

Emotional Intelligence Across Generational Cohorts: A Comparative Review

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Abstract

Purpose: Emotional intelligence (EI) scores are assessed in this study for the following age cohorts: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. It examines various emotional intelligence (EI) characteristics, the societal and technical influences that shape them, and how they affect intergenerational cooperation in the workplace and in educational settings.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative systematic review of 50 peer-reviewed books, reports, and articles published between 2000 and 2024 was conducted. Using terms like "emotional intelligence," "generational differences," and "multi-generational workforce," data were retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Emotional intelligence (EI) components, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, adaptability, and social skills, were investigated by thematic content analysis. **Findings:** Baby Boomers are excellent at establishing relationships and demonstrating empathy, but they have trouble adjusting to new technology. Strong self-control, problem-solving abilities, and a moderate level of empathy are traits of Generation X. Deeper interpersonal connections are impacted by millennials' heavy reliance on technology, despite their high levels of collaboration and adaptability. Although Generation Z is very inclusive and emotionally aware, they are not very good at face-to-face contact. **Implications:** The study emphasizes that in order to improve intergenerational cooperation, EI training is necessary. Millennials' flexibility, Baby Boomers' mentoring skills, and Generation Z's inclusivity can all enhance educational and professional environments. **Originality/Value:** This study contributes to the field of organizational behaviour, generational studies, and emotional intelligence research by offering a comparative analysis of EI across generations.

Keywords: Generational Cohorts, Intergenerational Collaboration, Emotional Competencies, Adaptability

1.Introduction

The ability to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions while skilfully observing and influencing those of others is a popular definition of emotional intelligence (EI) (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). It includes a variety of abilities that are essential for both professional and personal success, including empathy, self-awareness, emotional control, and interpersonal skills (Goleman, 1995). Research continuously demonstrates that having a high EI is a valuable advantage in today's changing situations since it enhances leadership, teamwork, and decision-making (Brackett et al., 2011).

Organizations, schools, and society are seeing more age diversity, making generational studies increasingly important (Twenge et al., 2010). Each generation grows up in unique cultural, technological, and economic conditions, which shape their emotions and behaviour in different ways (Macky et al., 2008). Learning about the emotional intelligence (EI) of different generations helps improve leadership, teamwork, and communication while also

resolving emotional and interpersonal challenges in interactions between age groups (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

This review's objective is to investigate the ways in which EI levels vary among generational cohorts and the underlying causes of these differences. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the consequences of generational disparities in emotional intelligence in social and organizational situations by integrating previous studies. The findings provide actionable insights for enhancing intergenerational harmony and leveraging each cohort's skills in cooperative settings. This review aims to analyze how emotional intelligence manifests across generational cohorts, identify key strengths and weaknesses, and suggest practical strategies for application in workplace and educational settings.

2.Generational Cohorts Overview

A generational cohort is a group of individuals who were born in the same period and who have comparable life experiences, values, and attitudes that have been influenced by the technical, cultural, and socioeconomic shifts of their early years (Macky et al., 2008). With unique characteristics and behavioural tendencies, these cohorts are frequently categorized as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Gaining insight into these groups aids in determining the elements affecting their interpersonal dynamics and emotional intelligence.

Cultural changes, technological developments, and socioeconomic events all have a big influence on the beliefs and actions of every generation. For instance, post-war prosperity and conventional workplace hierarchy shaped Baby Boomers, but globalization and the rapid advancement of technology shaped Millennials. Each generation's perception and expression of emotional intelligence in many circumstances are influenced by these factors (Twenge et al., 2010). Millennials value digital communication and teamwork since they were exposed to the growth of social media and the internet (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Born into a world of technology, Generation Z is very inclusive but finds it difficult to communicate with people in person (González et al., 2021).

Table1: Generational Cohorts: Characteristics and Timelines

Generation	Timeline	Key Historical Events	Key Characteristics & Workplace Traits	Preferred Communication	References
Tradionalist (Silent Generation)	1925-1945	WWII, Great Depression, Post-war Recovery	Disciplined, loyal, traditional values, respect for authority, strong work ethic.	Formal (letters, memos, meetings)	Macky et al. (2008)
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	Economic Boom, Civil Rights Movement	Hardworking, loyal, value job security, respect hierarchy.	Face-to-face, phone calls	Lyons & Kuron (2014)
Generation X	1965–1980	Cold War, Rise of Personal Computers	Independent, adaptable, value work-life balance, skeptical of authority,	Emails, phone calls, direct talk	Twenge et al. (2010)
Millennials	1981–1996	Internet Boom, social media, 9/11 Attacks	Tech-savvy, collaborative, socially conscious, seek meaningful work, value flexibility and feedback.	Instant messaging, social media	Tapscott (2009)
Generation Z	1997–2012	AI, Smartphones, Climate Change Awareness	Digitally native, entrepreneurial, diversity-focused, high emotional awareness but prone to anxiety.	Social media, short videos	Turner (2015), Seemiller & Grace (2016)
Generation Alpha	2013-Present	AI-driven world, Automation, Hyperconnectivity	Highly tech-dependent, global perspective, fast learners, personalized education focus.	AR/VR, AI-powered tools	McCrindle & Fell (2020)

3.Literature Review

3.1 Emotional Intelligence: Theoretical Frameworks

Thorndike coined the phrase "emotional intelligence" in 1920 as part of his concept of "social intelligence." Later, in 1983, psychologist Howard Gardner put forth the notion of multiple intelligences, arguing that there are eight distinct types of intelligence. According to American psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who co-introduced the idea in 1990, emotional intelligence is "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions". (Salovey & Mayer, 1990)

The concept of emotional intelligence gained prominence with the 1995 publication of Daniel Goleman's book "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ" (Goleman, 2020). Known for coining the term "emotional quotient," Reuven Bar-On is a prominent EI researcher (Bar-On, 1988). He used the term "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (Bar-On, 1997) to characterize emotional intelligence in 1997.

The trait emotional intelligence model was developed by Petrides and Furnham (2001). Using rating scales and questionnaires, it assesses emotionally connected self-perceived abilities and moods. These elements are located at the bottom of the hierarchy of personalities. (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Furthermore, it appears that trait emotional intelligence is redefining emotional intelligence in a way that is consistent with the Big Five theories of personality. Indeed, it is nonsensical for Petrides (2009, 2010) to claim that emotional intelligence is a quality instead of intelligence. (Petrides, 2010). The knowledge pyramid (8-layer model) was created by Drigas and Pappas (2017), while Driggs and Papoutsis subsequently constructed the emotional intelligence pyramid (9-layer model). The foundation of the EI pyramid is also Gardner's concept of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. (Drigas & pappas, 2017).

There are four distinct models of emotional intelligence, according to published research: the ability model, the mixed model, the trait model, and the nine-layer model. In figure 1, the sources are adopted from (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Goleman, 2020; Bar-On,1997; Petrides, 2009; Chaidi & Drigas, 2022). 32, 10, 12, 14, 18]. It starts with the model of Mayer & Salovey, then Goleman and Baron, then Petrides & Furnham, and finally concludes with the nine-layer model of Drigas & Papoutsis. While the ability model focuses on emotional processing as a cognitive skill, the mixed and trait models integrate motivational and personality dimensions, making them more suitable for analyzing generational nuances in EI.

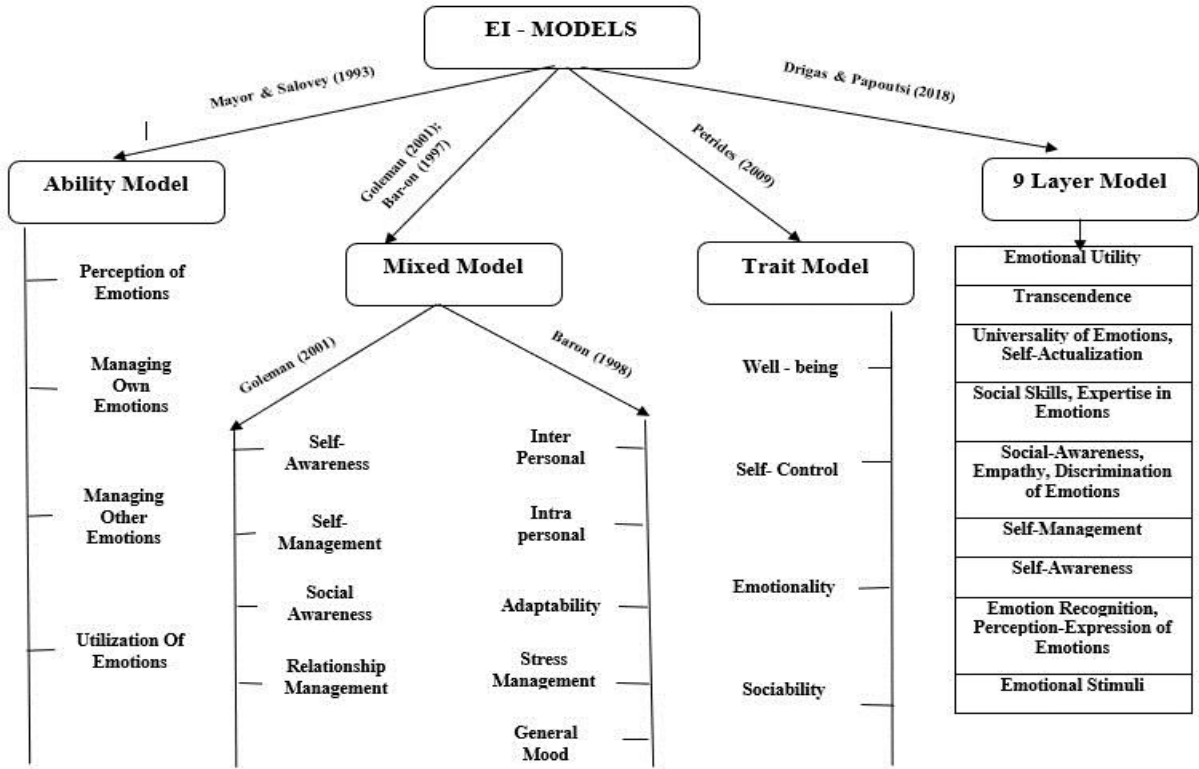


Figure 1: An overview of emotional intelligence models

(Source: Banu. P & Rani. S, *NEW PARADIGMS IN MANAGEMENT*)

3.2 Generational differences in Emotional intelligence:

Existing research indicates that generational cohorts differ significantly in their emotional intelligence. Higher levels of emotional intelligence have been linked to younger generations, including Generation Z, especially in domains like relationship management, empathy, and social awareness. (Coronado-Maldonado & Benitez-Marquez,2023) This might be explained by their prolonged use of social media and technology, which has influenced their capacity to handle challenging social situations and comprehend the emotional requirements of others. (Mahmoud et at.,2020) There may be disparities in emotional intelligence levels between older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, who may take a more conventional approach to interpersonal communication and emotional expression. (Mahmoud et al., 2020) Compared to Generation Y, Generation Z possesses greater emotional intelligence, especially in the areas of social and self-awareness. Both their own and their co-workers' emotions are easier for them to identify and comprehend (Tolani et al., 2020). In contrast, members of Generation Y demonstrate a greater capacity for emotional regulation in times of stress (Tolani et al., 2020). Although Gen Z performs exceptionally well on the job and in general emotional intelligence, Generation Y is more resilient under pressure. There is a positive relationship between EI and work performance that benefits both generations, suggesting that higher EI typically translates into higher production (Tolani, K. C., & Sao, R. ,2020).The table 2 displays the generational differences in EI.

Table 2: Generational Differences in Emotional Intelligence

Generation	Strengths in EI	Challenges in EI	References
Traditionalist	Discipline, resilience, strong interpersonal skills	Resistance to rapid societal and technological changes	Strauss & Howe, 1991
Baby Boomers	Strong interpersonal skills, empathy, and loyalty	Low adaptability to new technology, resistance to change	Twenge et al., 2010
Generation X	Emotional regulation, resilience, problem-solving skills	Moderate empathy, preference for independence over teamwork	Smola & Sutton, 2002
Millennials	High adaptability, collaboration, tech proficiency	Over-reliance on technology, reduced deep interpersonal connections	Seemiller & Grace, 2016
Generation Z	Emotional awareness, inclusivity, social justice orientation	Weak face-to-face communication, high digital dependency	González et al., 2021

4.Implications for Intergenerational Collaboration

Emotional intelligence allows individuals to utilize their emotions to enrich their thoughts and knowledge (Muñoz-Oliver et al., 2022). It includes the capacity to recognize, distinguish, and use one's own emotions as well as those of others to inform one's feelings and actions (Ramesh et al., 2021). According to Maraichelvi and Rajan (2013), emotional intelligence is a collection of acquired skills that enable people to fully comprehend themselves, form enduring bonds with others, collaborate effectively, and manage everyday stressors. High emotional intelligence people are highly self-aware and sensitive to others' feelings (Hamid & Ishak, 2019). Understanding one's inner self and being conscious of one's emotions, psychological states, and motivations are made possible by intrapersonal intelligence (Jansen et al., 2014). To succeed in life, one needs both emotional and cognitive intelligence (Tolani et al., 2024). According to Suleman et al. (2020), emotional intelligence is essential for both personal and professional success since it improves relationships, communication, and decision-making. Furthermore, it improves interactions with others and directs personal emotional practices, encouraging people to perform to the best of their ability (Deeba, 2021). It also enables individuals to connect with others, understand themselves, and lead more authentic, healthy, and happy lives (HMM, 2020). Each person has a different level of skill in identifying emotions in others and in themselves, as well as in using that knowledge in positive ways (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This talent can have an unexpectedly significant impact on our lives, ranging from our capacity to develop enduring friendships and love relationships to our ability to thrive academically and pursue fulfilling careers that provide us with a sense of direction. The table 3 below highlights tailored approaches to managing emotional intelligence differences in workplaces and educational settings.

Table 3: Implications for Workplaces and Education

Domain	Implication	Strategy	References
Workplace	Generational gaps in EI may cause communication and collaboration barriers	Introduce mentorship programs for knowledge and empathy sharing	Lyons & Kuron, 2014
	Technology use varies, affecting engagement	Implement hybrid communication methods blending digital and in-person formats	González et al., 2021
	Different EI needs across age groups	Provide tailored EI training focusing on generational strengths and challenges	Macky et al., 2008
Education	Face-to-face skills are weakening among digital-native students	Use experiential learning to develop interpersonal and emotional expression skills	Seemiller & Grace, 2016
	Students respond differently to instructional methods	Design tech-integrated collaborative platforms that engage both Millennials and Gen Z effectively	Goleman, 1998

5.Research Limitations and Future Directions

This research is limited in its capacity to identify longitudinal, cultural, and geographic differences in emotional intelligence (EI) across generations due to its dependence on secondary and primarily Western-centric cross-sectional data. Furthermore, current research frequently ignores the ways in which distinct aspects of emotional intelligence (EI), like empathy or adaptability, fluctuate in expression across age groups and the ways in which these differences affect organizational outcomes like teamwork or leadership. Future studies that examine how EI changes in various contexts should use cross-cultural and longitudinal designs to fill in these gaps. Workplace assessments and qualitative interviews are two examples of mixed-method approaches that can offer more in-depth understanding of generational EI trends. Furthermore, examining the role of digital communication in shaping EI among younger cohorts and evaluating the effectiveness of age-specific EI training programs can significantly advance both theoretical understanding and practical application.

6.Conclusion

Assessing EI across generations reveals unique strengths and challenges. The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers excel in interpersonal relationships, Generation X in emotional regulation, Millennials in adaptability, and Generation Z in inclusivity. Enhancing EI through tailored training and intergenerational collaboration can bridge gaps in workplaces and education, fostering a more cohesive and emotionally intelligent society.

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