

A Comparative Study of Generation Z and Millennials: Job Preferences, Organizational Loyalty, and Work-Life Balance Expectations

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Abstract—The present quantitative study examined whether Generation Z and Millennials differ in job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations within the Indian post-pandemic workforce. A cross-sectional comparative survey design was used with 142 employed participants between 18 and 45 years of age, including 104 Generation Z participants (73.2%) and 38 Millennials (26.8%). Data were collected from January to March 2026 through a self-structured five-point Likert questionnaire administered online using purposive and snowball sampling. The questionnaire assessed job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations through five items for each construct. Because the distributions of the variables showed departures from normality and included skewness and outliers, nonparametric analysis was used. Kruskal–Wallis H tests were conducted separately for the three dependent variables, with the significance level set at .05. No statistically significant generational differences were found for job preferences, $\chi^2(1) = 1.496$, $p = .221$; organizational loyalty, $\chi^2(1) = 2.690$, $p = .101$; or work-life balance expectations, $\chi^2(1) = 0.756$, $p = .384$. Thus, all three null hypotheses were retained. Although descriptive patterns showed slightly higher job-preference scores for Generation Z and slightly higher organizational-loyalty and work-life-balance scores for Millennials, these differences were not statistically significant. The findings suggest convergence in workplace expectations across the two cohorts in the Indian post-pandemic context and caution against relying on generation-based stereotypes when designing human-resource practices. The study supports more individualized, context-sensitive approaches to employee engagement, retention, and work design.

Index Terms—Generation Z, Millennials, job preferences, organizational loyalty, work-life balance, generational differences, India, post-pandemic workforce

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations increasingly include employees from multiple generations whose formative experiences have occurred under different economic, technological, and cultural conditions. Generational research in organizational psychology has therefore examined whether cohort membership is associated with differences in work values, job attitudes, career expectations, organizational attachment, and work-life orientations. Mannheim's (1952) concept of generations provides an early theoretical basis for understanding cohorts as groups shaped by shared historical experiences. Later organizational research extended this perspective to workplace values and attitudes, although findings have often been inconsistent (Costanza et al., 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

Millennials, generally defined in the present study as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, entered employment during major technological and economic transitions, including the expansion of the internet, globalization, and the 2008 financial recession. Generation Z, defined here as individuals born from 1997 onward, entered adulthood in an environment characterized by smartphones, social media, rapid digital connectivity, and, for many, the COVID-19 pandemic during formative educational or early-career

years. The original dissertation framed these differences as potentially important for understanding contemporary job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations.

Research on job preferences has not consistently supported popular stereotypes about generational differences. Kowske et al. (2010), using a large U.S. sample, found that commonly expressed negative assumptions about Millennials were not supported by their empirical analysis. More recent research has reported stronger preferences among Generation Z for flexibility, autonomy, learning, and work-life balance (Surugiu et al., 2025), whereas Manohar (2024) reported differences between Generation Y and Generation Z in an Indian sample. Such findings suggest that generational patterns may exist, but their magnitude and generalizability remain uncertain.

Organizational loyalty represents another important dimension of the employment relationship. The construct is closely related to organizational commitment, which includes employees' psychological attachment and willingness to remain with and contribute to an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1979). Previous research has associated Millennials' loyalty with meaningful work, shared organizational values, and a sense of connection, while research on Generation Z has emphasized intrinsic motivation, work engagement, and opportunities for development (Aboobaker et al., 2020; Sisodia, 2024). Flexibility and work-life balance may also contribute to loyalty, suggesting that the three constructs examined in the present study are conceptually interconnected (Capnary et al., 2018; Rudi et al., 2024).

Work-life balance has become particularly salient following the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier research treated balance partly as a desirable organizational benefit, whereas contemporary employees may regard flexibility, personal-time protection, and boundaries between work and nonwork as central employment expectations. Research on remote work has linked working arrangements with work-life balance and employee happiness (Elnanto & Suharti, 2021), while more recent work has identified generational differences in some dimensions of work-life balance and engagement (Manafe et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

The Indian context is important because much of the generational workplace literature has emerged from

Western countries. The original dissertation identified a need for post-pandemic Indian evidence that examines multiple workplace constructs within the same sample rather than treating job preferences, loyalty, and work-life balance as entirely separate domains. The present study addresses that gap by comparing Generation Z and Millennials across all three variables.

II. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study was to compare Generation Z and Millennials in terms of job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations among employed adults in India. The study addressed three questions: (a) whether the two cohorts differ in job preferences, (b) whether they differ in organizational loyalty, and (c) whether they differ in work-life balance expectations.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials in job preferences.

H2: There will be a significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials in organizational loyalty.

H3: There will be a significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials in work-life balance expectations.

Corresponding null hypotheses stated that no significant differences would exist between the two cohorts on each of the three variables.

III. METHOD RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative survey design. Generational cohort was treated as the independent grouping variable, and job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations were treated as dependent variables. No variables were experimentally manipulated. Data were collected at one point in time, making the design suitable for comparing the two cohorts as they were situated during the January–March 2026 data-collection period (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019).

IV. PARTICIPANTS

The final sample consisted of 142 employed individuals residing and working in India. Participants were between 18 and 45 years of age and had at least one year of work experience. The sample included 104 Generation Z participants (73.2%) and 38 Millennials (26.8%). Of the total sample, 85 participants (59.9%) identified as male and 57 (40.1%) as female. Most participants were employed in the private sector (79.6%), followed by self-employment (9.9%), government/public sector or PSU employment (5.6%), and contractual or temporary employment (4.9%).

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently employed full-time or part-time, aged 18–45 years, to have at least one year of active work experience, and to reside and work in India. Individuals who were unemployed, on extended leave, below 18 or above 45 years of age, had less than one year of work experience, or provided incomplete or invalid responses were excluded.

V. MEASURES

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire developed from themes identified in the literature review. The questionnaire contained four sections: demographic information; five items assessing job preferences; five items assessing organizational loyalty; and five items assessing work-life balance expectations. All substantive items used a five-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores represented stronger endorsement of the relevant workplace preference, loyalty orientation, or expectation.

The original dissertation selected a self-structured measure because the study focused on preferences and expectations rather than solely on experienced organizational states. The questionnaire underwent face-validity review by the research guide and five scholars with expertise in organizational psychology and generational research. The original study did not report a full psychometric validation of the scale; this limitation is retained in the present research-paper conversion.

VI. PROCEDURE

Data were collected online from January through March 2026 using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed through professional networking sites, internship connections, social-media channels, and word of mouth. Participants received information about the purpose and scope of the study and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Responses were recorded in Google Sheets and subsequently analyzed. The study reported confidentiality, voluntary participation, anonymity of responses, and secure digital data storage.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics included means, medians, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. Distributional properties were also inspected using density histograms and box plots. The original analysis found clear departures from normality for job preferences and organizational loyalty, including positive skewness and upper-end outliers. Accordingly, the Kruskal–Wallis H test was selected as the primary inferential procedure. The test was conducted separately for each dependent variable with $\alpha = .05$. The original analysis also specified the Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner procedure for pairwise comparisons. All inferential analyses were performed using Jamovi (Version 2.6).

VIII. RESULTS PARTICIPANT FINDINGS

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	n	%
Generation Z	104	73.2
Millennials	38	26.8
Male	85	59.9
Female	57	40.1
Private sector	113	79.6
Self-employed	14	9.9
Government/public sector/PSU	8	5.6
Contractual/temporary	7	4.9

Note. Percentages are based on N = 142. Generation Z = 18–29 years; Millennials = 30–45 years.

IX. DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

At the cohort level, Generation Z had a slightly higher mean score for job preferences ($M = 22.34$, $SD = 2.25$, median = 23.00) than Millennials ($M = 21.95$, $SD = 1.90$, median = 22.00). Millennials reported higher organizational loyalty ($M = 19.58$, $SD = 3.09$, median

= 19.00) than Generation Z ($M = 18.17$, $SD = 3.93$, median = 18.00). Millennials also reported a slightly higher work-life balance expectation score ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 2.47$, median = 22.50) than Generation Z ($M = 21.45$, $SD = 2.88$, median = 22.00). These differences were descriptive and were not interpreted as statistically significant.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics by Generation

Variable	Generation	n	M	SD
Job preferences	Generation Z	104	22.34	2.25
Job preferences	Millennials	38	21.95	1.90
Organizational loyalty	Generation Z	104	18.17	3.93
Organizational loyalty	Millennials	38	19.58	3.09
Work-life balance	Generation Z	104	21.45	2.88
Work-life balance	Millennials	38	22.00	2.47

Note. Scores represent composite totals across five Likert-scale items; possible scores range from 5 to 25.

X. INFERENTIAL FINDINGS

Table 3 Kruskal–Wallis Tests Comparing Generation Z and Millennials

Variable	χ^2	df	p	Decision
Job preferences	1.496	1	.221	Retain H0
Organizational loyalty	2.690	1	.101	Retain H0
Work-life balance expectations	0.756	1	.384	Retain H0

Note. $\alpha = .05$. H0 = null hypothesis.

The Kruskal–Wallis analysis showed no statistically significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials in job preferences, $\chi^2(1) = 1.496$, $p = .221$. The difference in organizational loyalty was also nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.690$, $p = .101$. Finally, work-life balance expectations did not differ significantly between the cohorts, $\chi^2(1) = 0.756$, $p = .384$. Therefore, all three null hypotheses were retained. The item-level analysis in the original study additionally indicated broadly shared endorsement of respect, learning opportunities, leave entitlement, personal initiative, and protection of personal time across the two cohorts.

XI. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether Generation Z and Millennials differed in job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations within the Indian post-pandemic workforce. Contrary to the directional hypotheses, none of the three comparisons reached statistical significance. The results therefore provide evidence of convergence rather than separation across the three workplace domains examined.

Job Preferences

The first hypothesis predicted a significant generational difference in job preferences, but the Kruskal–Wallis test was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1) = 1.496$,

$p = .221$. Generation Z nevertheless showed a slightly higher descriptive mean than Millennials. This pattern does not support a strong generational divide in job preferences within the present sample.

The finding contrasts with research suggesting that Generation Z places comparatively greater emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, rapid learning, and work-life balance (Surugiu et al., 2025), as well as with Manohar's (2024) Indian study, which reported generational differences in job preferences and organizational attachment. At the same time, the result is consistent with the broader literature cautioning against simplistic generational stereotypes. Kowske et al. (2010), for example, demonstrated that commonly held assumptions about Millennials were not necessarily supported by empirical evidence.

One possible interpretation is that the contemporary Indian work environment has produced overlapping priorities across cohorts. Access to digital work practices, changing employment expectations, and post-pandemic normalization of flexibility may have reduced the practical distance between age groups. Thus, characteristics historically described as distinctive to Generation Z may increasingly be shared by Millennials as well.

Organizational Loyalty

The second hypothesis predicted a significant difference in organizational loyalty. The result was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.690$, $p = .101$, although Millennials had a higher descriptive mean than Generation Z. The direction of the descriptive finding is compatible with literature describing Millennials' organizational attachment as connected with purpose, shared values, and a sense of community (Aboobaker et al., 2020). It also aligns directionally with research suggesting that Generation Z commitment is associated with intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Sisodia, 2024).

The absence of a statistically significant difference indicates that organizational loyalty may be shaped by factors that cut across generational boundaries. Previous work has identified job satisfaction, work-life balance, flexibility, organizational culture, and intrinsic motivation as relevant influences on loyalty or commitment (Capnary et al., 2018; Wardhani & Ali, 2025). Consequently, generational cohort may be a less direct predictor of loyalty than the organizational conditions experienced by employees.

Work-Life Balance Expectations

The third hypothesis predicted a significant difference in work-life balance expectations. The Kruskal–Wallis result was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.756$, $p = .384$. Millennials showed a marginally higher descriptive score than Generation Z, but the difference was small. This result is particularly important because work-life balance is frequently portrayed as a defining preference of Generation Z.

The convergence observed in the present study may reflect a broader post-pandemic normalization of work-life balance. Remote and hybrid work, increased attention to boundaries, and wider awareness of employee well-being may have transformed work-life balance from a cohort-specific preference into a shared expectation. Previous evidence indicates that working from home can support work-life balance and employee happiness (Elnanto & Suharti, 2021), while recent studies have continued to document work-life balance as an important employment consideration across Generation Y and Generation Z (Manafe et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the three nonsignificant findings suggest that the workplace expectations of Generation Z and Millennials in this sample are more similar than the generational narrative might imply. The study therefore contributes to the ongoing debate about whether generational categories are sufficiently strong predictors of organizational attitudes. Costanza et al. (2012) and Lyons and Kuron (2014) have already highlighted methodological and conceptual problems in interpreting generational differences, including the difficulty of separating cohort effects from age and historical-period effects.

The post-pandemic context is especially relevant. The pandemic affected employees across age groups and may have generated common expectations around flexibility, well-being, autonomy, and personal-time protection. In this context, differences that might once have been interpreted as generational may instead reflect shared responses to common economic, technological, and organizational conditions.

Implications

The findings have practical implications for human-resource professionals and organizational leaders. Because no statistically significant differences were

found across the three major workplace constructs, organizations should be cautious about designing entirely separate HR policies solely on the basis of generational membership. Instead, employee preferences should be assessed at the individual and organizational level.

The item-level findings reported in the original study point toward shared priorities, including being respected, learning new skills, exercising personal initiative, receiving leave, and protecting personal life outside working hours. Organizations can therefore emphasize universal practices that support employee autonomy, development, respectful treatment, and healthy work boundaries while allowing individual employees to express different needs.

For industrial-organizational psychology, the findings encourage a broader multivariate understanding of workplace attitudes. Generational cohort may be considered alongside organizational culture, job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, career stage, sector, tenure, economic context, and flexible working arrangements rather than treated as a sufficient explanatory variable on its own.

XII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design captures workplace attitudes at one point in time and cannot determine whether similarities between the cohorts are stable across careers. Second, the self-structured questionnaire was reviewed for face validity but did not undergo the full psychometric evaluation required to establish reliability and construct validity. Third, purposive and snowball sampling may have produced network homogeneity and limits representativeness. Fourth, the generational groups were uneven in size, with Generation Z constituting 73.2% of the sample and Millennials 26.8%. Finally, the sample was restricted to India, limiting generalizability to other national, cultural, or organizational contexts.

Future studies should use larger and more balanced samples and validated instruments, such as established measures of work values, organizational commitment, and work-home interaction. Longitudinal designs would help distinguish generational cohort effects from age and period effects, while mixed-method research could clarify why employees report similar or

different workplace expectations. Future studies should also examine mediators and moderators such as job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, organizational culture, flexible working arrangements, sector, gender, and organizational tenure.

XIII. CONCLUSION

This study examined generational differences in job preferences, organizational loyalty, and work-life balance expectations among 142 employed Generation Z and Millennial participants in India. None of the three hypothesized generational differences was statistically significant. Although Generation Z showed a slightly higher descriptive score for job preferences and Millennials showed slightly higher scores for organizational loyalty and work-life balance expectations, these differences did not meet the statistical criterion for significance.

The central contribution of the study is therefore its evidence of convergence. Within the present Indian post-pandemic sample, workplace expectations appear to overlap substantially across Generation Z and Millennials. The findings caution against assuming that generational labels automatically translate into distinct employee needs and support a more individualized, evidence-based approach to employee management. Future research using larger, balanced samples, validated measures, longitudinal designs, and multivariate models is needed to determine the extent to which generational, age-related, historical, cultural, and organizational influences interact.

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