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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Dialogue across Generations: A Review on Communication and Organizational Behavior

Kuşaklar Arasında Diyalog: İletişim ve Örgütsel Davranış Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary workplace is characterized by an unprecedented demographic convergence of five generations, presenting both a strategic ecosystem of wisdom and a complex communicative challenge. This review synthesizes research at the intersection of management and organizational behavior to examine how intergenerational dialogue acts as the primary mediator between age diversity and performance. By evaluating the tensions between generational cohort theory and the lifespan perspective, the paper argues that age-based friction is often a communicative construct rather than an immutable trait. The analysis explores the dynamics of dialogue through media richness and communication accommodation theories, highlighting the shift toward asynchronous modalities and evolving professional identities. Findings indicate that intentional dialogue is essential for fostering relational leadership, bidirectional knowledge management, and psychological safety. Furthermore, the review outlines managerial implications for building generational intelligence through communication audits and mixed-age task forces. It concludes by addressing the future role of artificial intelligence and the necessity of global, non-western research perspectives. Ultimately, this article posits that adaptive, inclusive dialogue is the foundational mechanism for transforming generational differences into a source of collective resilience and institutional stability.

**Keywords:** Intergenerational Dialogue, Organizational Behaviour, Communication Accommodation, Knowledge Management, Workplace Diversity.

ÖZ

Günümüz iş dünyası, beş farklı kuşağın bir arada çalıştığı benzeri görülmemiş bir demografik birleşme ile karakterize edilmektedir. Bu durum hem stratejik bir bilgi ekosistemi hem de karmaşık bir iletişimsel zorluk sunmaktadır. Bu derleme makalesi, kuşaklararası diyalogun yaş çeşitliliği ile kurumsal performans arasındaki temel aracı rolünü incelemek için yönetim ve örgütsel davranış literatürünü sentezlemektedir. Çalışma, kuşak kohort teorisi ile yaşam boyu gelişim perspektifi arasındaki gerilimleri değerlendirerek, yaşa dayalı sürtüşmelerin değişmez özelliklerden ziyade genellikle iletişimsel kurgular olduğunu savunmaktadır. Analiz, medya zenginliği ve iletişim uyum teorileri aracılığıyla diyalog dinamiklerini inceleyerek, asenkron modalitelere geçiş ve evrilen profesyonel kimliklere odaklanmaktadır. Bulgular, kasıtlı diyalogun ilişkisel liderlik, çift yönlü bilgi yönetimi ve psikolojik güvenlik ortamı oluşturmak için temel teşkil ettiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca makale, iletişim denetimleri ve farklı yaş gruplarından oluşan çalışma grupları aracılığıyla kuşaksal zekanın geliştirilmesine yönelik yönetsel çıkarımları ana hatlarıyla sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, yapay zekanın gelecekteki rolü ve batı dışı küresel araştırma perspektiflerinin gerekliliği ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışma, uyarlanabilir ve kapsayıcı diyalogun, kuşaksal farklılıkları kolektif bir direnç ve kurumsal istikrar kaynağına dönüştüren temel mekanizma olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kuşaklararası Diyalog, Örgütsel Davranış, İletişim Uyumu, Bilgi Yönetimi, İş Yerinde Çeşitlilik.

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## INTRODUCTION

The modern workplace is defined by an unprecedented demographic convergence, with five generations, from the Silent Generation to Gen Z, working side by side. In Organizational Behavior (OB), this diversity is no longer viewed as a hurdle, but as a strategic ecosystem of institutional wisdom and digital fluency.

The primary catalyst for performance within this ecosystem is intergenerational dialogue. Unlike simple communication, dialogue is a collaborative process of shared meaning-making that facilitates Knowledge Management, bridging the gap between senior tacit experience and younger technological agility.

The objective of the Review is to synthesize research from Management and Communication Studies to explore how adaptive dialogue drives organizational success. It moves beyond generational clash narratives to examine the shift toward Generational Intelligence (GQ). Specifically, this paper evaluates the theoretical foundations of age diversity, the evolution of digital communication modalities, and the resulting impact on Psychological Safety and Leadership Efficacy. By providing a comprehensive synthesis of current literature, this article identifies how organizations can transform generational differences into a foundation for collective resilience.

Despite the growing body of research on age diversity in organizations, existing studies remain theoretically fragmented and often framed through narratives of generational conflict, stereotyping, or managerial adaptation. Such approaches tend to privilege instrumental outcomes while overlooking dialogue as a socially embedded process shaped by power relations, institutional norms, and evolving communication practices. Moreover, research on intergenerational interaction is frequently isolated across management, communication, and organizational psychology, limiting cumulative theoretical insight. Addressing this gap, the present review adopts an integrative social science perspective to reconceptualize intergenerational dialogue as a relational and cultural capability. By synthesizing multidisciplinary literature, it advances understanding of how dialogic practices contribute to psychological safety, leadership legitimacy, and collective resilience within contemporary organizations.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE GENERATIONAL DEBATE

To understand how dialogue functions across age groups, it is necessary to examine the competing and complementary frameworks that define generational interaction. The literature is currently divided between traditional cohort-based perspectives and more recent critiques that favor lifespan or contextual variables.

The validity of generational cohort theory is rooted in the sociological work of Mannheim (1952), who suggested that people are shaped by the socio-historical events of their youth. In an organizational context, this implies that workers carry a set of values, such as a preference for hierarchy or a need for autonomy, that remains stable throughout their lives. Proponents like Lyons and Kuron (2014) argue that these differences are statistically significant enough to warrant specific management strategies. For example, the rapid feedback loops required by younger employees are often attributed to their background in an era of instant digital communication, as noted by Twenge (2010). From

this perspective, dialogue is a tool used to bridge fixed differences between distinct social groups.

However, a significant body of recent organizational behavior research argues that generational labels are largely socially constructed and lack empirical rigor. Rudolph et al. (2021) contend that the focus on generations ignores the more complex interactions of age, period, and cohort effects. They suggest that what we call generational conflict is often just a result of age-related power dynamics or common life-stage transitions. This critique is vital for management because it suggests that by labeling a worker as a Millennial or a Boomer, organizations may be creating the very stereotypes that lead to communication breakdowns. Instead of fixed traits, these scholars argue that workplace behavior is a fluid response to the current organizational environment.

As an alternative to cohort theory, the lifespan perspective posits that human needs evolve in a predictable cycle regardless of birth year. Super (1980) and Savickas (2005) emphasize that individuals in the exploration stage of their careers, typically younger employees, require different types of dialogue than those in the maintenance or disengagement stages, typically senior staff. For instance, a junior employee's request for constant feedback may not be a generational trait of Gen Z, but rather a universal need for career validation during the onboarding phase. This perspective shifts the burden of dialogue from managing identity to managing career development stages, viewing communication as a way to support the specific psychological needs of an employee at their current point in life.

To address the abstract nature of intergenerational dialogue, it is essential to establish its ontological status as a constitutive rather than an instrumental process. Following the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) framework, dialogue is defined here as the fundamental social substance through which organizational reality is negotiated and sustained (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Under this view, the generational gap is not a static demographic fact, but a communicative achievement that is either reinforced or dissolved through daily interaction. The theoretical boundaries of this construct are delineated by the transition from relational engagement to monologic transmission. Dialogue reaches its conceptual limit when participants resort to othering through rigid age-based stereotypes, a process that halts mutual transformation and reverts the interaction to an asymmetrical exercise of power (Isaacs, 1999). By identifying these boundaries, the construct is distinguishable from general workplace discussion. It exists only where there is a shared commitment to the suspension of assumptions and a reciprocal influence between cohorts.

While the previous theories debate the source of difference, the communication accommodation theory provides the framework for how these differences are negotiated in real time. Developed by Giles (1973), this theory explores how individuals adjust their speech, non-verbal cues, and even digital syntax to achieve social goals. In a multigenerational setting, the debate centers on whether employees choose to converge, adjusting their style to match the other person, or diverge, emphasizing their differences to maintain their own social identity. Dragojevic et al. (2015) notes that divergence often occurs when one group feels its status is threatened, leading to the use of jargon or exclusionary language. The goal for organizational behavior is to foster mutual

accommodation, and dialogue is used to decrease social distance rather than reinforce age-based boundaries.

The debate between these theories suggests that intergenerational dialogue is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a sophisticated management of multiple realities. If managers strictly follow cohort theory, they risk essentializing their employees; if they ignore it entirely, they may miss the genuine cultural shifts brought about by technological advancement. The most effective organizational models integrate these views by acknowledging that while shared historical experiences do influence communication styles, individual life stages and active behavioral choices are equally powerful. This theoretical synthesis allows for a more nuanced approach to organizational behavior, wherein dialogue functions as the mediator between personal identity and collective goals.

To expand the OB pillars, we must examine how dialogue functions as a structural force in leadership, knowledge management, and the creation of psychological safety. This section shifts from theoretical debate to the practical outcomes of communicative integration.

### **IMPACT ON KEY ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR PILLARS**

The intersection of intergenerational dialogue and leadership efficacy is a primary determinant of organizational health. Traditional leadership models often rely on hierarchical structures where authority is derived from tenure and positional power. However, modern organizational behavior research suggests a transition toward relational leadership, where influence is negotiated through dialogue rather than mandated by rank. Gerpott et al. (2019) demonstrate that the timing and sequencing of communication behaviors influence how leadership emerges within teams, highlighting the importance of interactional dynamics in relational leadership. By adopting a coaching-oriented communication style, leaders can bridge the gap between different generational expectations of authority, moving from a command-and-control approach to one based on mutual respect and shared goals.

A critical function of dialogue within the organization is the facilitation of knowledge management and the mitigation of intellectual capital loss. As senior employees approach retirement, organizations face the challenge of transferring tacit knowledge, wisdom gained through experience that is difficult to codify. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue in their SECI model that knowledge creation is a social process requiring continuous dialogue. While traditional mentorship remains relevant, the rise of reverse mentoring has added a new dimension to this exchange. In reverse mentoring frameworks, younger employees share digital-native skills and insights into emerging cultural trends with senior executives (Garg & Singh, 2020). This bidirectional dialogue prevents knowledge division and ensures that institutional history is preserved even as the organization undergoes digital transformation.

The development of psychological safety is perhaps the most significant outcome of successful intergenerational communication. Edmondson (1999) defines psychological safety as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. In age-diverse teams, this safety is often threatened by age-based stereotypes or the fear of being

perceived as either incompetent or out-of-touch. Research by Gibson and Vermeulen (2003) suggests that inclusive dialogue helps deconstruct these subgroups, allowing for a learning orientation where mistakes are viewed as collective growth opportunities. When dialogue is prioritized, employees feel empowered to speak up regardless of their age, leading to higher levels of innovation and more effective problem-solving in complex environments.

The culmination of these efforts is seen in increased organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions across the generational spectrum. The psychological contract, the unwritten set of expectations between employer and employee, has evolved. While older generations may have prioritized stability and loyalty, younger cohorts often emphasize the quality of workplace relationships and the transparency of communication (Becton et al., 2014). Dialogue serves as the mechanism for aligning these differing expectations. When an organization fosters a culture of open communication, it signals to employees of all ages that their perspective is valued. This sense of belonging is a key driver of retention, as it builds a resilient organizational identity that transcends individual age differences.

The strategic management of these pillars ensures that generational diversity becomes a source of competitive advantage. Rather than viewing age differences as a barrier to be managed, organizations that master intergenerational dialogue treat diversity as a reservoir of cognitive variety. This approach requires a move away from superficial age-awareness training toward a deep integration of dialogue into every aspect of the organizational structure, from how meetings are conducted to how performance is evaluated and how knowledge is shared across the firm.

### **THE DYNAMICS OF INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE**

The practical application of dialogue in the workplace is largely dictated by the choice of communication modalities. Modern organizations operate through a complex mix of synchronous and asynchronous channels, ranging from traditional face-to-face meetings to instant messaging platforms. Research suggests that employees from different generations may differ in their communication preferences and interpretations of workplace communication practices (Venter, 2017). For older employees, synchronous communication such as phone calls or in-person discussions may be viewed as the standard for high-stakes decision-making because these channels offer rich non-verbal cues and immediate clarity. Conversely, younger employees, particularly digital natives, may perceive unscheduled synchronous interruptions as inefficient or intrusive, preferring the flexibility and processing time afforded by asynchronous digital channels like Slack or project management software (Venter, 2017).

Beyond the choice of medium, the evolution of feedback loops represents a significant shift in organizational behavior. The traditional model of the annual or bi-annual performance review is increasingly being replaced by a preference for continuous, real-time micro-feedback (Calk & Patrick, 2017). This shift is not merely a matter of frequency but of the nature of the dialogue itself. While senior staff may view periodic, formal reviews as a sign of professional boundaries and stability, younger cohorts often interpret long gaps between feedback as a lack of managerial support or psychological safety. This disconnect can lead to a breakdown in the psychological contract. Effective

intergenerational dialogue therefore, requires a hybrid approach to feedback that satisfies the need for both formal structure and real-time validation, ensuring that all employees feel seen and guided within their roles.

The definition of professional identity and language also serves as a critical dynamic in cross-generational interaction. This is often where the most visible friction occurs, as younger employees redefine professionalism through the lens of authenticity rather than formality. The use of emojis, casual syntax, and lowercase typing in professional digital communication acts as a linguistic marker of this shift. While younger workers use these markers to signal rapport and reduce social distance, older colleagues might interpret them as a lack of competence or professional seriousness (Lester et al., 2012). This represents a clash of impression management strategies. In a high-functioning organizational culture, dialogue must move toward a shared understanding of these markers. When employees engage in mutual learning about these shifting norms, the organization reduces the risk of misattribution where a simple difference in typing style is misread as a lack of professional respect.

Furthermore, the power distance inherent in different communication styles affects how dialogue is initiated. In many traditional settings, the burden of initiating dialogue falls on the subordinate. However, younger generations often expect a flatter communication structure where ideas are exchanged regardless of rank. This can lead to a perceived lack of respect for authority from the perspective of older managers, or a perceived lack of transparency from the perspective of younger staff. Bridging this gap requires an intentional redesign of the communicative space within the firm, moving toward an environment where the value of an idea is prioritized over the seniority of the speaker.

### **MANAGING FRICTION POINTS AND STRATEGIC CONFLICT**

The transition from understanding dialogue as a theoretical concept to implementing it as a management tool requires a strategic view of conflict. Organizational behavior literature distinguishes between functional and dysfunctional conflict, and in multigenerational teams, this distinction is often determined by communicative framing. Functional conflict, or creative abrasion, occurs when diverse perspectives are leveraged to challenge status quo thinking and spark innovation (Leonard & Straus, 1997). When dialogue is robust, the friction between a senior employee's reliance on proven methodologies and a younger employee's desire for disruptive change can lead to more rigorous problem-solving. However, without a foundation of mutual respect, this friction can devolve into dysfunctional conflict characterized by personal resentment and the reinforcement of age-based stereotypes.

Addressing these stereotypes is a core function of intergenerational dialogue. Popular narratives often polarize the workforce into categories such as the entitled millennial or the resistant boomer. These labels serve as cognitive shortcuts that prevent genuine engagement and lead to attribution bias, where a colleague's behavior is blamed on their age rather than the situation. Research by Abrams et al. (2006) suggests that increased intergroup contact, supported by structured dialogue, reduces these prejudices. By creating forums where employees share their career histories and technological challenges, organizations can deconstruct these narratives. Dialogue allows individuals

to see their colleagues as unique contributors rather than representatives of a birth-year category, thereby moving the organizational culture from a state of tolerance to one of genuine integration.

### **Managerial Implications and Best Practices**

To operationalize these findings, organizations must focus on building generational intelligence (GQ), among their leadership and staff. Generational intelligence is defined as the ability to understand, respect, and adapt to the different communicative norms present in a diverse workforce. This requires managers to become linguistically agile, able to switch between the formal, synchronous communication styles preferred by traditionalists and the informal, asynchronous digital styles favored by younger cohorts. Training programs should not focus on memorizing the traits of different generations, which can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, but rather on developing empathy and active listening skills that facilitate bridge-building (Urlick et al., 2017).

A practical step for management is the implementation of inclusive communication audits. These audits evaluate whether an organization's tools and meeting structures favor one age group over another. For example, a heavy reliance on unplanned instant messaging can alienate employees who value deep work and structured timelines, while a culture of long, face-to-face meetings may frustrate those who prioritize digital efficiency. Beyond technology, the design of collaborative spaces, both physical and virtual, plays a role in fostering dialogue. Hybrid work models should be intentionally managed to ensure that younger employees still receive the informal mentorship that occurs in physical offices, while senior employees are supported in adopting the flexible modalities that allow for work-life integration (Venter, 2017).

Finally, the role of generative AI as a mediator in intergenerational dialogue represents a new frontier for management. As AI tools begin to assist in drafting emails, summarizing meetings, and managing project workflows, they may act as a linguistic bridge that translates between different professional styles. However, managers must ensure that these tools do not replace the human element of dialogue. The objective is to use technology to lower the barriers to communication, allowing the inherent value of a multigenerational workforce, the blend of experience and innovation, to remain the primary driver of organizational resilience.

### **IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

The intersection of intergenerational dialogue and leadership efficacy is a critical focal point in organizational behavior. Traditional leadership models often rely on hierarchical structures where authority is derived from tenure and positional power. However, as organizations move toward more collaborative environments, a shift toward relational leadership has become necessary. Research indicates that the timing and sequencing of communication behaviors influence how leadership emerges within teams, highlighting the importance of interactional dynamics in relational leadership (Gerpott et al., 2019). Leadership in this context requires the ability to navigate diverse communicative expectations, moving from a command and control style to a coaching approach that emphasizes mutual growth.

A primary benefit of effective dialogue is the facilitation of knowledge management and the preservation of intellectual capital. Organizations face the constant risk of losing tacit knowledge, the unwritten wisdom, and institutional history held by senior employees as they transition toward retirement. Traditional top-down mentorship is often the standard response to this challenge, yet recent studies highlight the increasing value of reverse mentoring (Garg & Singh, 2020). In a reverse mentoring framework, younger employees share their digital fluency and insights into emerging market trends with senior leaders. This bidirectional dialogue ensures that knowledge transfer is not a one-way street but a continuous exchange that benefits both the individual career development of the junior employee and the strategic agility of the senior leader.

The presence of psychological safety within age-diverse teams is also heavily dependent on the quality of intergenerational dialogue. According to Edmondson (1999), psychological safety is the shared belief that the team is a safe environment for interpersonal risk-taking. In a multigenerational setting, a lack of dialogue can lead to the formation of age-based boundaries, where employees feel their ideas will be dismissed due to their birth year. For example, a senior employee might hesitate to suggest a traditional strategy for fear of appearing out of touch, while a younger employee might withhold a technological solution for fear of challenging authority. Cultivating a climate of psychological safety through inclusive dialogue allows for the healthy expression of dissenting opinions, which is essential for organizational innovation and problem-solving.

The ultimate outcome of these integrated dialogue strategies is an increase in organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions. When employees across the age spectrum feel that their communication style is respected and their contributions are heard, their sense of belonging within the organization strengthens. This is particularly relevant as the definition of the psychological contract continues to evolve. While earlier research focused on job security as a primary motivator, contemporary studies suggest that the quality of workplace relationships and the opportunity for meaningful dialogue are now central to employee retention (Becton et al., 2014). By prioritizing these communicative bridges, management can transform a diverse workforce into a unified and resilient organizational culture.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The practical implications of the proposed model must be considered within specific sectoral contexts to ensure its validity. For instance, in the agricultural sector, intergenerational renewal is closely connected to the transfer of knowledge and responsibilities between older and younger farmers (Zagata & Sutherland, 2015). In this context, dialogue acts as a balancing mechanism between traditional wisdom and technological modernization. Conversely, in the tourism and service sectors, where high-speed interaction and emotional labor are paramount, the dialogue takes on a more flexible and symmetrical character (Gursoy et al., 2008). The mutual dependency between the digital fluency of younger cohorts and the crisis-management expertise of senior staff transforms dialogue from a monologic transmission of information into a strategic partnership. These sectoral variations demonstrate that the model is not a rigid template but a dynamic framework capable of adapting to diverse operational requirements.

The synthesis of existing literature suggests that the primary task for modern management is the cultivation of generational intelligence. This involves moving beyond a standard one-size-fits-all approach to communication and developing a more adaptive organizational infrastructure. Managers must be trained to recognize their own communicative biases and to facilitate environments where different modalities are respected rather than judged. Practical implications include conducting communication audits to identify points of digital friction. In addition, organizations can establish mixed-age task forces that foster collaborative dialogue to achieve specific project goals. By intentionally designing workflows that demand intergenerational interaction, organizations can break down the silos that naturally form around age cohorts as suggested by Urick et al. (2017).

Furthermore, the integration of technology should be viewed as a tool for bridge-building rather than a source of division. While digital platforms can sometimes alienate those less familiar with them, they also offer opportunities for transparency and flattened hierarchies that appeal to younger employees. Managers should encourage a culture of mutual learning where technological training is paired with institutional mentoring. This ensures that the adoption of new tools does not come at the expense of human connection. According to Venter (2017), the goal is to create a communicative environment that is flexible enough to accommodate the synchronous needs of senior staff while leveraging the asynchronous efficiency preferred by newer entrants to the workforce. This hybridity is essential for maintaining the psychological contract across different age groups.

The future of research in this field must expand to include more diverse cultural contexts. Most current studies are centered on western organizational norms, which may not reflect the generational dynamics in other global regions where traditional hierarchies remain more rigid. Scholars examining collectivist or high power distance cultures suggest that different social scripts (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004) may govern the mechanics of intergenerational dialogue. Future research should also investigate the role of emerging technologies like generative artificial intelligence in mediating workplace dialogue. As AI begins to automate routine communication, its impact on the development of interpersonal relationships across age groups remains an open question. It is critical to determine whether these tools act as translators that close the gap or as barriers that further diminish the frequency of direct human interaction.

This dynamic framework is especially relevant when contextualized within the specific organizational landscape of Turkey. Research on Turkish management culture emphasizes the interplay between traditional values, such as paternalism and hierarchical respect, and modern strategic requirements (Ayca et al., 2000). In this cultural setting, intergenerational dialogue functions not just as a tool for information exchange but also as a mechanism for navigating deep-seated social norms. By integrating these local insights, the model acknowledges that effective dialogue in Turkish enterprises must balance traditional expectations with the demands of global strategic agility.

Furthermore, in order to provide a foundation for future empirical research, the following propositions are suggested based on the synthesized framework:

*PI:* The degree of symmetry in intergenerational dialogue is positively correlated with the level of digital interdependence between cohorts within the organization.

P2: In traditionally hierarchical sectors, such as agriculture, the effectiveness of intergenerational dialogue is moderated by the level of respect for tacit knowledge, whereas in service-oriented sectors, such as tourism, it is moderated by the openness to reverse mentoring.

P3: Higher levels of perceived ontological security among senior staff reduce monologic resistance and increase the frequency of transformative dialogic exchanges with younger cohorts.

In summary, this review has demonstrated that the perceived gap between generations is primarily a communicative construct that can be bridged through intentional management practices. By grounding organizational behavior in theories of accommodation and lifespan development, leaders can move away from the reductive language of conflict. Dialogue serves as the essential mechanism for unlocking the collective potential of a multigenerational workforce. When organizations prioritize the quality of these interactions, they do more than just resolve friction; they build a foundation for institutional memory, innovation, and long-term stability. In an increasingly complex global market, the ability to integrate age-diverse perspectives through effective dialogue is not merely a soft skill but a core strategic competency.

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