

CHAPTER III

EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 Generation

The concept of “generation” has evolved significantly over the years. A generation refers to a group of individuals who share similar birth years, ages, characteristics, and key life events that shape their experiences during their formative years. In line with this Kopperschmidt (2000) defines a generation as a cohort of individuals who recognize a shared identity based on common characteristics, such as birth year, age, geographical location, and significant life events that influence their developmental stage.

Generational differences are particularly evident in the workplace, where individuals from varying age groups often bring diverse perspectives, motivations, and behavioral patterns. These differences influence workplace expectations, career strategies, communication styles, and approaches to leadership and job satisfaction. As organizations become increasingly multigenerational, understanding these differences is essential. Companies that seek to transform generational diversity into a competitive advantage must enhance their human resource management strategies by fostering inclusion and designing systems that optimize collaboration across age groups.

According to Mark McCrindle, in his book *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* (2014), generational studies offer insight into how people of different ages relate to each other and to the world around them. He emphasizes that each generation is shaped not only by the time they were born, but also by

global influences, national trends, and technological developments that occur during their formative years. These influences impact how individuals perceive authority, adapt to change, interact with technology, and engage in professional environments.

McCrimble (2014) classifies the generation into the following groups: the Builders (1925-1945), the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Generation Y or Millennials (1980-1994), Generation Z (1995-2009), and Generation Alpha (2010-present). Each generation possesses unique characteristics and stereotypes that distinguish it from others. Understanding these traits is essential for fostering collaboration and minimizing potential conflicts in diverse organizational settings.

In the context of this study, understanding the concept of generation serves as the foundation for analyzing the intergenerational dynamics between the two main characters in *The Intern* (2015), Ben Whittaker and Jules Ostin. Ben, representing the Baby Boomer generation, and Jules, representing the Millennial generation, embody differing generational identities that influence how they communicate, solve problems, and build trust. Their evolving relationship throughout the film demonstrates that generational diversity—when acknowledged, understood, and respected—can lead to meaningful collaboration, professional growth, and emotional support.

To further examine these generational differences and their implications within the film, this study utilizes McCrimble's Generational Framework, which will be elaborated in the following section.

3.2 Generational Framework of McCrindle

Mark McCrindle, a prominent Australian social researcher and demographer, developed a generational framework that has become widely used for understanding generational differences in workplaces and society in his book *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* (2014). This model categorizes people into cohorts on the basis of their birth years and the significant historical, social, and technological events that shape their formative experiences (McCrindle, 2014). By emphasising common formative events—such as major geopolitical shifts, rapid technological change, or global economic cycles—McCrindle’s framework explains how each generation develops distinctive values, attitudes, communication styles, and workplace behaviours. Because of its clear, evidence-based categorisation, the framework is widely applied in organisational analysis, education, marketing, and leadership development to clarify generational differences and to design strategies that foster productive, intergenerational collaboration.

McCrindle’s framework identifies several key generational cohorts, each with distinct characteristics. First, the Builders (1925-1945). This cohort, sometimes called the “*Builders*,” entered life amid the aftermath of the Great Depression and, as children, heard first-hand accounts of the First World War before experiencing the upheaval of the Second. They’re known for their resilience, duty, and commitment to community values, they also tend to be empathetic toward younger generations who are growing up in a vastly different world. Next, there are the Baby Boomers (1946-1964). Named for the population surge following World

War II, Baby Boomers were born into an era of expanding housing, infrastructure, and economic opportunity. Baby Boomers are generally characterized by a strong work ethic, loyalty to organizations, respect for hierarchy, and a preference for face-to-face communication. They value stability and commitment and are often seen as hardworking and reliable. They brought about massive cultural change, social change, and economic change and continue to have impacts on society today, often dubbed the “bank of mum and dad” for the financial support they provide to subsequent generations.

After the Baby Boomers, there is Generation X (1965-1979). Douglas Coupland popularised the “X” label, capturing the cohort’s scepticism toward authority and anti-establishment streak. Growing up amid economic volatility, many Gen Xers nonetheless entered the property market earlier than later generations and benefited from decades of relative prosperity up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gen X experienced rapid technological advancement and social change during their formative years and are often described as independent, adaptable, pragmatic, and resourceful. Their experience fostered an entrepreneurial spirit and a pragmatic approach to career and finance, resulting in a steady rise in net worth from the early 1990s onward.

Generation Y or Millennials (1980-1994) Millennials are the first generation to grow up with widespread access to digital technology and the internet. They are known for being tech-savvy, collaborative, and open to change. Millennials value flexibility, diversity, and meaningful work. They prefer informal communication and are comfortable with multitasking and rapid technological shifts. Now in their

thirties and early forties, many Millennials are moving into family life while still contending with the economic constraints that marked their young adulthood. Next, Generation Z (1995-2009). As digital natives, Generation Z has grown up in an era of smartphones, social media, and global connectivity. They are entrepreneurial, socially conscious, and value individuality and instant access to information. And lastly, Generation Alpha (2010-2025). The term “Alpha” signifies a fresh beginning rather than a return to previous generational patterns, marking a clear break into a new era. Unlike their Millennial parents, Generation Alpha is growing up entirely within the 21st century, making them the first generation to be fully immersed in the digital age from birth. While they are not yet active in the workforce, Generation Alpha’s upbringing and values are expected to shape future trends in education, communication, and society at large (McCrindle & Fell, 2020).

Understanding McCrindle’s generational framework provides a valuable lens through which to analyze the behavioral tendencies, communication styles, and workplace expectations of different age cohorts. By identifying the shared formative experiences that shape each generation, this framework allows researchers and organizations to better interpret intergenerational interactions and address potential conflicts.

3.3 Social Relationship in American Working Culture

Social relationships in the American workplace are shaped by a combination of individualistic values, professional networking, and organizational culture. The U.S. work environment places a strong emphasis on meritocracy, where employees

are encouraged to showcase their skills, take initiative, and pursue career advancement based on performance rather than seniority. This cultural approach influences workplace interactions, leadership styles, and communication patterns.

One of the defining characteristics of social relationships in American working culture is professional networking. Building and maintaining professional relationships is crucial for career growth, with employees often engaging in networking events, mentorship programs, and industry conferences to expand their connections. Granovetter's (1973) "strength of weak ties" theory suggests that indirect, casual relationships in professional settings are often more beneficial for career mobility than close personal connections, a concept that holds strong relevance in American workplaces.

Another key aspect of workplace relationships in the U.S. is team collaboration balanced with individual accountability. While teamwork is valued, there is also a strong focus on personal responsibility and independent problem-solving. Employees are expected to contribute their expertise while also respecting the contributions of others. This dynamic can sometimes create tension between employees from collectivist cultures, who may be more accustomed to shared responsibilities, and American employees, who prioritize individual recognition.

Moreover, workplace hierarchy in the U.S. tends to be relatively flat compared to more rigidly structured cultures. While there is respect for authority, open-door policies and direct communication with supervisors are encouraged. Many companies embrace participatory leadership, where employees are invited to

share ideas and feedback, creating a more dynamic and innovative work environment (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). However, this emphasis on direct communication can sometimes be misinterpreted by individuals from cultures that value indirect, high-context communication styles (Hall, 1976).

Additionally, work-life balance is increasingly prioritized in American workplaces, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z employees. Age diversity is particularly relevant as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z coexist in the workforce. Each generation brings unique skills, experiences, and work expectations. Baby Boomers tend to value job stability and hierarchical structures, while Millennials and Gen Z prioritize work-life balance, flexibility, and digital communication (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2019). Bridging these generational differences is crucial for fostering productive collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Gender diversity has also gained significant attention, with more women entering leadership positions and companies implementing gender-equality policies. Research indicates that gender-diverse teams are more innovative and perform better in problem-solving tasks. However, gender biases and workplace discrimination remain challenges that organizations must address through equitable hiring practices and policies promoting work-life balance.

3.4 Technological Impact Upon American Working Culture

The increasing reliance on technology in the workplace has significantly impacted how employees from different generations interact, collaborate, and perform tasks.

Digital transformation has introduced new tools and methods that enhance efficiency, but it has also created a generational gap in technological adaptation. Baby Boomers and Millennials, in particular, demonstrate contrasting approaches to technology, necessitating organizational strategies to bridge these differences.

The ability to adapt to technological advancements varies among generations, influenced by their exposure to technology during their formative years. According to Tasheva (2024), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) entered the workforce when analog and mechanical devices were dominant, making them "digital immigrants" who had to learn and adjust to new digital tools later in their careers. Meanwhile, Millennials (born 1981–1996) grew up surrounded by digital technology, making them more intuitive in adopting emerging tools such as AI, cloud computing, and collaborative platforms.

Wesolowski (2014) reinforces this idea, stating that Baby Boomers often perceive new workplace technologies as disruptive to traditional workflows, while Millennials view them as opportunities for efficiency and innovation. Levenson (2010) further highlights that Millennials are more likely to embrace automation and digital collaboration tools, while Baby Boomers may struggle with rapid technological changes due to differences in learning styles and comfort with digital platforms.

Organizations recognize the challenges posed by generational gaps in technology adaptation and have implemented strategies to bridge this divide. According to Tapscott (1998), successful businesses provide structured digital training programs tailored to different generations, ensuring that older employees

can learn at their own pace while younger workers maximize the use of new technologies. Tasheva (2024) suggests several approaches for bridging the generational gap in technology adoption, such as reverse mentorship program, which younger employees mentor older colleagues on digital tools, fostering mutual learning and reducing resistance to new technologies. Blended training methods, which combine traditional instructor-led sessions with digital self-paced courses, accommodate different learning preferences.

In addition to generational differences in technology adoption, workplace communication methods have also undergone significant transformations. Tasheva (2024) highlights that Millennials prefer instant messaging and virtual collaboration, valuing speed and flexibility, whereas Baby Boomers favor structured, in-person discussions that foster personal relationships.

However, the reliance on digital communication has both positive and negative implications for cross-generational collaboration. While digital tools increase efficiency and accessibility, they can also create friction between employees with different communication preferences. Research by Borges et al. (2010) indicates that Millennials are more likely to embrace asynchronous communication, such as emails and chat messages, while Baby Boomers prefer scheduled meetings and direct verbal interactions.