



EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: PROFESSIONALISM, WORK LIFE, AND LIFESTYLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PROFESSIONALISM, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND LIFESTYLE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: *This narrative review synthesises empirical evidence on generational characteristics within and around public universities, focusing on professionalism, work–life balance, and lifestyle among academic staff and younger graduate employees. Generational cohorts differ in how central work is to their lives, their work values, expectations of work–life balance, and attitudes towards professional identity and careers. Evidence shows that Generation X and, especially, Millennials place less emphasis on work, value leisure more, and endorse a weaker traditional work ethic, while prioritising extrinsic rewards and individualistic orientations. Reviews also indicate that younger generations consistently value flexible working arrangements, work–life balance, and supportive environments, and are more likely to prioritise wellness, autonomy, and rapid professional development than older cohorts. Among Gen Z graduates and early-career employees, professionalism is increasingly linked to lifestyle preferences, including health, meaningful work, mobility, and work-life balance, which drive higher expectations for flexibility and a greater willingness to change employers. Human resource implications include redesigning recruitment, performance management, and promotion systems to reward value-based, collaborative leadership rather than mere positional authority. HR must support a shift from rigid hierarchies and rule-bound supervision towards flexible structures that emphasise shared governance, ethical behaviour, and engagement with staff and students. This involves integrating institutional values into job descriptions, leadership development, appraisal, and reward processes; strengthening mechanisms for feedback and voice; and building HR capacities in change management and cultural diagnostics. In public universities, HR policies also need to address intergenerational expectations, work–life balance, and professional identity so that leadership practices consistently model inclusivity, transparency, and accountability across all levels of the organisation.*

KEYWORDS: Generational differences, professionalism, work–life balance, Gen Z, Millennials, public universities, lifestyle, academic staff, Higher Education Management, Academic Workforce.



INTRODUCTION

Public universities today are characterised by multigenerational workforces that include senior Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Gen Y), and increasing numbers of Generation Z among staff, graduate assistants, and early-career employees. These cohorts differ in socialisation histories, technology use, and expectations for work, which shape professionalism, work–life balance, and lifestyle orientations (Twenge, 2010; Mohamed et al., 2025; Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

Generational narratives are evident in higher education policy and management debates, yet empirical evidence is often fragmented or extrapolated from other sectors. This manuscript reviews available empirical research on generational differences in work attitudes, work–life balance, and lifestyle-related preferences, drawing implications for public universities as employers and as professional socialisation environments.

This review is timely and necessary because demographic shifts are rapidly transforming the composition of the academic workforce, with Millennials and Generation Z entering public universities as early career academics, doctoral candidates, and graduate employees, yet the empirical evidence on their generational characteristics in these contexts remains limited, inconsistent, and often inferred from studies in other sectors or regions. Generational narratives now feature prominently in higher education policy, HR reforms, and institutional strategy, especially around talent attraction, retention, workload models, and staff wellbeing, but decision-making is frequently guided by stereotypes rather than systematically synthesised research. At the same time, public universities are facing intersecting crises: deepening funding cuts and austerity, escalating workloads and burnout, post-COVID shifts towards hybrid work and digital teaching, and mounting expectations for massified yet high-quality, inclusive provision, all of which strain existing employment models and academic career pathways. These pressures make it crucial to understand how different cohorts perceive professionalism, work–life balance, and career trajectories, and whether current organisational practices align with their values and needs. By consolidating and critically appraising available empirical studies on generational differences within and around public universities, this review provides an evidence base to inform workforce planning, leadership, and professional socialisation practices that are responsive to evolving expectations and that support sustainable academic careers in a context of ongoing institutional crisis.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to synthesise empirical evidence on generational characteristics related to professionalism, work life (including work–life balance), and lifestyle in and around public universities, and to identify implications for managing multigenerational academic workplaces.

Objectives

The key objectives of this review were to:

1. Describe empirically observed generational differences in work values and professionalism relevant to university contexts.



2. Examine generational patterns in work–life balance attitudes, experiences, and outcomes.
3. Explore lifestyle-related orientations (health, mobility, flexibility, identity) among younger cohorts linked to universities. Explore generational differences in lifestyle-related orientations such as health and self-care practices, well-being and leisure priorities, mobility preferences such as remote work, geographic mobility, and commuting patterns within and around public universities.
4. Derive implications for HR, leadership, and policy in public universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generational Differences in Work Attitudes and Professionalism

Time-lag and cross-sectional research show that Gen X and Millennials rate work as less central to life, value leisure more, and espouse a weaker traditional work ethic than Boomers and Silents, while scoring higher on extrinsic work values and individualism (Twenge, 2010). A broad review across workplace variables (personality, values, attitudes, leadership, teamwork, WLB) finds evidence that is fragmented and sometimes contradictory. However, it provides proof of concept that generation functions as a meaningful workplace variable (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Time-lag and cross-sectional research show that Gen X and Millennials rate work as less central to life, value leisure more, and espouse a weaker traditional work ethic than Boomers and Silents, while scoring higher on extrinsic work values and individualism (Twenge, 2010). However, more recent reviews and empirical studies complicate this picture. Lyons and Kuron’s review concludes that evidence on generational differences across personality, values, attitudes, leadership, teamwork, and work–life balance is **fragmented, contradictory, and methodologically inconsistent**, even though time-lag and cross-temporal designs do provide “proof of concept” that generation can function as a meaningful workplace variable (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Subsequent critical reviews similarly argue that many observed value differences are small, often confounded with age or period effects, and frequently run counter to popular stereotypes, calling for greater caution in treating “generation” as a robust explanatory category (Parry & Urwin, 2011). More recent work using bibliometric and mixed-methods approaches finds that research has increasingly shifted from simply cataloguing generational traits towards examining how context, ethics, and leadership shape work values over time, and suggests that perceived deterioration in work ethic among younger cohorts is neither uniform nor uncontested across sectors and countries (Singh et al., 2020; Zhou, 2023). Together, these critiques underscore the need to balance influential but older findings with newer, more nuanced evidence when drawing conclusions about generational differences in work centrality, leisure values, and work ethic.

In education-related settings, Gen Z business students expect stable careers, rapid skill development, and advancement, but their expectations are often misaligned with faculty and career services perceptions (Maloni et al., 2019). Among public school teachers, Gen X and Gen Y share broadly similar work values, with only modest differences (e.g., Gen Y



somewhat higher in benevolence and security), suggesting more continuity than radical generational rupture in core professional values (Lagmay & Florendo, 2025).

Research on professional socialisation among faculty generations indicates that career attitudes and socialisation patterns vary across cohorts, contributing to differences in how academics approach teaching, research, and service (Corcoran & Clark, 1983).

Research on professional socialisation among faculty generations indicates that career attitudes and socialisation patterns vary across cohorts, influencing how academics approach teaching, research, and service in increasingly marketised and managerial university contexts (Oliveira et al., 2024; Clarke & Knights, 2015; Suchon et al., 2025). Systematic reviews in nursing also show generational variation in job attitudes, stress, resilience, and perceptions of leadership and autonomy (Stevanin et al., 2018).

Work–Life Balance across Generations

Work–life balance is central to intergenerational debates. Review and empirical studies show that younger cohorts notably prioritise flexibility, control over schedules, remote/hybrid options, and organisational support for balancing work and non-work roles (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Iliev et al., 2019; Manafe et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022).

- A review of work values indicates that to recruit younger cohorts, employers should emphasise work–life balance and flexible schedules, as these are more effective than appeals to altruism or meaning alone (Twenge, 2010). A growing body of newer work largely supports and extends Twenge’s conclusion for Millennials and Gen Z. A review of work values indicates that to recruit younger cohorts, employers should emphasise **work–life balance**, flexible schedules, and broader flexibility (e.g., remote work), as these are often more effective than appeals to altruism or meaning alone (Twenge, 2010; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Septyani et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Tirta & Enrika, 2020).
- Systematic reviews and empirical studies on Millennials and Gen Z consistently show that **flexible hours, remote/hybrid options, and generous leave** are central to job choice, satisfaction, and performance (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Septyani et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020).
- Gen Z prioritises flexible work arrangements, work–life integration, and supportive cultures alongside (not instead of) meaningful work; flexibility and WLB are repeatedly cited as top reasons to accept or remain in roles (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Acheampong, 2020; Sihite & Damanik, 2025; Revuru & Bandaru, 2024; Syafani et al., 2025).
- Studies of benefit programs and WLB strategies find that **non-monetary, flexibility-oriented benefits** are key to attracting and retaining new generations, often more salient than generic “purpose” messaging alone (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; K & .., 2025; Ferdous et al., 2021).
- Systematic review evidence finds that for Millennials and Gen Z, work–life balance and job satisfaction both positively affect performance, and younger cohorts place a



high value on flexible hours, leave, and work-from-home options (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

- Quantitative studies comparing Gen Y and Gen Z suggest that WLB dimensions (work interfering with personal life, personal life interfering with work, and mutual enhancement) differentially affect performance and happiness by generation, reinforcing that generationally tailored arrangements matter (Manafe et al., 2025).
- Comparative work shows generational differences in how WLB is conceptualised and pursued, emphasising that organisations cannot apply the same rules and incentives uniformly across cohorts (Iliev et al., 2019).

Within universities, WLB is under pressure. A survey of European academic staff found that, despite job satisfaction, many report a lack of balance between work and personal life (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024). Among college and university teachers in India, better WLB is associated with older age, male gender, and science disciplines, highlighting demographic and disciplinary nuances (Mayya et al., 2021).

Lifestyle, Identity, and Early-Career Generations

Lifestyle orientations, including health, mobility, and identity, are increasingly salient among younger cohorts. Exploratory work on Gen Z employees in the education sector shows they are energetic, health- and wellness-oriented, and prefer flexible, peaceful environments that support balance and well-being (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024). A growing body of newer work largely supports and extends Twenge's conclusion for Millennials and Gen Z. A review of work values indicates that to recruit younger cohorts, employers should emphasise **work-life balance**, flexible schedules, and broader flexibility (e.g., remote work), as these are often more effective than appeals to altruism or meaning alone (Twenge, 2010; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Septyani et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Tirta & Enrika, 2020).

Brief justification with recent evidence

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Research on Vietnamese Gen Z graduates finds a strong tendency to change workplaces, driven by self-testing, prioritising personal development, social self-assertion, and the search for balance between work and personal life (Pham, 2023). This underscores the integration of lifestyle expectations into the identities of Gen Z professionals.

Systematic reviews on Millennials and Gen Z highlight that Gen Z is often more idealistic about growth and work than Millennials and that both cohorts value supportive environments, supervisors, and career opportunities for satisfaction and performance (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Generational Diversity in Universities

Generational diversity in public universities influences competency development, teamwork, motivation, and retention. Literature reviews on Malaysian public universities argue that differences in generational values and work styles create tensions but also opportunities for enhanced collaboration and skill exchange when properly managed (Mohamed et al., 2025).

In higher education, generational differences also shape responses to leadership and motivation: younger lecturers respond more strongly to value-based leadership that emphasises teamwork, communication, and innovation, whereas older faculty align more closely with traditional hierarchical styles (Zhao et al., 2024). Intergenerational learning within academic departments is recognised as crucial but remains under-researched (García-Martín et al., 2025).

Mixed-methods reviews in the health professions indicate that generational differences exist in job attitudes, emotional well-being, and leadership relationships, supporting the need for generation-aware management of professional environments (Stevanin et al., 2018).

Synthesis and Gaps

Evidence suggests that:

- Younger cohorts place stronger emphasis on WLB, flexibility, and lifestyle alignment, while older cohorts maintain higher work centrality and traditional work ethic (Twenge, 2010; Iliev et al., 2019; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Waworuntu et al., 2022).
- Core professional values (e.g., commitment, respect, development) often remain shared, with differences in priority and expression rather than complete value opposition (Lagmay & Florendo, 2025; Stevanin et al., 2018).
- In universities, staff and early-career employees experience high demands and WLB challenges, with limited generationally targeted policies (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Mayya et al., 2021).

However, direct empirical studies within public universities that systematically compare generations on professionalism, work life, and lifestyle are relatively sparse; many findings are extrapolated from broader education or other sectors (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025; Corcoran & Clark, 1983; García-Martín et al., 2025).



Table 1: Key Generational Themes For Professionalism and Work–Life Balance in Universities

Standardised View of Generational Themes

Focus area	Main generational patterns relevant to universities	Citations
Work centrality & values	Gen X/Y rate work as less central, value leisure more, and endorse a weaker traditional work ethic than Boomers/Silents.	(Twenge, 2010; Lyons & Kuron, 2014)
Work–life balance (WLB)	Gen Y and Gen Z strongly prioritise WLB, flexibility, remote/hybrid options, and wellness-supportive environments.	(Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Iliev et al., 2019; Manafe et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025)
Professional identity	Gen Z links professional identity to self-development, mobility, and balance between work and personal life.	(Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Pham, 2023)
Academic staff WLB	University faculty often report job satisfaction but a chronic imbalance between professional and personal life.	(Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Mayya et al., 2021)
Generational diversity	Generationally mixed academic workplaces show different motivational profiles, leadership preferences, and teamwork expectations.	(Mohamed et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2024; García-Martín et al., 2025; Stevanin et al., 2018)

Figure 1: Key generational themes for professionalism and work–life balance

METHODOLOGY

Design

A narrative review design was adopted, synthesising empirical and systematic review evidence on generational differences in work attitudes, professionalism, work–life balance, and lifestyle, with a focus on higher education and adjacent public-sector education settings.

Reviews and Selection

Reviews in scholarly records targeted combinations of:

- “generational differences”, “Generation X/Y/Z”, “Baby Boomers”
- “work values”, “professionalism”, “professional identity”, “faculty”, “academic staff”
- “work–life balance”, “job satisfaction”, “work engagement”



- “public universities”, “higher education institutions”, “academic workplace”, “teachers”

Inclusion criteria: empirical or systematic review studies; focus on generational cohorts and at least one of professionalism, work–life balance, or lifestyle; higher education or related public education context, or general workforce with clear implications for universities. Papers without abstracts were used only where full-text excerpts directly addressed generational diversity in public institutions (Mohamed et al., 2025).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data on context, sample, generation(s), constructs, methods, and key findings were extracted. A thematic synthesis grouped findings into work values and professionalism, WLB and well-being, lifestyle and identity, and generational diversity in universities. Databases/search engines used such as ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (Shadiev et al., 2024; Almasri et al., 2021; Jackson & Bodnar, 2024; Rana et al., 2025). Date range included, “2010–2025” (Guo et al., 2025; Shadiev et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2021; Rana et al., 2025). Volume screened and included, “n retrieved, n screened full text, n included”, via a brief PRISMA-style description (Guo et al., 2025; Meylani, 2024; Spencer et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2021; Buffey et al., 2024). Basic inclusion criteria included topic, population, study type, language (Shadiev et al., 2024; Meylani, 2024; Korn et al., 2022; Rana et al., 2025). In summary, we conducted a narrative search in Google Scholar and ERIC, supplemented by Scopus and Web of Science for English-language studies published between 2010 and 2025; approximately XXX records were screened, with YYY meeting the inclusion criteria for thematic synthesis.

RESULTS (THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE)

Work Values and Professionalism across Generations

Evidence shows that younger generations place **less centrality on work**, value leisure more, and show reduced endorsement of the traditional work ethic compared with Boomers and Silents, while rating extrinsic rewards (salary, advancement) more highly (Twenge, 2010). Meta-level reviews confirm that such differences exist but that results are sometimes inconsistent and affected by methodological issues (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

In education, Gen Z business students seek **stable yet rapidly progressing careers**, skill development, and alignment between coursework and career expectations (Maloni et al., 2019). Among public school teachers, Generation X and Generation Y differ modestly in specific values but share a strong commitment to job security, professional development, and collegial respect (Lagmay & Florendo, 2025).

Faculty socialisation research indicates cohort-based differences in career attitudes and patterns of engagement in teaching, research, and service (Corcoran & Clark, 1983). Nursing workforce reviews similarly note cohort differences in job attitudes, resilience, and leadership relationships (Stevanin et al., 2018).



Work–Life Balance and Well-being

Younger generations consistently place **high importance on WLB**, seeking flexibility, autonomy, and supportive policies (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Iliev et al., 2019; Manafe et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025).

- Multi-generation reviews emphasise that employers can attract younger workers more effectively by foregrounding WLB and flexible schedules (Twenge, 2010).
- Systematic evidence among Millennials and Gen Z shows WLB and job satisfaction both positively affect performance, with younger employees valuing flexible hours, leave, and work-from-home (Waworuntu et al., 2022).
- Comparative generational studies find that WLB dimensions impact performance and happiness differently across Gen Y and Gen Z, with stronger WLB–performance links in some cases for Gen Y, but higher prioritisation of balance among Gen Z (Manafe et al., 2025).

In higher education, academic staff frequently experience an **imbalance**. A multi-country survey of European university researchers reported job satisfaction but insufficient balance between work and personal life (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024). In Indian public universities, better WLB among faculty associates with older age, male gender, and science disciplines, indicating intersecting demographic influences (Mayya et al., 2021).

Lifestyle and Early-Career Generations Linked to Universities

Gen Z employees in the education sector are described as **energetic, health-focused, and highly appreciative of flexible work environments that enable them to integrate work, wellness, and personal life** (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024).

Studies of Gen Z graduates indicate a strong tendency to change workplaces, driven by a desire to test themselves, to focus on personal development, to assert themselves socially, and to balance work and life (Pham, 2023). Work and lifestyle are thus increasingly co-defined for Gen Z.

Systematic review evidence suggests that Gen Z is more idealistic in seeking growth than Millennials, and both cohorts emphasise supportive supervisors, career opportunities, and flexible working conditions as key to job satisfaction and performance (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Generational Diversity, Leadership, and Intergenerational Learning in Universities

Generational diversity in public universities shapes competency development and collaboration. A literature review of Malaysian public institutions emphasises that differences in generational values, communication styles, and work approaches can create tension. However, it can also be harnessed to strengthen teamwork and performance if understood and managed (Mohamed et al., 2025).

In Chinese universities, **younger lecturers** respond more strongly to value-based leadership promoting teamwork, communication, and innovation, and show a more pronounced link



between such leadership and intrinsic work motivation than older lecturers; growth mindset benefits intrinsic motivation similarly across age groups (Zhao et al., 2024).

A scoping review of intergenerational learning highlights the **lack of empirical research on IGL in higher education institutions**, despite its recognised importance for organisational development and managing generational change among teachers (García-Martín et al., 2025).

Evidence from mixed-methods systematic reviews in nursing reinforces that generational differences in job attitudes, stress, satisfaction, and leadership perceptions matter for workplace quality and must be integrated into management strategies (Stevanin et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION

Across studies, generational differences relevant to public universities can be summarised as **shifts in emphasis rather than wholesale value replacement**. Core elements of professionalism—such as commitment to job security, development, and respect for colleagues—are widely shared across generations (Lagmay & Florendo, 2025; Corcoran & Clark, 1983). However, younger cohorts, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, consistently:

- Place stronger emphasis on **work–life balance, flexibility, and personal well-being** (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Twenge, 2010; Iliev et al., 2019; Manafe et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022).
- Expect workplaces to support **rapid skill development** and visible career paths (Maloni et al., 2019; Waworuntu et al., 2022).
- Integrate professional identity with **lifestyle choices**, including health, mobility, and self-development (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Pham, 2023).

For public universities, these shifts interact with existing structures of academic work, often characterised by high workloads, blurred boundaries between work and non-work, and traditional career paths (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Corcoran & Clark, 1983; Mayya et al., 2021). Generational diversity among academic staff and graduate employees thus presents both **risks** (e.g., misaligned expectations, turnover, conflict) and **opportunities** (e.g., innovation in work practices, enhanced intergenerational learning).

Evidence also cautions against oversimplified generational stereotypes. Reviews emphasise methodological limitations and contradictions in the literature and call for more nuanced, theoretically grounded approaches that treat generation as one social force among many (e.g., gender, discipline, contract type) (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Stevanin et al., 2018). A core distinction is between: Generational (cohort) effects – stable differences tied to birth cohort (e.g., growing up digital). Age/life-course effects – differences that arise because people are at different stages (e.g., early career vs. mid-life). Period effects – differences driven by historical time (e.g., post-COVID remote work). A large age–period–cohort analysis of over 580,000 people in 113 countries concludes that work motivation is explained far more by age and historical period than by generational cohort labels (X/Y/Z, etc.) (Schröder, 2023). Work becomes more important up to about age 40, then declines; this life-course curve makes younger cohorts look “less motivated” when they may just be younger (Schröder, 2023).



Similarly, a very large employer dataset using age–period–cohort modelling finds that while some attitudes vary by generation, the effects are small, raising doubts about the need for strong generational tailoring (Kowske et al., 2010). A narrative review of work values also finds differences (e.g., higher leisure and lower work centrality in later cohorts), but effect sizes are modest, and many domains are inconsistent across studies (Twenge, 2010).

By contrast, some time-lag studies do report cohort-linked shifts even when age is held constant, such as increases in leisure values and declines in work centrality from Boomers to Gen X to Gen Y (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge, 2010). These authors argue that even small mean shifts can matter at scale (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge, 2010). Other cross-sectional studies find Gen Z scoring higher than older cohorts on extrinsic, leisure, and sometimes work-life balance values, but explicitly note they cannot rule out that these are age-stage effects that may converge as cohorts age (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Kwiecińska et al., 2023; Tan & Chin, 2023; Rafiki & Hartijasti, 2022).

Flexibility, WLB and “youth effects”

Research on flexible work and WLB repeatedly shows age-specific patterns that cut across generational labels: Flexible schedules and FWPs relate differently to well-being and WLB at different ages (e.g., benefits sometimes stronger for older or middle-aged workers, sometimes for younger workers), with mixed evidence overall (Piszczek & Pimputkar, 2020; Ferdous et al., 2021; Bal & De Lange, 2015; Masso et al., 2023). One study of remote work and WLB finds no generational cohort differences at all; outcomes depend on how remote work is designed, not age cohort (Kam & Tran, 2025).

These results support the point that valuing flexibility and mobility is a well-documented feature of younger workers generally, not uniquely “Gen Z”. While several studies describe Gen Z as especially flexible- and WLB-oriented, large age–period–cohort analyses suggest that much of what is labelled a ‘Gen Z’ profile may instead reflect being at an early career stage and working in a post-COVID period, rather than fixed generational traits (Kam & Tran, 2025; Schröder, 2023; Twenge, 2010; Kwiecińska et al., 2023; Masso et al., 2023).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

i. Design WLB-Responsive Work Systems

Introduce and communicate flexible scheduling, remote/hybrid options, and workload management, especially for younger cohorts who strongly value WLB (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Twenge, 2010; Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Mayya et al., 2021). Public universities can support work–life balance by changing core systems: revise tenure and promotion criteria to reward sustainable workloads and mentoring, not chronic overwork; normalize flexible tenure clocks and part-time tenure-eligible roles; adopt transparent workload models that capture teaching, research, service, and pastoral care; embed flextime and hybrid work with clear limits on availability; and regularly audit sabbatical, leave, and childcare policies for equity in access and impact on early-career, caregiving, and marginalized faculty.



ii. **Align Professional Development with Generational Expectations**

Provide clear, accelerated development pathways and mentoring for Millennials and Gen Z, integrating skill growth with well-being initiatives (Maloni et al., 2019; Mohamed et al., 2025; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024).

iii. **Foster Intergenerational Learning and Collaboration**

Develop structured intergenerational learning programmes within departments to leverage different strengths and reduce value-based tensions (Mohamed et al., 2025; García-Martín et al., 2025; Stevanin et al., 2018).

iv. **Generation-Aware Leadership**

Train academic leaders to adopt **value-based, participatory leadership** that resonates more strongly with younger lecturers while maintaining clarity for older cohorts (Zhao et al., 2024).

v. **Use Evidence, Not Stereotypes**

Monitor local data on attitudes, WLB, satisfaction, and turnover by age and generation; avoid uncritical adoption of generic generational labels (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Stevanin et al., 2018).

vi. **Support Lifestyle–Professionalism Integration**

Recognise health, well-being, and mobility as legitimate components of professional life, particularly for younger staff and graduate employees (Fatima & Srivastava, 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Pham, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Empirical evidence indicates that generational cohorts associated with public universities differ systematically but not uniformly in work centrality, work–life balance priorities, and lifestyle orientations. Younger generations converge with older cohorts in core professional values yet diverge in their insistence on flexibility, balance, and integrated personal professional development. Public universities that understand and respond to these nuanced patterns, while avoiding simplistic stereotypes, are better positioned to sustain professionalism, enhance well-being, and harness the benefits of generational diversity in academic work.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- Longitudinal studies of generational cohorts within public universities examining changes in WLB, professionalism, and lifestyle across the academic career.
- Comparative research across disciplines and contract types (tenure-track vs. non-academic staff) to map how generational patterns manifest differently.



- Qualitative studies of intergenerational learning, mentorship, and conflict resolution in academic departments (García-Martín et al., 2025).
- Evaluations of WLB and flexibility interventions in universities, with generationally disaggregated outcomes (Antoniuk-Gula et al., 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Mayya et al., 2021).
- Studies linking generational characteristics to student-facing professionalism (teaching quality, advising, research supervision).

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