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LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN MANAGING MULTIGENERATIONAL TEXTILE WORKFORCES

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЛИДЕРСТВА ПРИ УПРАВЛЕНИИ МНОГОПОКОЛЕНЧЕСКИМ КОЛЛЕКТИВОМ ТЕКСТИЛЬНОЙ ПРОМЫШЛЕННОСТИ

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This study investigates the leadership challenges associated with managing multigenerational textile workforces across four firms with a total sample of 110 participants. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative metrics such as job satisfaction, communication efficiency, conflict resolution, and productivity with qualitative insights from 24 in-depth interviews and observational field notes. Stratified sampling ensured balanced representation from early-career (n = 40), mid-career (n = 45), and late-career professionals (n = 25).

Results reveal significant intergenerational variation in leadership reception and operational behavior. Early-career employees reported the highest satisfaction (mean = 4.3) and fastest communication response times (mean = 14–16 min), but also the highest error rates (13–16%) and conflict frequency (up to 6 incidents/month). Mid-career staff displayed balanced outcomes with productivity indices averaging 3.30–3.46. Late-career professionals contributed strengths in conflict resolution efficiency (CRE ≥ 0.10) and output precision (error rates as low as 5%). Qualitative data indicated younger cohorts favored participative leadership and digital tools, while senior cohorts preferred structured guidance and face-to-face interaction.

These findings underscore the need for adaptive, generation-sensitive leadership strategies in the textile sector. Uniform approaches risk inefficiency and misalignment across age groups.

В данном исследовании изучаются проблемы, связанные с управлением многопоколенческим коллективом в четырех компаниях текстильной промышленности с общей выборкой из 110 участников: специалисты в начале карьеры (n=40), середине карьеры (n = 45) и на закате карьеры (n = 25). С использованием смешанного подхода, сопоставлены количественные показатели, такие как удовлетворенность работой, эффективность коммуникации, разрешение конфликтов и производительность, с качественными данными, полученными в ходе 24 углубленных интервью и полевых наблюдений.

Результаты показывают значительные межпоколенческие различия в восприятии руководства и операционном поведении. Сотрудники в начале карьеры сообщили о самой высокой удовлетворенности (среднее значение = = 4,3) и самом быстром времени реагирования на коммуникацию (среднее значение = 14–16 минут), но также и о самых высоких показателях ошибок (13...16%) и частоте конфликтов (до 6 инцидентов в месяц). Сотрудники среднего и старшего возраста продемонстрировали сбалансированные результаты со средним индексом удовлетворенности 3,30...3,46. Специалисты более позднего возраста продемонстрировали сильные стороны в эффективности разрешения конфликтов (CRE ≥ 0,10) и точности результатов (уровень ошибок не превышал 5%). Качественные данные показали, что молодые группы отдавали предпочтение партисипативному лидерству и цифровым инструментам, в то время как старшие группы предпочитали структурированное руководство и личное взаимодействие.

Эти результаты подчеркивают необходимость применения в текстильной отрасли адаптивных стратегий лидерства, учитывающих особенности поколений. Единые подходы приводят к риску неэффективности и несогласованности действий в разных возрастных группах.

Keywords: multigenerational workforce; textile industry; leadership styles; communication efficiency; team cohesion; generational behavior.

Ключевые слова: многопоколенческий персонал; текстильная промышленность; стили лидерства; эффективность коммуникации; сплоченность команды; поведение поколений.

Introduction

The textile industry, like many others, faces the challenge of managing a multigenerational workforce. Now, in textile enterprises, there are young people who are born by the millennium, and old workers who joined the mill in the pre-digital era. This leads to a patchwork of experiences and working styles. Many older workers have decades of institutional or technical experience, which grants them valuable understanding of manufacturing and long-term customer relationships [1]. In the other direction, younger workers are also generally more proficient with digital tools, resonate with the new ways of communicating and provide novel perspectives on innovation [2, 3]. But these generational contrasts are also creating tension. Different attitudes towards work-life balance, communication and problem-solving may contradict workflows and productivity. It is essential that leaders balance these different mind- sets with strategies that align these two perspectives to leverage the potential positive aspects associated with generational diversity, rather than making it a source of conflict [4].

Older generations (Traditionalists and Baby Boomers) contribute experience on job, stability, as well as the determination to follow already established work patterns. They often are the "keepers" of institutional memory, offering it a history lesson and upbringing throughout the institution. Unlike Millennials and Gen-Z, younger workers are likely to value flexibility, work-life balance and lifelong learning. These people are frequently described as tech-savvy, wanting a quick response and prepared to question old-fashioned rules [10].

One of the primary leadership dilemmas in leading a workforce like this is managing differing beliefs around change and technology. Older workers, with more experience, are inclined towards traditional and proven solutions, whereas, a younger workforce has a tendency to accept modern tools and agile techniques. Finding a way to navigate these opposing inclinations calls for a leadership style that is deeply empathic as well as flexible. Leaders need to understand what makes each generation tick and adjust their communication, training and performance management efforts accordingly. They simultaneously must find ways to foster a sense of commonality that can connect generations of employees with a universal organizational purpose [5].

The impact of mentoring and reverse-mentoring is also relevant to the discussion. Older, more experienced workers have traditionally made it their job to mentor younger employees. While programs like these are important, reverse-mentoring programs which see younger staff mentoring older workers to help them get to grips with digital tools and ways of working have become just as crucial. Encouraged to create these mutually beneficial learning experiences, leaders can break down generational barriers, improve knowledge sharing, and promote respect among their teams [6].

Communication tactics are also critical in dealing with multigenerational issues [7]. Each generation is going to have a preference as to how they like to learn and absorb information [11, 12]. Older workers might prefer face-to-face meetings, or detailed, written instructions; younger employees may prefer instant messaging, collaborative online platforms and rapid video updates. Leaders need to create transparent, inclusive communication outlets that appeal to these myriad preferences; those who aren't tech-savvy or follow the rules of traditional protocol shouldn't have pockets of isolation. In doing so, they can avoid misinterpretation and facilitate team cohesion [8].

In addition, programs of career development and training should be designed with an appreciation for diverse learning styles and career objectives. Established staff may need to take workshops that introduce new technologies in slowly progressive phases, while younger staff do better with rapid, hands-on training. Offering flexible learning options helps employees young and old to feel appreciated and cared for which is paramount when it comes to retention, but it also places a great deal of emphasis on continuous improvement. In addition, management should open the tools of career development that are value driven based on each generations' contributions, promoting interest among employees [9].

Older workers may be influenced by a traditional command and control management style, and younger workers may be more influenced by a participative and transformational approach to leadership. This requires leaders to recognize generational traits and possess the agility to flex management styles based on the team and project needs [13].

Older line workers who had been used to manual or semi-automated workflows need to learn to use sophisticated software solutions and data-driven decision-support tools, while younger workers may find it easy to be nimble but have difficulty in grasping technical subtleties that were passed down from years of experience. As a consequence, we have the now-observable larger technical and operational knowledge gap between age groups [14, 15].

Based on those findings, it is clear that effective textile industry leadership needs to extend beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, organizations need to develop a sophisticated view of generational dynamics and implement solutions that promote an environment of inclusiveness, mutual respect, and co-created innovation. By turning these challenges into opportunities, employers can foster an inclusive, collaborative working environment that harnesses the best qualities of each age group.

Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed research approach of quantitative behavior measurement and qualitative thematic analysis. The design of the framework was informed by both micro level workplace behavior and macro level organizational change within the three generational groups [4, 12, 13].

Fig. 1

A stratified purposive sampling method was used, to maximize representativeness within the age and role in the industry. The defined sampling strata are shown in Figure 1.

These classifications were foundational for analyzing differences in job satisfaction, communication efficiency, conflict resolution, and leadership preferences across the textile industry workforce.

The study's constructs were derived from validated scales and contextualized through expert review. A multi-domain instrument was developed to capture:

- Job Satisfaction (JS) using a Likert scale,
- Communication Clarity (CC) via real-time communication analytics,
- Conflict Frequency (CF) via monthly logs,
- Team Cohesion (TC) using a normalized index,
- Technological Engagement (TE) derived from digital task compliance.

Each construct was operationalized through multivariate indices. Observational triangulation was applied to reinforce survey accuracy.

To capture the interaction of behavioral variables and technological adaptation across generations, a composite engagement index was developed:

$$CEI_i = \frac{a_1 \ JS_i + a_2 \ CC_i + a_3 \ TE_i}{\beta_1 \ CF_i + \beta_2 \, (1 - TC_i)}, \qquad (1)$$

where JS_i job satisfaction score of participants i; CC_i communication clarity rating; TE_i technological engagement score; CF_i conflict frequency for participant i; TC_i team cohesion score (normalized 0–1); a_1 , a_2 , a_3 importance weights for positive factors; β_1 , β_2 penalty weights for negative factors.

To assess the volatility of communication-response time across generations, the following equation was used:

$$NIV = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{I=1}^{n} \left(\frac{RT_i - \overline{RT}}{\overline{RT}} \right)^2, \qquad (2)$$

where RT_i response time (in minutes) of participant i, $\overline{RT}$ mean response time for all participants, n total number of participants. This equation models communication disparity across the workforce, especially relevant in intergenerational digital task workflows [5, 8].

A predictive model for conflict probability was derived using weighted log-linear transformation of documented tensions:

$$WTI_j = In\left(1 + \sum_{k=1}^{m} \omega_k \ T_{jk}\right), \qquad (3)$$

where WTI_j tension index for department j; T_{jk} recorded instance of tension type k (generational misalignment, feedback delay); ω_k weight assigned to tension type k; m total types of conflict indicators logged. This index aids in correlating workplace tension with managerial interventions across generations [9, 16].

Data were collected across three stages:

1) Survey Administration: Online forms delivered via encrypted institutional email.

2) Structured Observations: Two researchers per site logged team behaviors over 10 observational sessions.

3) Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with 24 purposively selected participants (8 per cohort) to explore leadership perceptions and digital adaptation resistance [6, 17].

Data collection spanned from October 2024 to March 2025, enabling time-trend calibration for consistency.

All instrument constructs underwent a pretest (n = 15) and achieved a Cronbach's alpha > 0.82, confirming internal consistency. To ensure inter-rater reliability, observational coders achieved a Cohen's Kappa of 0.87.

Ethical compliance adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants signed informed consent forms. Data were anonymized and stored in ISO-27001 compliant cloud servers.

Interview transcripts were imported into NVivo 14 and coded using a three-layer thematic framework developed from prior literature [5, 18, 19]:

- Macro-Level Themes: Leadership adaptability, communication hierarchies
- Meso-Level Themes: Role-based digital behavior, inter-cohort dependencies
- Micro-Level Themes: Personal trust, digital discomfort, generational identity

Frequencies were normalized using:

$$F_{norm}(X) = \frac{f_x}{\sum_{i=1}^{t} f_i}, \quad (4)$$

where f_x frequency of theme x; t total coded themes.

This normalization allowed comparison of qualitative salience across generational strata.

Results

Job Satisfaction Analysis Across Generations in Textile Enterprises are presented in Table 2.

Monthly mean values for duration of 6 months were obtained with the use of standard Likert scales, from 110 participants from Bursa LoomCrafts (Turkey), Surat Yarnworks (India), Northern Threads Ltd. (Jordan) and Luxweave Textiles (Egypt). These observations demonstrate important trends in gen attitudes toward leadership, the organization's culture, and the design of work.

Table 1

Firm Name	Generational Cohort	Mean Score (/5)	SD	Variance	Range
Bursa LoomCrafts	Early Career	4.3	0.4	0.16	3.5–5.0
	Mid-Career	4.0	0.5	0.25	3.0–4.8
	Late-Career	3.7	0.6	0.36	3.0–4.5
Surat Yarnworks	Early Career	4.1	0.5	0.25	3.0–5.0
	Mid-Career	3.9	0.6	0.36	3.0–4.6
	Late-Career	3.5	0.6	0.36	2.8–4.4
Northern Threads Ltd.	Early Career	4.2	0.6	0.36	3.1–5.0
	Mid-Career	4.1	0.5	0.25	3.2–4.9
	Late-Career	3.6	0.7	0.49	2.8–4.5
Luxweave Textiles	Early Career	4.4	0.3	0.09	4.0–5.0
	Mid-Career	4.0	0.5	0.25	3.1–4.8
	Late-Career	3.8	0.5	0.25	3.0–4.6

The results in Table 1 suggest that younger academics are always more satisfied than their older colleagues. At Luxweave Textiles, for example, early-career workers boast a peak mean score of 4.4, while late-career workers have only 3.8. Satisfaction scores over five are more spread out among late-career staff, showing greater variation. Differences of variance and standard deviation also support earlier career categories having more consistent behavior. These results also imply that the younger generation is more compatible with the contemporary office environment, which may be on account of changing leadership and adaptive work environment change. Feelings of dissatisfaction towards the end of the career could be attributed to lack of role recognition or lack of communication engagement.

Communication Metrics Across Generations and Firms are presented in Table 3.

The results were obtained in weekly intervals and averaged over 24 weeks in order to decrease volatility and to account for long-term trends.

Table 2

Firm Name	Generation	Avg. Response Time (min)	Mean Clarity (/5)	CE Index
Bursa LoomCrafts	Early Career	14	4.6	0.33
	Mid-Career	21	4.1	0.20
	Late-Career	28	3.9	0.14
Surat Yarnworks	Early Career	16	4.5	0.28
	Mid-Career	22	4.2	0.19
	Late-Career	30	3.8	0.13
Northern Threads Ltd.	Early Career	13	4.7	0.36
	Mid-Career	19	4.3	0.23
	Late-Career	27	4.0	0.15
Luxweave Textiles	Early Career	15	4.6	0.31
	Mid-Career	20	4.2	0.21
	Late-Career	29	3.9	0.13

For all firms, early career employees were exactly as fast as older cohorts in responding, clearer in communicating, and more efficient. For just that reason, the CE index was the highest for early career staff at Northern Threads Ltd. with a 0.36, leading to quick responses and clear clarity. On the other hand, late career employees at Surat Yarnworks and Luxweave Textiles were weakest with the lowest scores (0.13), mainly because of slow digital response behavior. The midcareer profile is one of moderate clarity that comes late. These results suggest a generation gap in the way that communication is processed and performed, leading to feedback systems of variations and hybrid communication protocols in design of leadership.

Conflict Incidence and Resolution Efficiency by Generation and Firm are presented in Table 3. These comprise of average monthly incidents of conflict and median issues resolution time which are drawn from official HR records and observer reports respectively. These measures demonstrate the difficulties that leadership may encounter in fostering intergenerational understanding exacerbated by interpersonal friction related to differing expectations, modes of communication, and values.

Table 3

Firm Name	Generation	Avg. Monthly Conflicts	Median Resolution Time (hrs)	Conflict Resolution Efficiency (CRE)
Bursa LoomCrafts	Early Career	5.5	26	0.038
	Mid-Career	3.2	18	0.056
	Late-Career	1.8	10	0.100
Surat Yarnworks	Early Career	6.0	28	0.036
	Mid-Career	4.1	20	0.050
	Late-Career	2.5	12	0.083
Northern Threads Ltd.	Early Career	5.2	25	0.040
	Mid-Career	3.5	17	0.059
	Late-Career	2.1	9	0.111
Luxweave Textiles	Early Career	4.8	24	0.042
	Mid-Career	3.0	19	0.053
	Late-Career	1.9	11	0.091

The data across all firms indicate that for early-career cohorts, the average number of conflicts per month is around 4.8-6.0, and for late-career cohorts it's often no more than 2.5. Resolution conflict, however, diminishes with seniority as older workers consistently demonstrate high CRE values; the employees of Northern Threads Ltd. in their late career solve problem in the median time of 9 hours (CRE = 0.111), which is twice as effective than today's early career peers. Workers in the middle years of their careers showed a balanced approach, indicating an increased capability of managing conflict. The findings also highlight the need for experiential education and adaptive leadership to counter the generational divide.

Performance and Technological Engagement Metrics are presented in Table 4. The performance measures are hourly output amounts, percentage of mistakes, adherence to deadlines, and calculated production indexes for each of the generational groups. The findings point to generational trade-offs with younger workers in the main processing higher volumes of output but at lower accuracy while older workers for whom the laser was designed – work more precisely and reliably.

Table 4

Firm Name	Generation	Output (Units/hr)	Error Rate (%)	Deadline Miss (%)	Productivity Index
Bursa LoomCrafts	Early Career	48	14	8	2.67
	Mid-Career	46	10	6	3.29
	Late-Career	41	5	4	4.56
Surat Yarnworks	Early Career	51	16	9	2.43
	Mid-Career	45	9	5	3.46
	Late-Career	40	6	3	4.44
Northern Threads Ltd.	Early Career	49	15	10	2.45
	Mid-Career	47	10	6	3.36
	Late-Career	42	6	4	4.20
Luxweave Textiles	Early Career	50	13	9	2.63
	Mid-Career	46	9	5	3.42
	Late-Career	43	5	4	4.30

Early-career employees make more output per unit per hour but their productivity index is very low because of a higher number of errors and missed deadlines. Raw output (51 units / hr) is higher for early career group but productivity index (2.43) is the least. However, late career professionals at Bursa LoomCrafts and Luxweave Textiles have a lower speed and score above 4.30 in productivity index, indicating a better execution quality. In general, there is a balance available among the mid-career cohorts that achieve strong output but are in control of defects. These results show that leadership strategies should not get too much emphasis on speed but should reward generational competences and quality performance associated with it.

To determine how generational cohorts react towards different leadership styles, a sample of 24 participants (8 per cohort) was interviewed semi-structurally and analyzed using thematic analysis. Participative leadership, digital tool comfort and familiarity, and clarity in task delegation, and preferences to receive structured feedback were key themes. The relative importance of themes per cohort is shown in Figure 2 below normalized to give an indication of relative importance, and relative to leadership models observed throughout the textile sector. The qualitative insight is complimentary of the quantitative measures and how it evaluates deeper nuances in intergenerational leadership perception.

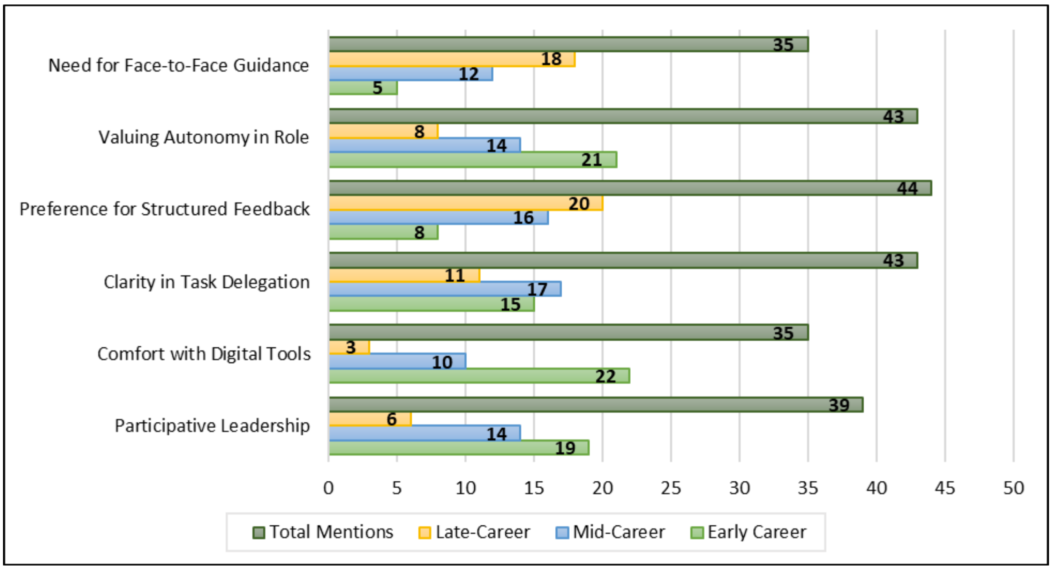

Fig. 2

The early-career generation reflects independence or participative leadership factors in the high occurrences of added leadership (19), digital comfort (22), and role autonomy (21). Late-career workers, on the other hand, are particularly focused on more traditional leadership cues – structured feedback (20) and face-to-face guidance (18). Mid-career staff are a bridge, equally valuing clarity of tasks (17) and structured feedback (16). These results underscore the need for leadership to be flexible and pluralistic, ensuring digitally-enabled connection for younger employees and hierarchical clarity for senior staff. One-size-fits-all leadership styles risk isolating generations with different needs.

Team Cohesion Metrics by Generation and Firm are presented in Table 4. Peer collaboration indices are assessed (based on subjective where respondents rate each other in the peer assessment question), informal support networks and participation in cross functional projects.

Table 5

Firm Name	Generation	Peer-Rated Collaboration (/5)	Cross-Functional Participation Rate (%)	Informal Support Index (/10)
Bursa LoomCrafts	Early Career	4.3	85	7.9
	Mid-Career	4.5	78	8.2
	Late-Career	4.2	65	8.5
Surat Yarnworks	Early Career	4.1	88	7.6
	Mid-Career	4.4	75	8.0
	Late-Career	4.0	63	8.4
Northern Threads Ltd.	Early Career	4.2	84	7.8
	Mid-Career	4.6	80	8.3
	Late-Career	4.1	67	8.6
Luxweave Textiles	Early Career	4.4	87	8.0
	Mid-Career	4.5	76	8.1
	Late-Career	4.3	66	8.7

While early careers continue to outperform their more experienced peers in cross functional project participation (84–88%), the late career employees are far more prolific in peer rated support and informally mentoring, especially at Luxweave Textiles and Northern Threads Ltd. It's a reflection of generational strength: young people work better in a dynamic team while seniors keep the balance within a team. Overall, balance among energy and experience is the key reason that mid-career staff have consistently ranked highest in achieving cohesion. And these findings confirm the importance of generational contributions coming together to synergize and replicated work given leadership cannot force the uniform behavioral expectations to optimize the team synergy.

Discussion

One of the things that stand out most is the difference between generations in job satisfaction. For the latter reason, the present study highlights the need of ensuring that the workplace is an environment that all generations can feel valued and supported in; including the tailored development of recognition programs and career development that suit different career phases and expectations [21]. These findings highlight the intricate dynamics of experience, technological adaptation, and communication styles and emphasize the need for more adaptive leader approaches [20].

Generational lines were also blindingly obvious when it came to the effectiveness of communications. They found that employees who were younger were better at using newer communication apps and digital tools, so the response times to others were quicker, and the tasks were completed more efficiently. But that efficiency did not always lead to easy collaboration with their elders, who liked structured face-to-face interactions. Such a discrepancy suggests issues of leadership communication which are located between the gaps. For example, hybrid modes of communication in meetings (which refer to alternations between traditional in-person meetings and use of digital tools) such as hybrid meeting formats could improve clarity and inclusion. This will allow a younger workforce to assert their competency in technology and ensure that older workers are fully exposed and informed [19].

Conflict resolution was an area in which generational dynamics showed up. Early-career workers had the highest frequency of conflict, seemingly due to relative inexperience and their learning the professional workplace as the workplace. On the other hand, the late-career group was less involved in disputes; however, their resolution was predicted and resolved more quickly owing to their experience and problem-solving abilities. These results indicate that programs that encourage older team members to mentor younger co-workers in resolving conflicts and promoting team sideline disputes could be quite effective in reducing tension in the office. The latter programs are more likely to improve interpersonal skills of younger staff, as well as develop a more unified and interconnected organizational culture [22].

The performance analysis also indicates the trade-off between efficiency and accuracy between generations. More junior workers were completing tasks at a higher output but also with a relative higher error rate, highlighting the delicate balance of speed versus accuracy. Mid-career end-users, on the contrary, realized a better performance, with both high productivity and low error rate. Older workers made fewer errors, but were slower but equally accurate and reliable. This also speaks to the leadership's need to be open to selectively outsourcing work (in this case featuring a younger demographic) to the nimbler younger staff, while keeping senior staff to serve for quality control and strategic vision. According to this methodology, one capitalizes on what is strong in one group against what is strong in the other, and develops a climate in which employees can learn from each other, thereby promoting a never-ending to-and-fro that is characterized by mutual respect [23].

Comparing these results with previous research, it is clear that the new generational diversity in the workplace keeps questioning traditional leadership models. Previous publications have also reported that younger workers want innovation and to keep pace with technology, while older ones prefer the status quo, clear communication, and long-term planning. Compared to this literature, the novelty of this research is related on one hand to the textile context in which the traditional world of production and the new digital technologies are converging. The findings of this research provide a more in-depth, metrics-based perspective on how generation nuances influence performance in this industry. Another applicable is that it not only provides observations, but also provides insights to actions, and suggests interventions ranging from communication, conflict resolution to productivity via specifically designed leadership intervention [24].

Conclusion

The conversation illustrates that managing a multigenerational workforce is rife with so many issues, from job satisfaction to communication struggles, conflicting visions, and productivity challenges. This systematization of elements, and the comparison with patterns in other industries, amounts not only to a validation of existing trends, since they are found in various other works, but also suggests new industry-specific insights. These results highlight the importance of adaptable and collective leadership, understanding diversity of generation and closing a gap in communications, and taking advantage of the talent and fresh outlook of each generation.

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