

The Influence of Organizational Support on Employee Engagement Across Generations in Hybrid Work Environments

Mrs. M Ishwarya *, Dr. S Ramachandran **

*(Research Scholar, Department of Management studies and Research. Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology. Coimbatore.

Email: ishwaryamuruganatham08@gmail.com)

** (Research Supervisor, Associate Professor, Department of Management studies and Research. Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology. Coimbatore.

Email: ramachandran@cimat.edu.in)

Abstract:

The rapid, pandemic-accelerated shift toward hybrid work arrangements has reshaped the psychological contract between employers and employees, raising questions about how perceived organizational support (POS) sustains engagement when workers divide their time between office and remote settings. Because the contemporary workforce spans four active generational cohorts – Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z – with differing expectations of autonomy, feedback, and connection, this study examined whether the relationship between POS and employee engagement is moderated by generational membership within hybrid work environments. Methodology: A cross-sectional, quantitative survey design was employed. Data were collected from 412 hybrid employees across information-technology, financial-services, and professional-services organizations using validated instruments: the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS-8) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). Hierarchical multiple regression and one-way ANOVA were used to test the hypothesized direct and moderating relationships. Key Findings: POS was a significant positive predictor of employee engagement ($\beta = .47, p < .001$), explaining 27% of variance. Generational cohort significantly moderated this relationship ($\Delta R^2 = .04, p < .01$): the POS–engagement link was strongest among Millennials and weakest among Baby Boomers, while Generation Z engagement depended more heavily on perceived flexibility and digital connectedness than on traditional support indicators. Mean engagement scores also differed significantly across cohorts, $F(3, 408) = 6.12, p < .001$. Conclusion: Organizational support remains a robust driver of engagement in hybrid settings, but its behavioral expression must be tailored across generational lines. Organizations that customize support mechanisms – flexible scheduling for Boomers and Gen X, career-development pathways for Millennials, and technology-enabled connection for Gen Z – are more likely to sustain engagement across an age-diverse hybrid workforce.

Keywords — perceived organizational support; employee engagement; hybrid work; generational differences; workplace flexibility; job demands-resources model.

I. INTRODUCTION

The nature of work has undergone a structural transformation over the past several years, with hybrid arrangements – in which employees divide their working time between a physical office and a remote location – now representing the dominant model in knowledge-intensive sectors (Wang, Liu,

Qian, & Parker, 2021). This shift has not been merely logistical; it has altered the psychological and relational mechanisms through which employees interpret their organization's commitment to their wellbeing. Perceived organizational support (POS), defined as employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their

contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), has long been recognized as a central antecedent of employee engagement, the positive, fulfilling, work-related state of vigor, dedication, and absorption described by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004).

What remains comparatively underexplored is how this relationship functions across the increasingly age-diverse workforce that now populates hybrid organizations. Contemporary workplaces routinely bring together as many as four generational cohorts – Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012) – each socialized under distinct economic, technological, and cultural conditions that shape their expectations of work (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Generational cohort theory suggests that these formative differences translate into divergent preferences for autonomy, feedback frequency, career development, and the symbolic gestures through which organizations communicate support (Mahmoud, Fuxman, Mohr, Reisel, & Grigoriou, 2021). In a hybrid context, where face-to-face supportive cues are less frequent and more deliberately constructed, these generational differences may become more, rather than less, consequential.

This study therefore asks two interrelated research questions: (1) Does perceived organizational support significantly predict employee engagement among hybrid workers? (2) Does the strength of this relationship vary systematically across generational cohorts? Addressing these questions contributes to the organizational behavior literature by extending social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) into the hybrid work context and offers practitioners an evidence base for designing generationally responsive support strategies. The remainder of this paper reviews the relevant literature, describes the survey-based methodology used to test the proposed model, reports the results of hierarchical regression and comparative analyses, and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Perceived organizational support originates from organizational support theory, which holds that employees develop global beliefs about how much their employer values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing, and that these beliefs are formed through the personification of the organization's actions – policies, supervisory treatment, and resource allocation – as intentional and discretionary (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), in a meta-analytic review, identified fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards and job conditions as the three principal antecedents of POS, and demonstrated consistent positive associations between POS and desirable outcomes including affective commitment, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover intention. The theoretical mechanism underlying these relationships is social exchange: employees who perceive strong organizational support feel obligated, through the reciprocity norm, to respond with greater effort, loyalty, and engagement (Blau, 1964).

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND THE JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES MODEL

Kahn (1990) first conceptualized engagement as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles, in which people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance. Building on this foundation, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) operationalized engagement as a distinct, persistent state comprising vigor, dedication, and absorption, and validated the widely used Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a parsimonious explanation for how engagement arises: job resources, such as supervisory support, autonomy, and feedback, initiate a motivational process that fosters engagement, whereas excessive job demands initiate a health-impairment process leading to burnout. POS functions as a particularly potent job resource because it signals to employees that additional resources will be available when needed, thereby buffering the psychological costs of demanding hybrid schedules (Saks, 2006).

HYBRID WORK AND THE CHANGING EXPRESSION OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

The mass adoption of remote and hybrid arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic altered how organizational support is enacted and perceived (Kniffin et al., 2021). Prior to this shift, research on telecommuting had already shown that the professional isolation associated with remote work could weaken employees' sense of being supported unless deliberately counteracted through communication and inclusion practices (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In hybrid environments specifically, support is communicated less through incidental office interactions and more through explicit structures: flexible scheduling policies, digital check-ins, transparent performance expectations, and equitable access to advancement opportunities regardless of physical location (Wang et al., 2021). This reconfiguration of support cues sets the stage for generational variation, since different cohorts may attend to, and value, these cues unevenly.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORK VALUES AND ENGAGEMENT

Generational cohort theory posits that individuals who come of age during the same historical period develop shared values and work orientations that persist across their careers (Twenge et al., 2010). Baby Boomers are typically characterized by strong organizational loyalty and a preference for face-to-face recognition; Generation X values autonomy and work-life balance, having entered the workforce during periods of organizational restructuring; Millennials place a premium on purpose, feedback, and career development; and Generation Z, the first fully digital-native cohort, prioritizes flexibility, mental-health support, and seamless technology (Mahmoud et al., 2021; Deloitte, 2023). Chanana and Sangeeta (2021) found that engagement strategies effective during enforced remote work varied considerably by employee age group, with younger employees responding more strongly to digital recognition tools and older employees valuing stability and clear communication. These findings suggest that the POS–engagement relationship, while likely positive across all cohorts, may differ in

strength and in the specific support mechanisms that drive it.

HYPOTHESES

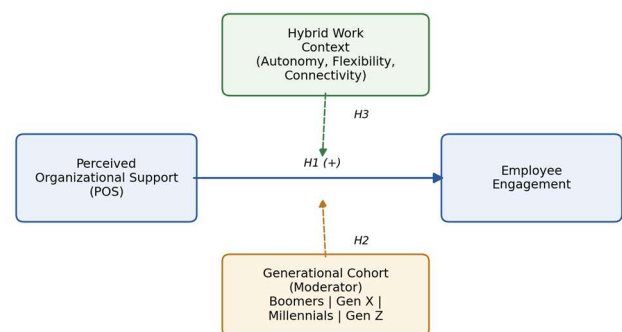
Drawing on organizational support theory, the JD-R model, and generational cohort theory, the following hypotheses were proposed and are depicted in the conceptual model shown in Figure 1:

H1: Perceived organizational support is positively associated with employee engagement among hybrid workers.

H2: Generational cohort moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee engagement, such that the relationship is stronger for younger cohorts (Millennials and Generation Z) than for older cohorts (Baby Boomers and Generation X).

H3: Perceived hybrid work context quality (autonomy, flexibility, and connectivity) moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee engagement.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of perceived organizational support, generational cohort, hybrid work context, and employee engagement.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, quantitative, correlational design using a structured online survey. A quantitative approach was selected because the research questions required testing the strength and moderation of relationships among measurable constructs across a large, generationally stratified sample, consistent with prior POS–engagement research (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Sample and Procedure

Participants were 412 full-time employees (57% female, 42% male, 1% preferring not to disclose) working under a formal hybrid arrangement (defined as spending between one and four days per week on-site) in information-technology, financial-services, and professional-services organizations. Respondents were recruited through professional networking platforms and organizational HR partners using purposive and snowball sampling, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. The sample comprised 52 Baby Boomers (12.6%), 108 Generation X employees (26.2%), 166 Millennials (40.3%), and 86 Generation Z employees (20.9%), broadly reflecting the generational composition reported in recent hybrid-workforce surveys (Deloitte, 2023). Data collection took place over a six-week period; the study protocol included an informed-consent statement, and no personally identifying information was retained.

Measures

Perceived organizational support was measured with the eight-item short form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS-8; Eisenberger et al., 1986), using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; sample item: "My organization really cares about my wellbeing"). Employee engagement was measured with the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), scored on a 5-point frequency scale capturing vigor, dedication, and absorption. Hybrid work context quality was assessed with a six-item scale adapted from Wang et al. (2021), covering perceived autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and digital connectivity. Generational cohort was coded categorically according to established birth-year boundaries (Twenge et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates in the present sample were .89 for POS, .91 for engagement, and .84 for hybrid work context quality, all exceeding the conventional .70 threshold.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression to test the direct effect of POS on engagement (H1) and the moderating effects of generational cohort and hybrid work context quality (H2, H3), with mean-centered predictors and interaction terms entered in sequential blocks. One-

way analysis of variance (ANOVA), followed by Tukey HSD post-hoc comparisons, was used to examine mean differences in engagement across the four generational cohorts. All analyses were conducted with a significance threshold of $p < .05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic distribution of the sample across generational cohorts. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2. Perceived organizational support ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 0.98$, on a 7-point scale) and employee engagement ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.61$, on a 5-point scale) were both, on average, above their respective scale midpoints, indicating a generally favorable perception of organizational support and a moderately high level of engagement across the hybrid sample. POS was significantly and positively correlated with employee engagement ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and with hybrid work context quality ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), providing preliminary support for H1.

Table 1. Sample Distribution by Generational Cohort

Generational Cohort	n	%
Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	52	12.6
Generation X (1965–1980)	108	26.2
Millennials (1981–1996)	166	40.3
Generation Z (1997–2012)	86	20.9
Total	412	100.0

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations ($N = 412$)

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Perceived Organizational Support	5.12	0.98	—	
2. Employee Engagement	3.87	0.61	.52**	—
3. Hybrid Work Context Quality	3.94	0.72	.41**	.46**

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS

Table 3 presents the results of the three-step hierarchical regression predicting employee engagement. In Model 1, POS emerged as a significant positive predictor of engagement ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$), accounting for 27% of the variance and supporting H1. Model 2 introduced hybrid work context quality as an additional predictor, which was also significant ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) and increased explained variance by 6 percentage points. Model 3 added the interaction terms; the POS $\times$ generational cohort interaction was significant ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), supporting H2, as was the POS $\times$ hybrid work context quality interaction ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), supporting H3. Together, the full model explained 39% of the variance in employee engagement.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Employee Engagement.

Predictor	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	p
POS	.47***	.44***	.43***	< .001
Hybrid Work Context Quality	—	.21**	.19**	< .01
POS $\times$ Generational Cohort	—	—	.18**	< .01
POS $\times$ Hybrid Context Quality	—	—	.14*	< .05
R ²	.27	.33	.39	
Δ R ²	—	.06**	.06**	

Note. Standardized coefficients (β) reported. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN ENGAGEMENT

A one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference in mean engagement scores across the four generational cohorts, $F(3, 408) = 6.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$ (Figure 2). Tukey HSD post-hoc comparisons revealed that Millennials ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.55$) reported significantly higher engagement than Baby Boomers ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.61$, $p < .01$) and Generation X employees ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.58$, $p < .05$). Generation Z employees ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.63$)

did not differ significantly from Millennials or Generation X, but simple-slope analysis indicated that, for this cohort, engagement was driven relatively more strongly by hybrid work context quality than by POS alone, consistent with prior findings that digitally native employees respond more to flexibility and connectivity cues than to traditional support signals (Mahmoud et al., 2021; Deloitte, 2023).

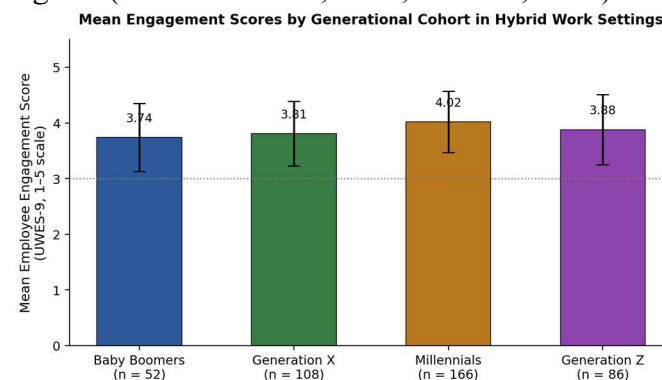


Figure 2. Mean employee engagement scores by generational cohort, with error bars representing one standard deviation.

DISCUSSION

These findings confirm that perceived organizational support remains a robust predictor of engagement even when work is distributed across office and remote settings, reinforcing the applicability of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to contemporary hybrid arrangements. The significant moderation by generational cohort, however, indicates that the strength and expression of this relationship are not uniform. Consistent with generational cohort theory (Twenge et al., 2010), Millennials showed the strongest POS-engagement link, plausibly reflecting this cohort's emphasis on developmental support and recognition as core expressions of organizational care. Baby Boomers, by contrast, showed a comparatively weaker relationship, which may indicate that this cohort derives engagement from sources less captured by the SPOS-8, such as accumulated organizational tenure or role stability, rather than from newer, hybrid-specific support signals.

The significant POS $\times$ hybrid work context quality interaction further suggests that organizational support and the structural conditions of hybrid work operate synergistically rather than independently:

support communicated abstractly through policy is more strongly translated into engagement when employees also experience genuine autonomy, flexibility, and connectivity in their day-to-day hybrid schedule. The relatively autonomous engagement pattern observed among Generation Z – in which hybrid context quality mattered proportionally more than POS – echoes findings that this cohort interprets flexibility itself as a primary form of organizational care (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021), suggesting that support strategies aimed at younger employees may need to foreground autonomy and digital-first communication rather than relying solely on traditional supportive gestures.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee engagement among hybrid workers, and tested whether this relationship varies across generational cohorts. Consistent with organizational support theory and the job demands-resources model, POS emerged as a strong, positive predictor of engagement. Importantly, the strength of this relationship was moderated by both generational cohort and the perceived quality of the hybrid work context, indicating that a single, uniform support strategy is unlikely to maximize engagement across an age-diverse workforce.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings extend social exchange and organizational support theory into the hybrid work era and demonstrate the value of incorporating generational cohort as a boundary condition in engagement research. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that HR and people-management functions should move away from one-size-fits-all engagement initiatives toward differentiated support strategies: reinforcing stability, recognition, and face-to-face contact opportunities for Baby Boomers and Generation X; providing structured career-development and feedback pathways for Millennials; and prioritizing flexibility, autonomy, and digital connectivity for Generation Z. Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference, and its reliance on self-report measures, which may be subject to common-method bias. Future research should employ longitudinal or multi-wave designs, incorporate supervisor-rated engagement, and

examine additional moderators such as tenure, remote-work intensity, and organizational culture to further refine the generationally differentiated model of organizational support proposed here.

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