

The State of Generations at Work

Rethinking Generational
Differences



Introduction

Age is one of the most powerful forces shaping today's workplace. Organizations routinely underestimate the impact of multiple generations working side by side, influencing how work gets done, how trust is built, and how performance is sustained.

Generational differences are regularly dismissed as cultural shorthand: easy jokes, tired stereotypes, and viral soundbites about entitled youth, out-of-touch leaders, clashing communication styles, and technological ineptitude. These narratives may seem trivial, even entertaining. However, in the workplace they represent an important operating context that can weaken the organization. They shape assumptions and harden biases, which quietly erode how people relate to one another.

When generational differences are misunderstood or ignored, miscommunication increases and frustration deepens, breaking down trust. Collaboration suffers. Engagement declines. Turnover rises. Over time, organizations pay a measurable price in lost innovation and weakened performance. Generational misunderstandings aren't just cultural issues; they are real business risks.

Organizations that take generational differences seriously gain a decisive advantage. By understanding how different generations experience work, companies can reduce friction and strengthen collaboration, creating environments where differences become assets rather than liabilities. When intentionally leveraged, age diversity doesn't weaken teams, but makes them more resilient and high-performing.

The question is no longer whether generational differences matter; the question is whether organizations will continue to let those differences undermine their workforce—or deliberately harness them as a competitive advantage.



5,702

EMPLOYEES SURVEYED IN
17 COUNTRIES, ALONG WITH
9 FOCUS GROUPS

This report reveals a powerful opportunity to transform generational differences into generational synergy that fuels innovation and long-term business success.

What we discovered

Rather than focusing on the differences between generations (and managing separate strategies around wellbeing, tech adoption, or recognition), building synergy across generations is much more effective at improving outcomes for individual employees. Synergy is also critical to reach the business goals companies need to stay competitive.

Understanding where employees are coming from helps organizations address sources of conflict and offer resources to meet every generation's needs. Even more important, synergy creates a culture where all generations can thrive, which leads to better business outcomes.



The Generational Contracts

In general, employees have different approaches to work that are rooted in their experiences coming of age in the labor market, and the contract or relationship they initially had with work. These generational contracts help determine where each generation shines, and where they struggle, when it comes to work. Because contracts differ by generation, they may also be the source of tension and misunderstandings between workers from different generations.

Our generational contracts approach is based on the idea of the psychological contract in the workplace,¹⁻³ and emphasizes an understanding of what each generation feels they owe their employer and what their employer owes them in the context of work.⁴ Following are descriptions of each generational contract and how organizations can leverage them for better collaboration.

BABY BOOMERS

GEN X

MILLENNIALS

GEN Z

BABY BOOMERS

BORN

1946-1964

THE INDUSTRIAL CONTRACT

Loyalty for Security

WORK APPROACH

Baby Boomers began working at the end of the post-war prosperity years and prize loyalty more than other generations. They believe that loyalty is, and should be, rewarded with job stability and security. They also have 59% increased odds of believing hierarchies are important at work.

GEN X

STRENGTH

They are loyal and hardworking, making them important organizational supporters and champions. They have 45% increased odds of saying loyalty should be rewarded at work with job security, fair pay, respect, and recognition.

STRUGGLE

Baby Boomers can struggle with working too much and expect the same level of loyalty and dedication from their organizations and from other generations, feeling frustrated when they don't see it.

MILLENNIALS

OPPORTUNITY

Organizations can help Baby Boomers collaborate more effectively with other generations by honoring their loyalty and contributions, providing clear structure in their work, and setting healthy expectations around work. Doing so turns Baby Boomers into stabilizing forces who strengthen trust and generational synergy.

GEN Z

“Work hard, stay loyal, and the system will reward you.”

**—TONY, PHYSICIAN
(BABY BOOMER)**

BABY BOOMERS

BORN

1965-1980

THE PERFORMANCE CONTRACT

Competence for Autonomy

WORK APPROACH

Gen X started working at a time when institutional downsizing was prominent. They learned that security depended not on loyalty or tenure, but on skill. Gen X cares about work, but rather than institutional loyalty, they value self-sufficiency and independence from micromanagement and strict corporate hierarchies.

GEN X

STRENGTH

Gen Xers are pragmatic realists, and 75% of Gen X describe themselves as self-sufficient at work. They are very independent, balanced workers.

STRUGGLE

Gen Xers have little faith in or expectations of their organizations as institutions. This generation is 21% less likely to trust their organizations to do the right thing and 30% less likely to trust senior leaders. As such, they struggle to understand Baby Boomers' fierce loyalty to work.

MILLENNIALS

OPPORTUNITY

Organizations can help Gen X collaborate more effectively by providing autonomy and trust, while calling out their skills, pragmatism, and self-sufficiency. Empower Gen X employees to work independently and position them as practical connectors across generations.

GEN Z

“If you’ve got the skills that [a company] needs so they can sell, or whatever they’re doing, you’re in the door.”

—JESSICA, MANAGER (GEN X)

BABY BOOMERS

GEN X

MILLENNIALS

GEN Z

BORN

1981–1996

THE PURPOSE CONTRACT

Meaning for Commitment

WORK APPROACH

Millennials entered the workforce at a time of rapid change and economic uncertainty, but with high ideals and an acute sense of social responsibility. They will give their full selves if the values of the organization align with their own, and they have 28% higher odds of being engaged at work compared to other generations.

STRENGTH

They are passionate and dedicated. Millennials are 5x more likely to be fulfilled and 7x more likely to do great work when their job is aligned with their personal values. Additionally, 80% say it's important that the organization they work for is ethical.

STRUGGLE

Misalignment between their jobs and personal values causes stress—63% of Millennials feel disengaged when leaders “don't do the right thing” (leading to 52% higher odds of burnout). They may not understand Gen X's more pragmatic approach to work.

OPPORTUNITY

Organizations can help Millennials collaborate more effectively with other generations by clearly connecting roles and decisions to purpose and values. This generation can bring higher energy and engagement to cross generational teams.

“It is important to me that the work that I do aligns with my values because it takes so much time out of my life and takes time away from my family. It's important to me that whatever I'm doing, I can make it make sense to me.”

—MARINA, DATA ANALYST (MILLENNIAL)

BABY BOOMERS

GEN X

MILLENNIALS

GEN Z

BORN

1997–2013

THE COMMUNITY CONTRACT

Inclusion for Engagement

WORK APPROACH

Gen Z, who grew up in the age of iPhones and social media, longs to feel that they are valued, contributing members of their workplace communities—which is why 77% say inclusion is “very important” to them. They thrive when they are an integrated part of their workplace community. This generation is also eager to learn and grow at work.

STRENGTH

Gen Z is adaptable and eager to participate as team players. They want to collaborate but can work independently and have an entrepreneurial spirit.

STRUGGLE

Sadly, Gen Zers are struggling to find community at work. This generation has 47% increased odds of saying they can’t find community at work and 25% increased odds of saying they would like to have more friends at work. Their communal approach to work contrasts with Millennials’ more personal alignment approach, which could cause misunderstanding and tension.

OPPORTUNITY

Organizations can help Gen Z collaborate more effectively by intentionally fostering inclusion and community. Provide frequent opportunities to learn from and work with other generations. When Gen Z employees feel welcomed and supported, they fully integrate into teams, and their adaptability improves collaboration across the entire workforce.

“The ‘hitting financial targets’ part, yeah, whatever, I could do that. But that’s not the part that would drive me to want to do better. I like working with people. I love the idea of being more expert and then helping train younger employees. That’s the part that’d be exciting.”

—CAMERON, INSURANCE AGENT (GEN Z)

GENERATION	STRENGTHS	STRUGGLES	HOW TO LEVERAGE DIFFERENCES
Baby Boomers	Dedicated and loyal	Work-life balance	Turn into stabilizing forces that strengthen trust
Gen X	Pragmatic and balanced	Lack of trust in institutions	Position as practical connectors across generations
Millennials	Passionate and invested	Stress caused by values misalignment	Employ their higher energy and engagement
Gen Z	Adaptable and community-seeking	Absence of community and inclusion	Apply adaptability and sense of community to improve collaboration

Summary of Generational Contracts

It's important to remember that the overall generational strengths and struggles are not fixed generational traits. Organizations can support each generation's struggles and activate their strengths to help the generations create synergy and work together successfully.

When organizations leverage the strengths of an intergenerational workforce, they enable better communication and collaboration for employees of all generations. This builds a stronger, more inclusive workplace culture that fuels innovation and drives business performance.

1. Argyris, Chris. 1960. *Understanding Organizational Behavior*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
2. Rousseau, Denise. 2004. "Psychological Contracts in the Workplace: Understanding the Ties that Motivate." *Academy of Management Perspectives* 18(1): 120-127.
3. Coyle-Shapiro, Jacqueline, and Marjo-Riitta Parzefall. 2008. "Psychological Contracts" In J. Barling, C. L. Cooper (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Behavior: Volume 1*: pp. 17-34.
4. Zechner, Minna, and Tiina Sihto. 2023. "The concept of generational contract: A systematic literature review." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 33(3), 710-723.

SECTIONS

Achieving Generational Synergy
Wellbeing for Every Generation
Synergy Enables Tech Adoption
Recognition as
the Generational Bridge

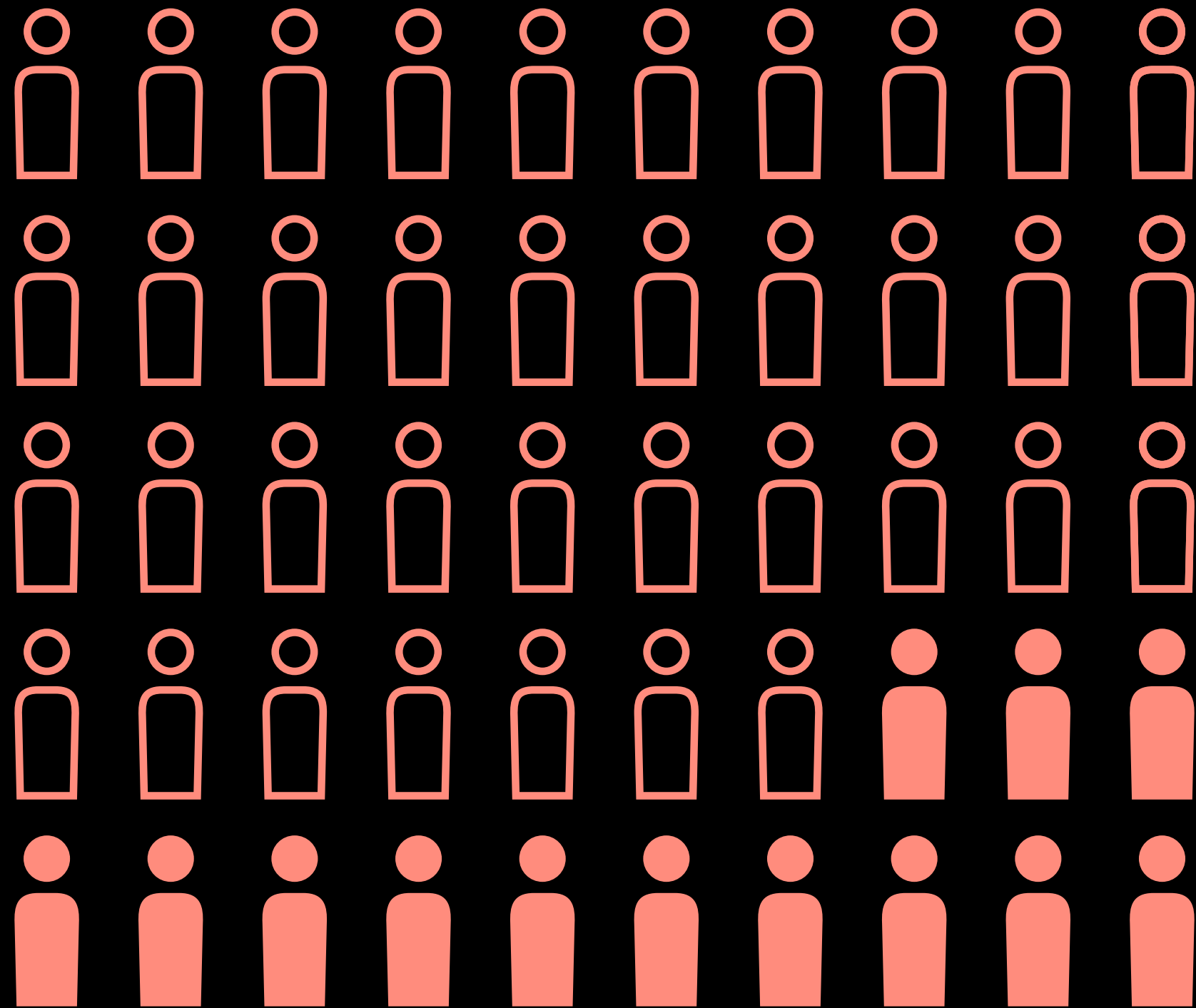
Achieving Generational Synergy



While generational differences can be a source of strength, they can quickly devolve into conflict without the right support. Gen X doesn't understand Baby Boomers' loyalty and dedication to the company. Millennials may find Gen X's approach to work cold and lacking enthusiasm. Gen Z feels lonely and struggles to connect with other generations. This creates misunderstanding and tension in the workplace.

The real advantage comes when we shift our perspective and use these differences to create conditions for generational synergy. What is generational synergy? Employees working together and leveraging their differences to produce better outcomes than they would have alone or within their generational silos. Synergy means positive outcomes for both the employee and the organization, which could be the deciding factor in whether an organization thrives or fails in a competitive business climate.

When generational differences are understood, valued, and celebrated, it unlocks innovation and performance.



**UNFORTUNATELY, ONLY 26% OF
EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE GENERATIONAL
SYNERGY AT WORK**

Why is generational synergy so important? Synergy is necessary to translate generational diversity into inclusion and performance. With synergy, organizations see increased odds of:

- **Inclusion (4x)**
- **Employees as Promoters (6x)**
- **Great work happening (9x)**

Generational synergy can be a competitive advantage when organizations intentionally create environments where generations learn from one another and work together towards shared goals.

When intergenerational workplaces embrace diverse viewpoints, perspectives, and ways of working, results soar. Generations work with each other, instead of around each other. Differences in communication styles or technology use are no longer sources of friction, but strengths that can be leveraged to build stronger teams.

"It's like a bridge. The younger generation is really tech savvy, but they may not have the best social skills. I work with data, so I would teach the older people how to make spreadsheets, and they would give me tips on how to be an ethical business professional in the workplace—things that you have to learn through experience."

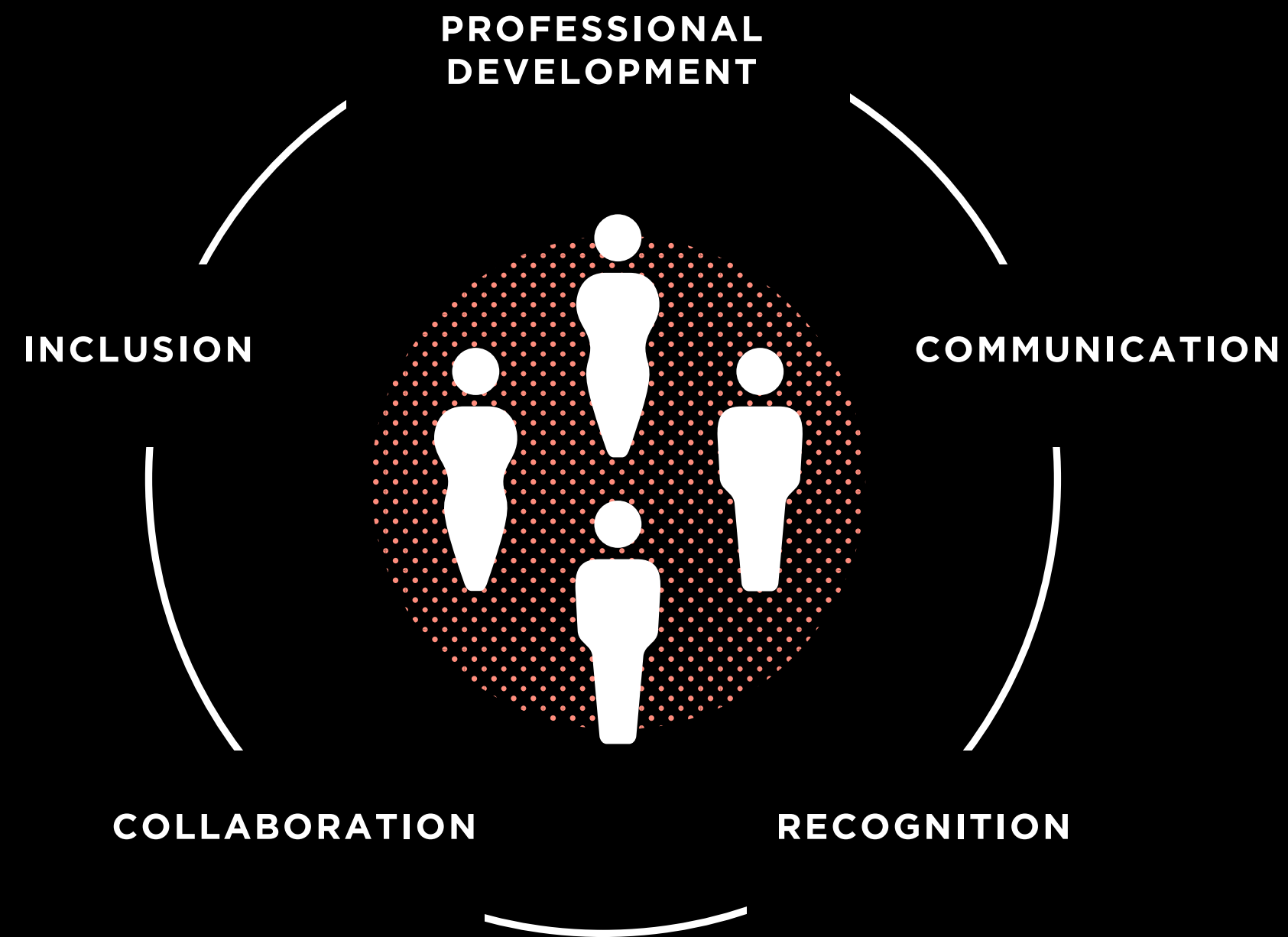
—MAX, DATA COORDINATOR (GEN 2)

The 5 elements of generational synergy

In our research, employees indicated there are 5 key areas that should be cultivated to achieve generational synergy. Strengthening these specific areas turns generational differences into a positive force that builds healthier cultures and better performance.

16x

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION ENSURES EMPLOYEES OF EVERY GENERATION FEEL SEEN AND VALUED FOR THEIR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS—INTEGRATED RECOGNITION BOOSTS GENERATIONAL SYNERGY 16X



Professional Development: All employees can grow and develop at work. Mentorship is circular and employees can learn from both older and younger generations.

Communication: Employees communicate effectively with one another across generations and use a variety of communication mediums.

Recognition: Recognition happens regularly, and everyone can give and receive it. There is variety and equity in recognition across all groups.

Collaboration: Employees collaborate well and also believe that working with diverse age groups and expertise leads to better results.

Inclusion: Employees of all generations feel welcomed, a sense of belonging, and included.

Together, these elements enable every generation to feel heard, seen, valued, and included. Understanding what motivates employees and what they struggle with in each of these areas can be a foundation for creating shared ways of working.

Empower all employees to grow, feel a sense of belonging and appreciation, and communicate and collaborate in ways that are comfortable for them.

"I have always been taught to embrace age diversity and that it just creates stronger teams. It allows you to look at things from different angles that you haven't before, so that you can build a stronger plan or look at whatever it is you're working on from a different view. So, I think it helps."

—STEVEN, SENIOR CONSULTANT (MILLENNIAL)

Generational synergy has ROI

Cross-generational synergy helps employees overcome their own generational struggles, setting them up for personal work success as well as contributing to a thriving workplace culture. Rather than being distracted by conflicts and miscommunication at work, generational synergy allows employees to focus on meeting goals, innovating, and doing great work, together.

When the 5 elements of generational synergy are not supported and cohesion is lacking, generational conflict emerges. The stress from poor communication and collaboration leads to 6x increased odds of burnout, as well as:

- 88%** decreased odds of doing great work
- 90%** decreased odds of thriving
- 93%** decreased odds of being engaged

But when each generation experiences synergy in the workplace, their specific generational contracts are more likely to be met and supported, reducing frustration and tension:

Baby Boomers are 6x more likely to have healthy boundaries.

Gen X workers are 8x more likely to trust senior leaders and 22x more likely to trust the organization to do the right thing.

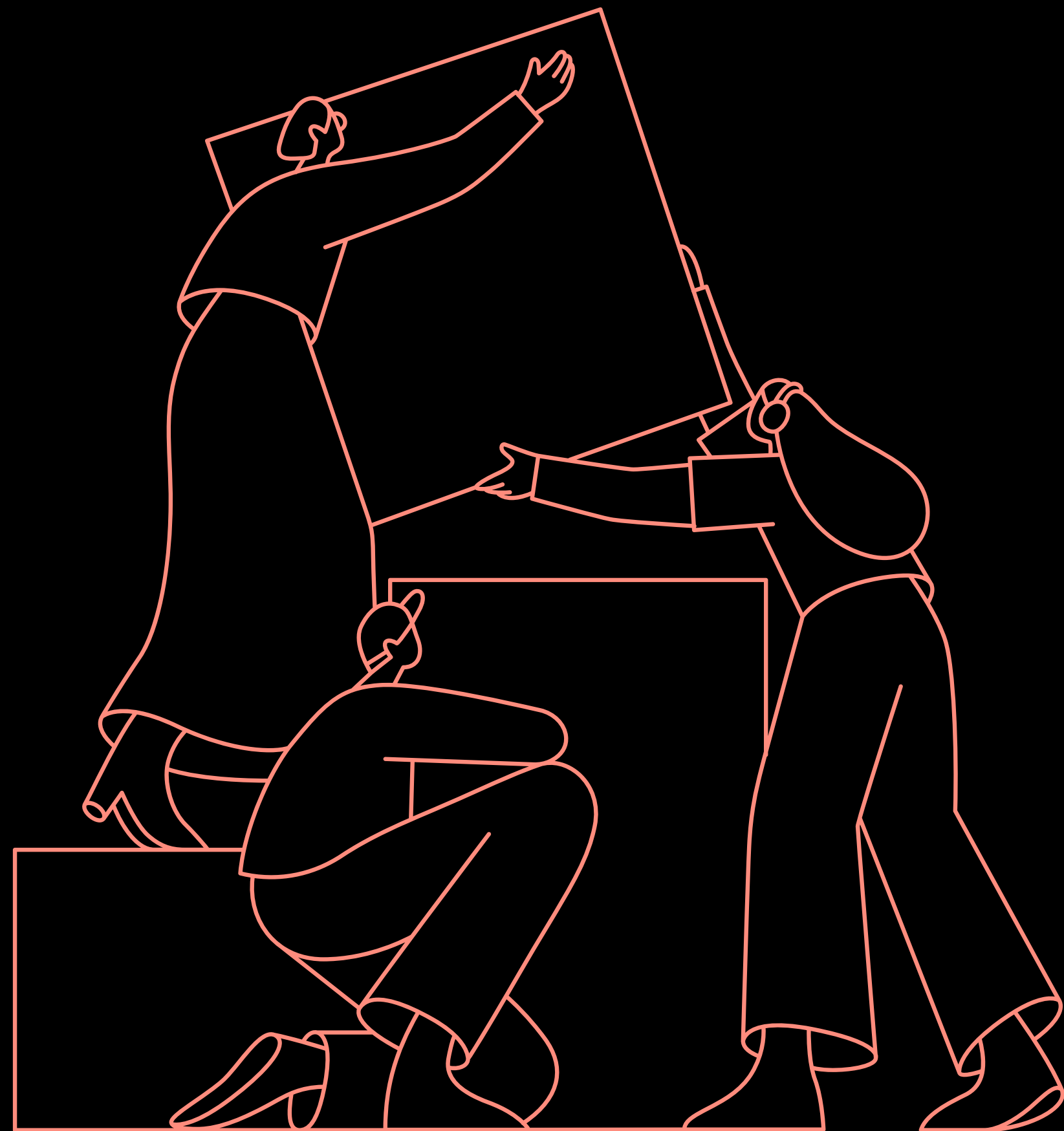
Millennials are 10x more likely to have a strong sense of purpose and 82% less likely to experience stress from values misalignment.

Gen Z workers are 5x more likely to feel a sense of community at work and feel connected to their teams (8x), leaders (10x), and the organization (6x).

Generational synergy also has an impact on cultural and business measures. Organizations have higher odds of trust and collaboration, which results in more innovation, improved retention, higher customer satisfaction, greater resilience, and growth.

ODDS OF BUSINESS OUTCOME	WHEN GENERATIONAL SYNERGY IS PRESENT
Low turnover	2x
Company financial stability	8x
Innovation	8x
Customer satisfaction	10x
Organizational growth	10x
Organization adapts well to change	11x

ODDS OF CULTURAL OUTCOME	WHEN GENERATIONAL SYNERGY IS PRESENT
Culture of honesty	11x
Collaboration encouraged	11x
Leadership can achieve goals	12x
The organization cares for all employees	12x
High level of trust	12x
I value the organization's policies and procedures	13x
I respect the organization's values	17x



RECOMMENDATIONS

Shift from managing generations separately to building conditions for generational synergy, starting with the 5 key elements

Create cross-generational growth and connection opportunities for all employees, so they can learn from and work with employees in other generations

Provide tools for all employees to communicate and collaborate in ways that are comfortable for them, and implement systems to recognize one another for great work

Wellbeing for Every Generation



Wellbeing is the foundation for [high-performance cultures](#) that endure, but one-size-fits-all wellbeing initiatives often fail to connect with employees. Organizations may expect all generations to thrive under the same environmental and emotional conditions, but each generation prioritizes wellbeing and experiences burnout differently.

While the inclination may be to provide different wellbeing strategies and resources for each generation, the more effective approach is to strengthen generational synergy, which enables every generation to feel cared for at work.

By expanding our definitions of wellbeing and burnout, informed by generational contracts, organizations can provide wellbeing offerings that better align with employee values, improving personal, cultural, and business outcomes.

A holistic wellbeing approach can address varying generational wellbeing needs

Overall, employees define wellbeing on a spectrum from security to enrichment, and each generation prioritizes these differently.

Security Wellbeing: Job and financial stability, health, safety

Enrichment Wellbeing: Growth, community, flexibility, purpose, feeling valued

GENERATION	TYPE OF WELLBEING	WELLBEING PRIORITIES
Baby Boomer	Security	Stability, health
Gen X	Security	Stability, health, flexibility
Millennial	Enrichment	Purpose, feeling valued
Gen Z	Enrichment	Community, growth, purpose

These wellbeing priorities align with the generational contracts, where Baby Boomers value security, Gen X independence and flexibility, and the younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) look for more enrichment factors.

Each generation also has different struggles when it comes to wellbeing at work:

- Almost half (45%) of Gen Z feel uncomfortable openly talking about wellbeing at work (more than Millennials or Gen X)
- Younger generations are more likely to say their wellbeing isn't supported by leaders (44% of Gen Z, 38% of Millennials)
- Gen X (43%) feel a lack of flexibility negatively impacts their work

Viewing employee wellbeing through generational contracts helps organizations design holistic solutions that address the struggles of all employees. Understanding how different generations define and prioritize wellbeing, and what they struggle with, is key to ensuring the right offerings are provided to meet all employees' needs. When employees feel a strong sense of wellbeing, odds of generational synergy improve 13x.

"I think for me it's flexibility because I've created a profile of what I'm capable of doing, what I can deliver. I always deliver when it matters. I think the people who have managed me understand that and I've gained that flexibility. And for me, that's a big part of wellbeing."

—MATTHEW, PROJECT MANAGER (GEN X)

Generational synergy prevents early burnout

An important component of high wellbeing is preventing burnout. But burnout is more than just the weight of too much work with too little time for recovery. When employees described their experiences with burnout in focus groups, what we heard was more than fatigue—it was the strain of having to be someone inauthentic:

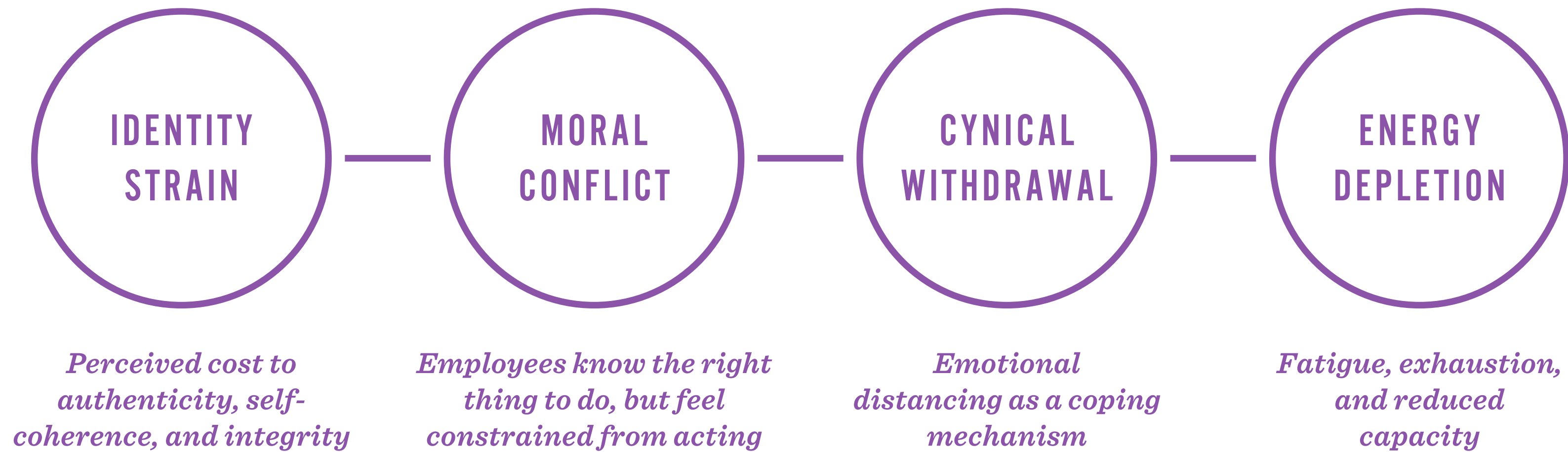
“Very, very few people will care for your wellbeing... you’re the only person who’s looking out for yourself basically.” (Gen Z)

“I knew the right thing to do...but my boss caved completely.” (Millennial)

“It’s frustrating...there’s no support because there’s nobody behind you to help with these questions.” (Gen X)

These statements reflect early warning signs for burnout. Burnout begins with an erosion of self-trust, a breakdown in connection between the employee and the organization—when the employee is unable to make sense of their work experience, as they perceive they are being asked to be someone they are not. Employees can no longer convince themselves that what they are feeling is temporary or acceptable, and severe burnout (and the disengagement and attrition that comes with it) begins to take hold.

OUR RESEARCH INFORMS
OUR EARLY WARNING INDEX,
WHICH ENCOMPASSES
FOUR KEY AREAS THAT
LEAD TO BURNOUT:



The model represents the phases employees experience in workplaces filled with tension and conflict, as can happen in organizations without generational synergy. When employees, no matter what age, feel they cannot be themselves at work and can no longer make sense of the

disconnect of who they must pretend to be at work, they begin to disengage and deplete.

A new employee is excited, enthusiastic, and eager to contribute. They join an organization for its values, inclusion, transparency, and innovation.

But, over time, they learn the unspoken rules of working at the organization: speaking up is risky. Values only apply sometimes. Decisions are made based on politics, not principles.

To succeed, the employee begins to adjust their tone and personality to fit in. They stop asking questions and stay quiet when something feels wrong.

As a result, they stop being authentic at work. They feel a moral conflict between doing what is required and what is right. They use cynicism to cope, eventually losing all motivation and energy.

EARLY WARNING EXPERIENCES SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT WELLBEING OUTCOMES:

80x

increase in odds of burnout

5x

increase in odds of anxiety

53%

decrease in wellbeing

AS WELL AS ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE:

36%

decrease in odds of innovation

38%

decrease in odds of growth

52%

decrease in desire to stay

YOUNGER GENERATIONS REPORT EARLY WARNING SIGNS MORE FREQUENTLY THAN OLDER EMPLOYEES:

42%

of Gen Z employees

38%

of Millennial employees

35%

of Gen X employees

28%

of Baby Boomer employees

Nearly half (49%) of Gen Z employees feel they have to suppress their values at work, compared to only 26% of Baby Boomers.

The good news: achieving generational synergy can prevent early burnout.

Generational synergy reduces the odds of early warning experiences by 53%. When generations work together well and act cohesively, employees of all ages feel a strong sense of identity, authenticity, and integrity that prevents early warning experiences. Employees can be their true selves, speak honestly, feel seen, and work through conflict together.

Most of all, they feel valued for exactly who they are, no matter what generation they belong to.

RECOGNITION IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO HELP EMPLOYEES FEEL SEEN FOR WHO THEY ARE AND THE VALUE THEY ADD TO THE ORGANIZATION. ORGANIZATIONS WITH INTEGRATED RECOGNITION SEE:

9x

INCREASE IN THE ODDS OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

32%

DECREASE THAT EMPLOYEES FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM THE PEOPLE THEY WANT TO BE AT WORK

43%

DECREASE IN THE ODDS OF EARLY WARNING EXPERIENCES

"I was working as an account manager, and it was a horribly toxic corporate environment, and I was miserable. I did it for four years and just toughed it out. And then one day I realized there's more to life. And if I'm hating every day of my life, why am I even alive?"

—LAUREN, PERSONAL TRAINER (MILLENNIAL)

Wellbeing, when aligned with generational needs, contributes to innovation, growth, and resilience

When wellbeing offerings meet generational needs, there is a tangible impact on how employees work. Innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial performance all improve.

Achieving wellbeing through generational synergy doesn't just help employees feel better—it changes how they work and leads to better business outcomes.

ODDS OF BUSINESS OUTCOME

WHEN SATISFIED WITH WELLBEING

Low turnover

3x

Company financial stability

5x

Innovation

5x

Customer satisfaction

5x

Organizational growth

6x

Organization adapts well to change

6x

RECOMMENDATIONS



Rather than separate wellbeing strategies or a one-size-fits-all approach, strengthen workplace conditions that support generational synergy and take differences into account

Prioritize providing job security and stability so all generations feel supported and thrive together

Create environments where employees can be their authentic selves at work, preventing misalignment with generational values and early warning experiences

Synergy Enables Tech Adoption



Most organizations rely on technology to facilitate communication and collaboration, especially on [dispersed or remote teams](#). Too often, the focus is on differences in generational tech adoption and how to get older generations to use tech more. The bigger risk, however, is an overreliance on technology at the expense of real connection, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing across generations.

When technology replaces relationship-building and in-person sharing of information, it can actually widen generational gaps. In environments where generational synergy is missing, a growing reliance on AI tools may replace intergenerational communication as younger employees seeking guidance turn to AI instead of building relationships with their older colleagues. As we've seen previously, strong relationships are [key to high performance](#), and generational synergy relies on human connection, not technology.

Organizations should prioritize building generational synergy alongside tech adoption. Without synergy, tech falls flat, but when tech is used with synergy in mind, it shines.

Overreliance on technology can weaken generational synergy

Although organizations hope technology increases collaboration and connection, many employees (particularly Millennials and Gen Z) find technology makes it more difficult to collaborate with employees from different generations.

Investments in AI can also unintentionally redirect younger employees away from cross-generational learning and disrupt the flow of information across the organization. Employees may use AI for answers and best practices instead of connecting with employees in other generations.

While organizations invest heavily in technology to improve collaboration:

38%

of employees say that technology makes it harder to collaborate with employees outside of their own generation

44%

of employees report that organizational encouragement to use AI has made them seek out human subject matter experts less

When AI is over-encouraged by the organization to become the first stop for problem-solving, opportunities to engage with older colleagues' experience and judgment decrease. As digital tools reduce cross-generational information sharing and guidance, the challenge becomes more than just a gap in tech usage. Tech adoption, if not done in an intentional way, begins to weaken intergenerational learning and connection.

GENERATION	TECHNOLOGY MAKES IT HARDER TO COLLABORATE WITH COWORKERS FROM DIFFERENT GENERATIONS	ORGANIZATIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT TO USE AI HAS MADE ME SEEK OUT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS LESS
Baby Boomers	28%	26%
Gen X	28%	31%
Millennials	43%	52%
Gen Z	45%	49%

"Technology can create a false sense of connection. People feel connected because they see uploads, but they don't know that person."

—JASMINE, RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR (MILLENNIAL)

Synergy bridges gaps in tech usage

Each generation views technology in the workplace differently, but synergy can help. While overuse of tech can be harmful, with synergy, employees across generations can have a healthier relationship to technology that drives better business outcomes.

Millennials and Gen Z are more likely than other generations to feel technology, like virtual meetings and chatting apps, make it possible to better connect with their teams, but are also more likely to feel pressure to help other generations use tech.

GENERATION	USE OF TECHNOLOGY	BELIEF IN TECH AS TOOL FOR COLLABORATION
Baby Boomer	Struggle to connect with others through digital tools	Do not see tech as enabling collaboration
Gen X	No fear of technology	23% less likely to see AI as a tool to strengthen generational collaboration
Millennial	Pressured to be tech experts (64% help other generations with tech at work)	69% believe digital tools make it easier to connect with other generations, but are 39% more likely to feel pressure to use AI instead of going to other generations for expertise
Gen Z	Adaptable but less enthusiastic about technology (46% believe new technology can replace them)	32% increased odds that technology makes it hard to disconnect from work

Older generations are less concerned with learning and adopting new technology as they rely on the younger generations to do so. This places pressure on younger employees to serve as tech experts and, as tools like AI are introduced, makes them feel more replaceable.

When organizations heavily encourage AI usage, it signals to younger generations that they should turn to technology instead of older generations for information or help, reducing collaboration, increasing stress, and undermining the human connection technology is meant to support.

Understanding the differences and struggles each generation has with technology can help organizations develop a holistic strategy for technology adoption. The approach should not be to develop different technologies for different generations, but to build generational synergy that allows all employees to use technology together.

Generational synergy encourages more in-person sharing of institutional knowledge and allows younger generations to be valued for more than just their technology expertise. Synergy develops a workforce where employees of all generations fully utilize digital tools.

Synergy determines if tech is connecting or isolating

Whether employees see technology as helpful for collaboration depends less on age or generation—and more on whether they experience generational synergy.

The shared understanding and connection that comes with generational synergy breaks down stigmas and stereotypes of generational technology use, allowing employees to find it more beneficial for collaboration.

THE ODDS OF FEELING THAT TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP WITH COLLABORATION INCREASE WHEN THERE IS GENERATIONAL SYNERGY:

4x

Technology makes it possible to better connect with my team

5x

Able to make meaningful connections with coworkers I work with online

3x

Go out of my way to get help from other generations for their expertise

4x

Believe every generation can use technology well at work

4x

Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to go to older generations for help, resulting in 4x higher odds of doing great work

Because recognition is a main element of generational synergy, recognition technology in particular can be a powerful way to foster collaboration between generations. As recognition helps employees in all generations feel seen and valued for their expertise, it naturally builds meaningful connections across generations. Recognizing Millennials for helping other generations learn and adopt tech, for example, can help alleviate their frustrations.

"I use AI to interpret dense regulations, but I listen to my boss—40 years of experience matters."

—ALONZO, SAFETY ADVISOR (GEN 2)

Technology delivers more value in a culture of generational synergy

For technology to have the desired impact, a foundation of generational synergy must be in place.

When employees work in environments with generational synergy and are positive about technology's impact on collaboration, organizations benefit from more innovation, resilience, customer satisfaction, and financial results.

ODDS OF BUSINESS OUTCOME	EMPLOYEES APPRECIATE AI TOOLS AND HAVE SYNERGY	EMPLOYEES BELIEVE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS MAKES IT EASIER TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND HAVE SYNERGY
Organization adapts well to change	15x	11x
Innovation	14x	9x
Company financial stability	10x	8x
Customer satisfaction	17x	11x
Organizational growth	13x	11x

RECOMMENDATIONS



Generational synergy facilitates tech adoption, not the other way around—focus on creating conditions for synergy rather than driving specific generations to adopt tech

Create opportunities for cross-generational, human interaction and mentorship rather than relying solely on technology to build collaboration and connection

Leverage recognition as a strategic complement to technology, reinforcing human connection and relationship-building alongside digital and AI tools

Recognition as the Generational Bridge



One of the most effective ways to build generational synergy? Employee recognition.

Employee recognition celebrates and unites employees across generations and is one of the 5 elements of the generational synergy model discussed previously in this report. Recognition is a simple but powerful way to bridge generational gaps, and organizations have a multitude of recognition options and ways to recognize.

Organizations can leverage generational differences to make recognition more personal, calling out each generation's unique attributes, which, rather than siloing generations, contributes to generational synergy. In fact, integrating generational contracts, personal traits, and unique skills in a recognition moment makes it even more meaningful as it calls out the uniqueness of each individual and their place in the organization.

Recognition can reframe generational differences to build trust, belonging, and great work.

Recognition honors the different generational values and strengthens connection

As previously discussed, each generation has a generational contract that influences how they feel about work:

BABY BOOMERS
Loyalty for Security

GEN X
Competence for Autonomy

MILLENNIALS
Meaning for Commitment

GEN Z
Inclusion for Engagement

Weaving these generational contracts into recognition strategies can help recognition be more meaningful to employees in each generation. While some organizations may try to create entirely different recognition experiences for each generation, designing a holistic recognition strategy that integrates all the generational contracts is more effective at building generational synergy.

Holistic, integrated recognition is embedded into the daily employee experience, provides tools to recognize for a variety of reasons, and ensures recognition is frequent, public, and always improving. Leaders and employees create personalized recognition experiences that highlight generational values and show how they contribute to generational synergy.

Providing recognition for diverse contributions enables organizations to engage all generations while honoring the distinct expectations each holds:

Loyalty. Baby Boomers place a high degree of importance on loyalty, and celebrating career anniversaries validates their loyalty to the organization. However, career celebrations can build loyalty for employees of any generation. When organizations celebrate and recognize contributions over time, odds of a strong sense of loyalty for all employees improve 7x (24x for Baby Boomers).

Skills and expertise. Highlighting employees' unique skills, expertise, and contributions can help build trust and connection for all employees, especially Gen X. It signals to coworkers that the employee is a trusted source of information and a valuable member of the team. Odds of trust in leaders increase 12x (14x for Gen X) and trust in the organization 19x (26x for Gen X) with integrated recognition.

"For me to feel appreciated is: try my idea. Because I'm the one who works with the people and with the software. I know how it works."

—CATHY, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT (GEN X)

Values and purpose. While Millennials place a high value on doing work with purpose, employees of other generations also want purpose. We found 3 out of 4 employees feel their organization's purpose motivates them to do their best work.

Recognition is the most direct way to connect employee work to the organization's goals, purpose, and values. Odds employees will experience generational synergy improve 10x (16x for Millennials) when employees' work and values align.

Community and inclusion. Feeling a sense of belonging is crucial for all employees to thrive at work, and even more so for Gen Z. Employee recognition, especially peer-to-peer and cross-functional recognition, is a natural way to build workplace community and belonging.

When recognition is integrated into an organization's culture, odds of a strong sense of community increase 7x and inclusion 9x. For Gen Z, that sense of community improves the odds they feel generational synergy 16x.

Recognition can also demonstrate growth for Gen Z employees, as 70% say recognition helps them feel they are growing in their career. This increases their odds of wanting to stay 22x.

Recognition is one of the most direct ways to convert the differing generational values into shared purpose, trust, and belonging. Crafting personal recognition experiences around generational contracts fosters a sense of generational synergy for everyone.

"If I wasn't recognized or if I didn't feel I was valued, I would want to keep looking elsewhere. I just want to work somewhere I feel valued. If I had a constant pressure that someone else is better and always above me, then I would want to leave because I feel replaceable or not needed."

—AMOS, PHARMACY TECHNICIAN (GEN X)

Recognition drives real business results

Recognition does more than help achieve generational synergy; it also greatly improves cultural and business outcomes. When employees work in organizations with integrated recognition, there is more trust, collaboration, innovation, and growth.

ODDS OF CULTURAL OUTCOME

WITH INTEGRATED RECOGNITION

I value the organization's policies and procedures

15x

Collaboration is encouraged

16x

Culture of honesty

17x

Leadership can achieve goals

17x

The organization cares for all employees

18x

I respect the organization's values

19x

High level of trust

21x

ODDS OF BUSINESS OUTCOME	WITH INTEGRATED RECOGNITION
Low turnover	2x
Company financial stability	10x
Customer satisfaction	12x
Organizational growth	12x
Innovation	13x
Organization adapts well to change	14x

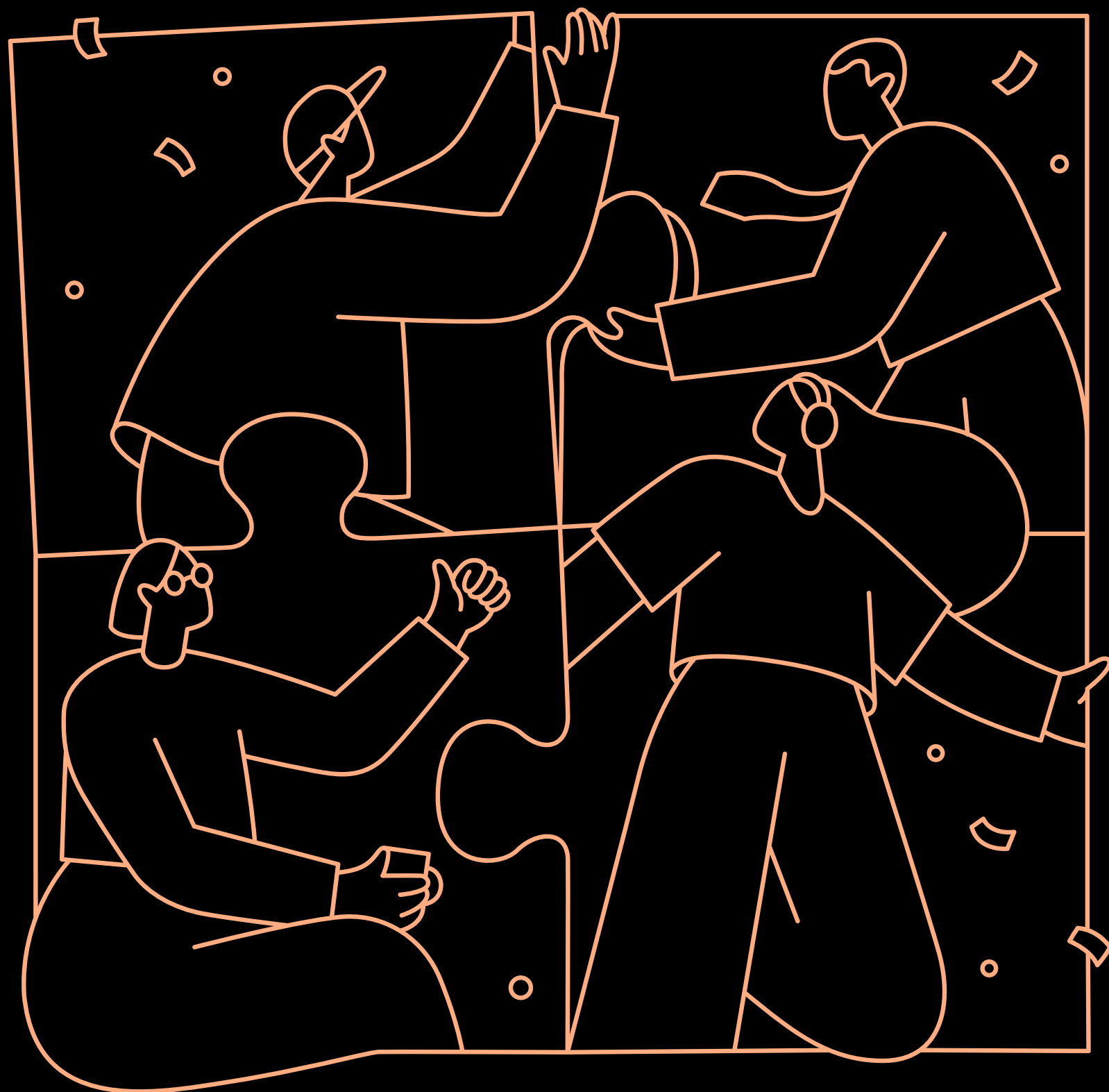
Organizations cannot afford to exclude employee recognition from their corporate strategies. Integrated recognition is a crucial strategy to strengthen generational synergy and build thriving cultures, which increase innovation, improve customer satisfaction, and grow companies. Recognition is not just a cultural add-on, it is a strategic lever that nurtures employees and improves businesses.

16x

**INTEGRATED RECOGNITION
BOOSTS GENERATIONAL SYNERGY 16X**

"If your immediate supervisor creates a team environment that regularly highlights positive behaviors, it cultivates an environment where people are recognizing each other. Peer recognition can be even more powerful than from someone higher up. Hopefully, you create a culture where recognition is coming from all directions and at all frequencies."

—LINDSAY, CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER (MILLENNIAL)



RECOMMENDATIONS

Use recognition as a practical way to strengthen the other 4 conditions for generational synergy (emphasizing growth, communication, collaboration, and inclusion in recognition moments)

Create a holistic recognition strategy that includes a variety of reasons to honor all of the generational contracts

Personalize recognition presentations by highlighting generational values and unique ways the employee has contributed to alignment with generational synergy

Start Building Synergy

Shared systems build generational synergy and help multi-generational teams succeed together better than separate strategies for each generation. Leveraging differences as strengths and points of connection will be more effective than trying to accommodate and cater to different generations.

Achieving generational synergy reveals the full value of the diverse perspectives and experiences each generation brings. It builds belonging instead of conflict. All employees thrive at work, and organizations become more innovative and grow.

How do you start building generational synergy in your workplace? By focusing on shared practices that foster trust and connection across the generations and help employees of every generation feel seen. Employee recognition does just that.

1. Implement a recognition technology solution built to personalize the recognition experience, like [Culture Cloud](#)[®], which offers recognition in a variety of ways that fulfill all the generational contracts
2. Honor loyalty and build belonging by celebrating career milestones with [Anniversaries](#)
3. Recognize skills, expertise, and growth in ways that directly tie to organizational purpose and values through [everyday performance recognition](#)
4. Build community and belonging with [company celebrations](#) and [life events](#)
5. Provide [peer-to-peer](#) and [offline recognition](#) tools with [integrations](#) so every employee in every generation feels appreciated and valued
6. Work with a proven recognition partner, like [O.C. Tanner](#), who can help you design a recognition solution that strengthens generational synergy

"People come to work for more than the paycheck.

They want to feel like they're part of the organization, and the more you can engage people through recognition, checking in, and making them feel like they belong, the more they'll give back to you and the more they'll stay."

—JOHN HAMMOND, CHRO, NORTON HEALTHCARE

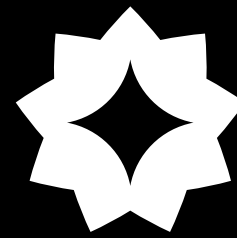
O.C. Tanner's Culture by Design approach helps organizations craft unique recognition solutions that reach all employees, regardless of role, geography, or generation. To learn more about the difference we can make together, please [contact us](#) or visit octanner.com.

Notes on Methodology

The O.C. Tanner Institute used multiple research methods to support the 2026 State of Generations Report, including focus group interviews and cross-sectional surveys. The qualitative findings are derived from 9 U.S.-based focus groups with employees, leaders, and HR professionals conducted in the winter of 2025. Employees represented a range of employers and industries (including both public and private firms).

The quantitative findings were derived from an online survey distributed in early 2026. The total sample size of 5,702 is comprised of employees working at organizations with 500+ employees in the United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

The O.C. Tanner Institute collected and analyzed all survey data. This sample is sufficient to generate meaningful conclusions about the cultures of organizations in the included countries. However, because the study does not include population data, results are subject to statistical errors customarily associated with sample-based information. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from the O.C. Tanner Institute.



O.C.TANNER

Thrive at work