

# **Job Satisfaction and Generational Difference: The Shifting Nature of the Workplace**

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*This study investigates job satisfaction across different generational cohorts within the workforce. It explores how intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, work relations, work-life balance, and employee activation variables influence job satisfaction among these groups. A web-based survey was conducted across the United States, involving 566 participants. Regression analysis was used to identify significant predictors of job satisfaction for each generational cohort. The results revealed that interesting work significantly predicts job satisfaction for all generations, with the strongest impact observed in Generation Z. Baby boomers, Generation X, and millennials reported high levels of satisfaction with pay and relations with management. The study highlights distinct generational preferences, contributing to a nuanced understanding of job satisfaction drivers.*

*Keywords: job satisfaction, generations, intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, work-life balance, worker relations, employee activation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the contemporary workplace, understanding the diverse factors contributing to job satisfaction is critical for fostering a productive and engaged workforce. As the generational composition of the workforce evolves, it becomes imperative to examine how different age cohorts perceive and prioritize aspects of their work life. This paper examines job satisfaction across four main generational cohorts—baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z—each shaped by unique socio-economic conditions and technological advancements during their formative years.

Historically, job satisfaction has been influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Ansori *et al.*, 2022; Wood, 1974), work relations, and work-life balance (Andrade *et al.*, 2019; Haar *et al.*, 2014). However,

with the shift in workplace dynamics and expectations, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, these factors may hold different significance levels for each generational group. Millennials and Generation Z, for example, have demonstrated distinct preferences for flexibility and purpose-driven work, contrasting with earlier generations who placed greater emphasis on job security and hierarchical advancement (Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018; Pasko *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2011).

This study utilizes a comprehensive survey distributed across the United States to gather empirical data on job satisfaction among different generational groups. By integrating theoretical frameworks with contemporary data, this paper investigates the shifting paradigms of job satisfaction and provides actionable insights for organizations striving to accommodate a multigenerational workforce. Through this analysis, we seek to contribute to the broader discourse on employment satisfaction, exploring how generational identities can influence workplace dynamics and employee retention strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research has been published on the antecedents of job satisfaction in a variety of contexts and for different populations of workers (Abate *et al.*, 2018; Andrade *et al.*, 2019, Andrade, Miller, and Westover, 2021; Andrade, Schill, Westover, and King, 2021; Andrade *et al.*, 2023; Conference Board, 2022; Hall *et al.*, 2023; Jena and Nayak, 2023; Olafsdottir and Einarsdottir, 2024; O'Sullivan, 2022; Zou, 2015). Four categories of variables capture much of this research: intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, work relations, and work-life balance. Global surveys indicate that stress, dissatisfaction, and lack of happiness are leading causes for people seeking new jobs with nearly half of respondents indicating increasing expectations for work happiness (Indeed, 2022). In Canada, lack of happiness, or a sense of well-being in a job, is second only to pay in reasons for turnover (Indeed, 2021). The great resignation illustrates the extent to which employees are leaving jobs for greater flexibility and work-life balance (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024; Harter, 2022; Microsoft, 2021). Since the pandemic, employees have opted to work at home where feasible or advocate for hybrid work arrangements to achieve work-life balance (Office for National Statistics, 2022). However, this may have negative repercussions due to gender inequalities (Partridge, 2021).

A strand of research that has been minimally examined is differences in job satisfaction among generational cohorts. Individuals growing up in the same period experience similar social and historical events, influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Mannheim, 1952). The generations that comprise today's workplace are as follows: baby boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1976), Generation Y/millennials (born 1977-1995), and Generation Z (born 1996 and later) (Robinson, 2018). Studies measuring generational work values such as growth, loyalty, security, hard work, comfort, work attitudes, and personality have failed to identify consistent patterns, but show that employees from all generations have a sense of personal accomplishment and are similarly satisfied (Kowske *et al.*, 2010). A meta-analysis of generational differences and work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitments, turnover intent) found no generational differences (Costanza *et al.*, 2012).

In another study, variation in job satisfaction across generations was minimal. However, millennials reported more overall company satisfaction and satisfaction with security, recognition, development and advancement. At the same time, boomers and Gen Xers had similar satisfaction levels with pay, benefits, turnover, and work characteristics (Kowske *et al.*, 2010). Boreout, characterized by boredom and apathy due to lack of mental stimuli, was found to negatively impact career, life, and job satisfaction for both Gen Xers and millennials in the service industry in Nigeria (Abubakar, 2020). For IT workers in India, employee engagement was identified as a means of providing millennial employees with greater autonomy and control in their work, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and addressing high attrition (Jena and Nayak, 2023). In the banking industry, generational identity did not show a relation to turnover intention (Abate *et al.*, 2018).

Millennials are characterized by high self-esteem (Holt *et al.*, 2012) and a lack of understanding of the relationship between effort and performance (Alexander and Sysko, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2010) leading to lower long-term job commitment (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2013), particularly when they receive

negative performance feedback and low rewards (Laird *et al.*, 2015). Entitled employees who dislike feedback and find it harmful to self-esteem have been found to have low job satisfaction (Harvey and Harris, 2010; Harvey and Martinko, 2009), but with exceptions where accountability is high (Laird *et al.*, 2015). Millennials may be more likely to quit jobs if they experience high stress even though they lack options due to inexperience (Matin *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, boomers and Gen Xers may stay in jobs despite being unhappy due to a lack of skill currency (Abate *et al.*, 2018).

Dissatisfaction can cause lower-quality customer service and job burnout (Lu and Gursoy, 2016). Millennials and Xers have been shown to value their jobs and potential for promotion yet lack long-term commitment, although effective management practices, rewards, and recognition contribute to retention for these generations (Pena, 2013). For millennials, organizational type affects job satisfaction, specifically, having a voice in decision-making in independent organizations and opportunities for growth in corporate organizations (Muskat and Reitsamer, 2019). Other studies have found that millennials value task direction (Morton, 2002; Zemke *et al.*, 2000), leadership, and mentoring (Gursoy *et al.*, 2013) as well as opportunities for career growth (Kong *et al.*, 2014). Satisfaction for these employees is founded in organizational support for goal achievement.

A comparison of Australian Gen Xers and boomers found that boomers had higher levels of job satisfaction and a lower likelihood of quitting, consistent with generational characteristics (Benson and Brown, 2011). A weak relationship was found for commitment. Predictors of job satisfaction included job security, resources, and co-worker support for boomers with promotion, role ambiguity, and supervisor support predictive for both. Benefits, promotion, and supervisor support predicted organizational commitment for both generations with job security, role ambiguity, and resources predictive only for boomers and co-worker support only for Gen Xers. Finally, pay level, promotion, role conflict, and supervisor support correlated with willingness to quit for both groups with a lack of co-worker support salient only for Gen Xers. These findings indicate specific differences across the two generations as well as a number of commonalities, suggesting a need for awareness on the part of managers, and policies and work cultures that reflect generational distinctions.

The various studies cited indicate the challenges and importance of managers understanding generational identities to increase job satisfaction, performance, and customer service and retain qualified, effective employees. Drivers of job satisfaction may differ by generation, but research findings appear to indicate that workers from all generational cohorts find satisfaction in their work.

## RESEARCH MODEL AND DESIGN

To understand how job satisfaction varies across generational cohorts, it is essential to consider the distinct socio-economic contexts and formative experiences that shape each generation's work values and expectations. Baby boomers, who experienced economic stability and traditional work hierarchies, often prioritize job security and extrinsic rewards such as pay and benefits. In contrast, Generation X, having witnessed economic fluctuations and the rise of dual-income households, places importance on both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, valuing autonomy and career advancement opportunities. Millennials, entering the workforce during economic recessions and technological booms, seek flexibility, meaningful work, and positive work relations. Generation Z, the digital natives, prioritize work-life balance, purpose-driven work, and supervisor support (Close and Martins, 2015). Given the gap in the literature with limited research on generational differences in job satisfaction variables based on generational characteristics, we propose the following hypotheses:

***Hypothesis 1a:*** *Intrinsic rewards influence job satisfaction more strongly among younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) compared to baby boomers and Generation X.*

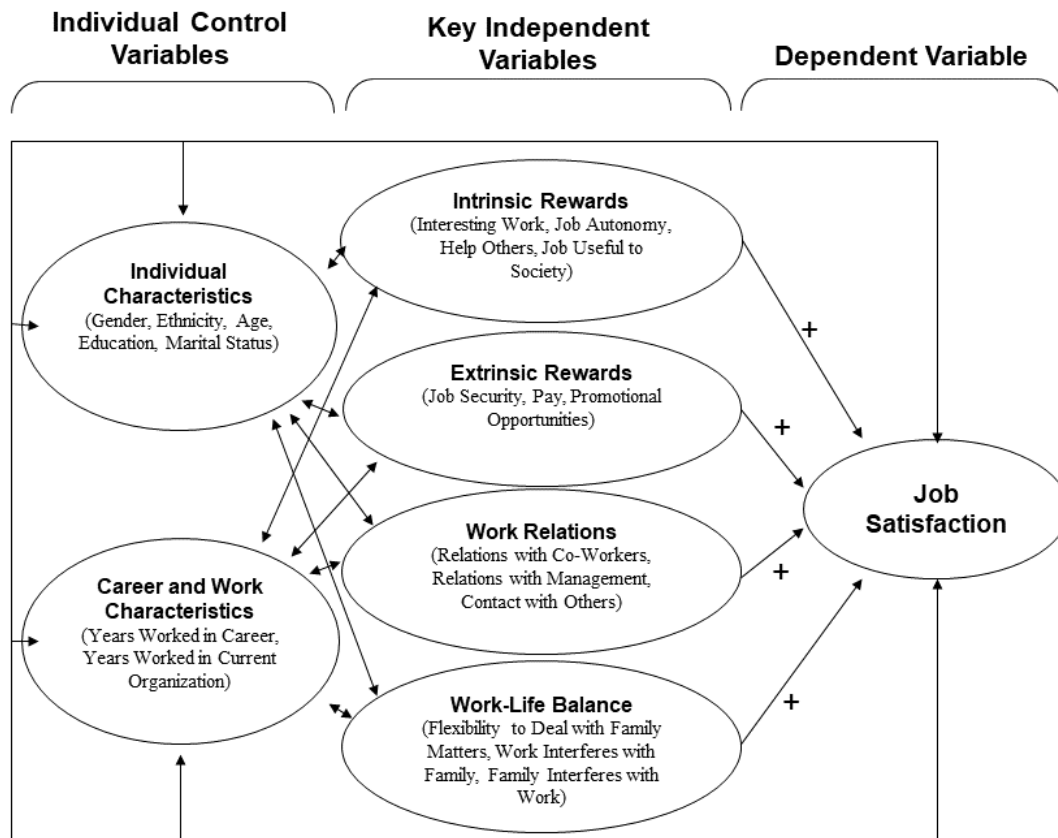
***Hypothesis 1b:*** *Extrinsic rewards influence job satisfaction more strongly among older generations (Baby boomers and Generation X) compared to younger generations (millennials and Generation Z).*

**Hypothesis 2:** Work relations have a stronger impact on job satisfaction for millennials than for other generations.

**Hypothesis 3:** Work-life balance is a stronger predictor of job satisfaction for millennials and Generation Z compared to baby boomers and generation X.

**Hypothesis 4:** Worker activation determinants have a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction for younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) compared to older generations (baby boomers and Generation X).

**FIGURE 1  
RESEARCH MODEL**



Modeled, in part, after the International Social Survey Work Orientations Module and the work of Andrade *et al.* (2023), we developed a web-based survey to explore the shifting nature of the workplace. The survey included questions related to intrinsic, extrinsic, workplace relations, work-life balance, and employee activation variables. The survey was administered during winter 2024 using a stratified random sampling method across the United States, resulting in 566 completed surveys.

**Operationalization of Variables**

We operationalized the study variables following the approach of Andrade *et al.* (2023). Additionally, building on the survey conducted by Andrade *et al.* (2023), new survey questions were added to the follow-up survey, which allowed us to utilize new variables in the analysis. See Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1**  
**STUDY VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENTS**

Variable	Item
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Job satisfaction	“How satisfied are you in your main job?” (0) extremely dissatisfied to (10) extremely satisfied
<i>Intrinsic Rewards</i>	
Interesting Job	“My job is interesting.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job autonomy	“I can work independently.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Help others	“In my job I can help other people.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job useful to society	“My job is useful to society.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Extrinsic Rewards</i>	
Pay	“My income is high.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Job security	“My job is secure.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Promotional opportunities	“My opportunities for advancement are high.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Work stress	“How often do you find your work stressful?” (1) never to (5) always
<i>Work Relations</i>	
Relations with management	“In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between management and employees?” (1) very bad to (5) very good
Relations with coworkers	“In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between workmates/colleagues?” (1) very bad to (5) very good
Contact with others	“In my job, I have personal contact with others.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Work-Life Balance</i>	
Flexibility to deal with family matters	“How difficult would it be for you to take an hour or two off during work hours, to take care of personal or family matters? (1) not difficult at all to (5) very difficult
Work interference with family	“How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your family?” (1) never to (3) always
Family interference with work	“How often do you feel that the demands of your family interfere with your job?” (1) never to (3) always
<i>Worker Engagement</i>	
Job engagement	“Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job?” (1) not at all engaged to (10) extremely engaged
Do what you do best	“I Have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Understanding of Meaning and Purpose</i>	
Meaningful work	“I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Purposeful work	“I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree

Variable	Item
<i>Sense of Encouragement and Belonging</i>	
Supervisor encouragement	“My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts.” (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree
Where I am meant to be	“I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be.” (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree
<i>Leadership Efficacy</i>	“I see myself as a leader.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Career Meaning and Commitment</i>	
Meaningful career	“I have found a meaningful career.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Organizational Commitment	“I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Controls</i>	Dummy variables for race, ethnicity, education level, marital status, and state of residence; Continuous variables for birth year, full-time years worked in career, and years worked in current organization.

## Statistical Methodology

Following the approach of Andrade *et al.* (2023), we used a multi-step approach to analyze respondents' work experience and characteristics data as well as their job satisfaction responses. First, we conducted bivariate and descriptive analyses of work characteristics and attitudes by generation and for the full sample. Next, we tested statistically significant differences in job satisfaction between generations using t-test analyses. We then examined generation-specific OLS and ordered probit regression models to evaluate the relative contribution of work characteristics and experiences to job satisfaction for each generation. Finally, using moderation analyses, we tested for statistically significant differences between generations in the impact of work-life and worker activation determinants on job satisfaction.

## RESULTS

### Participant Demographics

More than 550 respondents ( $n=566$ ) participated in the modal stratified random sample in Utah and other areas of the U.S. The respondents were full- or part-time workers who worked prior to the COVID pandemic and were employed at the time of the study. As seen in Table 2, 129 respondents fell within the Baby Boomer generation (born 1946-1964), 191 fell into the Gen X generation (born 1965-1980), 185 fell into the Millennial generation (1981-1996), and 55 fell into the Gen Z generation (1997-2012). As seen in Table 3, males comprised 46.11% ( $n=261$ ) of the sample and females 53.89% ( $n=305$ ). Respondents provided details on their racial and ethnic background; as seen in Tables 4 and 5 below, 67.67% of the sample was White or Caucasian, 19.96% of the sample was Black or African American, 9.72% of the sample was Asian, just over 1% was Native American or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and less than 2% of the sample reported their race as “other”. They also reported their ethnicity, and 88.34% of respondents were not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, and 11.66% of respondents were.

**TABLE 2  
GENERATION OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Baby Boomer	129	23.0%
Gen X	191	34.1%
Millennial	185	33.0%
Gen Z	55	9.8%
Total	560	100

**TABLE 3  
GENDER OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Female	305	53.89
Male	261	46.11
Total	566	100

**TABLE 4  
RACE OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
White	383	67.67
Black or African-American	113	19.96
Asian	55	9.72
Native American or Alaska Native	2	0.35
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	4	0.71
Other	9	1.59
Total	566	100

**TABLE 5  
ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	66	11.66
Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	500	88.34
Total	566	100

As seen in Table 6, over 44% ( $n=249$ ) of the sample have only some college or less, and a little under 56% ( $n=314$ ) have a college degree or higher. As seen in Table 7, 62.7% of respondents are married or cohabitating, and 36.59% of the sample are single (with just four respondents preferring not to say). As seen in Table 8, 1977 is the average birth year of respondents, 20.57 is the average full-time years worked in the respondent's career, and 13.94 is the average years worked in the respondent's current organization.

**TABLE 6  
EDUCATION LEVEL OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Less than high school	6	1.07
High school diploma	96	17.05
Some college, but no degree	147	26.11
Bachelor's degree	192	34.1
Master's degree	97	17.23
Doctoral degree	25	4.44
Total	563	100

**TABLE 7  
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Married or cohabitating	353	62.7
Single	206	36.59
Prefer not to say	4	0.71
Total	563	100

**TABLE 8  
OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENT**

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Birth year	1977.34	13.99
Full-time years worked in career	20.57	13.92
Years worked in current organization	13.94	86.29

### **Descriptive Results**

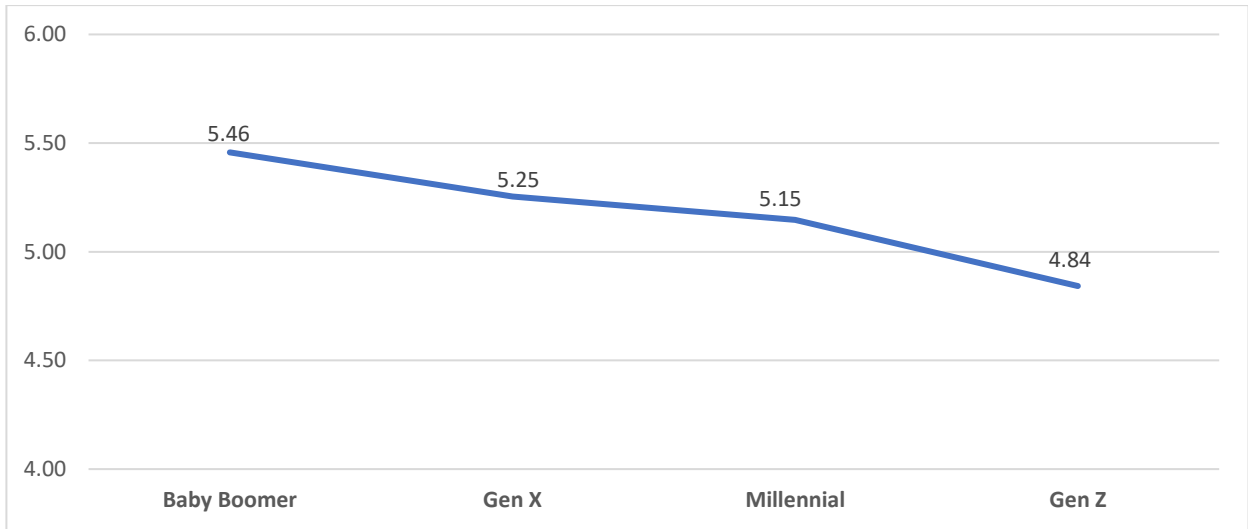
Table 9 below shows the means of job satisfaction and other main study variables, by generation, as well as significant differences where present. Figure 2 shows a statistically significant difference in reported job satisfaction between older and younger generations, with a steady decline in perceived job satisfaction levels as we move from the older to younger generations. Additionally, as seen in Figure 3, there is a statistically significant difference in reported employee engagement between older and younger generations, with a steady decline in perceived employee engagement levels as we move from the older to younger generations. While there are several other significant differences in mean scores by generation, of additional note, as seen in Figure 4 is the difference in the “pay” variable across generations, with pay having the highest mean scores for Gen X and millennials, and the lowest mean scores for baby boomers and Gen Z.



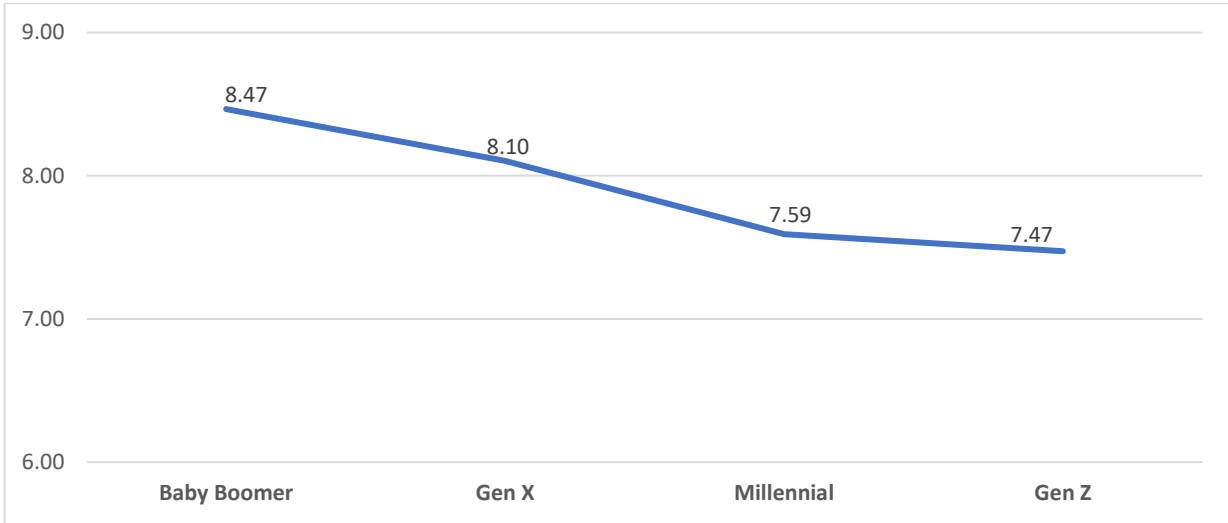
**TABLE 9**  
**VARIABLE MEANS AND TEST OF DIFFERENCE, BY GENERATION**

Dependent Variable	Baby Boomer		Gen X		Millennial		Gen Z		All		T Statistic & p-value		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p-value	df
Job Satisfaction	5.46	1.49	5.25	1.61	5.15	1.65	4.84	1.637	5.21	1.62	1.94**	0.027	560
<b>Intrinsic Rewards</b>													
Interesting Job	3.98	0.87	3.86	1.02	3.74	1.06	3.73	1.062	3.83	1.02	2.04*	0.020	560
Job autonomy	4.25	0.87	4.08	1.05	4.01	0.91	3.76	1.105	4.06	0.99	2.36*	0.009	560
Help others	4.24	0.76	4.14	0.88	4.12	0.83	4.16	0.938	4.15	0.86	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Job useful to society	3.99	0.96	4.03	0.99	4.01	0.96	4.05	0.951	4.01	0.98	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Extrinsic Rewards</b>													
Pay	2.83	1.16	3.03	1.10	3.16	1.22	2.89	1.301	3.01	1.18	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Job security	3.88	1.05	4.01	0.92	4.06	0.91	4.05	0.931	3.99	0.96	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Promotional opportunities	2.96	1.16	3.10	1.17	3.42	1.16	3.44	1.135	3.20	1.18	-3.84***	0.000	560
<b>Work Relations</b>													
Relations with management	3.83	0.89	3.65	1.06	3.81	0.96	3.71	0.956	3.75	0.99	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Relations with coworkers	4.16	0.79	3.94	0.93	4.06	0.86	4.18	0.641	4.05	0.85	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Contact with others	4.25	0.81	4.20	0.89	4.09	0.91	4.25	0.775	4.17	0.89	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>													
Flexibility to deal with family matters	1.93	0.90	2.09	1.02	2.17	0.96	2.35	0.907	2.10	0.97	-2.30*	0.011	560
Work interference with family	1.59	0.59	1.73	0.67	1.85	0.69	2.04	0.693	1.76	0.67	-3.92***	0.000	560
Family interference with work	1.35	0.51	1.60	0.63	1.72	0.71	1.89	0.712	1.61	0.66	-4.69***	0.000	560
<b>Worker Activation</b>													
Job engagement	8.47	1.51	8.10	2.02	7.59	2.16	7.47	1.894	7.93	2.02	4.14***	0.000	560
I see myself as a leader	3.67	1.58	4.02	1.55	4.09	1.51	4.00	1.515	3.96	1.54	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
I have found a meaningful career	4.10	0.99	3.95	1.13	3.90	1.17	3.82	1.219	3.95	1.14	2.38**	0.010	560
Work that has a satisfying purpose	4.06	0.92	3.89	1.12	3.88	1.07	3.69	1.169	3.95	1.11	2.31*	0.011	560
Supervisor Encouragement	5.25	1.55	5.08	1.74	5.26	1.52	4.98	1.75	5.16	1.64	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Where I am meant to be	5.31	1.51	5.09	1.79	5.14	1.68	4.64	1.71	5.10	1.70	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
My work contributes to my life's meaning	4.06	0.92	3.89	1.12	3.88	1.07	3.69	1.17	3.90	1.08	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Organizational commitment	5.49	1.61	5.10	1.84	5.02	1.87	4.60	1.852	5.10	1.82	2.18*	0.015	560

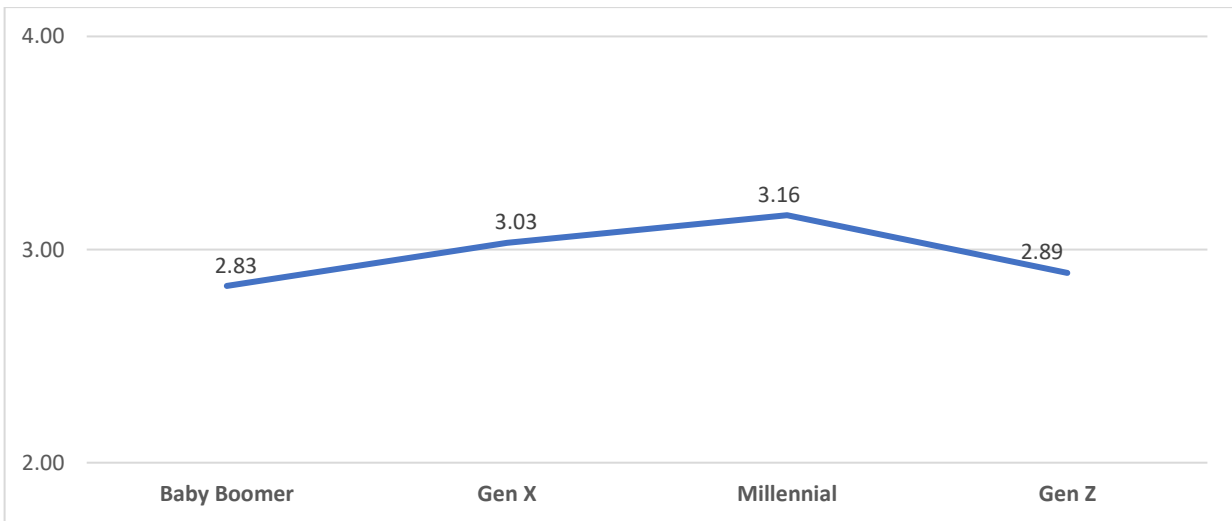
**FIGURE 2**  
**MEAN JOB SATISFACTION, BY GENERATIONAL COHORT**



**FIGURE 3**  
**MEAN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, BY GENERATIONAL COHORT**



**FIGURE 4**  
**MEAN PERCEIVED LEVEL OF PAY, BY GENERATIONAL COHORT**



**Regression Results**

Following the approach of Westover et al. (2024), we examined the association between job satisfaction and the independent variables across multiple regression analyses. The first model (Table 10) examined the influence of intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, work relations, work-life balance variables, and control variables on job satisfaction by generation. In the second model (Table 11) we focused on the “worker activation” variables and represented what we consider to be “the best” model.

Table 10 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient strength and statistical significance for each variable. For baby boomers, “interesting work”, “pay”, “promotional opportunities”, and relations with management” were the significant and most impactful variables. For Gen X, “interesting work”, “helping others”, “pay”, “relations with management”, and “contact with others” were the significant and most impactful variables. For millennials, “interesting work”, job autonomy”, “pay”, “relations with management”, and “contact with others” were the significant and most impactful variables. Interestingly,

“years worked in career” and “years worked in current organization” were also statistically significant control variables for millennials. For Gen Z, only “interesting work” was significant (along with the dummy control variable for state of residence). Hypothesis 1a proposed that intrinsic rewards would influence job satisfaction more strongly among younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) than baby boomers and Generation X. The results partially supported this hypothesis. Intrinsic rewards in the form of interesting jobs had the strongest impact on job satisfaction among Generation X and Generation Z. Extrinsic rewards in the form of “pay” was most strongly related with job satisfaction for baby boomers and Generation X supporting Hypothesis 1b. Hypothesis 2 proposed that work relations have the strongest impact on job satisfaction for millennials. While “relations with management” and “contact with others” are positively associated with job satisfaction, “relations with management” have a stronger impact among the Generation X cohort, thus not supporting Hypothesis 2. Interestingly, the relationship between work-life balance variables and job satisfaction was not statistically significant for any of the generational cohorts, thus hypothesis 3 is not supported. It is worth noting that the Gen Z sample size was small (only 55 respondents in this group), which also makes it difficult to achieve statistical significance for variables in the model.

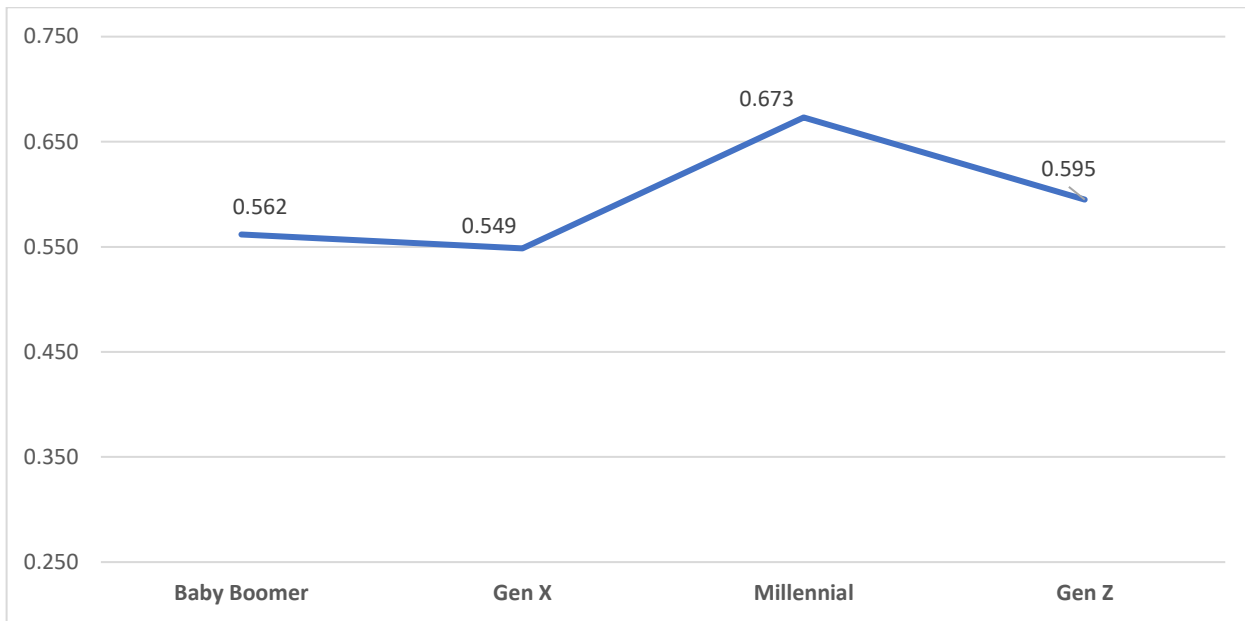
**TABLE 10**  
**MODEL 1 – OLS TRADITIONAL JOB SATISFACTION REGRESSION RESULTS,**  
**BY GENERATION**

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z	All
<b>Intrinsic Rewards</b>					
Interesting Job	0.293**	0.315***	0.216**	0.584***	0.316***
Job autonomy	0.062	0.029	0.156**	0.138	0.063
Help others	-0.126	0.184**	0.084	-0.037	0.079*
Job useful to society	-0.037	-0.076	0.060	-0.123	-0.035
<b>Extrinsic Rewards</b>					
Pay	0.173*	0.232***	0.169**	-0.052	0.180***
Job security	0.086	-0.034	0.007	0.072	0.020
Promotional opportunities	0.176*	0.052	0.063	-0.028	0.120**
<b>Work Relations</b>					
Relations with management	0.177*	0.316***	0.247***	0.182	0.233***
Relations with coworkers	0.088	0.027	0.016	-0.023	0.028
Contact with others	0.091	-0.128*	0.117*	-0.068	-0.012
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>					
Flexibility to deal with family matters	-0.005	-0.011	-0.031	-0.136	-0.026
Work interference with family	-0.068	-0.119	-0.082	-0.214	-0.086*
Family interference with work	0.015	0.011	0.063	0.196	0.057
<b>Controls</b>					
Race	0.058	-0.066	-0.006	-0.281	-0.003
Gender	0.043	-0.007	-0.019	0.041	0.000
Ethnicity	-0.035	0.023	0.048	-0.161	0.013
State of Residence	-0.078	0.087	-0.033	0.500**	0.020
Education Level	-0.059	-0.021	-0.025	-0.059	-0.009
Marital Status	0.011	-0.061	0.001	-0.054	-0.042
Years Worked in Career	0.057	0.005	-0.107*	0.041	0.012
Years Worked in Current Organization	0.028	-0.030	0.153**	0.134	-0.012
N	129	191	185	55	561
<b>Adjusted R-Squared</b>	<b>0.562</b>	<b>0.549</b>	<b>0.673</b>	<b>0.595</b>	<b>0.596</b>
F	8.82***	11.99***	19.04***	4.78***	38.49***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

Additionally, as seen in Figure 5, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values across the OLS generational models: baby boomers (adjusted r-squared = 0.562), Gen X (adjusted r-squared = 0.549), millennials (adjusted r-squared = 0.673), and Gen Z (adjusted r-squared = 0.595). This means the model accounted for over 56% of the variation in job satisfaction for baby boomers, just under 55% of the variation in job satisfaction for Gen X, just over 67% of the variation in job satisfaction for millennials, and just under 60% of the variation in job satisfaction for Gen Z.

**FIGURE 5**  
**ORIGINAL MODEL FIT (ADJUSTED R-SQUARED), BY GNERATIONAL COHORT**



Finally, Table 11 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient strength and statistical significance for each variable. For baby boomers, “I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful,” “My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts,” “I have found a meaningful career,” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” were the significant and most impactful variables. For Gen X, “I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day,” “I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose,” “My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts,” “I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be,” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” were the significant and most impactful variables. For millennials, “employee engagement,” “I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose,” “My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts,” “I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be,” “I see myself as a leader,” “I have found a meaningful career,” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” were the significant and most impactful variables. Interestingly, “years worked in career” and “years worked in current organization” were also statistically significant control variables for millennials. For Gen Z, “employee engagement,” “I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful,” “I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose,” “My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts,” “I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be,” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” were the significant and most impactful variables. It is worth noting that even though the Gen Z sample size was small (only 55 respondents in this group), which makes it difficult to achieve statistical significance for variables in the model, this model fit the Gen Z generational cohort much better than the first model, with many of the variables in the model achieving statistical significance. Hypothesis 4 proposed that worker activation

determinants have a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction for younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) than older generations (baby boomers and Generation X). The results support hypothesis 4.

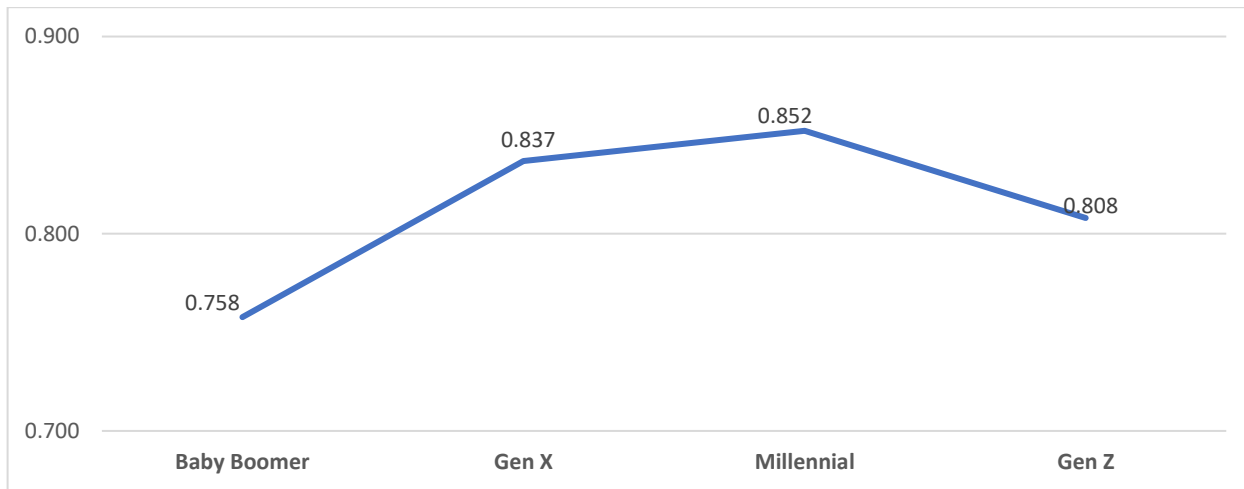
**TABLE 11**  
**MODEL 2 – NEW OLS JOB SATISFACTION REGRESSION RESULTS, BY GENERATION**

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z	All
<b>Worker Engagement</b>					
Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job	0.000	0.063	0.162***	0.185*	0.108***
I Have the opportunity to do what I do best every day	0.080	0.113*	0.038	-0.020	0.076***
<b>Understanding of Meaning and Purpose</b>					
I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful	0.173**	0.083	-0.044	0.201*	0.083**
I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose	0.066	0.106*	0.104*	-0.239*	0.073*
<b>Sense of Encouragement and Belonging</b>					
My supervisor shows me encouragement for my work efforts	0.204**	0.118**	0.206***	0.204***	0.166***
I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be	0.127	0.152***	0.319***	0.501*	0.204**
<b>Leadership Efficacy</b>					
I see myself as a leader	-0.027	-0.039	-0.071*	-0.130	-0.058**
<b>Career Meaning and Commitment</b>					
I have found a meaningful career	0.207*	0.054	0.125*	0.085	0.108***
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	0.264***	0.439***	0.219***	0.196*	0.324***
<b>Controls</b>					
Race	0.059	0.032	0.004	-0.050	0.030
Gender	0.031	0.005	-0.026	-0.025	0.002
Ethnicity	0.003	0.025	-0.020	-0.074	-0.012
State of Residence	-0.071	0.030	-0.033	0.142	-0.019
Education Level	-0.068	0.024	0.003	-0.043	-0.014
Marital Status	0.044	0.005	-0.001	-0.037	0.010
Years Worked in Career	-0.077	-0.024	0.008	-0.071	-0.066**
N	129	191.000	185.000	55	561
<b>Adjusted R-Squared</b>	<b>0.758</b>	<b>0.837</b>	<b>0.852</b>	<b>0.808</b>	<b>0.821</b>
F	26.02***	61.91***	67.30***	15.20***	151.60***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values across the OLS generational cohort models: baby boomers (adjusted r-squared = 0.758), Gen X (adjusted r-squared = 0.837), millennials (adjusted r-squared = 0.808), and Gen Z (adjusted r-squared = 0.821). This means the model accounted for nearly 76% of the variation in job satisfaction for baby boomers, just under 84% of the variation in job satisfaction for Gen X, just over 85% of the variation in job satisfaction for millennials, and just over 82% of the variation in job satisfaction for Gen Z.

**FIGURE 6**  
**REVISED MODEL FIT (ADJUSTED R-SQUARED), BY GENERATIONAL COHORT**



### REVISITING HYPOTHESES

In this section, we revisit each of our initial hypotheses, evaluating them against the findings from our study. This analysis sets the stage for the revised model, highlighting key insights and whether the data supported our hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1a:** *Intrinsic rewards influence job satisfaction more strongly among younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) compared to baby boomers and Generation X.*

Our data revealed that intrinsic rewards, specifically having interesting work, significantly predicted job satisfaction across all generations, with the strongest impact observed among Generation Z. However, Generation X also showed a strong preference for intrinsic rewards. Therefore, this hypothesis is partially supported.

**Hypothesis 1b:** *Extrinsic rewards influence job satisfaction more strongly among older generations (baby boomers and Generation X) compared to younger generations (millennials and Generation Z).*

Extrinsic rewards, particularly pay, were significant predictors of job satisfaction for Baby Boomers and Generation X. This aligns with our hypothesis, indicating that these older generations place more value on extrinsic rewards compared to millennials and Generation Z. Hence, this hypothesis is supported.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Work relations have a stronger impact on job satisfaction for millennials than for other generations.*

While work relations, such as relations with management and contact with others, were positively associated with job satisfaction, they had a stronger impact on Generation X rather than millennials. This finding contradicts our hypothesis; thus Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

**Hypothesis 3:** *Work-life balance is a stronger predictor of job satisfaction for millennials and Generation Z compared to baby boomers and Generation X.*

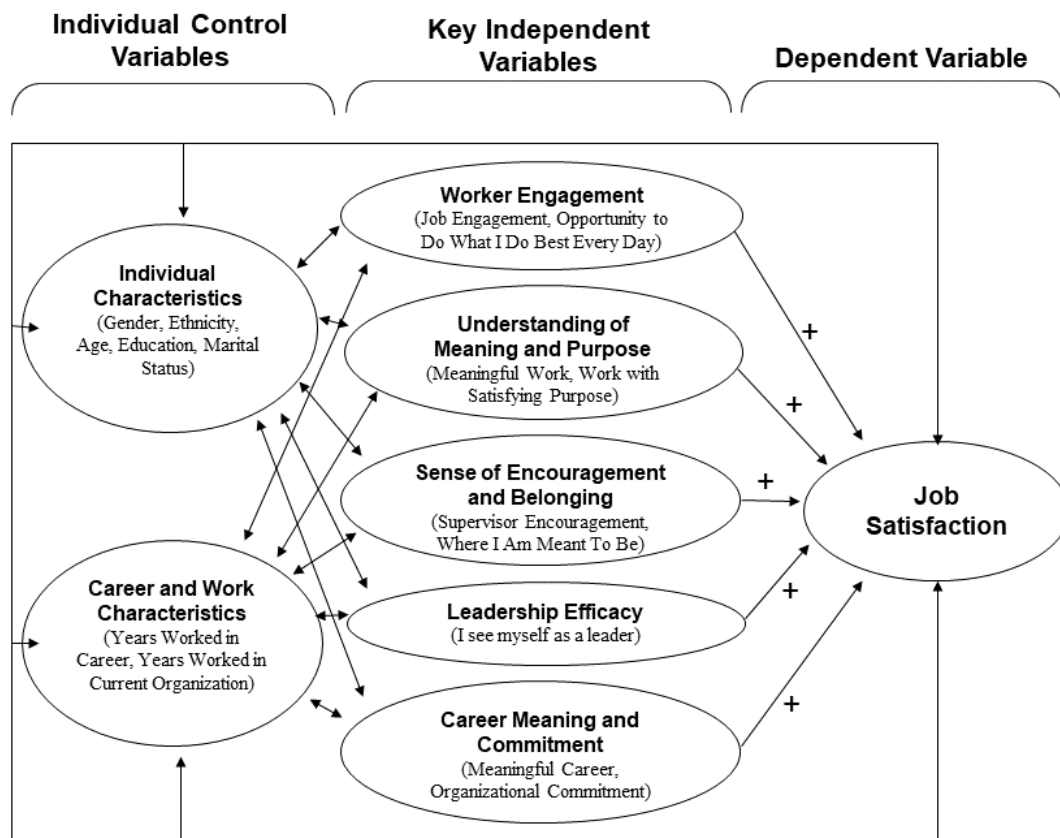
Interestingly, work-life balance did not emerge as a significant predictor of job satisfaction for any of the generational cohorts in our study. This unexpected result suggests that other factors might be more critical for job satisfaction across all generations. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

**Hypothesis 4:** Worker activation determinants have a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction for younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) compared to older generations (baby boomers and Generation X).

Worker activation variables, such as employee engagement and a sense of meaningful work, were indeed stronger predictors of job satisfaction for millennials and Generation Z. These findings align with our hypothesis, indicating that younger generations derive more satisfaction from factors that enhance their engagement and sense of purpose at work. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

These insights guide the development of our revised model, which integrates these findings to better explain the dynamics of job satisfaction across different generational cohorts. This revised model can help organizations tailor their management practices to effectively meet the distinct needs of a multigenerational workforce.

**FIGURE 7  
REVISED RESEARCH MODEL**



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper considered generational preferences as related to job satisfaction among four generational cohorts of workers, namely, baby boomers, Generation X, millennials and Generation Z. The study specifically measured intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, work relations, work-life balance and employee

activation variables and how these influenced job satisfaction for the four cohorts. The model applied control factors that considered individual and workplace demographics, including age, indicating robust results pointing to generational influences in workplace and job satisfaction preferences. Across all four generations, one unifying preference towards job satisfaction is that of having interesting work. Generation Z is more prominently attuned to this preference but every generational cohort reveals it is a necessity. Having interesting work, in fact, is the only preference for Generation Z found to be a significant contributor to job satisfaction, however, the work still yields important information related to Generation Z. The younger generations (millennials and Generation Z) are less satisfied with their jobs in general, and they also perceive a decline in employee engagement levels, as well. Additional results associated with pay include Generation Z and baby boomers receiving less pay compared to the Generation X and Millennial cohorts who reported higher pay levels. Baby boomers associate their satisfaction in the workplace with interesting work, as well as pay and promotional opportunities. Like baby boomers, Generation X values interesting work and pay, helping others, relations with management, and contact with others. Some significant preferences for millennials are shared with Generation X, including interesting work, pay and relationship with management, but millennials also have their own unique preferences of job autonomy and contact with others. However, relations with management are more impactful for Generation X than millennials.

Some findings are not necessarily in alignment with expectations. For example, rather than intrinsic rewards being the strongest predictors of job satisfaction for the younger generations (millennials and Generation Z), they are strongest for Generation X and Generation Z. The expectation for extrinsic rewards being associated with the older generations (baby boomers and Generation X) does hold true, as pay is strongly associated with their job satisfaction, as does the expectation that worker activation determinants have a stronger positive effect on job satisfaction for the younger generations. Other unexpected results include work relations being more influential for Generation X than millennials and that work-life balance is not a more significant predictor for millennials and Generation Z than baby boomers and Generation X. In fact, work-life balance is not a significant predictor of job satisfaction for any of the generational cohorts. Such findings signify that traditional research variables need adjusting to account for the shift in ways job satisfaction preferences emerge in this study. The new model integrates employee activation factors, including worker engagement, understanding of meaning and purpose, sense of encouragement and belonging, leadership efficacy, and career meaning and commitment, as a means for better comprehension of features in the workplace that contribute to job satisfaction across generational groups.

### **Implications for Theory**

Results in this work validate, refute, as well as further past research in various aspects. For example, this work denotes that from a generational lens, there are notable generational differences associated with job satisfaction as opposed to some previous studies who determined minimal to no connections of work outcomes with generational differences (see Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Kowske *et al.*, 2010). Findings also signify the unifying thread for all generations studied, that of preference for interesting work, as related to job satisfaction, which can likely be linked to the concept of boreout (Abubakar, 2020). Some generational trends or characteristics previously applied to various generational cohorts are also corroborated, such as millennials valuing job autonomy as part of job satisfaction (Jena and Nayak, 2023) and baby boomers valuing promotional opportunities (Benson and Brown, 2011). Additionally, this work contributes to new veins of research when considering generational preferences in the workplace by considering worker activation determinants and how these impact job satisfaction. The revised research model provides a more specific set of variables that not only expand upon current theory but also aid management in determining how to support employees by informing them of specific generationally-tied preferences with the aim of increasing job satisfaction and employee retention.

### **Implications for Management**

Findings in this study indicate workers have specific preferences that reflect their generational status, which can act as anchors for management in terms of understanding how to support workers from the four



generational cohorts considered. Organizations can leverage the findings to produce multifaceted approaches in offering workers with 1) jobs that are attractive, 2) support in the workplace that answers specific needs, and 3) a plethora of diverse and flexible opportunities for development – altogether catering to a spectrum of preferences to ensure job satisfaction of a multigenerational workforce. In considering the particular findings of this study towards implementing policy, some unique challenges and considerations contribute to providing work conducive to multiple job satisfaction preferences.

The first consideration is to ensure that workers of all generations have interesting work, as this has proven to be a unanimous preference. Interesting work may be defined differently for each generation, thus creating more work for organizations in discovering what interesting work entails. In a more general sense, interesting work can entail engaging work that is varied and challenging (Bakker and Leiter, 2017) as well as fun (Celestine and Yeo, 2020), is tied to an organizational purpose or mission (van Turin *et al.*, 2020), engages a worker's creativity and promotes additional learning (Kooij, *et al.*, 2020).

Second, management developing multifaceted offerings to adeptly respond to the spectrum of preferences is paramount to satisfying a generationally diverse workplace. This requires providing a variety of extrinsic and intrinsic awards in ways that cater to various generationally-influenced motivations. This also obliges management to be familiar with these preferences, ensuring that they cater to baby boomers' inclinations for promotional opportunities while simultaneously providing opportunities for job autonomy and contact with others to satisfy millennial workers. The less predictable findings in this study insinuate that preferences related to job satisfaction are not perhaps as intuitive as previously considered, requiring management receive specialized training to become familiarized with the distinctive characteristics associated with each generational cohort, while being attuned to the changes and developments that arise within current research.

Third, work relations preferences are an important area of job satisfaction that has proven to be an especially important factor for Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z. This revelation can guide management in terms of bolstering the internal workings of their organizations to place increasing emphasis on workers' relations with management, contact with others, as well as helping others.

Finally, it appears that work-life balance, a previous staple of job satisfaction preferences has become somewhat obsolete, being replaced, at least in the younger generations, with preferences related to employee activation variables. This shift in job satisfaction preference options will require that management and supervisors become better acquainted with these variables, such as worker engagement, understanding meaning and purpose of their work and roles, encouragement and belonging, leadership efficacy and career meaning and commitment. Additionally, management will need to consider ways to implement these variables in the workplace in a manner that successfully satisfies the younger generations while simultaneously answering the complex and diverse preferences of the older generations.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has forwarded a unique understanding of job satisfaction elements attributed to specific generational preferences. Future work is needed to further comprehend variability in worker preferences based on generational influences with the aim of improving practical policies and applications as well as theoretical ones. Extant literature has explored generational differences as they relate to job satisfaction, revealing characteristics and ideas surrounding specific generations, however, this work highlights that past findings are not necessarily predictors of future preferences, as the dynamic nature of generational preferences is not an unalterable landscape. Findings in this study that opposed initial hypothetical assumptions illustrate that generational workplace preferences related to job satisfaction exist, but that they are not static or created in a vacuum. External and internal forces impact generational tendencies, making it imperative that further research examines what those forces are and how they influence the trends in generational preferences as they emerge. For example, as baby boomers remain in the workplace for many factors (see Benson and Brown, 2011), additional exploration illuminates the nuanced and changing elements that govern what each working generation values in terms of job satisfaction. As previously explained, this study had a limited number of Generation Z respondents, making it challenging to make salient determinations regarding their job preferences. Future research aimed at better understanding

Generation Z by including larger sample sizes in examining determinants for Generation Z, particularly aimed at better understanding their worker activation preferences, will further job satisfaction associated with generational cohort studies in valuable ways, such as providing important insight on how to combat the current declining job satisfaction inherent in millennials and Generation Z as well as making findings more generalizable. This future research will benefit from integrating worker activation variables to address gaps in generational differences related to job satisfaction. Such research ultimately promotes inclusive workplace settings where supported and satisfied workers of diverse generations can thrive.

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