INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORKFORCE FLEXIBILITY PREFERENCES: AN ANALYSIS OF GENERATION X AND GENERATION Y

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Abstract

The current labour market is characterised by the growing importance of workforce flexibility, while individual generations may perceive and prefer these forms of flexibility differently. The aim of this study was to analyse intergenerational differences in workforce flexibility preferences between Generation X and Generation Y and to identify the main factors associated with these preferences. The research is based on a quantitative questionnaire survey conducted on a sample of respondents from Generation X and Generation Y, with responses measured using five-point Likert scales.

The theoretically derived model was empirically tested through confirmatory factor analysis, which was used to verify the measurement structure of latent constructs representing workforce flexibility factors (motivational factors, barriers, job task preferences, working time preferences, and preferences regarding contractual forms of employment). Based on the obtained factor scores, the research hypotheses were subsequently tested using linear regression models and correlation analysis. The analyses were conducted separately for each generation.

The results confirmed that workforce flexibility preferences in both generations are primarily influenced by preferences for remote work, which show a statistically significant relationship with motivational factors, job task preferences, and working time preferences. At the same time, differences were identified in the strength of these relationships between Generation X and Generation Y, indicating distinct mechanisms in the formation of flexible work preferences across generations. Positive and statistically significant relationships were also identified among selected latent constructs, particularly between motivational factors and flexibility barriers, as well as between job task preferences and working time preferences.

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of intergenerational differences in the area of workforce flexibility and provide practical implications for human resource management, particularly in designing flexible working conditions, job positions, and HR strategies that take generational specificities into account.

Key words:
Human resource management, workforce flexibility, intergenerational differences, Generation X, Generation Y

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INTRODUCTION

The current labour market is undergoing a significant transformation characterised by growing uncertainty, technological acceleration, and changing employee expectations towards work and employers. In this context, organisations are compelled to seek new approaches to human resource management in order to maintain competitiveness, workforce stability, and long-term performance (Gallo et al., 2023). One of the most prominent trends in recent years has been the expansion of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA), which include flexibility in working time, workplace location, job tasks, and contractual relationships (Noermijati et al., 2025).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility has ceased to be perceived as a premium benefit and has instead become an expected component of working conditions that fundamentally influences the psychological contract between employees and organisations (Noermijati et al., 2025; Schulz et al., 2024). Research further indicates that work flexibility has significant implications for job satisfaction, work-life balance, health, and turnover intentions across various sectors (Kozova et al., 2025; Hinge et al., 2025). Among knowledge workers, decisions regarding workplace location have become a dynamic process in which employees daily evaluate combinations of home offices, traditional offices, and alternative workspaces (Kuchenbauer & Besic, 2026).

Despite the growing importance of workforce flexibility, employees do not perceive and evaluate flexible arrangements uniformly. Generational differences may significantly influence work-related attitudes and expectations. Although prior research has examined flexible work and generational characteristics separately, fewer studies have analysed the multidimensional structure of workforce flexibility preferences and the relationships among motivational factors, perceived barriers, and specific flexibility dimensions within distinct generational cohorts.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse intergenerational differences in workforce flexibility preferences between Generation X and Generation Y and to empirically verify a multidimensional measurement model of work flexibility. By examining structural relationships among flexibility drivers, barriers, and preference dimensions, this study contributes to both theoretical discussion and practical HRM applications.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

However, flexibility preferences are not homogeneous and differ significantly depending on generational affiliation. Generation X, shaped by a period of economic change and uncertainty, places greater emphasis—compared to younger cohorts—on job stability, financial security, and predictability of working conditions (Gallo et al., 2023; Viterouli et al., 2024). For this generation, flexibility is often associated with the need to reconcile work and family responsibilities, particularly in the context of caring for children and ageing parents (Russo et al., 2025). Remote work and flexible working hours therefore represent for Generation X a practical tool for maintaining labour market participation and protecting health, rather than primarily a means of self-fulfilment (Moriarity et al., 2014; Kozova et al., 2025).

In contrast, Generation Y (millennials) approaches work with a strong emphasis on personal development, meaningful work, and technological integration. This generation is characterised by high expectations regarding feedback, learning opportunities, and career growth (Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruța, 2025; Gallo et al., 2023). For millennials, flexibility in working time and place is closely linked to their willingness to remain in an organisation and to their intrinsic motivation (Noermijati et al., 2025; Backman et al., 2025). Studies also suggest that technological orientation and a positive attitude towards digital tools increase the acceptance of hybrid and remote forms of work, particularly in knowledge-based professions (Panina et al., 2020; Lee, 2025).

The literature further indicates that flexibility preferences are shaped by a combination of individual values, organisational conditions, and the degree of alignment between employees' expectations and the actual design of work. The alignment between preferred and implemented forms of work is associated with higher satisfaction, lower burnout, and reduced turnover (Gee & Yeager, 2026). Conversely, the absence of clear boundaries in flexible arrangements may lead to the so-called flexibility paradox, characterised by overwork and difficulties in detaching from work (Russo et al., 2025; Schulz et al., 2024).

From a human resource management perspective, these findings represent a significant challenge. The effective design of flexible working arrangements requires consideration of generational differences, job roles, and the need for team interaction (Viterouli et al., 2024; Atan et al., 2026). At the same time, flexibility has become an important component of employer branding, with younger generations in particular associating flexible working conditions with technological advancement, transparency, and corporate social responsibility (Hakam et al., 2024; Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruța, 2025).

These theoretical insights provide the conceptual foundation for the development of the proposed multidimensional model of workforce flexibility examined in this study.

GOAL AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, we examined how work preferences and attitudes towards work flexibility are shaped within Generation X and Generation Y, and whether these attitudes can be captured through a coherent

model of latent constructs applicable in the field of human resource management. The research problem was not conceived merely in a descriptive manner, but rather as a verification of whether selected dimensions of work flexibility and related value orientations form a statistically supported structure and whether significant relationships exist among them, with particular attention paid to generational differences.

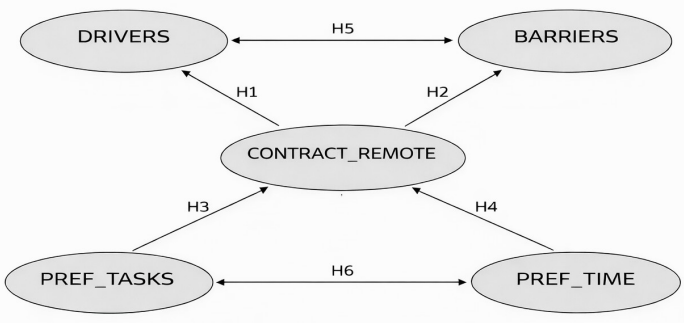
The analytical procedure consisted of two consecutive steps. In the first step, the measurement part of the model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with the aim of assessing whether the selected questionnaire items adequately represented the intended latent constructs. In the second step, based on the obtained factor scores, the research hypotheses were tested through regression analysis and correlation tests, conducted separately for Generation X and Generation Y. This approach enabled a comparison of the relationship structures between the two generations.

The measurement model included six latent constructs. The construct DRIVERS (motivational factors of flexibility) was operationalised through items focused on career growth, financial remuneration and benefits, family-related reasons, health and psychological well-being, technological conditions, and work-life balance. The construct BARRIERS (barriers to flexibility) included items related to lack of skills, insufficient employer support, distrust from supervisors or colleagues, and organisational or legislative constraints. Preferences regarding job content were captured by the construct PREF_TASKS, composed of items addressing job enlargement, job enrichment, and job rotation.

Time flexibility was represented by the construct PREF_TIME, which included preferences for fixed working hours, shift work, and part-time employment. Spatial flexibility and flexibility in workplace location were captured by the construct CONTRACT_REMOTE, encompassing remote work from a location other than home, home office work, and telework. Alternative forms of work arrangements were represented by the construct CONTRACT_ALT, including job sharing, flexible working hours, taking leave, and atypical working arrangements.

All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” which led to the use of the WLSMV (DWLS) estimation method, appropriate for ordinal data. Model adequacy was evaluated using standard fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR). Data were collected through an anonymous questionnaire survey among economically active respondents via the Survio platform. A total of 437 valid responses were included in the analysis, of which 193 respondents belonged to Generation X (born 1965-1980) and 244 respondents belonged to Generation Y (born 1981-1996). Generational boundaries were defined according to widely used demographic classifications in generational and HRM research. This sample size provided sufficient statistical power to test the measurement model separately for each generation, as well as to subsequently test the formulated hypotheses and compare results between generational groups.

Figure 1: SEM model diagram



Source: Authors’ own processing

FINDINGS

In this section, we present the results of the empirical analysis in a manner that enables an objective and reliable interpretation of the relationships among the examined constructs related to work flexibility preferences. Before evaluating the relationships between latent variables and comparing generational differences, it was necessary to verify whether the proposed measurement model adequately fits the data and whether the observed indicators sufficiently represent the intended latent constructs.

Since the analysed variables are ordinal in nature and were measured using Likert scales, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the WLSMV estimation method was applied to estimate the measurement model. CFA represents a fundamental step in validating the measurement structure, as it allows for the assessment of construct dimensionality and the suitability of individual indicators within each generational group.

The adequacy of the measurement model was evaluated using a set of commonly applied model fit indices, which collectively express the degree of correspondence between the empirical data and the specified model. An overview of the key fit indices for both generations is presented in Table 1 and serves as the basis for the subsequent interpretation of the measurement model results and further analyses.

Table 1: Fit indices of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model

Gen X			**Gen Y**		
Measure	**Standard**	**Scaled/Robust**	**Measure**	**Standard**	**Scaled/Robust**
Estimator	DWLS (WLSMV)		Estimator	DWLS (WLSMV)	
N (observations)	193		N (observations)	244	
Chi-square	418.188	433.623	Chi-square	433.203	474.15
df	213	213	df	213	213
p-value (scaled)		$p < 0.001$	p-value (scaled)		$p < 0.001$
CFI	0.972	0.929	CFI	0.968	0.914
TLI	0.967	0.915	TLI	0.963	0.898
RMSEA	0.071	0.073	RMSEA	0.065	0.071
SRMR	0.092	0.092	SRMR	0.086	0.086
Chi-square (standard)	418.188		Chi-square (standard)	433.203	
df (standard)	213		df (standard)	213	
Chi-square (scaled)		433.623	Chi-square (scaled)		474.15
df (scaled)		213	df (scaled)		213

Source: Authors' own processing in R (lavaan package), based on the survey data

The model was estimated using the WLSMV method, as the analysed variables are ordinal in nature and were measured using Likert scales. This method provides robust parameter estimates and test statistics even in the presence of non-normal response distributions. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicate an adequate level of fit between the proposed model and the empirical data in both examined generations. For Generation X, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) reaches 0.972 in the standard version of the model and 0.929 in the scaled version. The Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) achieves values of 0.967 (standard) and 0.915 (scaled), suggesting a good level of model fit. For Generation Y, the CFI values are 0.968 in the standard version and 0.914 in the scaled version of the model. The TLI values reach 0.963 (standard) and 0.898 (scaled). These results can also be considered acceptable given the complexity of the model.

The RMSEA values in both generations range from 0.065 to 0.073, indicating an acceptable level of approximation error. Although these values slightly exceed the strict threshold of 0.05, they remain

within the range commonly regarded in the literature as acceptable for models with a higher number of latent constructs and indicators. The SRMR values are below 0.10 in both cases, indicating a good fit between the empirical correlations and those reproduced by the model.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the proposed confirmatory factor model is adequately specified in both generations and provides a suitable foundation for further interpretation of factor loadings and comparison of latent constructs between Generations X and Y.

Table 2: Factor Loadings of Indicators in the CFA Measurement Model

Latent construct	Indicator	Unstd. loading (X)	Std.all (X)	Unstd. loading (Y)	Std.all (Y)
DRIVERS	Family reasons (drv_fam)	1	0.692	1	0.648
DRIVERS	Career growth (drv_car)	0.824	0.57	0.986	0.639
DRIVERS	Health and psychological well-being (drv_hea)	1.212	0.839	1.152	0.747
DRIVERS	Work–life balance (drv_wlb)	1.172	0.811	1.199	0.777
DRIVERS	Financial remuneration and benefits (drv_com)	1.226	0.848	1.059	0.687
DRIVERS	Technological conditions (drv_tec)	0.956	0.662	1.096	0.711
BARRIERS	Lack of skills (bar_skl)	1	0.714	1	0.687
BARRIERS	Distrust from supervisors or colleagues (bar_tru)	1.177	0.841	1.126	0.774
BARRIERS	Insufficient employer support (bar_sup)	1.254	0.896	1.438	0.987
BARRIERS	Organisational or legislative constraints (bar_lim)	1.255	0.896	1.204	0.827
PREF_TASKS	Job enlargement (task_ext)	1	0.712	1	0.777
PREF_TASKS	Job enrichment (task_enr)	1.03	0.733	0.898	0.698
PREF_TASKS	Job rotation (task_rot)	0.859	0.611	0.916	0.712
PREF_TIME	Fixed working hours (time_fx)	1	0.588	1	0.573
PREF_TIME	Shift work (time_onc)	0.756	0.444	0.582	0.334
PREF_TIME	Part-time employment (time_prt)	1.288	0.757	0.85	0.487
CONTRACT_REMOTE	Remote work (con_dist)	1	0.734	1	0.801
CONTRACT_REMOTE	Home office (con_home)	0.794	0.582	0.942	0.754
CONTRACT_REMOTE	Telework (con_tele)	1.083	0.795	1.007	0.806

Source: Authors' own processing in R

The table presents the estimates of factor loadings for Generation X and Generation Y within the confirmatory factor analysis. Both unstandardised loadings (Unstd. loading), which are directly estimated in the model, and standardised loadings (Std.all), which allow comparison of the strength of the relationship between individual items and latent constructs as well as comparison of results across generations, are reported.

For the construct BARRIERS (barriers to flexibility), all indicators in both generations achieve moderate to strong standardised factor loadings. In Generation X, the Std.all values range approximately from 0.714 to 0.896, with the highest loadings observed for "Organisational or legislative constraints (bar_lim)" and "Insufficient employer support (bar_sup)". In Generation Y, the standardised loadings range approximately from 0.687 to 0.987, with "Insufficient employer support (bar_sup)" emerging as the strongest indicator. The unstandardised loadings are consistent in both generations, as the reference item within each construct has its loading fixed at 1 and the remaining items are estimated relative to it.

For the construct CONTRACT_REMOTE (remote work preferences), the standardised factor loadings in Generation X range approximately from 0.582 to 0.795, while in Generation Y they range from about 0.754 to 0.806. In both generations, the indicators are adequately associated with the latent construct. In Generation Y, the item "Home office (con_home)" shows a higher standardised loading than in Generation X. The item "Telework (con_tele)" remains the reference indicator in both generations, with its unstandardised loading fixed at 1.

Within the construct DRIVERS (motivational factors of flexibility), the standardised loadings in Generation X range approximately from 0.570 to 0.848 and in Generation Y from 0.639 to 0.806. In Generation X, the highest standardised loading is observed for "Financial remuneration and benefits (drv_com)", whereas in Generation Y the strongest indicator is "Health and psychological well-being (drv_hea)". In both generations, "Work–life balance (drv_wlb)" represents an important indicator, while "Technological conditions (drv_tec)" shows lower, yet still acceptable, standardised loadings.

For the construct PREF_TASKS (preferences for flexibility in job tasks), the standardised factor loadings in Generation X range approximately from 0.611 to 0.733, while in Generation Y they range from about 0.698 to 0.777. This suggests that job enlargement, job enrichment, and job rotation form a consistent measurement of the latent construct in both generational groups.

In the case of the construct PREF_TIME (preferences for working time flexibility), the standardised loadings in Generation X range approximately from 0.444 to 0.757 and in Generation Y from 0.334 to 0.573. The strongest indicator in both generations is part-time employment, whereas the item "Shift work (time_onc)" shows a weaker, yet still acceptable, association with the latent construct, particularly in Generation Y.

Overall, all listed indicators achieve positive and sufficiently high standardised factor loadings in both generations. The proposed measurement model therefore provides a stable and comparable basis for further analysis of relationships among latent constructs and for comparing workforce flexibility preferences between Generation X and Generation Y.

Table 3: Hypothesis testing results in the SEM model – Gen X

Hypothesis	Relationship (arrow)	Estimate (Beta)	SE	t	p-value	Method	Result
H1	CONTRACT_REMOTE → DRIVERS	0.292	0.064	4.581	<0.001	LM	Accepted
H2	CONTRACT_REMOTE → BARRIERS	-0.016	0.066	-0.242	0.809	LM	Rejected
H3	CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TASKS	0.331	0.061	5.395	<0.001	LM	Accepted
H4	CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TIME	0.605	0.032	19.011	<0.001	LM	Accepted
H5	DRIVERS ↔ BARRIERS	0.336	–	–	<0.001	Pearson correlation	Accepted
H6	PREF_TASKS ↔ PREF_TIME	0.504	–	–	<0.001	Pearson correlation	Accepted

Source: Authors' own processing in R

Table 4: Hypothesis testing results in the SEM model – Gen Y

Hypothesis	Relationship (arrow)	Estimate (Beta)	SE	t	p-value	Method	Result
H1	CONTRACT_REMOTE → DRIVERS	0.181	0.052	3.509	5e-04	LM	Accepted
H2	CONTRACT_REMOTE → BARRIERS	0.038	0.05	0.764	0.4454	LM	Rejected
H3	CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TASKS	0.22	0.06	3.635	3e-04	LM	Accepted
H4	CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TIME	0.485	0.029	16.896	<0.001	LM	Accepted
H5	DRIVERS ↔ BARRIERS	0.214	–	–	8e-04	Pearson correlation	Accepted
H6	PREF_TASKS ↔ PREF_TIME	0.689	–	–	0.000	Pearson correlation	Accepted

Source: Authors' own processing in R

H1 (CONTRACT_REMOTE → DRIVERS)

Hypothesis H1 tested whether a higher preference for remote work and alternative contractual forms (CONTRACT_REMOTE) is associated with stronger motivational factors of work flexibility (DRIVERS). This relationship was examined using a linear regression model separately for Generation X and Generation Y. The results revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship in both generational groups. In Generation X, a stronger effect was identified ($\beta = 0.292$, $t = 4.581$, $p < 0.001$) compared to Generation Y ($\beta = 0.181$, $t = 3.509$, $p = 0.0005$). Hypothesis H1 was confirmed in both generations.

H2 (CONTRACT_REMOTE → BARRIERS)

Hypothesis H2 examined whether preference for remote work and alternative contractual forms (CONTRACT_REMOTE) is related to perceived barriers to work flexibility (BARRIERS). The relationship was tested using a linear regression model separately for both generations. The results did not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship in either Generation X ($\beta = -0.016$, $t = -0.242$, $p = 0.809$) or Generation Y ($\beta = 0.038$, $t = 0.764$, $p = 0.445$). Hypothesis H2 was not confirmed in either generational group.

H3 (CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TASKS)

Hypothesis H3 tested the relationship between preference for remote work and alternative contractual forms (CONTRACT_REMOTE) and preference for flexibility in job tasks (PREF_TASKS). The linear regression analysis indicated a statistically significant positive relationship in both generations. In Generation X, a stronger effect was identified ($\beta = 0.331$, $t = 5.395$, $p < 0.001$) compared to Generation Y ($\beta = 0.220$, $t = 3.635$, $p = 0.0003$). Hypothesis H3 was confirmed in both generations.

H4 (CONTRACT_REMOTE → PREF_TIME)

Hypothesis H4 tested whether preference for remote work and alternative contractual forms (CONTRACT_REMOTE) is associated with preference for working time flexibility (PREF_TIME). The regression analysis confirmed a strong and statistically significant relationship in both generations. In Generation X, $\beta = 0.605$, $t = 19.011$, $p < 0.001$, while in Generation Y, $\beta = 0.485$, $t = 16.896$, $p < 0.001$. Hypothesis H4 was confirmed in both generations.

H5 (DRIVERS ↔ BARRIERS)

Hypothesis H5 examined the relationship between motivational factors of work flexibility (DRIVERS) and perceived barriers to flexibility (BARRIERS). As this is a non-directional relationship, it was tested using

Pearson's correlation analysis. The results showed a statistically significant positive correlation in both generations. In Generation X, $r = 0.336$, $p < 0.001$, while in Generation Y, $r = 0.214$, $p = 0.0008$. Hypothesis H5 was confirmed in both generations.

H6 (PREF_TASKS ↔ PREF_TIME)

Hypothesis H6 tested the relationship between preference for flexibility in job tasks (PREF_TASKS) and preference for working time flexibility (PREF_TIME). The relationship was examined using Pearson's correlation analysis. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation in both generations, with a stronger correlation in Generation Y ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.001$) than in Generation X ($r = 0.504$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis H6 was confirmed in both generations.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on analysing intergenerational differences in workforce flexibility preferences, with particular attention to Generation X and Generation Y. The aim was to verify the structure of key latent constructs of work flexibility and subsequently examine the relationships between preference for remote work and selected areas of work preferences and attitudes within each generation.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis confirmed a stable and comparable measurement structure of the latent constructs in both generations, which enabled subsequent hypothesis testing based on factor scores. In both generational groups, sufficiently strong factor loadings of the indicators and an acceptable level of model fit with the empirical data were identified, creating the basis for comparing relationships among the constructs.

The analysis of relationships between preference for remote work (CONTRACT_REMOTE) and other areas of flexibility showed that in both generations this preference represents a significant factor in shaping work preferences. In Generation X as well as in Generation Y, preference for remote work was statistically significantly associated with motivational factors of flexibility, preferences for flexibility in job tasks, and preferences for working time flexibility. At the same time, differences in the strength of these relationships between generations were identified. In Generation X, stronger relationships were found between preference for remote work and preference for working time flexibility, as well as with motivational factors of flexibility. This suggests that for older respondents, the time dimension of flexibility and practical aspects of work organisation play a more prominent role in shaping overall attitudes towards flexible forms of work.

In Generation Y, all of the above relationships were also statistically significant, but generally reached lower intensity compared to Generation X in terms of direct links to remote work. On the other hand, younger respondents demonstrated stronger interconnections among the individual dimensions of flexibility. In particular, the relationship between preferences for flexibility in job tasks and preferences for working time flexibility was stronger in Generation Y than in Generation X, indicating a more integrated and multidimensional perception of flexibility as a whole.

The relationship between preference for remote work and perceived barriers to flexibility was not confirmed as statistically significant in either generation. This result suggests that barriers to flexibility do not represent a decisive factor in shaping preference for remote work in either Generation X or Generation Y, and that their perception is largely independent of preferences for remote forms of work.

Positive and statistically significant relationships were also identified among the latent constructs themselves. In both generations, a positive association was found between motivational factors and barriers to flexibility, as well as between preferences for flexibility in job tasks and working time flexibility. However, the strength of these relationships was in several cases higher in Generation Y, indicating a greater internal consistency of flexibility preferences among younger employees.

Overall, the results show that although Generation X and Generation Y share a similar structural pattern of workforce flexibility preferences, differences exist in the strength and character of relationships among individual areas of flexibility. While time-related and practical aspects of flexibility appear to play a

more dominant role in Generation X, flexibility preferences in Generation Y seem to be more multidimensional and interconnected across various aspects of working conditions.

The findings highlight the need for a differentiated approach to managing workforce flexibility with regard to generational specificities. The results suggest that flexible working conditions should not be designed uniformly for all employees but should instead reflect differing preferences and mechanisms underlying flexibility in individual generations. At the same time, the findings open space for further research aimed at extending the analysed model with additional determinants of work preferences and verifying its validity in a broader demographic and sectoral context. The study also contributes to the theoretical discussion on generational workforce differences by empirically validating a multidimensional measurement model of work flexibility across generational cohorts.

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