, transparent communication. This research emphasizes the need for organizations to foster a positive communication environment that caters to the unique preferences of each generation to enhance overall job satisfaction.

Finally, Marshall's (2023) analysis of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) provides a theoretical lens to understand how communication behaviors can impact employee engagement across generations. By aligning communication practices with CAT, organizations can create more inclusive environments where generational preferences are respected, fostering higher engagement and productivity. Marshall advocates for leveraging motivational and interpersonal communication strategies to address the diverse needs of multigenerational workforces, thereby mitigating disengagement risks and promoting organizational cohesion.

Overall, the body of literature on generational communication preferences highlights that while differences exist, many commonalities can be leveraged to foster employee engagement. Understanding these nuances allows organizations to tailor their communication strategies to meet the needs of a multigenerational workforce, enhancing engagement, reducing turnover, and improving overall performance.

### Research Aim

This study aims to investigate how different generations in the workplace perceive and prioritize communication channels, to explore the factors contributing to generational differences in communication preferences, and to assess the impact of these preferences on employee engagement. Furthermore, the research will provide insights and recommendations for organizations to effectively adapt their communication strategies to accommodate diverse generational preferences, ultimately enhancing overall employee engagement across various age groups.

### Research Question

1. How do different generations perceive and prioritize various communication channels and methods in the workplace?
2. What are the underlying factors influencing generational differences in communication preferences, and how do these preferences impact employee engagement?
3. How can organizations effectively adapt their communication strategies to accommodate diverse generational preferences and enhance overall employee engagement across different age groups?

*Objective*

1. To identify the communication preferences of different generational cohorts (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials) within the workplace.
2. To explore the factors influencing generational differences in communication preferences.
3. To examine the impact of generational communication preferences on employee engagement levels.
4. To provide recommendations for organizations to effectively address generational differences in communication preferences and enhance overall employee engagement.

## Methodology :

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth understanding of communication preferences of IT sector employees belonging to various generations. Qualitative research allows for deeper understanding of the preferences and to explore its underlying reasons.

*Research Design*

This study has adopted an exploratory research design to gain insights into the perspectives of IT professionals regarding employee engagement and communication preferences. The research employed in-depth interviews as the primary method for data collection.

The target population comprises IT professionals across various domains, ensuring a diverse range of experiences and viewpoints. Data was collected through a combination of individual approaches, leveraging personal connections and referrals to reach potential participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, with all participants informed about the study's purpose and provided with comprehensive information regarding their involvement. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews, and participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any repercussions.

A semi-structured questionnaire was utilized to collect demographic data, followed by in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted online. This approach facilitated a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and opinions, allowing for flexibility in responses and the opportunity to probe further into relevant topics. The interviews were designed to encourage open dialogue, thereby providing rich qualitative data to better understand the communication preferences and engagement levels of IT professionals.

*Sampling*

- **Population of the Study**

This study employed purposive (non-probability) sampling to select participants from various departments of the IT sector. Eight IT professionals participated in the survey, with a balanced representation of 4 millennials and 4 Generation Z participants. The study focused on full-time IT professionals with at least one year of experience.

- **Inclusion Criteria**

IT professionals with at least one year of full-time experience in the IT field, categorized as either Millennials (born 1981-1996) or Gen Z (born 1997-2012).

- **Exclusion Criteria**

IT professionals those unable to provide informed consent for the study.

*Tools and Measures*

The primary tool for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide designed to capture in-depth perspectives from IT professionals across different generations (Millennials and Gen Z) on their communication preferences and how these preferences impact employee engagement. The interview guide was developed by reviewing the literature on generational communication styles and employee engagement, focusing on key themes such as preferred communication channels, engagement strategies, and workplace communication challenges. Both probes and open-ended questions were included to allow participants to express their experiences comprehensively.

## Methods of Data Collection :

The methods employed for data collection include:
- **Semi-Structured Interviews**: In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected IT professionals. The interviews explored their communication preferences, perceptions of workplace communication, and how these preferences influence employee engagement. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to share their views in detail, providing rich qualitative data about the differences between Millennials and Gen Z in workplace communication.

**Procedure**

Ethical approval was obtained for the research, and IT professionals working across various sectors and roles were selected using **purposive sampling**. Details about the study, including its objectives and research questions, were shared with potential participants. Upon confirmation of their willingness to participate, interview sessions were scheduled.

The interviews were conducted either in person or via online platforms that were comfortable for the participants. The interview sessions lasted from 20 minutes to 45 minutes, and all collected data was transcribed for further analysis.

**Ethical Considerations**

Adherence to ethical standards is crucial in research involving human subjects to safeguard their rights, privacy, and well-being. Key ethical considerations for this study included:

- **Informed Consent**: Participants were fully informed about the research goals, their roles, and the nature of their participation, including the generational focus. They were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study without any consequences.
- **Confidentiality**: Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential, and their identities were anonymized in all reports. No personally identifiable information was shared without explicit consent.
- **Voluntary Participation**: Participation was entirely voluntary, with no coercion or pressure applied. Participants were free to decline or withdraw from the study at any point.
- **Minimizing Harm**: The study took steps to minimize any potential discomfort during interviews. Care was taken to ensure discussions were non-sensitive and focused on professional experiences. Support was offered if any issues arose.
- **Respect for Autonomy**: Participants' autonomy was respected throughout the process, allowing them to control the information they shared and how much detail they provided.

**Data Analysis**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze the interview data. This method was chosen to identify patterns and themes in participants' responses, providing a comprehensive understanding of how generational communication preferences impact employee engagement.

The thematic analysis offered a structured yet flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data. It allowed for the identification of key themes relevant to communication preferences, generational differences, and their influence on engagement.

The process involved several key steps:

- **Familiarization**: The researchers thoroughly reviewed the interview transcripts, reading them multiple times to become familiar with the data.
- **Initial Coding**: Systematic coding was applied to segments of the text, labeling key ideas, concepts, or experiences relevant to communication preferences and employee engagement.
- **Theme Development**: Codes were grouped into potential themes and sub-themes based on common patterns related to generational differences in communication methods and their impact on engagement.
- **Theme Review and Refinement**: Themes were reviewed in the context of the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represented participants' responses and were consistent across generational cohorts.
- **Theme Definition and Naming**: Each theme was defined and named to represent core findings.
- **Report Writing**: The results were presented with detailed descriptions of each theme, supplemented by direct quotes from participants to highlight key generational insights and differences.

**Results :**

**Table 1**

Demographic and Professional Profile of IT Professionals

| Sl no. | Dob | Age | Gender | Educational Qualification | Current job role | Years of experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 11.01.1999 | 25 | Female | Post Graduation | Senior Engineer | 2.3 years |
| 2 | 8.10.1999 | 25 | Female | Post Graduation | Programmer analyst | 2 years |
| 3 | 30.06.1999 | 25 | Female | Post Graduation | Software engineer | 3 years |
| 4 | 10.03.1997 | 27 | Male | Post Graduation | Associate Manager | 3.5 years |
| 5 | 5.11.1994 | 29 | Male | Graduate | Cloud operation consultant | 7 years |
| 6 | 10.04.1996 | 28 | Male | Post graduate | Services Consultant | 4 years |
| 7 | 18.05.1995 | 29 | Male | Graduate | Cybersecurity Engineer | 6 years |
| 8 | 14.10.1994 | 30 | Male | Graduate | SAP BASIS consultant | 7 years |

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional details of IT professionals who participated in this study. It includes age, gender, current job title or position, educational qualifications and years of experience.

**Interpretation :**

*1. Communication Channel Preferences*

Communication Channel Preferences refer to the modes and platforms individuals from different generations prefer to communicate within the workplace, such as instant messaging, email, or face-to-face interactions. These preferences are shaped by familiarity, the immediacy of responses, and the formality required for the task.

**1.1 Instant Messaging vs. Email**

Instant messaging tools (like WhatsApp or Microsoft Teams) are the go-to for both Millennials and Gen Z for quick, informal, and real-time communication, particularly for team collaboration. However, email is favored for formal or client-related communication, particularly when documentation is necessary.

**Millennials:**

- Prefer a balance of instant messaging for internal, informal communication, and email for formal exchanges. Email is especially useful for maintaining a record of communication.

- **Quotations:**
  - "For day-to-day work, I prefer Teams or WhatsApp—it's quick and convenient." (P1)
  - "Email is for more formal communication or when there is need for documentation." (P3)

**Gen Z:**

- Strong preference for real-time tools, feeling more natural with platforms like Slack or Teams. However, they use email for larger, more formal discussions, and when communicating with upper management.

- **Quotations:**
  - "I prefer Microsoft Teams for quick exchanges; it helps me keep things moving." (P5)
  - "For formal updates, I would use email, but we always ping each other on teams with things and if they are "OOO" I just whatsapp them." (P8)

**1.2 Face-to-Face vs. Digital Communication**

Face-to-face communication is often reserved for more critical, high-stakes discussions or brainstorming, especially when nuances and emotions need to be conveyed. Both generations find video conferencing or in-person meetings useful in these contexts, but their reliance on digital communication has increased significantly.

**Millennials:**

- Use face-to-face communication for meetings that require more depth, such as client meetings or strategic discussions, but prefer video calls as a substitute.

- **Quotations:**
  - "For important meetings or discussions, I still value face-to-face or video calls, but daily work happens over team calls." (P4)

**Gen Z:**

- Less dependent on face-to-face interactions, with many feeling comfortable conducting discussions over video calls or even via digital messaging tools. But some offline meeting become inevitable.

- **Quotations:**
  - "For quick catch-ups, I prefer Teams, but for detailed discussions, we do have team meetings at office on WHO days." (P6)

*2. Frequency and Nature of Communication*

Frequency and Nature of Communication refer to how often individuals communicate in the workplace and the balance between brief updates and in-depth discussions. This theme is essential for understanding how communication preferences impact productivity and engagement.

**2.1 Frequent, Brief Communication**

Both Millennials and Gen Z favor frequent, short communication to maintain workflow and address immediate concerns. Instant messaging tools enable real-time updates and check-ins without needing scheduled meetings.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials prefer short, frequent updates throughout the day, using messaging platforms for quick exchanges. However, they value more structured, longer discussions for deeper collaboration.

- **Quotations:**

- o "I will be constantly in touch with my team. It keeps things moving smoothly." (P3)

**Gen Z:**

- Even more inclined toward brief, frequent communication. Gen Z often feels that long-form communication disrupts their focus.

- **Quotations:**

    - o "I like frequent, short exchanges because they help prevent delays." (P7)

    - o "Ya, Quick check-ins do keep me on track; but sometimes some long discussions are real waste of time, you can do actual work with that time " (P8)

**2.2 In-Depth Discussions**

In-depth, longer discussions are necessary for strategic planning, project development, or complex problem-solving. Both generations switch to more formal methods of communication, like meetings or team calls, when a deeper engagement is required.

**Millennials:**

- Use in-depth discussions for strategic or problem-solving conversations, but avoid them for daily updates.

- **Quotations:**

    - o "Short messages are fine for daily work, but for some big transitions or if there are some issues, longer discussions will be needed." (P2)

**Gen Z:**

- Though they prefer brief communication, they recognize the need for detailed conversations for major decisions.

- **Quotations:**

    - o "For larger issues, I don't mind longer discussions, but only when they are really needed." (P6)

**3.*Formality in Communication***

Formality in Communication relates to how employees switch between formal and informal tones depending on the context. This theme highlights the differences in how generations adjust their communication style based on their audience.

**3.1 Informal Communication with Peers**

Both Millennials and Gen Z prefer informal communication styles when interacting with peers or immediate team members, using more casual language and relying on instant messaging.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials prefer an informal tone when communicating within teams but switch to formal language when dealing with upper management.

- **Quotations:**

    - o "I'm definitely more informal when it's within my team members." (P1)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z strongly favours informal communication, even when communicating across teams, unless they are interacting with senior leaders or clients. They find switching little difficult.

- **Quotations:**

    - o "I prefer keeping things casual with my immediate team. It's better for bonding too." (P7)

**3.2 Formal Communication with Clients or Senior Leadership**

For both generations, formality increases significantly when communicating with senior leadership or clients, where clarity, professionalism, and documentation are prioritized.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials tend to use more formal communication with senior leadership, especially when discussing high-level strategy or client-related work. They seems comfortable with such formality in coversations

- **Quotations:**

    - o "When dealing with clients or senior management, I definitely switch to formal communication like emails or structured meetings." (P2)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z is more likely to maintain informality within internal teams but shifts to formal modes when needed, such as in client interactions or when discussing important issues with senior leaders.

- **Quotations:**
  - "I switch to formal email when communicating with clients or when something needs to be documented officially." (P6)

## 4. Impact of Communication Preferences on Engagement

Impact of Communication Preferences on Engagement explores how communication styles influence the emotional connection, motivation, and productivity of employees in the workplace.

### 4.1 Real-Time Communication Boosts Engagement

Both Millennials and Gen Z agree that real-time communication, particularly through instant messaging, enhances their engagement, allowing them to stay connected and focused on their tasks.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials feel that quick, real-time feedback keeps them engaged and prevents unnecessary delays.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Quick communication keeps me productive and engaged—waiting for an email slows everything down." (P1)

**Gen Z:**

- For Gen Z, real-time tools are essential for maintaining engagement. Delays caused by emails or slower communication methods result in disengagement.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Instant feedback keeps me connected. If I had to rely on email, I'd feel more disconnected." (P5)

### 4.2 Formal Communication Hinders Engagement

Formal communication methods, especially long email chains, tend to reduce engagement for both generations, causing delays in decision-making and slowing down workflows.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials find that formal communication methods, like lengthy emails or scheduled meetings, can feel disengaging and unnecessary when quick resolutions are possible.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Waiting for formal meetings or emails drags things out and reduces engagement." (P4)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z feels similarly, with formal communication causing frustration when faster methods would suffice.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Long emails or formal processes are frustrating when you could just send a quick message." (P8)

## 5. Recommendations for Enhancing Communication and Engagement

This theme focuses on the suggestions provided by both Millennials and Gen Z for improving communication practices to foster better engagement and collaboration in the workplace. Both generations suggest strategies that would create a more flexible and inclusive communication environment, leading to higher levels of employee engagement.

### 5.1 Flexible Communication Approaches

Both Millennials and Gen Z recommend adopting flexible communication strategies that blend formal and informal methods. Flexibility allows for real-time efficiency while maintaining professionalism when necessary.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials suggest using a hybrid approach that incorporates both informal messaging for quick updates and formal methods like email for official communication, allowing teams to move fluidly between tasks.
- **Quotations:**
  - "We need flexibility in how we communicate. Let's use instant messaging for quick tasks, but switch to email when documentation is needed." (P1)
  - "A flexible approach means less friction, especially when dealing with clients or senior leadership." (P4)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z also advocates for flexible communication practices, where individuals can choose the most suitable communication method based on

the task's urgency or formality.

- **Quotations:**
  - "Flexibility should be encouraged so people can choose their preferred method without feeling pressured to conform to just one." (P6)

### 5.2 Encouraging Open and Transparent Communication

Both groups propose promoting open communication cultures where employees feel comfortable expressing their communication preferences. This transparency helps foster understanding and ensures that employees from different generations can communicate effectively.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials recommend creating a culture of **open communication**, where employees can openly discuss their communication preferences and adjust accordingly.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Open communication helps. Let's encourage employees to share their preferred methods so we can adapt." (P3)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z also stresses the importance of **open forums** and **team-building activities** to break down communication barriers and help different generations understand each other's styles.
- **Quotations:**
  - "I think open forums where employees can share their preferences would nice" (P5)

### 5.3 Role of Leadership in Facilitating Communication

Leadership plays a vital role in setting the tone for effective communication. Both Millennials and Gen Z suggest that managers and leaders should act as facilitators in bridging generational communication gaps by promoting best practices.

**Millennials:**

- Millennials suggest that **leaders should model flexible communication** styles, showing the value of both real-time and formal methods.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Leadership plays a big part—if they are fine a more a flexible communication, everyone will follow." (P3)

**Gen Z:**

- Gen Z believes that **managers should encourage open conversations** around communication, allowing for feedback and ensuring all voices are heard.
- **Quotations:**
  - "Our team lead is actually good, she makes an effort and checks in with us individually, which's good you know." (P8)

**Table 2**

**Coding Table**

| Theme | Subtheme | Code | Relevant Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication Channel Preferences | Instant Messaging vs. Email | - Millennial preference for balance | For day-to-day work, I prefer Teams or Whatsapp—it's quick and convenient. (P1) |
| | | - Gen Z preference for real-time tools | I prefer Microsoft Teams for quick exchanges; it helps me keep things moving. (P5) |
| | Face-to-Face vs. Digital | - Millennials value depth in meetings | For important meetings or discussions, I still value face-to-face or video calls. (P4) |
| | | - Gen Z comfort with digital meetings | For quick catch-ups, I prefer Teams, but for detailed discussions, we do have team meetings at office on WHO days. (P6) |
| Frequency and Nature of Communication | Frequent, Brief Communication | - Millennials' frequent updates | I will be constantly in touch with my team. It keeps things moving smoothly. (P3) |
| | | - Gen Z preference for brief exchanges | I like frequent, short exchanges because they help |

| | | | prevent delays. (P7) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | In-Depth Discussions | - Millennials' strategic discussions | Short messages are fine for daily work, but for big transitions or issues, longer discussions are needed. (P2) |
| | | - Gen Z recognition for necessary depth | For larger issues, I don't mind longer discussions, but only when they are really needed. (P6) |
| Formality in Communication | Informal Communication with Peers | - Millennials' informal tone preference | I'm definitely more informal when it's within my team members. (P1) |
| | | - Gen Z informality within teams | I prefer keeping things casual with my immediate team. It's better for bonding too. (P7) |
| | Formal Communication with Clients | - Millennials' comfort with formal tone | When dealing with clients or senior management, I definitely switch to formal communication like emails. (P2) |
| | | - Gen Z adapts to formal as needed | I switch to formal email when communicating with clients or when documentation is required. (P6) |
| Impact of Communication Preferences on Engagement | Real-Time Communication Boosts Engagement | - Millennials feel engaged with quick feedback | Quick communication keeps me productive and engaged—waiting for an email slows everything down. (P1) |
| | | - Gen Z reliance on real-time tools | Instant feedback keeps me connected. If I had to rely on email, I'd feel more disconnected. (P5) |
| | Formal Communication Hinders Engagement | - Millennials feel delays with formalities | Waiting for formal meetings or emails drags things out and reduces engagement. (P4) |
| | | - Gen Z frustration with formalities | Long emails or formal processes are frustrating when you could just send a quick message. (P8) |
| Recommendations for Enhancing Communication and Engagement | Flexible Communication Approaches | - Millennials' hybrid approach suggestion | We need flexibility in communication... instant messaging for quick tasks, email for documentation. (P1) |
| | | - Gen Z supports communication choice | Flexibility should be encouraged so people can choose their preferred method without feeling pressured. (P6) |
| | Open and Transparent Communication | - Millennials' support for open discussions | Open communication helps... employees to share preferred methods. (P3) |
| | | - Gen Z values open forums | Open forums where employees can share preferences would be nice. (P5) |

| | Role of Leadership in Facilitating Communication | - Millennials' call for flexible leaders | Leadership plays a big part—if they are fine with more flexible communication, everyone will follow. (P3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | - Gen Z wants active leader check-ins | Our team lead checks in with us individually, which is good. (P8) |

## Discussion :

The analysis of the interviews revealed that both Millennials and Gen Z exhibit more similarities than differences in their communication preferences, particularly in their emphasis on speed, convenience, and adaptability in workplace communication. This finding aligns with Woodward and Vongswasdi's (2021) study, which emphasizes the convergence of communication preferences among different generations, highlighting that assumptions about stark differences may overlook significant common ground.

Nature and Frequency of Communication:
Both generations prioritize quick, real-time communication through platforms like Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp for daily exchanges. They favor brief, frequent interactions that enhance productivity and workflow. As IT professionals, digital tools are integral for managing tasks and fostering teamwork. Although both generations acknowledge the necessity of email or formal meetings for client-related communications, instant messaging is typically reserved for informal, internal exchanges. This reflects Arora and Dhole's (2023) assertion regarding Generation Y's preferences for effective engagement strategies and job experiences.

Gen Z occasionally finds it slightly challenging to transition to formal email communication; however, this minor adjustment does not significantly impact their overall effectiveness. The value of face-to-face communication remains, especially for high-stakes discussions, yet its prevalence has decreased in hybrid work environments. Digital meetings on platforms like Teams or Zoom largely fulfill communication needs, underscoring both generations' comfort with digital tools and their adaptability, which resonates with Meng and Reber's (2020) emphasis on the balance between traditional and digital communication methods.

In terms of communication frequency, both generations prefer brief exchanges to address immediate concerns without necessitating formal meetings. They recognize the need for in-depth discussions for complex problem-solving or strategic planning. Some Gen Z participants expressed frustration with prolonged meetings, indicating a preference for streamlined communication. This is similar to findings in Basic's (2020) study, which underscores the importance of a positive workplace culture that encourages efficient communication.

Impact on Engagement:
Communication preferences significantly influence employee engagement for both Millennials and Gen Z. The quick, real-time communication fosters a sense of connection and immediacy, enhancing motivation. Instant feedback through messaging prevents delays, while lengthy email chains can hinder engagement and workflow. This supports Walden, Jung, and Westerman's (2021) findings, which illustrate that effective communication bolsters job engagement, ultimately strengthening organizational commitment.

Flexibility in communication channels is another key factor contributing to higher engagement. Both generations advocate for a blended approach, utilizing the most efficient communication method for the task at hand, consistent with insights from Chawla, Dokadia, and Rai (2020), who highlight diverse generational preferences in work engagement.

Recommendations for Enhancing Communication and Engagement:
Both Millennials and Gen Z emphasize the importance of flexible and open communication in the workplace. Encouraging transparency around communication preferences and promoting a culture where employees feel comfortable expressing these preferences are vital for maintaining engagement. Leadership plays a crucial role in facilitating effective communication by setting an example and balancing formal and informal methods, as supported by Majid, Zia, and Ahmad (2021), who identify significant generational preferences for engagement strategies.

Regular check-ins from managers are particularly appreciated, helping employees feel valued and understood. Ultimately, while the research uncovered minor generational differences, both Millennials and Gen Z demonstrate a preference for quick, real-time communication and recognize the necessity of formal communication when appropriate. The findings suggest that fostering a flexible communication environment, backed by supportive leadership, is essential for sustaining engagement across both generations, a sentiment echoed in Mehra and Nickerson's (2022) research on generational differences in communication dynamics.

## Limitations :

This research on generational differences in communication preferences and their impact on employee engagement has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on qualitative data gathered through interviews with IT professionals, which, while offering valuable insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions, may introduce subjective bias. The personal views of the participants may not fully capture the broader trends or complexities of communication preferences across other generational groups or industries.

Additionally, the study focuses on IT professionals from specific geographical locations, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Communication preferences may vary across sectors, cultural contexts, or organizational structures, making it difficult to apply these results universally. Future research

could employ quantitative methods, such as surveys or statistical analysis, to capture a more representative sample and offer broader conclusions that span across multiple industries and locations.

Another limitation is the potential oversight of external factors that might influence communication preferences and engagement. Factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, or technological infrastructure could significantly shape how different generations communicate in the workplace. By not fully accounting for these variables, the study may present an incomplete understanding of the dynamics at play. Future research should incorporate these elements to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the factors impacting communication and engagement in multi-generational teams.

## Scope for Future Research :

Future research on generational differences in communication preferences and their impact on employee engagement should expand by exploring a broader range of industries and generations. This study focused on Millennials and Gen Z in the IT sector, where digital communication tools are prevalent. However, future studies could examine industries where face-to-face interaction and communication play a more critical role, such as healthcare, hospitality, or customer service. Understanding how communication preferences differ in these environments could reveal new insights into how generational differences impact engagement in sectors where real-time, direct communication is essential.

Additionally, exploring communication preferences among generations with a greater age gap, such as Baby Boomers or Generation X compared to Gen Z, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational communication challenges and synergies. The current study primarily focused on younger generations; incorporating older generations might highlight different preferences regarding communication technology, formality, and face-to-face interaction, offering a more holistic view of generational communication dynamics.

Finally, future research could examine the role of organizational culture, leadership, and communication technology in shaping these preferences across different sectors. Investigating how companies in various industries use digital platforms, hybrid work models, and leadership styles to bridge communication gaps between generations would enrich the understanding of the impact of these factors on employee engagement. Such research would provide valuable insights into best practices for fostering cohesive, engaged multi-generational teams across diverse work environments.

## Implications :

This study offers several key implications for HR professionals and organizations aiming to enhance employee engagement through a better understanding of generational differences in communication preferences. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing that Millennials and Gen Z, while both highly comfortable with digital communication tools, may have nuanced differences in how they engage with formal and informal communication channels. By acknowledging these generational preferences, HR teams can adapt communication strategies to ensure that employees feel more engaged, connected, and understood, ultimately improving productivity and satisfaction.

One major implication is the need for organizations to adopt flexible communication practices that cater to the varied preferences of different generations. While instant messaging and digital communication platforms like Microsoft Teams or Slack are widely accepted for informal and day-to-day communication, both generations still value face-to-face or formal digital meetings for critical discussions. HR professionals should consider balancing these approaches to ensure efficient and effective communication within teams, regardless of generational differences.

Furthermore, the research highlights that organizations must provide communication training and support to help younger generations, particularly Gen Z, navigate formal communication channels, such as email and client-facing discussions, more comfortably. By investing in training programs that help bridge the gap between informal and formal communication, companies can foster better professional development and ensure that all employees can communicate effectively in different contexts.

The study also underscores the importance of creating inclusive communication environments. Understanding that different generations may have unique preferences in how and when they communicate can help organizations build more cohesive and collaborative teams. HR professionals should work to create an open, adaptable workplace culture that embraces these differences rather than relying on a "one-size-fits-all" approach to communication.

Finally, the research suggests that tailored communication strategies can significantly impact employee engagement and retention. By aligning communication methods with employee preferences, organizations can foster a stronger sense of belonging and loyalty among their workforce. This proactive approach to communication management can contribute to long-term employee satisfaction and retention, reducing turnover and promoting a positive workplace culture.

 In conclusion, this research reinforces the need for organizations to be attuned to generational communication preferences to maximize employee engagement. By leveraging these insights, companies can create more harmonious work environments where employees from different generations collaborate effectively, leading to improved organizational performance and employee satisfaction in the long run.

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