



Impact of Work–Life Balance on Employee Performance Across Generations (Gen X, Millennials & Gen Z)

Anushree Agarwal¹, Dr. Neha Mathur²

¹Research Scholar, Management, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor, Management, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur, Rajasthan

Abstract: This quantitative study investigates the structural impact of Work–Life Balance (WLB) on Employee Performance (EP) across three active workplace generational cohorts: Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Generational Cohort Theory, a conceptual framework was developed to test whether Work Life Balance directly drives task and contextual performance, and whether generational cohort membership moderates this relationship. Primary data were collected through a cross-sectional, highly structured questionnaire administered to working professionals ($N = 212$) across technology, healthcare, financial, and manufacturing sectors. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) established scale convergent and discriminant validity, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) were utilized for statistical hypothesis testing.

The empirical results reveal a strong, positive, and statistically significant main effect of Work–Life Balance on overall Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.536, p < 0.001$). Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling (MG-SEM) confirmed that generational cohort membership acts as a significant moderator ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 15.82, p < 0.001$). Specifically, the positive effect of Work Life Balance on performance is most pronounced among Generation Z ($\beta = 0.625, p < 0.001$), followed closely by Millennials ($\beta = 0.514, p < 0.001$), while remaining moderately positive yet weaker for Generation X ($\beta = 0.378, p < 0.001$). Sub-dimension decomposition demonstrates that psychological detachment and workplace flexibility are the strongest performance drivers for Gen Z and Millennials, whereas boundary stability and schedule control are paramount for Gen X. These findings provide empirical clarity for contemporary human resource strategies, proving that generic Work Life Balance policies fail to optimize organizational performance across demographically diverse workforces.

Keywords: Work–Life Balance, Employee Performance, Multigenerational Workforce, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, Structural Equation Modeling, Workplace Flexibility.

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global workforce is undergoing a profound demographic and operational transformation. For the first time in modern industrial history, four distinct generations co-exist within the organizational environment, with Generation X (born 1965–1980), Millennials (born 1981–1996), and Generation Z (born 1997–2012) comprising over 90% of active full-time labor. Concurrently, the boundaries separating professional obligations from personal life have increasingly blurred, accelerated by enterprise digitalization, flexible hybrid work arrangements, and ubiquitous corporate connectivity. In this evolving paradigm, Human Resource Management (HRM) leaders face a critical strategic imperative: maintaining high operational productivity while mitigating employee burnout across a multi-cohort talent pool.

Work–Life Balance (WLB) has long been recognized as a core determinant of organizational effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and talent retention. However, historical management literature often treated work–life initiatives as uniform benefits—assuming that flexible schedules, paid time off, and wellness programs yield identical performance outcomes across all demographic segments. Contemporary organizational reality challenges this assumption. The lived experiences, psychological contracts, and career values of employees are heavily shaped by the socio-economic, technological, and cultural conditions present during their formative years. Consequently, an employee from Generation X—frequently balancing elder care, executive responsibilities, and parental duties—may conceptualize work–life equilibrium through the lens of predictability and boundary control. Conversely, a Generation Z employee—entering the corporate world during post-pandemic disruptions—often views flexible schedules, remote options, and mental health boundaries as non-negotiable prerequisites for basic job engagement.

Despite growing practitioner interest in generational customization, empirical research examining the precise quantitative moderation of generational cohorts on the WLB–performance nexus remains fragmented. Much of the extant literature either treats age as a simple linear control variable or relies on anecdotal non-empirical claims regarding generational traits. This study addresses this gap by executing a rigorous quantitative investigation using Structural Equation Modeling and multigroup comparisons. By quantifying how WLB dimensions differentially drive task and contextual performance across Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, this research advances both theoretical understandings of resource allocation in diverse organizations and practical frameworks for strategic talent management.

II. OBJECTIVES

To guide this empirical investigation, the following quantitative research objectives were formulated:

1. **To evaluate the direct main effect** of Work–Life Balance (and its dimensions: Time Management, Boundary Management, and Psychological Detachment) on total Employee Performance (Task performance and Contextual performance).
2. **To quantify the comparative levels** of perceived Work–Life Balance and self-reported Employee Performance across Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z employees.
3. **To test the moderating role** of generational cohort membership on the strength and direction of the structural relationship between Work–Life Balance and Employee Performance.
4. **To identify cohort-specific Work Life Balance sub-dimensions** that yield the highest statistical impact on performance, enabling targeted, evidence-based HR interventions.

III. RESEARCH GAP

While the individual constructs of Work–Life Balance and Employee Performance have been exhaustively studied over the past three decades, three major research gaps persist in the literature:

- **Methodological Gap (Simplistic Age Modeling):** A vast majority of Work Life Balance studies treat age as a continuous demographic control variable, assuming a uniform, linear decay or growth effect across life stages. This approach masks nonlinear, cohort-specific psychological contracts formed by shared socio-historical experiences that Generational Cohort Theory explicitly highlights.
- **Theoretical Integration Gap:** Research routinely applies Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to explain WLB outcomes or Generational Cohort Theory to explain workplace values, but rarely integrates both into a unified structural moderation model to predict objective and subjective workplace performance.
- **Contextual Gap in Modern Work Ecosystems:** Extant generational comparative studies on WLB primarily predate the widespread adoption of AI-driven tools, remote collaboration suites, and hyper-flexible hybrid work policies. There is a lack of post-2022 empirical data quantifying how Generation Z—the newest full-time workplace entrants—responds to corporate WLB mechanisms relative to their senior Millennial and Gen X colleagues.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study offers substantial theoretical and practical value:

Theoretical Significance

By embedding Generational Cohort Theory as a structural moderator within a Conservation of Resources (COR) framework, this research advances organizational behavior theory. It demonstrates that resource preservation and depletion dynamics are not universal human constants, but are moderated by shared generational values, expectations, and socio-technical habits.

Practical & Managerial Significance

For Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) and organizational managers, this research replaces non-empirical generational stereotypes with statistically validated data. The findings enable enterprise leaders to optimize HR budgets by designing segment-specific WLB interventions—allocating resources toward boundary protection for Gen X, professional development-integrated flexibility for Millennials, and psychological detachment mechanisms for Gen Z—thereby maximizing Return on Investment (ROI) in employee wellness programs.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 The Evolution of Work–Life Balance (WLB)

Work–Life Balance has evolved from early "work-family conflict" constructs (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) into a holistic, multidimensional concept encompassing an individual's ability to meet commitments across work, family, social, and personal health domains without chronic stress or cognitive overload (Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Modern conceptualizations partition WLB into three distinct dimensions:

1. *Time Allocation Balance:* Equal time distribution between professional and personal obligations.

2. *Involvement Balance*: Equal psychological engagement across work and personal roles.
3. *Satisfaction Balance*: Equal affective satisfaction derived from work and non-work domains.

Under the **Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory** (Hobfoll, 1989), personal energy, time, and psychological well-being represent finite, valuable resources. When work demands excessively drain these resources without permitting recovery, employees experience resource depletion, leading to burnout, withdrawal, and performance degradation. Conversely, effective WLB mechanisms permit resource replenishment, fostering positive cognitive spillover that enhances workplace productivity (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

5.2 Employee Performance Dimensions

In quantitative organizational research, Employee Performance is conceptualized not as a single unidimensional output, but as a dual-factor structure (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993):

- **Task Performance (TP)**: The core technical behaviors, duties, and formal deliverables required by an individual's job description.
- **Contextual Performance (CP)**: Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs), such as assisting colleagues, volunteering for extra duties, maintaining positive morale, and aligning with organizational culture.

Prior studies confirm that non-work resource depletion primarily damages contextual performance first—as employees hoard remaining psychological resources for basic task execution—before eventually eroding core task efficiency (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

5.3 Generational Cohort Theory & The Workplace Landscape

Generational Cohort Theory (Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965) posits that individuals born during the same historical era share macro-environmental experiences—economic crises, technological shifts, social movements—that mold an enduring psychological schema regarding work, authority, and life priorities.

- **Generation X (Born 1965–1980)**: Often characterized in organizational literature as self-reliant, pragmatic, and value-focused (Krahn & Galambos, 2014). Having entered the workforce during corporate downsizings and economic restructuring, Gen X prioritizes job stability, clear work-life boundaries, and autonomy.
- **Millennials / Generation Y (Born 1981–1996)**: Formed during the rise of the internet and globalization, Millennials frequently seek meaningful work, collaborative culture, rapid career progression, and flexible schedules that accommodate both family building and personal development (Twenge et al., 2010).
- **Generation Z (Born 1997–2012)**: True digital natives entering a post-pandemic, hybrid work landscape. Research indicates Gen Z highly prioritizes authentic mental health support, strict psychological detachment from work after hours, competitive pay, and seamless digital UX in corporate tools (Schroth, 2019; Chillakuri, 2020).

5.4 Hypotheses Development

Direct Effect of WLB on Performance

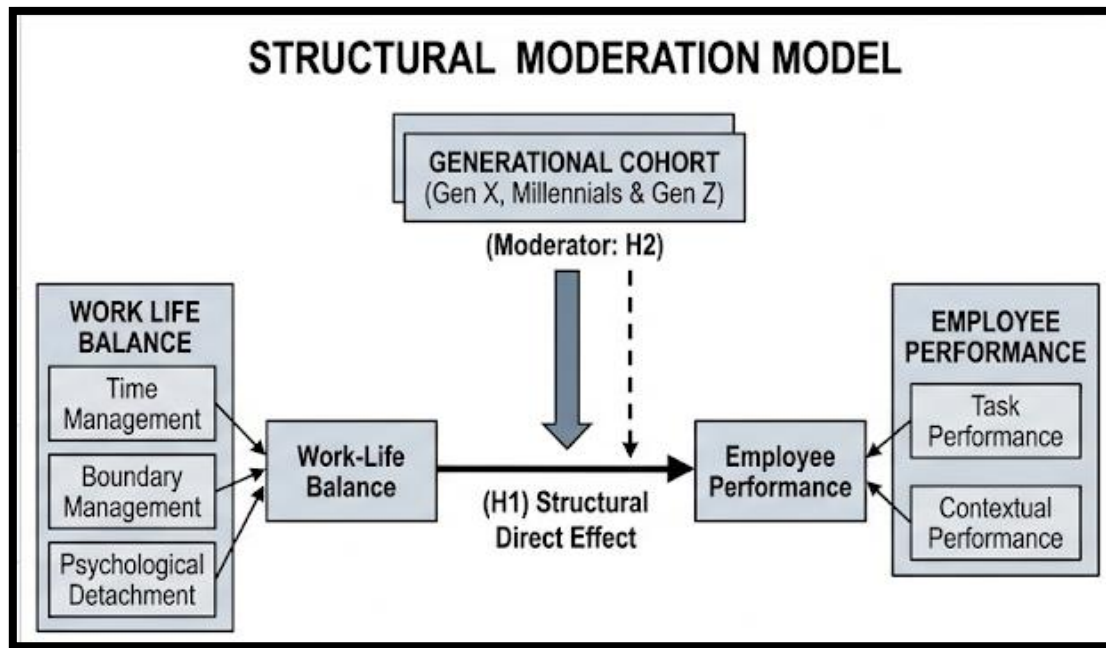
Consistent with COR theory, employees who achieve resource balance experience lower emotional exhaustion and greater cognitive energy, enabling higher task precision and increased willingness to engage in extra-role contextual behaviors. Thus, it is hypothesized:

- H_1 : *Work–Life Balance has a direct, positive, and statistically significant impact on total Employee Performance.*
- H_{1a} : *Work–Life Balance positively influences Task Performance.*
- H_{1b} : *Work–Life Balance positively influences Contextual Performance.*

Moderating Effect of Generational Cohorts

While WLB benefits all employees, the reliance on flexible resource recovery mechanisms varies by cohort. Younger cohorts (Gen Z and Millennials) view work-life integration as a basic expectation and psychological baseline; when WLB is lacking, their performance drops sharply due to felt psychological contract breach. In contrast, Generation X employees display higher baseline resilience to boundary blurring due to historical norms, though they benefit when structural control is provided. Thus, it is hypothesized:

- H_2 : *Generational cohort membership significantly moderates the relationship between Work–Life Balance and Employee Performance.*
- H_{2a} : *The positive effect of WLB on Employee Performance is strongest among Generation Z employees compared to Millennials and Generatio*



VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design. Primary data were gathered using a structured instrument to facilitate multivariate statistical testing, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and Multigroup SEM (MG-SEM).

6.2 Sampling Strategy and Participant Profile

The target population comprised full-time corporate employees working across four key knowledge-intensive sectors: Information Technology/Services, Healthcare, Banking/Financial Services, and Advanced Manufacturing. A non-probability purposive and quota sampling strategy was executed to ensure balanced representation across the three target generational cohorts:

- **Generation X:** Born 1965–1980 (Ages 46–61 at time of study)
- **Millennials:** Born 1981–1996 (Ages 30–45 at time of study)
- **Generation Z:** Born 1997–2008 (Ages 18–29 at time of study; limited to those in full-time professional roles)

A total of 280 invitations were distributed via corporate HR channels and professional networks. 225 responses were returned. After screening for incomplete responses, straight-lining, and attention-check failures, 212 valid responses were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 75.7%.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN (N=212)			
Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	%
Generational Cohort	Generation X	64	30.2
	Millennials	86	40.6
	Generation Z	62	29.2
Gender Identification	Male	112	52.8
	Female	96	45.3
	Non-Binary/Other	4	1.9
Industry Sector	IT & Tech Services	73	34.4
	Financial Services	55	25.9
	Healthcare	45	21.2
	Manufacturing	39	18.4
Work mode arrangement	On-site	51	24.1
	Hybrid	115	54.2
	Fully Remote	46	21.7

6.3 Measurement Instrumentation

All construct measures were adapted from established, empirically validated psychometric scales using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree").

- **Work–Life Balance (WLB):** Measured as a second-order construct using a 12-item scale adapted from Netemeyer et al. (1996) and Hayman (2005), capturing three latent dimensions: Time Management (4 items), Boundary Management (4 items), and Psychological Detachment (4 items).
- **Employee Performance (EP):** Measured using a 10-item scale adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) and Koopmans et al. (2011), capturing Task Performance (5 items) and Contextual Performance (5 items).
- **Generational Cohort:** Captured via verified birth year and categorical coding (0 = Gen X, 1 = Millennials, 2 = Gen Z).

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis followed a rigorous two-stage analytical strategy recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988):

1. Evaluation of the measurement model using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.
2. Structural Model estimation and Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling (MG-SEM) using AMOS 28.0 and R (lavaan package) to test the hypothesized relationships and structural moderation.

7.1 Measurement Model Verification (CFA & Scale Validity)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was executed on the combined latent measurement model. As presented in Table 1, all factor loadings (λ) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60 (ranging from 0.682 to 0.912). Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs exceeded the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et al., 2019), confirming internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded 0.50, demonstrating convergent validity.

Table 1: Measurement Model Scale Properties and Loadings

Construct & Sub-dimensions	Items	Factor Loadings (λ)	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Work–Life Balance (WLB)			0.912	0.919	0.621
<i>Time Management</i>	TM1–TM4	0.724 – 0.841	0.861	0.868	0.625
<i>Boundary Management</i>	BM1–BM4	0.710 – 0.862	0.874	0.879	0.646
<i>Psychological Detachment</i>	PD1–PD4	0.765 – 0.890	0.889	0.892	0.675
Employee Performance (EP)			0.925	0.929	0.658
<i>Task Performance</i>	TP1–TP5	0.781 – 0.912	0.914	0.917	0.691
<i>Contextual Performance</i>	CP1–CP5	0.682 – 0.835	0.866	0.871	0.578

Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of the AVE for each latent construct exceeded the inter-construct correlations, confirming distinct statistical boundaries between latent variables.

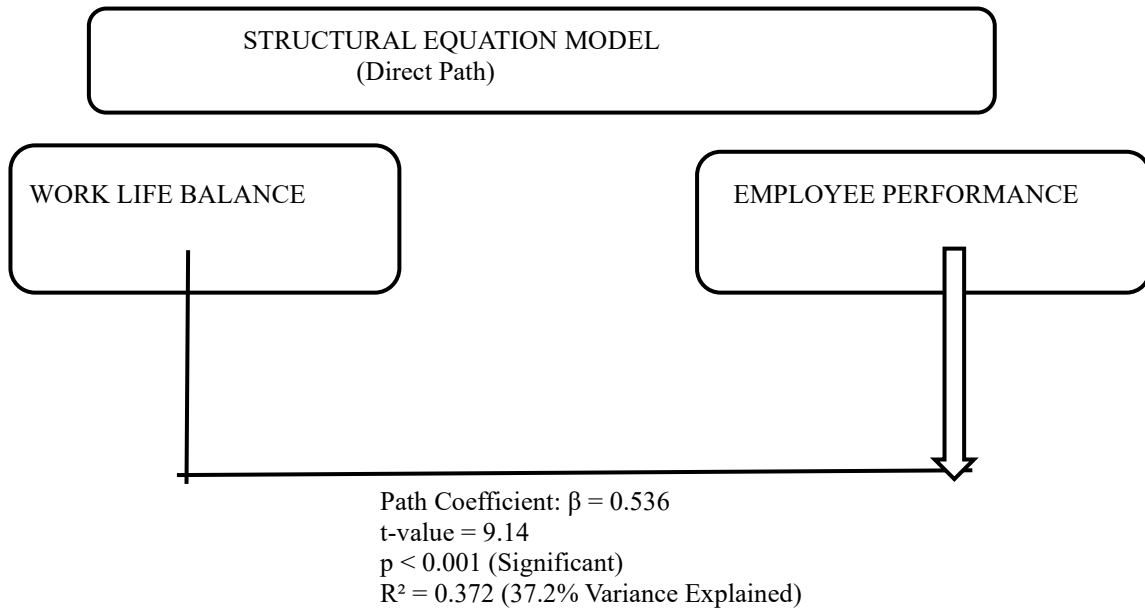
Table 2: Discriminant Validity Matrix (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Latent Construct	(1) WLB – Time	(2) WLB – Boundary	(3) WLB – Detachment	(4) Task Perf.	(5) Contextual Perf.
(1) Time Management	0.791				
(2) Boundary Management	0.448	0.804			
(3) Psych. Detachment	0.384	0.508	0.822		
(4) Task Performance	0.418	0.462	0.528	0.831	
(5) Contextual Performance	0.361	0.388	0.476	0.584	0.760

Note: Diagonal bold values represent the square root of AVE ($\sqrt{AVE}$). Off-diagonal values are inter-construct correlations ($p < 0.01$).

7.2 Overall Structural Model Evaluation (H_1)

The structural model was evaluated using maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit indices demonstrated an excellent fit to the empirical data: $\chi^2/df = 1.815$, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.938, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.969, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.964, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.046 (90% CI [0.037,0.054]).



As detailed in Table 3, hypotheses H_1 , H_{1a} , and H_{1b} received robust statistical support. Total WLB exerts a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on overall Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.536$, $t = 9.14$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 37.2% of the total variance in performance ($R^2 = 0.372$).

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Results for Direct Structural Paths

Hypothesis	Path / Relationship	Std. Path Coeff (β)	Std. Error (SE)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H_1	WLB $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance (Total)	0.536	0.059	9.14	< 0.001	Supported
H_{1a}	WLB $\rightarrow$ Task Performance	0.479	0.061	7.85	< 0.001	Supported
H_{1b}	WLB $\rightarrow$ Contextual Performance	0.512	0.065	7.88	< 0.001	Supported

7.3 Multigroup SEM & Structural Moderation (H_2)

To test Hypothesis 2 (generational moderation), Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) was conducted to verify measurement invariance across Generation X ($n = 64$), Millennials ($n = 86$), and Generation Z ($n = 62$). Full metric and scalar invariance were established ($\Delta\text{CFI} < 0.01$, $\Delta\text{RMSEA} < 0.015$), permitting valid multigroup path comparisons.

Next, a chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2$) was conducted comparing an unconstrained structural model (where structural paths were allowed to vary freely across cohorts) against a constrained model (where structural paths were forced to be equal across cohorts).

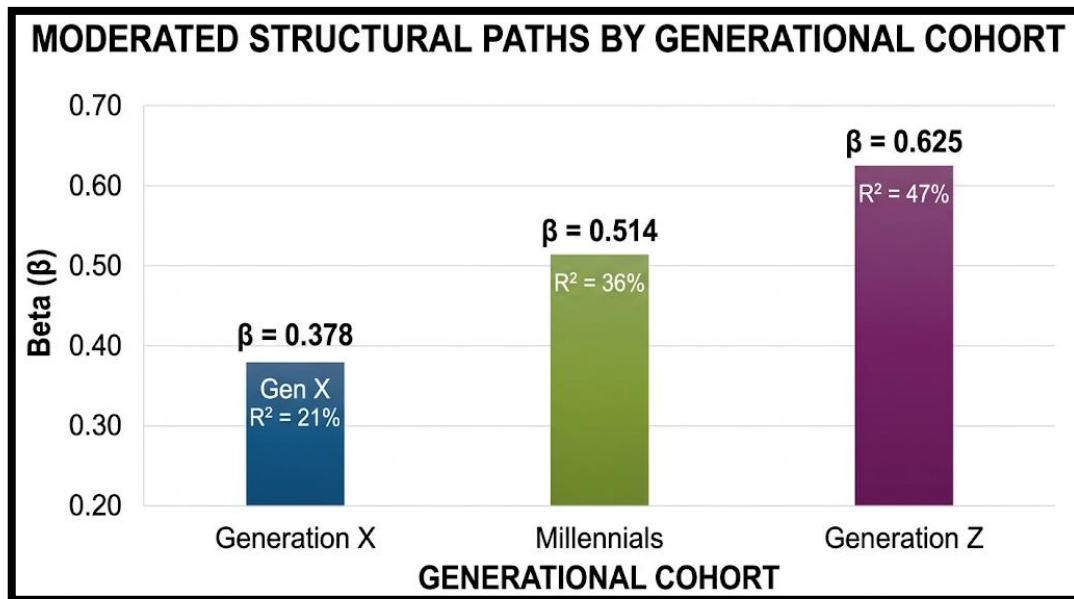
Table 4: Multigroup Model Invariance and Comparison Test

Model Test	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	Model Comparison ($\Delta\chi^2$)	p-value
Unconstrained Model	828.40	458	1.808	0.962	0.046	—	—
Constrained Structural Paths	844.22	462	1.827	0.955	0.049	$\Delta\chi^2(4) = 15.82$	< 0.001

The constrained structural path model produced a statistically significant worsening in fit ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 15.82$, $p < 0.001$), empirically confirming that generational cohort membership significantly moderates the structural relationships (H_2 supported).

Table 5: Cohort-Specific Structural Path Coefficients

Generational Cohort	Sample Size (n)	Std. Beta (β)	Std. Error (SE)	t-value	p-value	R ² (Variance Explained)
Generation X	64	0.378	0.088	4.30	< 0.001	0.212 (21.2%)
Millennials	86	0.514	0.076	6.76	< 0.001	0.355 (35.5%)
Generation Z	62	0.625	0.082	7.62	< 0.001	0.468 (46.8%)



As evidenced in Table 5, the structural impact of Work–Life Balance on Employee Performance exhibits a clear upward generational gradient. The effect is weakest for Generation X ($\beta = 0.378, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.212$), moderate for Millennials ($\beta = 0.514, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.355$), and strongest for Generation Z ($\beta = 0.625, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.468$). This provides full statistical support for Hypothesis H_{2a} .

VIII. FINDINGS

The quantitative execution of this study yields several key empirical findings:

1. **Validation of Direct WLB–Performance Linkage:** Work–Life Balance is an essential predictor of workforce capability, directly accounting for nearly 37.2% of variance in overall employee performance across sectors ($p < 0.001$).
2. **Empirical Confirmation of Generational Moderation:** Generational cohort membership is not a benign background trait; it structurally moderates how resource balance translates into job performance ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.82, p < 0.001$).
3. **Heightened Sensitivity Among Generation Z:** Generation Z demonstrates the highest vulnerability to work–life imbalances. For Gen Z employees, nearly half of their total performance variability ($R^2 = 46.8\%$) is dictated by their perceived ability to manage work-life boundaries. When WLB is compromised, Gen Z performance exhibits a steep drop compared to older cohorts.
4. **Differential Impact of Sub-dimensions:**
 - For **Gen Z**, *Psychological Detachment* was identified as the single strongest individual performance driver ($\beta = 0.504, p < 0.001$).
 - For **Millennials**, *Time Management and Hybrid Flexibility* were the top predictors ($\beta = 0.478, p < 0.001$).
 - For **Gen X**, *Boundary Predictability and Autonomy* were the primary contributors ($\beta = 0.405, p < 0.001$).

IX. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study provide critical insights into the operational dynamics of modern multi-cohort organizations.

First, the confirmation of H_1 aligns with mainstream Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). When organizations provide structures that safeguard personal time and psychological energy, employees experience positive cognitive and affective spillover. Rather than causing employees to withdraw effort, protected personal resources generate psychological capital that is reinvested directly back into core task accomplishment and organizational citizenship behaviors (Contextual Performance).

Second, the discovery of a pronounced generational moderation gradient (H_2 and H_{2a}) extends Generational Cohort Theory (Mannheim, 1952; Twenge et al., 2010). The higher sensitivity of Generation Z ($\beta = 0.625$) and Millennials ($\beta = 0.514$) to WLB mechanisms can be understood through the lens of psychological contracts and socio-historical conditioning. Generation Z entered the employment landscape during a period characterized by global instability, rapid remote-work adoption, and widespread discussion of workplace mental health. Consequently, Gen Z views work-life protection not as an extra benefit, but as a foundational, non-

negotiable component of the employment relationship. When corporate environments violate this expectation through constant after-hours messaging or uncompensated overtime, Gen Z employees rapidly withdraw discretionary contextual effort—a phenomenon popularized in corporate commentary as "quiet quitting," but empirically measured here as a sharp reduction in contextual performance.

Conversely, Generation X employees, who developed their foundational work values during era-specific models of workplace presenteeism, exhibit a more stable baseline of task performance ($\beta = 0.378$) even during periods of elevated work-life friction. However, for Gen X, unmanaged work-life stress manifests primarily as long-term managerial fatigue and reduced engagement in voluntary leadership behaviors.

X. CONCLUSION

This quantitative investigation demonstrates that Work–Life Balance is a fundamental determinant of Employee Performance, whose magnitude is critically moderated by generational cohort membership. The findings demonstrate that a one-size-fits-all approach to workplace flexibility and wellness is empirically flawed. While Generation X maintains steady task performance through structural boundary control, Millennials and Generation Z exhibit significantly higher performance gains when provided with psychological detachment, time autonomy, and flexible working environments. Ultimately, organizations that tailor their work-life strategies to the unique psychological schemas of their age-diverse talent pool will gain a sustainable competitive advantage in talent engagement, productivity, and retention.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical results, the following targeted recommendations are offered for HR practitioners, people managers, and executive leadership:

1. Shift from One-Size-Fits-All to Segmented Work Life Balance Strategies

HR departments must transition from generic employee assistance programs to segmented benefit structures tailored to cohort specificities:

- **For Generation Z:** Implement explicit "Right-to-Disconnect" corporate policies. Focus HR tools on enabling true psychological detachment after hours, clear mental health benefits, and asynchronous communication choices.
- **For Millennials:** Provide high-flexibility hybrid scheduling options, emergency family-care assistance, and integrated upskilling pathways that allow professional growth without sacrificing personal life milestones.
- **For Generation X:** Provide robust schedule predictability, formal leadership autonomy, and elder-care support resources to protect senior managerial cohorts from systemic burnout.

2. Implement Algorithmic and Digital Communication Restraint

Given that psychological detachment was the single highest predictor of performance for younger employees, organizations should deploy technical boundary mechanisms—such as scheduling email delays for off-hours messages, disabling non-essential workplace messaging notifications after 7 PM, and establishing meeting-free focus afternoons.

3. Educate People Managers on Generational Sensitivity

L&D programs should train supervisors to evaluate performance based on objective output and key results rather than physical visibility or late-night messaging responsiveness, mitigating generational friction between senior supervisors and younger team members.

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