

**Multi-Generational Differences: Females' Perspectives on Factors Influencing
Employee Retention**

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Commerce

in the subject

Human Resource Management

at the

University of South Africa

Supervisor:

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27th February 2026

DECLARATION

I, Denelle D Gopal, student number 62123440, declare that this dissertation titled **Multi-Generational Differences: Females' Perspectives on Factors Influencing Employee Retention** is my own work. All the sources that I have used or have quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references. The work has not in part or whole been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

I declare that the dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been fully disclosed.

I further declare that ethical clearance to conduct the research was obtained from the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of South Africa. I also declare that the study was carried out in strict accordance with the Unisa policy on research ethics and that I conducted the research with the highest integrity taking into account Unisa's policy for copyright infringement and plagiarism.



Denelle D Gopal

27th February 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout the journey of completing this dissertation.

First and foremost, to the participants who generously shared their time and experiences during the interviews, thank you for your openness and honesty. Your insights formed the heart of this study and made this research meaningful.

I am deeply grateful to my parents (Devan and Ashini) for their unconditional love, encouragement and belief in me. Your support has been the foundation of my academic journey. To my two little sisters (Danielle and Daylene), thank you for always being there with words of motivation and for reminding me of my strength during challenging times. I am deeply grateful to my family for their constant love, patience and belief in me.

To my fiancé, Kreesan Ethiraju, your constant support, motivation and unwavering belief in me have been my anchor. Thank you for encouraging me to keep going, even when the path felt uncertain and for ensuring that I never gave up. Your emotional support and understanding during the most challenging moments gave me the strength to persevere.

Special thanks to my friends and colleagues who offered words of encouragement, helped me brainstorm ideas and reminded me to take breaks when needed. Your presence made this journey less daunting and more fulfilling.

Last, but certainly not least, I extend my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Nadia Ferreira from the University of South Africa (UNISA), for her invaluable guidance, encouragement and expertise. Her thoughtful feedback and unwavering support have been instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of this research.

This dissertation reflects the collective support received and I am truly grateful to each person who walked this path with me.

ABSTRACT

Multi-Generational Differences: Females' Perspectives on Factors Influencing Employee Retention

by

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DEPARTMENT : Human Resource Management
DEGREE : MCOM BUS MAN (HRM)

The aim of this study was to explore the multi-generational differences in the driving and inhibiting factors that influence employee retention from a female perspective. A qualitative research design was used, and 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data were analysed through thematic coding using ATLAS.ti. The findings revealed that emotional and psychological well-being, inclusive leadership and value alignment are central factors that influence retention, particularly for women navigating personal and professional responsibilities. Multi-generational differences emerged in participants' perceptions of organisational support, leadership styles and career development opportunities. The study highlights the importance of fostering inclusive and empathetic workplace cultures that support life transitions, promote diversity and build trust through transparent communication. Recommendations are provided to guide human resource practitioners and organisational leaders in developing retention strategies that are responsive to generational needs and gender-specific challenges.

OPSOMMING

**Multigenerasieverskille: Vroue se perspektiewe op faktore wat werknemerbehoud
beïnvloed**

deur

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Die doel van hierdie studie was om die multigenerasieverskille in die motivering- en stremmingsfaktore wat werknemerbehoud beïnvloed vanuit 'n vroulike perspektief te ondersoek. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik, en 20 semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer. Die data is ontleed deur tematiese kodering met behulp van ATLAS.ti. Die bevindinge het getoon dat emosionele en sielkundige welstand, inklusiewe leierskap en waardebelyning sentrale faktore is wat behoud beïnvloed, veral vir vroue wat persoonlike en professionele verantwoordelikhede navigeer. Multigenerasieverskille het na vore gekom in deelnemers se persepsies van organisasie-ondersteuning, leierskapstyle en loopbaanontwikkelingsgeleenthede. Die studie beklemtoon die belangrikheid van die bevordering van inklusiewe en empatiese werkplekkulture wat lewensoorname ondersteun, diversiteit bevorder en vertrouwe deur deursigtige kommunikasie bou. Aanbevelings word verskaf om menslikehulpbronpraktisyns en organisasieleiers te lei in die ontwikkeling van behoudstrategieë responsief tot generasiebehoefte en geslagspesifieke uitdagings.

OKUCASHUNIWE

Umehluko Phakathi Kwezizukulwane Eziningi: Imibono Yabesifazane Mayelana

Nokugcinwa Kwabasebenzi

ngu

Denelle D Gopal

USUPHAVAYZA : USolwazi N Ferreira
UMNYANGO : Ukuphathwa Kwezindaba Zabasebenzi
IDIGRI : MCOM BUS MAN (HRM)

Inhloso yalolu cwaningo ukuhlonza umehluko phakathi kwezizukulwane eziningi mayelana nezinto ezinomthelela ekuqhutshweni nasekuvinjelweni kokugcinwa kwabasebenzi emsebenzini, ngokubona kwabesifazane. Kwasetshenziswa ucwaningo oluhleliwe oluyikhwalthi kanti futhi nemibuzo engama-20 engahleliwe ngokuphelele nayo yasetshenziswa. Idatha yahlaziywa ngokusebenzisa ukuhlukanisa ngemixholo ye-ATLAS.ti. Imiphumela yadalula ukuthi inhlakahle ngokwengqondo nangokwemizwa, ubuholi obubandakanyayo kanye nokuhambisana ngokwamanani kungumgogodla wokugcinwa kwabasebenzi emsebenzini, ikakhulukazi abesifazane abanezibopho zabo siqu kanye nezasemsebenzini. Umehluko phakathi kwezizukulwane eziningi, waqala emva kwemicabango yababambiqhaza yokwesekwa kwenhlangano, izindlela zobuholi kanye namathuba okuthuthukisa umsebenzi. Ucwaningo lugqamisa ukubaluleka kokugqugquzela ukubandakanya kanye namasiko okusebenza anozwelo eseka ukuguqula impilo, agqugquzela ukwehluka kanti futhi akha ukwethembana ngokuxhumana okusobala. Kuhlizekwe ngezincwadi ezizokweluleka abasebenzi ababhekelela izindaba zabasebenzi kanye nabuholi benhlangano ekusunguleni amaqhinga azohlangabezana nezidingo zesizukulwana kanjalo nezingqinamba eziqondene nobulili obuthile.

KEY TERMS

employee retention; multi-generational differences; female employees; psychological well-being; emotional labour; inclusive leadership; organisational culture; value alignment; diversity and inclusion; life transitions; human resource management; workplace support; leadership styles; flexible work arrangements; trust and transparency; representation

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research focused on investigating the multi-generational differences in females and the factors (drivers and inhibitors) that influenced their retention at an organisation. The research project discussed the background and motivation for the study, the problem statement, the research question and aims that the study addressed.

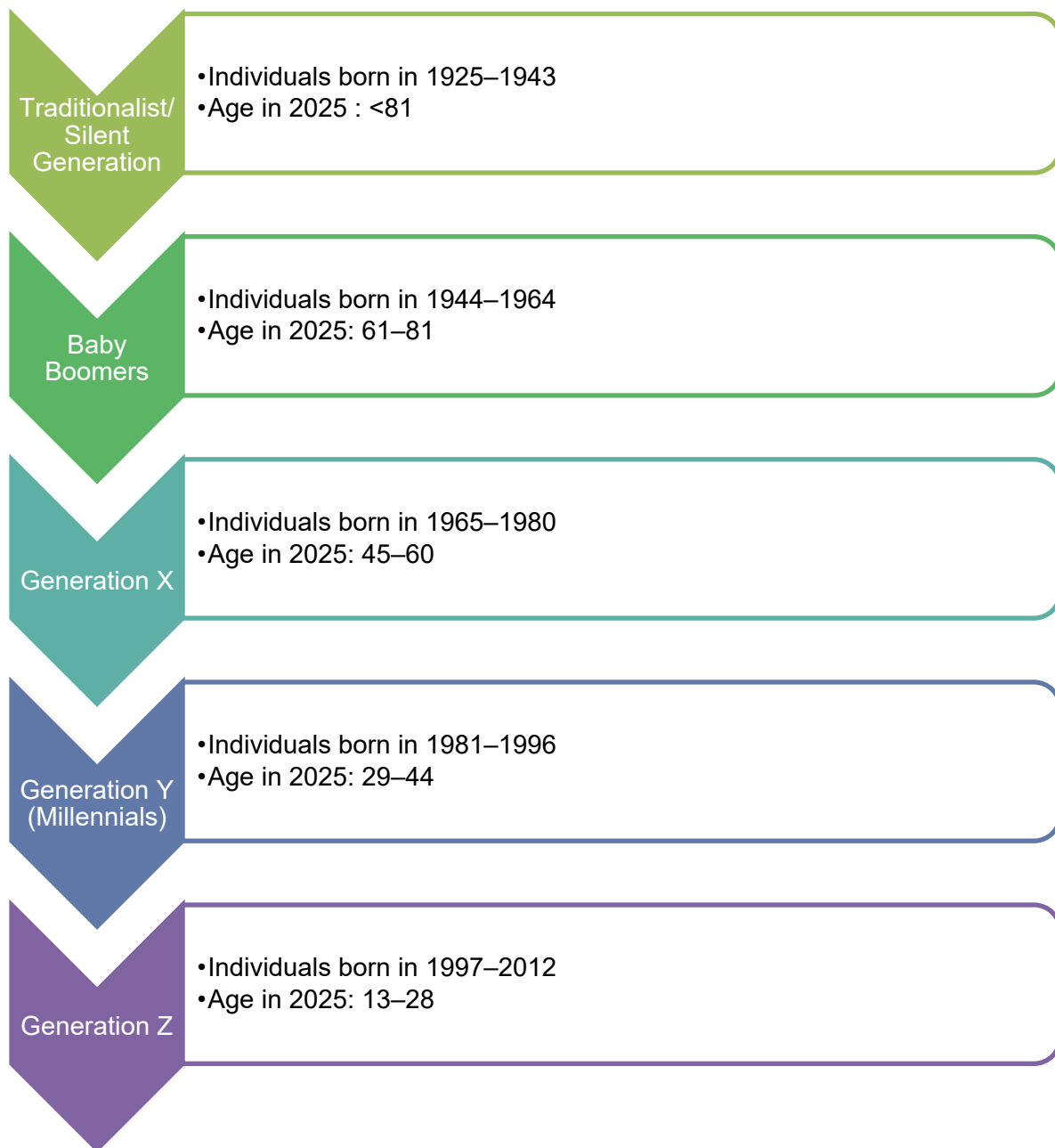
The research explored the influencing factors of retention in the workplace, with a specific focus on females within multi-generational cohorts. It studied the dynamic factors presented by participants and attempted to explore the differences between these multi-generational cohorts as well as how and why some factors were more significant than others.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

One of the challenges faced by organisations is the ability to retain employees (Reddy & Koundal, 2023). Ghani et al. (2022) defines retention as the ability of any organisation to ensure the prevention of turnover (the number of individuals who leave an organisation voluntarily or involuntarily). The increase of retention has an inevitable impact on the performance of the organisation. When an employee departs from a position, they carry with them the acquired skills, attributes and work ethics developed within a specific organisational context. The challenge for the organisation lays in the effort required to rebuild these elements when hiring a replacement. Therefore, retaining employees who had been taught skills and were already familiar with the organisational culture is of the utmost importance.

There are research papers, for example by Chatzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022), Ghani et al. (2022), and Ahmad et al. (2022), that attempt to provide insight into employee retention. However, this research combined the constructs of multi-generational cohorts and employee retention, which focused on a specific gender. Multi-generational cohorts were defined as per Figure 1.

Figure 1: Multi-Generational Cohorts



Source: Guerrero et al. (2021, p. 48) and Puckett et al. (2022, p. 165)

Regarding criticisms by Giancola (2006), Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2007) and Costanza and Finklestein (2015), which challenge the notion of the "generational gap" and question the validity of generational differences, it is vital to defend the classification of generational cohorts. While these critics show a lack of empirical evidence and propose alternative explanations, some researchers, such as Dimock (2019), argue that generational classifications provide a useful tool to understand patterns, trends and shared experiences within specific age groups.

Addressing the concerns raised by Rudolph and Rauvola et al. (2020), it is acknowledged that defining generations poses challenges, including conflicts that may arise with regard to the exact cut off points, labelling irregularities, disputes about significant influencing events and cross-cultural equivalencies.

In response to these concerns, this research methodically selected the cut off points by referencing recent literature such as Guerrero et al. (2021) and Puckett et al. (2022). The use of generational labels in this study is recognised as an empirical tool, emphasising that while individual differences exist within each generation, broader trends still offer valuable insights into societal shifts, cultural changes and workplace dynamics. The study directly addressed the issue of specific significant influencing events and historical events that shaped generational perspectives in the South African context. Furthermore, to improve cross-cultural equivalencies, the research considered the socio-demographic differences among individuals, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the multi-generational landscape.

Organisations in South Africa consist of many different and diverse individuals, but most organisations are mandated to have a specific amount of female/male and racial representation as per the new Employment Equity Bill that was recently signed in 2023 (Employment Equity Act Amendment, 2023). Diversity in the workplace is an important factor, and employees are observing whether employers are leading with this in mind (Kiradoo, 2022). According to the research conducted by Ferreira and Coetzee (2010), the results showed that South African female participants are more inclined towards managerial roles that enhance their growth and creative expression compared to their male counterparts. Kiradoo (2022) states that having a diverse workforce benefits the employer in many ways, contributing to the long-term success of the organisation. Although having a diverse workforce is beneficial, an employer needs to understand that the socio-demographic differences may have an effect on how to retain employees.

According to Wu and Cheng (2016), the more balanced an organisation is, the more inclined it is towards higher productivity and overall success. The female presence in an organisation increases productivity, intensifies diversity and promotes innovative ideas and skills, which grants organisations a competitive edge in the business market (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that retaining female employees is a top priority. Mainiero and Gibson (2018) show that males and females both experience changing career needs, but these shifts occur differently across their career stages, leading females to adjust their paths more often while males tend to progress more steadily. Mainiero and Gibson (2018) state that

males and females are differ in how their needs change at various stages in their careers and lives.

According to Nasir et al. (2019), females contribute exceedingly towards the global and national economies, as in today's world it is extremely difficult for a middle-aged couple or family to support a household on only one income. In a study by Naghdi and Tourkman (2017), there is societal pressure on females to balance childcare, household responsibilities and their career.

According to Nasir et al. (2019), when employees perceive their rights being respected, upheld and promoted, they tend to stay longer at an organisation. Gorde (2019) postulates that employees who are happier and more satisfied with their jobs and more likely to be more dedicated. According to Dorio (2023), Baby Boomers may be regarded, in some respects, as workaholics; Generation X will work as hard as needed and Generation Y does not consider work as a centrality of their lives. These differences have an impact on their influencing factors of employee retention.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Half of young adult South African employees are concerned with looking for new jobs within the first 12 months of being hired (Mabaso & Mathebula, 2025). At the start of 2024, most of the labour force comprises Generation X, who are gradually moving towards retirement age, Generation Y (commonly known as Millennials) and Generation Z (Gen Z), who are slowly coming into the working world (Guerrero et al., 2021).

There are many differences amongst the multi-generational cohorts. Jonck et al. (2016) states that 58% of human resource managers have reported on the conflict experienced between younger and older employees on a variety of aspects such as work ethic and work-life balance. These conflicts can be linked to their difference views on work ethic and work-life balance, as Goessling (2017) shows that some generations value work-life balance whilst others may not. Investigating these multi-generational differences in retention factors for females is important in bridging the gap of knowledge. This will result in more effective retention strategies being created or current strategies being amended. It is important to understand how these factors differ from generation to generation.

Goessling (2017) states that driving factors that contribute to retaining a Baby Boomer include recognising their wealth of experience and expertise, displaying appreciation for their valuable

contributions, offering chances for ongoing growth and advancement and establishing a workplace culture that appreciates their strong work ethic and unwavering dedication.

On the other hand, the driving factors that contribute to the retention of Generation X employees comprise providing options for a balanced work-life structure, granting flexibility in scheduling work hours, acknowledging the importance of personal fulfilment and autonomy and extending opportunities for career progression and skill enhancement (Goessling, 2017).

Goessling (2017) also shows that the driving factors that contribute to the retention of Generation Y employees include facilitating chances for learning and development, fostering a sense of purpose and significance in their tasks, creating a work environment that is both flexible and inclusive and creating opportunities for collaboration and fostering teamwork.

Providing a work environment equipped with advanced technology, facilitating continuous learning and development opportunities, cultivating a culture of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and creating chances for creativity and fostering innovation are the key driving factors in retaining Generation Z (Goessling, 2017).

As per Goessling (2017), it can be noted that the key factors influencing retention differ from generation to generation. The retention of top-performing individuals in organisations is one of the many components in ensuring the success of the business, therefore, retaining these employees is vital. Olivetti (2024) shows that female employees are leaving their jobs in pursuit of equal pay, more flexibility and more advancement opportunities.

Female retention is becoming more important as it has an economic advantage and promotes diversity and better performance (Nasir et al., 2019). A significant challenge for many females is finding a balance between work and family responsibilities (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020).

An individual's gender and the generational cohort they belong to can shape how they view the world, influencing their attitudes, behaviours and the way they make sense of their experiences. One of the notable gaps identified by Alhmond and Rjoub (2020) is the lack of empirical data that shows the correlation or relationship between the multi-generational cohorts and retention in an organisation. According to Macky et al. (2008), there are changes in personalities across multi-generational cohorts that affect their views and attitudes towards work, which in turn affect their factors of retention. Hence, this needs to be investigated. However, there is limited research that identifies the factors of retention about females and the multi-generational differences which this study investigated.

1.2.1 Research Questions

The problem statement led to the formulation of the following general research question:

What are the multi-generational differences in the driving and inhibiting factors of female employee retention?

From the general research question, the below research questions were formulated in terms of the literature review and empirical study.

1.2.1.1 *Research Questions in Terms of the Literature Review*

Research Question 1: How does the research literature conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and the driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females?

Research Question 2: How does the research literature conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work?

Research Question 3: What conclusions can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts and the retention of females and what are the implications for retention practices?

1.2.1.2 *Research Questions in Terms of the Empirical Study*

Research Question 1: What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?

Research Question 2: How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies?

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?

Research Question 4: How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?

Research Question 5: How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms?

Research Question 6: How do socio-demographic differences impact employee retention strategies?

Research Question 7: How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

When considering the research questions that were formulated, the aims of this research study have been formulated below.

1.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The general aim of the research is to explore the multi-generational differences in females and their driving and inhibiting factors that influence employee retention.

The following specific aims have been established for the literature review and empirical study:

1.3.1 Specific Aims: Literature Review

Research Aim 1: To conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and the driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females.

Research Aim 2: To conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work.

Research Aim 3: To establish conclusions that can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts and the retention of females and what are the implications for retention practices.

1.3.2 Specific Aims: Empirical Study

Research Aim 1: To identify the key factors that influence employee retention from a female perspective.

Research Aim 2: To explore the multi-generational differences that influence employee retention strategies.

Research Aim 3: To identify the challenges faced by female employees and how these challenges can impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs.

Research Aim 4: To identify how companies can attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace.

Research Aim 5: To identify how companies can adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms.

Research Aim 6: To explore the socio-demographic differences impact employee retention strategies.

Research Aim 7: To identify how companies can create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and understand the impact on employee retention.

1.4 HYPOTHESES

The hypothesis of this study was:

There are differences between the multi-generational cohorts of females and the influencing factors that drive or inhibit retention within an organisation. These differences and factors will be established based on the research conducted.

1.5 POTENTIAL VALUE ADD

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The study contributes to human resource literature by exploring the concepts and alignment of these concepts with management theories. The research has informed theoretical frameworks about how organisations can retain female employee talent strategically amid the evolving work practices which enhance the organisational landscape. This study explored the multi-generational differences of the driving and inhibiting factors of retention within an organisation which contributes to the theoretical understanding of how multi-generational cohorts influence the driving and inhibiting factors of retention.

This research identified the driving and inhibiting factors of female retention among multi-generational cohorts, expanding on the theories that currently exist surrounding employee retention while integrating the aspects of gender and generational diversity. The research also portrays how societal change in demographics, such as female participation in the workplace, interconnect with multi-generational differences which will enhance theories relating to retention, organisational behaviour and human resource management.

1.5.2 Empirical Significance

The empirical significance lies in the study's ability to offer evidence-based insights into the driving and inhibiting factors of female employee retention. The research contributes valuable insights in terms of data-driven knowledge, which informs organisational retention strategies for organisations based in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The study eliminates the gap in research by investigating specific driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females across multi-generational cohorts.

The results of the study provide evidence that supports or challenges existing theories and assumptions regarding female employee retention, particularly in the context of generational diversity. The study provides insights from real-world experiences which enhance the empirical basis for creating targeted strategies of retention for multi-generational cohorts within Kwa-Zulu Natal organisations.

1.5.3 Practical Significance

This study may guide organisations in creating and/or adapting retention strategies to retain female talent. The study offers actionable insights which enhance management practices, providing a competitive advantage to Kwa-Zulu Natal organisations that are attempting to optimise their retention of females. This study provides insights on challenges faced by females and allows organisations to benefit from on opportunities to enhance employee satisfaction, engagement and loyalty.

The practical outcomes of this research can involve other aspects of human resource management such as overall performance of the organisation, talent management practices, succession planning and attracting and retaining diverse staff.

1.6 THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

Kankam (2019) identifies a paradigm as a model, pattern or framework used to assist a researcher to create a theory or a generalisation based on the collective assumptions that have been made. A paradigm is used to explain how an individual interprets and views a phenomenon (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

1.6.1 Theoretical Paradigms

A theoretical paradigm provides a roadmap that assists the researcher by providing a guide to the design, analysis and interpretation of results. Systems theory provides a theoretical framework for this research as it encourages researchers to look at an entire system and not just a specific construct; it provides a holistic view (Bertalanffy, 1968). This theory views the workplace holistically before highlighting the multi-generational cohorts of females of which it consists of.

Adopting both holistic and humanistic perspectives strengthens this study by enabling a deeper, more integrated understanding of the retention experiences of multi-generational cohorts of females. A holistic stance allows the researcher to consider the broader organisational, social and generational influences that shape retention, rather than isolating single variables. The humanistic perspective complements this by emphasising the value of each participant's lived experience, recognising that personal meaning, developmental needs and individual perceptions directly influence decisions to stay or leave. Together, these perspectives provide a fuller, more nuanced foundation for interpreting the factors that drive or hinder retention across different generations of females in the workplace. The study explores the drivers and inhibitors of the retention of multi-generational cohorts of females. Systems theory highlights how various changes in the world, which are external factors, may change the factors that drive or inhibit the retention of many females based on the effects these events had on each of them within their generational cohorts. This theory allows the researcher to gain a holistic overview of the multi-generational differences in retention factors identified among these individuals.

This research adopted a humanistic perspective as it entails exploration of the lived experiences of participants in relation to the factors affecting retention (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). An individual's experience allows the individual to decide whether to stay with an organisation or to leave in order to fulfil their needs.

1.6.2 Meta-Theoretical Concepts

A meta-theory is the investigation, description, and analysis of a theory (Allana & Clark, 2018). In this study, the term “meta-theory” does not refer to basic assumptions such as axioms or mathematical truths; rather, it refers to the broad conceptual lenses and foundational ideas that shape how a theory is developed, interpreted and applied. These meta-theoretical positions guide the researcher’s worldview and determine which concepts, relationships and explanations are prioritised when constructing or evaluating a theory. Meta-theories are important because they influence how theories are framed and how knowledge is interpreted within a specific study (Allana & Clark, 2018).

The meta-theoretical concepts explored in this study are multi-generational cohorts (to explain the differences and similarities, if any, between different generations) and employee retention factors (which are the factors that drive or inhibit retention). In this study, retention factors of female employees refer to the specific conditions, needs, or experiences that shape how female employees think about staying with an organisation, while the driving or inhibiting factors affecting their retention describe how these conditions operate in practice, either encouraging continued employment or contributing to a decision to leave. In other words, the retention factors identify the underlying elements, and the driving or inhibiting forces reflect the direction and impact of those elements on actual retention outcomes. The meta-theoretical concepts explored conceptualise the unique retention factors of female employees that contribute to the drivers or inhibitors of their retention in their organisational context. For the purposes of this study, the organisational context refers to the environment in which the organisation operates.

In this research, the organisational context refers to the internal conditions within the organisation, such as culture, leadership approaches, workplace policies and support practices, while the environment in which the organisation functions include broader external influences such as economic conditions, labour market shifts, social expectations and legislative requirements. The organisational context is shaped by these external environmental conditions, meaning that retention is influenced by both internal organisational dynamics and the wider environment in which the organisation operates.

1.6.3 Applicable Concepts and Constructs

Below are the applicable concepts and constructs that will be used in this study:

Employee Retention:

According to Deshwal (2015), employee retention is the process where employees within an organisation are encouraged or motivated to stay within the organisation for the maximum amount of time. Retention is considered as the most valuable tool within an organisation that allows the organisation to maintain effectiveness while meeting operational requirements (Deshwal, 2015).

Generational Cohorts:

Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al. (2017) describe a generation as a group of individuals who were born during the same time period, with similar characteristics shaped by the same economic, historical and social conditions as well as technological advances that they have experienced. This conceptualisation does not imply that all members of a generational cohort are exposed to identical economic or social realities; rather, it acknowledges that they are influenced by a common set of societal conditions that form the backdrop of their formative experiences. These shared contextual influences give rise to broad generational tendencies, even though individuals within the same cohort may differ substantially in terms of socioeconomic status, opportunity and lived experience.

1.6.4 Methodological Convictions

Methodological convictions are the assumptions, beliefs and principles that guide the processes and application of specific research methods.

- **Ontological dimension:** Reality is seen through a variety of viewpoints; therefore, the nature of reality is subjective (Al-Ababneh, 2020). This allows the researcher to report on the subjective perspectives of individuals realities. The researcher reports on the individuals' perceptions of what they believe are their retention factors. These ontological assumptions operate within the wider interpretivist set explained above; the list does not represent a second, separate framework but rather illustrates how the broader paradigm is expressed in this study's specific context.
- **Epistemological dimension:** Due to the subjective nature of the information being collected, the researcher will attempt to lessen the distance between the phenomenon and herself/himself (Al-Ababneh, 2020), while obtaining data from the participants. This reflects

an epistemology aligned with interpretivism, where knowledge is generated through interaction rather than detached observation.

- **Axiological dimension:** The researcher understands that values play a role, which allows biases to be present at times in the study environment (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). Rather than attempting to remove values, this position requires transparency about the role the researcher plays in shaping judgments and interpretations.

Methodological dimension: The researcher takes an inductive approach which focused on studying phenomena within their contextual framework (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). The researcher obtained data via interviews and the study is qualitative. This methodological stance flows from and is consistent with, the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions outlined above.

1.6.5 Empirical Paradigm

An interpretivist approach is used as a paradigm for this study, as this approach is useful when trying to examine lived experiences (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). The aim of this paradigm is to describe and/or interpret the phenomena being studied whilst understanding and taking into consideration that a person's world and reality is influenced by the outside world (social, political, economic and technological contexts) (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023).

There are four assumptions that are made by the interpretivist paradigm:

- **Ontological dimension:** All research is socially constructed based on existing theories and world views which may be different for different individuals in diverse cultures (i.e., reality is socially constructed) (Creswell & Poth, 2016).
- **Epistemological dimension:** You can only understand a human's life from within. This means that everyone will experience and understand an "objective" differently to each other as each person has their own consciousness; we are not merely puppets that react the same way (Creswell & Poth, 2016). One individual may react differently or perceive the same phenomenon differently compared to another.
- **Axiological dimension:** Research should be qualitative, as an interpretivist approach attempts to understand and make sense of one's experience instead of simply testing whether a hypothesis is true or not (Creswell & Poth, 2016).
- **Methodological dimension:** Research should allow ideas and themes to emerge from the data being collected which allows the researcher to create a hypothesis to be evaluated (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Kar and Biswal (2019) argue that the interpretivist approach posits multiple natures of reality which are socially constructed to which the main goal is to understand the phenomena that is being studied. Due to the subjective nature of the interpretivist approach, it was ideal when investigating the multi-generational differences that females have regarding employee retention. The interpretive approach comprises the broader field of Human Resource Management. The domain of this research will also comprise the broader field of Human Resource Management.

1.7 THE RESEARCH MODEL

Research is considered to a systematic investigation of a phenomenon to gain new and/or more information or to prove a specific hypothesis (Patel & Patel, 2019). Research encompasses numerous ways of collecting data, such as interviews, questionnaires and case studies. Yao (2023) states that research could be considered a tool which helps to understand issues, confirm truths. or disprove lies, increasing public awareness whilst promoting learning and intellectual development.

This study adopted a qualitative design because it aimed to explore and interpret participants' experiences in depth, thereby developing a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon rather than measuring it numerically (Sofaer, 1999). The qualitative approach allowed a researcher to understand a phenomenon based on lived experiences faced by individuals (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Mouton and Marais's (1994) research model provided a framework for this research.

This research model encompassed five dimensions, including the ontological, sociological, epistemological, methodological and teleological dimensions, which represent the research framework that the study adopted (Mouton & Marais, 1994). This model was regarded as a systems-theoretical model which encompassed three subsystems, which further consisted of a representation of intellectual resources and climate as well as the complete research process (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

This model was relevant to this study as it attempted to investigate differences between multi-generational cohorts in relation to their factors of retention. It involved in-depth interviews with female employees to investigate the factors that drove or inhibited their decision to stay at an organisation.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

Adjovi (2025) states that research is composed of systematically reviewing, studying and investigating materials and sources to identify facts and/or reach new conclusions. Ahmad et al. (2023) states that a research design is the framework or plan that the researcher will utilise to conduct the research; it involves detailing the approach and methods that this study will use.

1.8.1 Research Approach

Anthropology, psychology and sociology are the diverse disciplines from which qualitative research methods originated (Haradhan, 2018). The research approach used for the purposes of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research was used to investigate the nature of a phenomenon (Busetto et al., 2020). A qualitative approach was chosen to align with the study's focus on exploring the subjective experiences of females within multi-generational cohorts regarding retention factors. The in-depth exploration afforded by qualitative research was essential for capturing the richness of individual attitudes towards the factors related to retention. To address the inherent limitations associated with qualitative research, measures to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability and confirmability, were applied throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004).

Phenomenological inquiry was employed to gain a deep understanding of the participants lived experiences and perceptions related to multi-generational differences in employee retention within the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal's service sector. This form of phenomenology, as commonly presented in qualitative research methodology, focuses on understanding how individuals perceive, interpret, and make meaning of a particular phenomenon in their everyday contexts. It does not engage with the philosophical foundations of phenomenology; instead, it emphasises rich description, subjective interpretation and capturing the essence of participants' experiences as they express them. This makes it well suited to exploring how female employees from different generations understand and navigate the factors that influence their retention within KwaZulu-Natal's service sector. As this research approach relied on influencing factors of retention which were inherently subjective, a qualitative methodology was used to conduct the research (Creswell, 2014).

1.8.2 Research Strategy

In the context of a qualitative study, a research strategy encompassed the structured plan or sequence of actions crafted by the researcher to organise, gather, analyse and assess the qualitative data acquired for addressing the research questions (Tomaszewski, 2020). The interpretive research strategy suggested that reality in the world was socially constructed and always changing which is suited for qualitative research (Tomaszewski, 2020).

1.8.3 Exploratory Research

An exploratory research design was used to assess the differences between the multi-generational cohorts on the retention factors of the individuals in this study. There were many advantages to an exploratory research design: it was inexpensive; it allowed the researcher flexibility; it provided insights on the phenomena; and lastly, it allowed the researcher an opportunity to decide at an early stage whether to pursue the topic (Thomas & Lawal, 2020).

This study explored the perspectives of females within multi-generational cohorts. The factors of retention were inherently subjective and characterised by their reality; therefore, an exploratory research design was used. An exploratory research design was chosen for this study as it aimed to assess differences across multi-generational cohorts of females about retention factors, a subject with limited existing research. Given the subjective nature of the study's focus, a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate (Creswell, 2014). An exploratory research design was cost-effective, flexible and allowed for in-depth insights, which was crucial for a study on retention factors among females in multi-generational cohorts. The selection of this design was justified by the need to delve into a relatively unexplored area and its alignment with the study's qualitative and subjective nature (Thomas & Lawal, 2020).

1.8.4 Unit of Analysis

The phrase “units of analysis” refers to the object, subject or event that the researcher would like to study. For the purposes of this research, the units of analysis were female employees currently employed within the service sector within Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. Subgroups were thereafter classified in terms of their generation cohort. The Service Sector was defined as companies that provide services to other companies, for example, a company that provides outsourced HR and payroll services. Female employees were then invited to participate voluntarily in this study. Organisations based in KwaZulu-Natal were used.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted across two phases, specifically the literature review and the empirical study.

1.9.1 Phase One: Literature Review

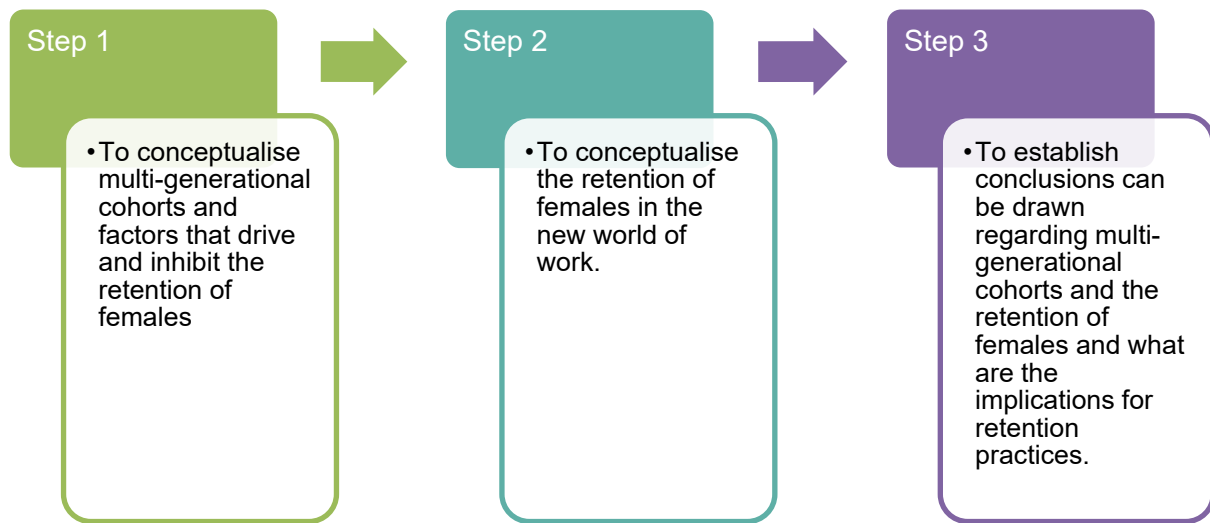
The literature review provided an analysis and overview of current ideas and themes surrounding the key concepts and constructs of the research. It provided an overview of the multi-generational cohorts, their specific traits and female retention factors that organisations were currently aware of. For the study, the organisational context related to the environment in which the organisation functions. There were three essential steps to this process as illustrated in Figure 2.

Step 1: To conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and factors that drive and inhibit the retention of females. At this phase of the process, the concept of retention will be explored and the factors of retention in organisations.

Step 2: To conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work. This phase of the study will explore the concept of retention of females only and their factors of retention in the 21st century.

Step 3: To establish conclusions that can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts and the retention of females and what are the implications for retention practices. This phase of the study will establish conclusions regarding the retention practices of females from different multi-generational cohorts.

Figure 2: Literature Review Process



Source: Author's Own Work

1.9.2 Phase Two: Empirical Study

This study was conducted on female employees within the service industry of KwaZulu-Natal. Figure 3 illustrated an outline of the steps that were taken to conduct the research. Below is a detailed outline of the steps taken within this empirical study.

Step 1: The Research Setting

This study was situated in the dynamic employment environment of KwaZulu-Natal, particularly within the service sector. The emphasis on this geographical area facilitated a comprehensive investigation into multi-generational differences in employee retention, considering the distinctive dynamics and challenges inherent to the regional context. The primary objective was to reveal valuable insights that could inform the enhancement of employee retention strategies specific to the local employment landscape. The target group was employed females in the service industry in KwaZulu-Natal. The service industry in KwaZulu-Natal was divided into a variety of sectors, such as financial services, wholesale and retail services, tourism, professional services and healthcare, according to Statistics South Africa (2020). The service sector was selected due to its high concentration of female employees and its labour intensive nature, which makes it an appropriate context for examining retention factors across diverse and multi generational work environments (Ghani et al., 2022). The organisation was in Durban (Province – KwaZulu-Natal); however, their branches expanded to include offices in Cape Town (Province – Western Cape) as well as

Johannesburg (Province – Gauteng). The organisation falls within the professional services sector, as it provides specialised human resource and payroll outsourcing services. Focusing on KwaZulu-Natal allowed for a geographically tailored exploration of multi-generational differences in employee retention in the service sector, capturing unique regional dynamics. This approach enhanced the study's relevance by providing context-specific insights applicable to the local employment landscape. Permission was sought from the participating organisation prior to any data collection. These organisations were presented with detailed information outlining the study prior to conducting the research.

Step 2: Entrée and Establishing the Researcher's Role

A qualitative researcher fulfils a unique role by immersing themselves in participants' stories and lived experiences, carefully interpreting these narratives as part of a reflective, process-oriented approach that uncovers how people understand, respond to and give meaning to the events that shape their everyday lives (Stahl & King, 2020). The key role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to gain insight into the factors affecting retention of female employees through dialogue (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

In this study, the term *entrée* refers to the process of gaining formal access to the research setting, which includes obtaining permission from relevant gatekeepers, establishing rapport with participants and developing the trust needed to enter the organisational environment in an ethical and respectful manner.

Permission was obtained through the Directors and CEOs of organisations. Qualitative research aimed to provide an interpreted and in-depth understanding of the (socially constructed) realities of individuals by learning about their experiences, histories and, most relevant to this study, drivers and inhibitors of retention (Moriarty, 2011). This study obtained an in-depth understanding of the female's retention factors within organisations.

In the context of the study, the researcher played a pivotal role in establishing a successful research endeavour. Recognising the significance of the researcher-participant relationship, as highlighted by Raheim et al. (2016), was essential. Pulla and Carter's (2018) emphasis on immersion within a qualitative study aligned with the interpretivist approach adopted, transforming the researcher into an active participant rather than a detached observer. This active involvement granted the researcher the flexibility to make real-time adjustments and integrate into the participant community.

Given this role, the researcher had to navigate inherent risks, particularly ethical concerns and issues related to participant anonymity. Mitigating these risks involved meticulous planning, as evidenced by the detailed informed consent process and an overarching ethical framework. The researcher's responsibility extended to fostering a collaborative and ethical research environment, ensuring transparency and respecting the rights and well-being of participants. In essence, the researcher became a vital link between the study's objectives and the lived experiences of the participants, necessitating a nuanced, ethical and participant-centric approach throughout the research journey.

Step 3: Sampling Procedure

Sampling is defined by Bhardwaj (2019) as a process by which a researcher selects a sample from a large population group. Sampling was the method used to obtain relevant participants needed for this research. There were a variety of ways to obtain a sample; however, for the purposes of this study, convenience sampling was used.

Convenience sampling was used by the researcher to obtain participants for the study that were easily accessible to them, which was an easy and inexpensive method to use (Bhardwaj, 2019). The researcher gained as many participants as possible within each generational cohort to ensure a rich sample. The descriptions of the generational cohorts aligned with the details provided in Figure 1.

Step 4: Data Collection

Data collection refers to the methods that the researcher used to obtain the relevant information (Palinkas et al., 2025). This research used semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule was used which encompassed questions as shown in Annexure 1. All interviews were recorded and stored safely and confidentially by the researcher. Moriarty (2011) states that interviews are the most used data collection method in qualitative studies as they allowed the researcher flexibility and familiarity when asking participants about their feelings, opinions, thoughts and emotions.

Step 5: Recording of Data

Data obtained via semi-structured interviews were recorded using the researcher's laptop via MS Teams as well as a cellular recording device. Consent from participants was obtained to

record the interview sessions prior to the commencement of the interview. Field notes were also taken by the researcher to make notes of behavioural changes and facial expressions.

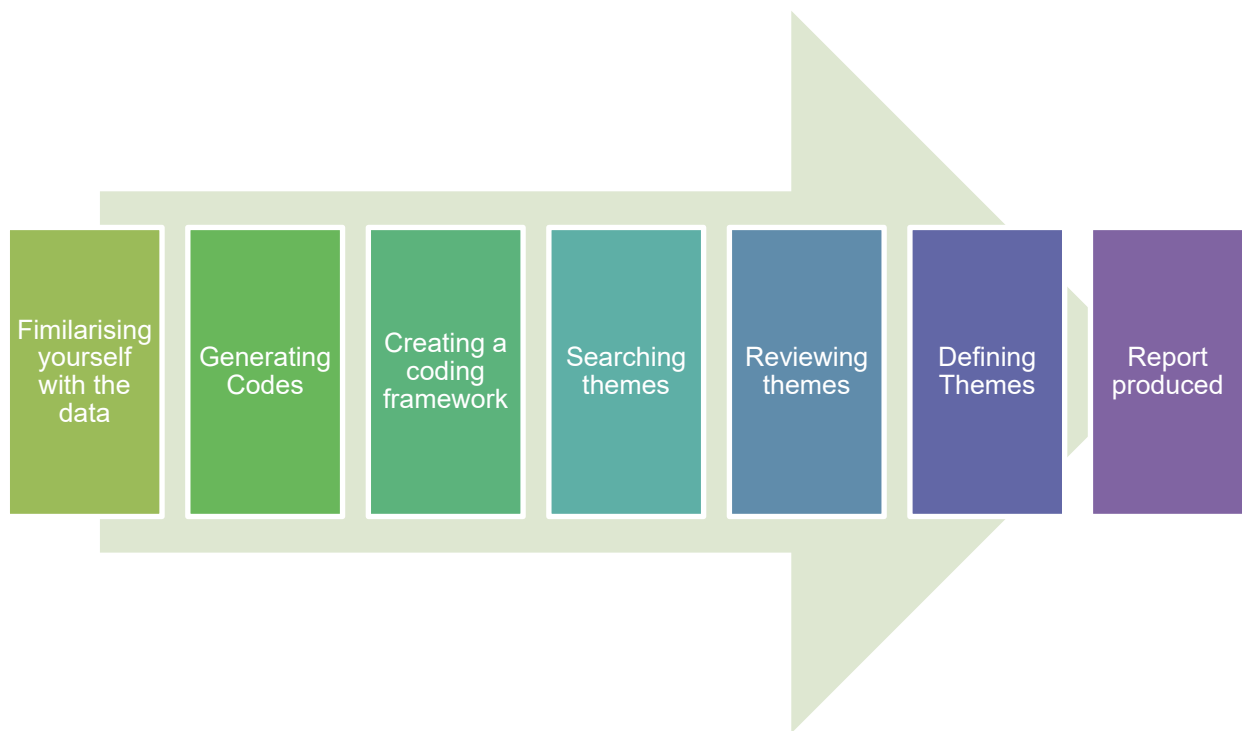
All recording of data were anonymous, using numbers instead of names. All data were kept in encrypted, password-protected files to ensure their security. The file management system used ensured anonymity and confidentiality of the participants as identifying data such as dates and names were coded and kept in a safe place within the researcher's personal office. Participants remained anonymous and all ethical considerations were addressed beforehand. All data will be kept for five years and will then be destroyed, with all electronic files permanently deleted and all physical documents, including written field notes, disposed of through a professional shredding service.

Step 6: Data Analysis Process

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, thematic analysis was applied to identify themes within the data that answered the research questions. Thematic analysis was best suited for understanding the perceptions, understandings and experiences faced by individuals (Handke et al., 2019). Coding was used by the researcher to organise and identify themes. This study integrated thematic analysis with an inductive approach in qualitative research, which entailed extracting themes directly from raw data, promoting adaptability and permitting the gradual emergence of patterns.

The researcher used a software system, ATLAS.ti, to assist with the analysis of the data. Thematic analysis was best suited for this study as the study explored the multi-generational differences of females and their factors of retention (Handke et al., 2019). ATLAS.ti used a combination of seven phases: familiarising yourself with the data; generating codes; creating a code frame; searching, reviewing and defining themes; and lastly, producing a report via ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti enhanced the thematic analysis process by aiding as a platform for the coding, visualization and exploration of qualitative data. This integration increased the efficiency and accuracy of conducting thematic analysis on research findings.

Figure 3: Phases of the Thematic Analysis Reporting



Source: Handke et al. (2019, pp. 295–401)

Step 7: Strategies Employed to Ensure Quality Data

Good quality data are accurate, dependable, relevant and collected ethically; they adhere to principles of completeness, consistency, transparency and representativeness, ensuring its validity and usefulness in research. Quality within qualitative research can refer to various elements, including the depth and richness of the data gathered, and the relevance and significance of the topic being investigated (Hayashi Jr et al., 2019).

The researcher's ability to be sensitive and apply the correct mental processes that allowed him/her to interpret or capture the meaning of the behaviour or factors being studied without bias and subjectivity was reflected by the researcher's self-reflexivity. The researcher remained unbiased and objective throughout the study to ensure that the results of the research remained untainted.

In accordance with Adele and Malau-Aduli (2023), this research was evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a) **Credibility:** The researcher showed that the research was undertaken carefully and accurately to ensure that the findings were the truth and believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ensuring the study's credibility involved the researcher meticulously conducting and documenting the research with a focus on truthfulness and believability. Transparency was emphasised, providing a detailed account of research methods and challenges encountered in both data collection and analysis. The researcher was dedicated to upholding the integrity of information, avoiding any alterations or undue emphasis on data.

- b) **Transferability:** This relates to how consistently a study would produce the same patterns, conclusions, and/or observations if repeated under similar conditions (Hayashi Jr et al., 2019). It also refers to whether those findings can be meaningfully applied across different contexts or settings (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). In this study, incorporating rich descriptions entailed offering comprehensive details about the research context, participants and procedures. This meticulous documentation facilitated the evaluation of similarities and differences between the study setting and diverse contexts, ensuring the transferability of findings to organisational and cultural settings.
- c) **Dependability:** This referred to the consistency or reliability of findings for qualitative studies. This study used consistent coding and data collection which enhanced the study's reliability. This study ensured the researcher reflexivity and documented biases which bolstered the investigation's credibility. The study clearly articulated the methodology which fortified the study's dependability, ensuring consistent findings which were documented to ensure the dependability of the study (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023).
- d) **Confirmability:** This referred to the link between the data and the interpretations which should have been based on the evidence presented by the researcher (Adele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). The researcher's ability to remain impartial and the implementation of triangulation ensured the confirmability (Mandal, 2018). To ensure this, the researcher implemented triangulation by using multiple data sources to corroborate findings. Triangulation was also used when participants were invited to participate. The researcher attempted to encompass a varied representation of participants, considering diverse backgrounds and roles within the organisation.
- e) **Authenticity:** The researcher ensured that the participants' opinions and experiences were reflected accurately (Levitt, 2024). Ensuring authenticity in the study entailed accurately portraying participants' opinions and experiences which were achieved by employing in-depth data collection methods like interviews.

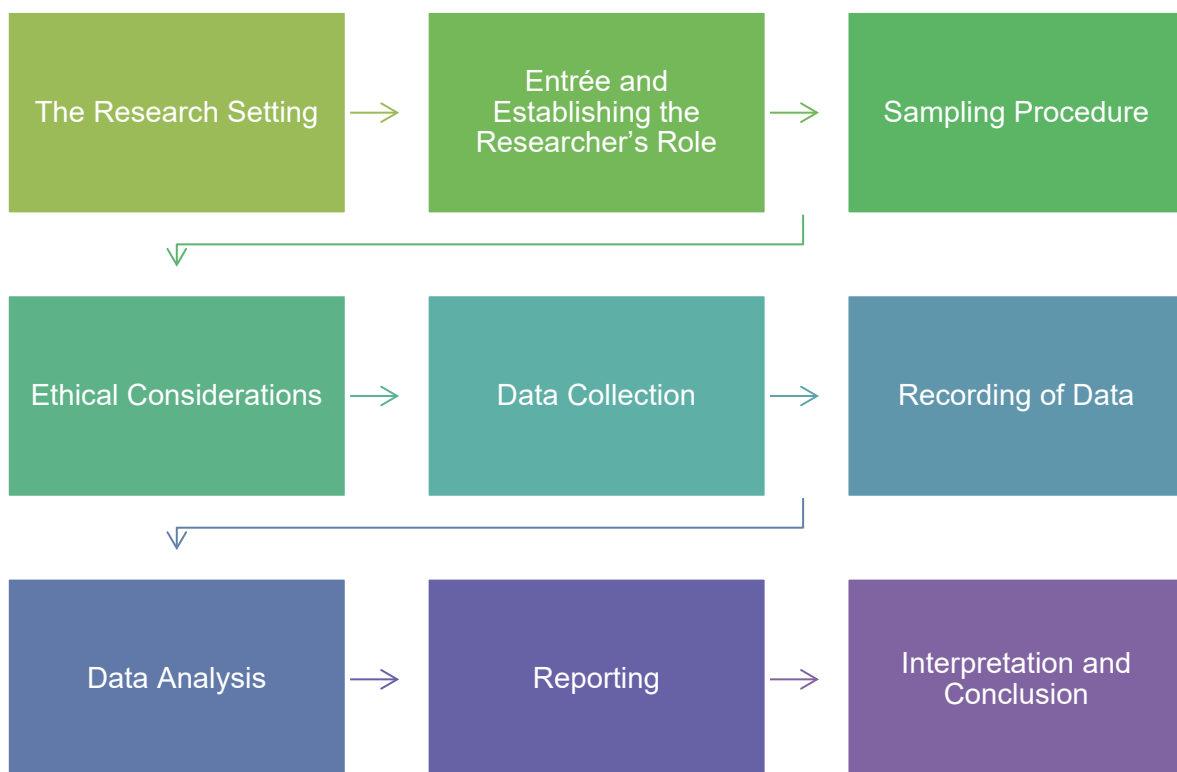
Step 9: Reporting

The results are reported in the form of a thematic analysis report that is supplemented with graphs and tables to ensure a coherent interpretation of the findings.

Step 10: Interpretation and Conclusion

The results were interpreted using relevant theoretical frameworks as a guideline. The researcher provides conclusions for the study and limitations of the study as well as recommendations regarding the resolution of the challenges established in the study. Figure 4 provides a summary of the process that will occur when conducting the empirical study.

Figure 4: *The Process of the Empirical Study*



Source: Author's Own Work

The empirical study is conducted using the above process to ensure that the data collected by the researcher provided an accurate representation of the phenomena being studied.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gajjar (2013) states that ethics is a process, method, or perspective that the researcher abides by when deciding how they should act while analysing complex issues. No research study was considered ethically exempt as all research gives rise to ethical issues (Moriarty, 2011). Ethical considerations were implemented to protect the participants from any harm during this study.

The research took into consideration any ethical issues that may have arisen from this study. Ethical clearance for this study was obtained by the Department of Human Resources. Permission was obtained from all organisations that had been approached and agreed to participate in this study. All research findings were presented accurately, reflecting the data obtained during the research and without bias or prejudice.

Given the study's focus on exploring multi-generational differences in employee retention, the risk to confidentiality was inherently low. The comprehensive nature of the research, coupled with its intent to safeguard participant anonymity through anonymisation techniques, contributed to minimising potential risks associated with confidentiality breaches.

There was no research methodology that was exempt or ethically privileged with regard to the protection of participants and their data (Moriarty, 2011). This research study provided each participant with a written informed consent, as per Annexure 2, which explained their rights as participants, detailed information about the study process and provided the opportunity for participants to ask questions or address concerns.

1.11 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters are divided as per below:

Chapter 1: Scientific Overview of the Research

Chapter 2: Meta-Theoretical Context of the Research: Retention in the New World of Work

Chapter 3: Multi-Generational Cohorts and Employee Retention

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Chapter 5: Research Findings

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

1.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 provided insights into the background and motivations of the study, inclusive of the problem statement and potential value add. The research questions and aims that the study sought to achieve and answer were discussed. A description of the research design, approach and strategies was highlighted, including the ethical considerations of the research.

Chapter 2 discusses the meta-theoretical context on retention in the new world of work.

CHAPTER 2: META-THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH: RETENTION IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to understand the study within its context by understanding retention and the 21st-century world of work which forms a boundary for the research. This chapter discusses retention, retention theories and retaining employees in the 21st-century new world of work. There are many changes that have occurred; as we step into the 21st-century world of work, there is a notable change in the increase in talent and flexibility of employees who are now more concerned with satisfying their own individual needs, which has made organisations more aware of the importance of retaining employees (Jeyaseeli, 2022).

2.2 DEFINING RETENTION

Hattangadi (2025) describes retention as an organisational goal that enhances productivity by reducing turnover and creating or fostering a positive and healthy working environment. Charzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022) states that retaining employees is extremely important and the continuous loss of these employees can create a negative impact on any organisation, especially during a time of consistent change and instability. This may assist employers in managing the expectations of employees, specifically females and will provide a better understanding of the factors of their retention, which will allow human resource managers to develop policies and retention strategies to retain their top female talent within their organisation. This is important, as the study will attempt to identify differences in retention drivers and inhibitors across multi-generational cohorts. Accordingly, this study will help organisations develop tailored retention strategies that address the unique needs and preferences of employees from each generation.

Retention plays a key role in ensuring organisational success and employee satisfaction. To effectively address retention, it is essential to first grasp what it entails. According to Hattangadi (2025), retention helps build trust between employees, fostering team cohesion and collaboration within the organisation.

Nasir et al. (2019) states that retention is a set of procedures and policies implemented in an organisation that make individuals stay for prolonged periods. The process of motivating

employees to stay at an organisation and the initiatives an organisation takes to prevent skilled employees from leaving is referred to as employee retention (Hassen, 2022).

Employee retention is broadly understood as the ability of an organisation to retain its employees over time while minimising voluntary and involuntary turnover (Rakhra, 2018; Shu, 2023). It reflects a deliberate and systematic effort to satisfy employees' needs and create an environment that fosters commitment and loyalty (Bharath, 2023). When employees perceive that their rights are respected and promoted, they are more likely to remain within the organisation (Nasir et al., 2019). Similarly, effective management practices contribute significantly to retention, as organisations that manage employees efficiently are better positioned to retain them (Moore & Hanson, 2022). Job satisfaction also plays a central role, as employees who are more satisfied tend to demonstrate greater dedication and are less likely to leave (Sinha, 2012).

Employee retention is often viewed as the opposite of employee turnover, which can negatively affect organisational productivity and profitability (Hassen, 2022). High turnover results in the loss of skills, knowledge and organisational investment in employee development, highlighting the importance of understanding the reasons employees leave (Rakhra, 2018). For instance, factors such as lack of managerial support may drive employees to exit, emphasising the need for targeted retention strategies such as supportive leadership (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Retention is therefore regarded as a critical strategic function that supports organisational effectiveness, reduces operational costs and enhances overall performance (Deshwal, 2015; Ghani et al., 2022).

In practice, employee retention involves motivating and encouraging employees to remain within an organisation for as long as possible (Deshwal, 2015). This is particularly important in sectors characterised by high turnover, where retention is influenced by factors such as work life balance, quality of work life, intrinsic motivation, career development opportunities and effective talent management practices (Shu, 2023). When these factors are absent or insufficiently addressed, employees are more likely to seek alternative opportunities. As such, employee retention remains a vital organisational priority, enabling stability, continuity and the preservation of institutional knowledge.

Gelencsér et al. (2023) also identify benefits, such as higher employee engagement, which includes better employee health, greater employee loyalty, happy and satisfied employees, better customer service, lower absenteeism and higher profitability. Retention is of the utmost importance as it reduces costs and time spent on hiring new individuals after others leave and

reduces roadblocks on productivity (Gelencsér et al., 2023). Retaining employees limits many costly processes within any organisation, such as recruitment, training and selection processes (Charzoudes & Chatzoglou, 2022).

Chaudhary and Sharma (2023) state that retention is considered an organisational strategy that combats, the cost of turnover, the loss of company knowledge, the disruption of customer service and regaining efficiency. The fundamental components of employee retention include a productive work environment, growth opportunities, compensation and a good relationship between management and employees (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2023).

Hassen (2022) states that employee retention is the feeling of commitment that employees have towards an organisation, which is instilled by the factors provided by the employer. Bharath (2023) notes that the shortage of human resources has emerged as a significant challenge for organisations, particularly in developing countries such as South Africa. Keeping employees, stakeholders, and employers happy is the ultimate goal of employee retention (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2023). Organisations that cannot afford to lose talented employees need to create better opportunities and motivate them in order to retain them (Urme, 2023).

Although the authors offer slightly different perspectives, their definitions of retention are closely related and point to the same core idea. Charzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022) emphasise the organisational impact of retaining employees, while Nasir et al. (2019) and Hassen (2022) focus on the policies, practices and motivations that encourage employees to stay. Other authors highlight aspects such as commitment, work-life balance, organisational support and job satisfaction. Together, these definitions suggest that retention involves a deliberate organisational effort to create conditions that encourage employees to remain for sustained periods by meeting their needs, supporting their growth and fostering a positive and stable working environment. This consolidated view captures the shared features across the definitions discussed.

2.3 RETENTION IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

Hou and Sing (2025) state that the COVID-19 pandemic changed the working environment; it created and accelerated the digitisation of work, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and innovations such as working from home. Mabaso and Manuel (2024) concur by stating that South Africa's work environment has changed significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic with the rise in hybrid work models and more flexibility which improves employee wellbeing.

The move towards the digitalisation of work and more flexibility will be advantageous to employees in the new world of work (Mabaso & Manuel, 2024). The new world of work shows that employees expect more flexible working arrangements, the consistent evolution of the way work is done and competition for talent (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024).

PWC (2022) characterises the new world of work with automation, AI, rapid technological advancements and the constant reinvention of skills. The megatrends that are foreseeable include technological advancements, automation and AI, which will reclassify and rebalance the world of work. These new characteristics require a major shift in the global workplace, requiring new strategies to create engagement and enhance performance (An Achievers Report, 2021).

Table 1: *Characteristics of the New World of Work*

Characteristic	Description
Remote working	Employees feeling pressured to be productive while working remotely may lead to burnout. However, remote work has become the new normal and affects the way employers and employees interact.
Employee engagement	Increased importance placed on employee engagement, building trust and loyalty between employers and employees.
Mental health and wellbeing	An employee's mental health and wellbeing are now considered as important for the productivity of the organisation.

Source: An Achievers Report (2021, p. 11–16)

The new world of work emphasises the rapid change taking place, which enhances the need for mental health awareness, the demand for cognitive and leadership skills and the loss of human connection due to remote working practices (Kotera & Correa Vione, 2020). Table 1 provides a summary of the characteristics seen in the new world of work.

With all these changes and challenges, employers need to adapt their retention strategies to the new world of work. They need to be aware of retention opportunities such as allowing employees increased flexibility to promote a healthy work-life balance, onboarding employees effectively, recognising contributions made by employees and maximising engagement

(Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Retention challenges require strategies that can maintain employees through the digitisation and technological advancements of the working world.

Employers need to value employees' insights, say "thank you" often and adapt to the changing work environment (An Achievers Report, 2021). PWC (2022) highlights 12 ways to enhance retention in the new world of work:

- **Focus on Total Reward:** Offer employees both financial and non-financial benefits (such as remote working).
- **Employee Value Proposition:** Inform employees as to why they should choose to work for a specific organisation.
- **Talent Management:** Identify and develop talent.
- **Lifelong learning:** Encourage continuous development learning.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offer flexible/hybrid working.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Align the organisations values with that of its employees.
- **Performance Management:** Create a system that is fair and fosters learning.
- **Employee Engagement:** Create a culture that enhances engagement.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Promote policies and practices that support a healthy work-life balance.
- **Adaptability and Reskilling:** Always provide opportunities for reskilling which enhances adaptability.
- **Employee Advocacy:** Make employees feel heard.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** Encourage and support employees.

Adapting to the new world of work and aligning the organisation instead of opposing change allows organisations to effectively retain employees. Due to the unique challenges that females face in the world of work, it becomes increasingly important to take note when implementing retention strategies. Gander and Sharafizad (2025) emphasise the need to address the gaps in organisations to effectively develop females, with specific regards to females in leadership. Gander and Sharafizad (2025) assert that organisations must implement or revise policies to retain and develop female employees in the workplace. These insights highlight the importance of creating retention strategies that align with the drivers of female retention in the evolving world of work.

2.4 RETAINING FEMALES

Retaining employee's fuels productivity in an organisation and upon a deeper inspection there is a noticeable difference in the retention rates of females compared to males (Katekhaye & Dhone, 2023). In the ever-changing post-pandemic new world of work, it is vital to ensure female retention in any organisation, however, this has become increasingly challenging as females in leadership are leaving their jobs due to burnout, lack of recognition and career advancement and company culture and management (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Retaining females contributes to high levels of productivity, increases diversity (bringing in unique perspectives), creates greater employee engagement (which has shown to be vital for retaining all employees in the new world of work) and promotes an inclusive environment (Dwivedi et al., 2021). When examining the challenges that affect female retention in an organisation according to Dwivedi et al. (2021), the following three factors have a significant impact:

- **Burnout** - Employers need to create a supportive working environment and allow for flexible working arrangements to support females and reduce burnout.
- **Lack of recognition and advancement** - Employers need to recognise the achievements made by females and reward them appropriately by increasing financial rewards or career advancements. They need to mentor and coach females who have potential to take over leadership positions.
- **Company culture** - Employers need to foster an environment that ensures all employees feel safe and secure which will create higher employee engagement.

Females are leaving their jobs in search of flexibility and better financial compensation (Magda & Lipowska, 2021). Factors that influence the retention of employees include opportunities for career development or advancement, positive work-life balance, fair and competitive benefits and remuneration, managerial support and the fair and consistent application of HRM practices (Hammond & Coetzee, 2022). Organisations need to keep in mind that it is not just about the individual female but the symbiotic relationship between the females of different generations when trying to retain employees (Rudolph et al., 2021).

2.5 RETENTION AND GENERATIONAL COHORTS

Generational differences stem from the distinct historical periods in which individuals were raised, each influenced by the prevailing global events, economic landscapes, societal norms and technological innovations of that time (Bailey & Owens, 2020). Generational diversity allows an organisation to create an environment that is more vibrant, productive and inclusive (Bailey & Owens, 2020). As the newer generation (Generation Z (Gen Z)) joins the workforce, it becomes increasingly difficult to engage employees as well as promote loyalty and productivity in the organisation (Zahari & Puteh, 2023). Job hopping is becoming a rapid trend in the current workforce for Generation Z employees (Zahari & Puteh, 2023). The highest employee turnover is seen within the Generation Z and Generation Y generations. According to Ravid et al. (2025), most organisations are composed of the following generational cohorts:

- **Baby Boomers:** These are individuals close to retirement that are considered to be respectful and disciplined.
- **Generation X:** These are individuals who crave job security, love collaborating with others, make good use of technology and prefer a positive work life balance.
- **Generation Y:** Most of the workforce, these are individuals who value hybrid work models and flexibility and are reliant on technology.
- **Generation Z:** The youngest generation entering the work force, they require freedom and are considered talented users of technology.

Females from different generations have varying approaches towards work and these differences should be considered when developing retention strategies (Ravid et al., 2025). Whilst the diversity shown by each generation provides diverse experiences, perspectives and skill sets, it presents its own set of challenges (Bailey & Owens, 2020). Ensuring understanding of what motivates and drives each generation allows companies to retain a diverse pool of employees which in turn enhances the success and productivity of the organisation (Bailey & Owens, 2020).

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 2 provided clarity on the meta-theoretical context of the research which delved into the definition of retention and retention in the new world of work. There have been many changes expected as we enter the new world of work which is inherently technologically driven. As Generation Z enters the workforce and the Baby Boomer generation retires,

understanding how to retain employees becomes a crucial aspect of running a successful organisation.

Chapter 3 will focus on addressing research aim 1, 2 and 3 of the literature review:

Research Aim 1: To conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and the driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females.

Research Aim 2: To conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work.

Research Aim 3: To establish conclusions that can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts, the retention of females and the implications for retention practices.

CHAPTER 3: MULTI-GENERATIONAL COHORTS AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will delve in to the exploration of the research questions related to the literature review. The chapter aims to conceptualise multi-generational cohorts by identifying their characteristics and factors that drive and inhibit their retention. Chapter 3 will also examine the driving and inhibiting factors influencing female retention and how they are conceptualised within the new world of work. Lastly, the chapter will draw conclusions based on the literature review about multi-generational cohorts and female retention, discussing the implications for retention practices. This analysis of the literature surrounding the research will provide a deeper understanding and provide insights for improving retention strategies.

3.2 CONCEPTUALISING MULTI-GENERATIONAL COHORTS

3.2.1 Defining Multi-Generational Cohorts

A cohort is defined by Barrett and Noble (2019) as a group of individuals who share a similar characteristic, such as their date of birth within a specific period. A key feature of multigenerational cohorts is the specific birth years that define each cohort, with individuals grouped according to the period in which they were born, as shown in Figure 1. Twenge (2024) states that a generation will take on a special significance, as the individuals who belong to a generation are shaped by the critical events, experiences, and transitions that will eventually define their lives. This statement is further supported by the generational cohort theory postulated by Karl Mannheim in 1928, which states that generational cohorts are shaped by the experiences that occur within a specific historical context (Mannheim, 1952).

In this study, it is important to distinguish between a generational cohort and a multi-generational cohort. A generational cohort refers to a single group of individuals born within the same historical period who share a broadly similar set of formative influences, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, or Generation Z. In contrast, a multi-generational cohort refers to a group or setting that includes individuals from two or more different generational cohorts. For example, a workplace team made up of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials would be considered multi-generational. Therefore, when discussing characteristics, attitudes or retention factors specific to one generation, the correct term is generational cohort, whereas multi-generational cohort should be used only when referring to

groups consisting of multiple generations. This distinction clarifies terminology and prevents confusion when interpreting findings across different generational groups.

The current workforce is comprised predominantly of four generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z. As described by Cotrell (2024), these generations have been shaped by their experiences and life events which would have an effect in shaping their characteristics.

3.2.1.1 *Baby Boomers (Age in 2025: 61–81)*

Baby Boomers are often seen as the generational cohort with selfish and narcissistic tendencies that has benefited from the modern government setup, while denying these benefits to future generations (i.e., their children and grandchildren) (Martin & Roberts, 2021). This generation is the largest generational cohort; they grew up during a period of economic stability and high living standards (Vallesteros et al., 2020). Baby Boomers are technologically inclined, which is mostly used for communication purposes (Vallesteros et al., 2020).

Baby Boomers played an important role in integrating technology into their everyday lives by using devices such as televisions, computers and radios, which has created the basis for future generations (Abraham et al., 2023). This generational cohort worked hard to attain their lifestyle, paying for their homes, vehicles and new technologies (Abraham et al., 2023). During their era, technological advancements were market-driven and powered by consumer demand. Education also became more available, accessible and valued, leading to higher rates of classroom attendance (Abraham et al., 2023). The importance of science and technology escalated which led to new research and significant innovations in medicine and healthcare (Abraham et al., 2023).

Abraham et al. (2023) states that Baby Boomers were the pillars of economic growth and prosperity; they created a change to social norms and provided an optimistic and positive outlook on life. Baby Boomers possess substantial wealth and continue to contribute to the workforce even though they are reaching retirement age (Smoyer, 2019).

Balon (2024) states that Baby Boomers are the largest generation, having been shaped by political movements and societal changes. This generational cohort played a crucial role in showing support for equality and other social causes, which allowed them to capture the hearts and minds of many individuals (Balon, 2024). Baby Boomers grew up during a time of technological advancements and innovations such as birth control, they faced unique

challenges, including an increase in mental health issues and concerns (Balon, 2024). The rapid rise of technology and societal changes have highlighted the importance of mental health, with Baby Boomers experiencing higher levels of depression and other mental health problems compared to prior generational cohorts (Balon, 2024). This understanding or experience led to a change in the job market, where the need for benefits related to mental health became more prevalent. Employment opportunities had to provide inspiration, fulfilment and competitive salaries to meet the evolving needs and wants of this generation (Balon, 2024).

The emphasis on mental well-being and work-life balance was first brought to the forefront by the Baby Boomer generation, whose influence extended beyond their immediate societal contributions and helped shape the values embraced by subsequent generational cohorts (Balon, 2024). Their experiences emphasised the need for organisations to prioritise employee satisfaction and well-being, which allowed organisations to create more comprehensive approaches to employment and remuneration (Balon, 2024). This change has had a long-term impact, influencing how future generational cohorts view work and personal fulfilment (Balon, 2024).

Societal values and workplace culture were deeply shaped by a generation that championed social causes, embraced technological advancements and made substantial economic contributions (Balon, 2024). As Baby Boomers reach retirement age, they have made a lasting impact and created a legacy in promoting equality, mental health awareness and work-life balance which will continue to influence future generational cohorts (Abraham et al., 2023; Balon, 2024; Martin & Roberts, 2021).

This generational cohort shows technological proficiency and actively participates in their organisations. This highlights their adaptability, resilience and legacy, demonstrating the importance of employee satisfaction, holistic well-being and sustainable practices (Abraham et al., 2023; Balon, 2024; Martin & Roberts, 2021).

3.2.1.2 Generation X (Gen X) (Age in 2025: 45–60)

Generation X, often known as the MTV generation or the "middle child" due to its smaller size compared to the Baby Boomers and Generation Y (Lester, 2024), was the first generational cohort that grew up with personal computers. This generational cohort is ethnically diverse and tends to have more liberal societal views of the world (Smoyer, 2019). Generation X is

known for their independence, resourcefulness and strong emphasis on maintaining a work-life balance, similar to Baby Boomers (Lester, 2024).

Balon (2024) states that Generation X wore a lot of black clothing, specifically during the period when youth protests were no longer of interest and cynicism was predominant. Generation X shifted from Baby Boomers in that they had lower birth rates and began to marry their partners later in life; this may be influenced by the increased awareness and availability of birth control (Balon, 2024). During the time frame of Generation X, societal shifts were supplemented by a rise in homicide rates, which coincided with the emphasis now being placed on individualism (Balon, 2024).

Members of Generation X are more likely than members of earlier generational cohorts to experience different family dynamics during their childhood or upbringing, such as single parenthood, divorced parents or households where both parents worked (Smoyer, 2019). As a result, many of them became "latchkey kids" returning to an empty home after school and taking care of themselves until their parents finished work (Smoyer, 2019). This latchkey upbringing and the significant economic and cultural shifts in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s may have shaped their typical attitudes and values (Smoyer, 2019).

Individuals within this generational cohort were faced multiple challenges during their adolescence, including higher suicide rates and a more difficult transition to adulthood (Balon, 2024). Despite these challenges, Generation X is shown to have resilience as a generational cohort of adults who are more stable and grounded when compared to their Baby Boomer predecessors (Balon, 2024). This generation is often characterised by a greater scepticism toward authority and a reduced inclination to trust others (Balon, 2024).

Lissitsa (2024) describes the characteristics of Generation X as follows:

- **Independence:** Labelled as the "latchkey kids" many individuals within Generation X came home to empty houses after school, creating self-reliance from a young age.
- **Flexibility:** Generation X experienced significant social changes, which allowed them to develop adaptability, creating a willingness to embrace change and questioning traditional norms.
- **Critical Thinking:** Generation X were raised during events such as the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, which may have contributed to their development towards a sceptical and analytical approach to information.

- **Self-Reliance:** Generation X faced many challenges, including the threat of nuclear war; these challenges allowed them to learn to depend on themselves and make the best of their situations.

These characteristics have shaped Generation X into a generational cohort known for their adaptability, critical thinking and self-sufficiency (Lissitsa, 2024).

Generation X is known for their realistic outlook on life and independence, which further establishes their drive towards job security and financial stability (Drange, 2021). Generation X exhibits cynicism toward traditional institutions and societal norms, favouring entrepreneurial endeavours and a work-life balance, unlike Baby Boomers (Drange, 2021). Generation X is branded by their characteristics such as adaptability and resilience, valuing independence, reliability and stability in the workplace, creating long-term careers, while socially prioritising relationships that are meaningful and focusing on securing financial stability for their families (Drange, 2021).

3.2.1.3 Generation Y (Gen Y/Millennials) (Age in 2025: 29–44)

This generation are the children of Baby Boomers; they are considered to be the most planned and wanted children (Balon, 2024). Generation Y was raised by positivity and optimism which allowed them or directed them into having very high expectations of themselves (Balon, 2024). Their parents put pressure on teachers and schools to give better results for students, emphasising that they should receive points or credits for simply attending classes or attempting or completing their assignments (Balon, 2024).

Generation Y is widely recognised for its strong commitment to family values and collaborative efforts, which naturally extend to embracing diversity, self-expression and progressive social ideals, setting them apart from Baby Boomers and Generation X (Rank & Contreras, 2021). The term "Millennials" was coined to describe this group, as its oldest members reached adulthood around the dawn of the 21st century (Rank & Contreras, 2021). Raised during a time of rapid technological growth, they are often labeled as digital natives due to their seamless integration with digital tools and platforms (Rank & Contreras, 2021).

While their youth was generally joyful, adulthood has presented more challenges, including lower levels of sexual activity and a noticeable shift away from traditional institutions such as marriage and religion, especially when compared to earlier generations (Balon, 2024). Generation Y are also among the most educated generational groups, though they are

sometimes criticised for traits such as entitlement and narcissism. Much like Generation X, they contributed to declining birth rates by prioritising personal freedom and a slower-paced lifestyle (Balon, 2024).

Often dubbed the "snowflake" generation, Generation Y have been portrayed as hesitant to embrace adult responsibilities. Unlike Baby Boomers, they have faced the harsh realities of late-stage capitalism, grappling with unstable employment, mounting student debt and unaffordable housing (Martin & Roberts, 2021). Their heightened awareness of privacy concerns has made them particularly cautious about protecting personal data (Balon, 2024).

Despite environmental uncertainties, Generation Y maintains a hopeful outlook and actively participate in sustainable living. They are financially mindful, placing importance on saving and making strategic investment choices (Balon, 2024). Their enthusiasm for travel reflects a desire to immerse themselves in diverse cultures and experiences. Nostalgia plays a significant role in shaping their consumer habits and cultural preferences (Balon, 2024).

Technology and globalisation have deeply influenced Generation Y, shaping their worldview and daily routines (Njoroge et al., 2021). Their upbringing in a digitally connected era has fostered a strong affinity for creativity, inclusivity and meaningful work (Njoroge et al., 2021).

3.2.1.4 Generation Z (Gen Z) (Age in 2025: 13–28)

Generation Z is the generational cohort that follows Generation Y (Millennials) and precedes Generation Alpha (Twenge, 2024). Generation Z is considered to be the true digital natives as they were born into a world of technology; thus, they have never experienced a world without the internet, which has greatly influenced their perspectives and behaviours (Bhalla et al., 2021). They have been shaped by significant life events such as the global pandemic of COVID-19 and economic challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2023). These experiences may have deeply impacted their personalities and values, which makes them a unique and important demographic to understand (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2023).

Travelling remains a significant interest for this generational cohort, with a majority of them planning both domestic and international trips (Priporas et al., 2022). Despite their adventurous spirit, this generational cohort reports higher levels of anxiety compared to previous generational cohorts which can be noted as a trend that has been increasing in various regions (Priporas et al., 2022). Gaming, on the other hand, is seen as more than just

a hobby, it has become a cultural cornerstone and the primary mode of social interaction for Generation Z (Priporas et al., 2022).

While Generation Z is frequently linked to environmental activism, their views on sustainability reveal a nuanced and multifaceted perspective (Priporas et al., 2022). This group leads the way in integrating artificial intelligence into daily life, showing both frequent engagement and a notable level of trust in emerging technologies (Priporas et al., 2022). Platforms such as Instagram have become central to their cultural engagement, serving as hubs for inspiration and content exploration (Priporas et al., 2022).

Much like Generation Y, Generation Z tends to postpone traditional life milestones such as marriage, buying a home and starting a family (Balon, 2024). Their birth rates are slightly lower than those of Generation Y, reflecting broader shifts in lifestyle and priorities (Balon, 2024). A defining trait of this generation is their openness to gender diversity and fluid sexual identities, highlighting a broader societal acceptance of non-binary expressions (Balon, 2024). Politically, they lean progressive, advocating for LGBTQ rights and acknowledging human-driven climate change, even among those with conservative leanings (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

Safety, both emotional and physical, is a top concern for Generation Z, with a particular sensitivity to discomfort and psychological well-being (Balon, 2024). According to Balon (2024), the pervasive use of social media has contributed to increased feelings of isolation, as digital interactions often replace face-to-face connections. This shift has been linked to higher rates of depression, making Generation Z currently the most affected generation in terms of anxiety and mental health challenges (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

Despite these struggles, Generation Z stands out as the most academically accomplished generation to date. In 2018, 57% of Generation Z individuals aged 18 to 21 who had completed high school were enrolled in college programs, up from 52% of Generation Y in 2003 and 43% of Generation X in 1987 (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Additionally, in 2019, 44% of Generation Z youth aged 7 to 17 lived with at least one parent holding a tertiary qualification, compared to 33% of Generation Y at the same age (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

Financially, Generation Z tends to be cautious and security-focused, shaped by witnessing economic instability such as the Great Recession (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). These experiences have instilled a preference for conservative spending, stable employment and thoughtful investment strategies. Their strong emphasis on education has also contributed to lower employment rates among young adults, as many prioritise academic achievement over

immediate workforce entry (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Overall, Generation Z is navigating the complexities of modern life with a blend of resilience, pragmatism and adaptability (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

Table 2: Summary of Characteristics of the Multi-Generational Cohorts

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y (Millennials)	Generation Z
Age in 2025	61–81	45–60	29–44	13–28
Technological Use	Technologically inclined, mostly for communication purposes. Integrated technology into everyday lives using devices like televisions, computers and radios (Vallesteros et al., 2020).	First generation to grow up with personal computers. Technologically inclined (Lester, 2024).	Digital natives, grew up with rapid technological advancement, high emphasis on technology and social media (Rank & Contreras, 2021).	True digital natives, born into a world of technology, never experienced a world without the internet, high degree of trust in technology (Bhalla et al., 2021).
Social Values	Loyal to employers, value structured leadership, prefer traditional workplace norms (Pasko et al., 2020).	Independent, value clarity in roles, cautious about leadership, seek balance (Pasko et al., 2020).	Emphasis on family values, teamwork, diversity, self-expression, social responsibility, environmental concerns, socially liberal (Rank & Contreras, 2021).	Complex attitudes toward sustainability, progressive politics, support LGBTQ rights, acknowledge human-driven climate change (Priporas et al., 2022).

Mental Health	Higher levels of depression and mental health issues, emphasised the importance of mental well-being and work-life balance (Balon, 2024).	Higher probability of experiencing different family dynamics, higher suicide rates, resilience (Balon, 2024).	Faced difficult adulthood, lower sexual activity, reduced emphasis on marriage and religion, cautious about privacy, optimistic (Balon, 2024).	High anxiety and depression, loneliness due to social media, prioritise emotional and physical safety (Balon, 2024).
Work Ethic	Worked hard to attain their lifestyle, valued education and technological advancements were market-driven (Abraham et al., 2023).	Independence, flexibility, critical thinking, self-reliance (Lissitsa, 2024).	Value creativity, diversity, inclusion, seek meaningful careers, prudent with finances (Pasko et al., 2020).	Pragmatic, security-oriented, value financial stability, conservative spending, stable employment (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).
Family Dynamics	Prioritised work over family, modelled loyalty despite instability (Pasko et al., 2020).	Influenced by Boomers' sacrifices, value personal time and family balance (Pasko et al., 2020).	Most planned and wanted children, raised with optimism, high expectations, parental pressure on education (Balon, 2024).	Delay traditional milestones (marriage, homeownership), lower birth rates, embrace gender and sexual diversity (Balon, 2024).

Personality Traits	Loyal, structured, leadership-focused (Pasko et al., 2020). Adaptability, critical thinking, self-sufficiency, realistic outlook on life (Lissitsa, 2024).	Independent, clarity-seeking, sceptical of leadership (Pasko et al., 2020). Adaptability, critical thinking, self-sufficiency, realistic outlook on life (Lissitsa, 2024).	Driven, goal-focused, team-oriented, growth-seeking, open to feedback, inclusive, communicative (Pasko et al., 2020).	Adventurous, anxious, gaming as a cultural cornerstone and social outlet (Priporas et al., 2022).
Financial Behaviour	Strong preference for job security, stability-focused, cautious in career moves (Pasko et al., 2020).	Value security, slightly more confident in job mobility and financial adaptability (Pasko et al., 2020).	Cautious with money, prioritise job stability, aim for steady income, plan careers with financial goals in mind, seek balance between earnings and personal satisfaction (Pasko et al., 2020).	Conservative spenders, prioritise education and financial security, lower youth employment (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).
Environmental Attitudes	Prefer gradual environmental change, less likely to engage in activism, often prioritise economic growth over ecological reform (Goto et al., 2019).	Display moderate concern, tend to be pragmatic and selective in environmental engagement (Goto et al., 2019).	Consistently showing support for sustainability in lifestyle and policy, often push businesses and leaders toward eco-conscious practices (Goto et al., 2019).	High environmental concern, positive attitude toward eco-friendly products, responsive to media exposure on sustainability, prefer sustainable and recyclable products (Lavuri et al., 2021).

Legacy/Impact	Shaped traditional work norms, modelled loyalty despite instability (Pasko et al., 2020). Influenced societal values and work culture. (Abraham et al., 2023).	Influenced by Boomers, pushed for balance and clearer roles (Pasko et al., 2020). Promoted equality, mental health awareness and work-life balance (Abraham et al., 2023).	Shaped by digital culture and global exposure, purpose-driven work and inclusive leadership (Pasko et al., 2020).	Most educated cohort, shaped by COVID-19 and economic crises, resilient and adaptable (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).
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Source: Author's Own Work

3.2.2 Theory of Multi-Generational Cohorts

Generational cohorts will be defined as grouped individuals who were born during specific time frames (see Figure 1). According to the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, developed by William Strauss and Neil Howe, history unfolds in cycles of approximately 80 years, each comprising four "turnings" or eras (Padayachee, 2017). Each turning is associated with a specific generational model that influences societal attitudes and behaviours (Padayachee, 2017). According to this theory, each generation responds to the challenges and events of its time, shaping its collective identity and societal role (Padayachee, 2017). However, critics argue that the theory's deterministic view of generational cycles oversimplifies complex historical dynamics and may not account for the diverse experiences of marginalised groups.

In contrast, Karl Mannheim's Theory of Generations emphasises the social and historical contexts that shape generational identities (Padayachee, 2017). Mannheim suggests that a generation is a group of individuals who, due to shared experiences during a specific period, develop a collective consciousness and worldview (Padayachee, 2017). This perspective highlights the influence of historical events and social conditions on the formation of generational identities, suggesting that individuals born around the same time and place are likely to share certain attitudes and behaviours (Padayachee, 2017). Mannheim's approach provides a deeper understanding of generational dynamics, considering the impact of social structures and historical events on the development of generational cohorts (Padayachee, 2017).

Although the Strauss–Howe Generational Theory was originally developed to describe generational patterns within the United States, Padayachee's (2017) interpretation demonstrates how the underlying principles may be used more broadly to consider generational differences in other contexts. When applied outside the United States, the theory is understood as a conceptual guide rather than a fixed universal model, as each country has its own historical, cultural and socio-economic conditions that shape generational experiences. In this study, the discussion draws on Padayachee's (2017) application of the theory to illustrate how these ideas can be interpreted within the South African context, without assuming that the original framework was designed for, or directly transferable to, South Africa.

Generational Cohorts Theory postulates that individuals born into the same time frames will share similar characteristics, values, skills, behaviour and attitudes (Jonck et al., 2016). Generational cohorts are groups of individuals born within a specific timeframe and

geographical area, sharing common experiences and societal contexts that shape their beliefs, values and behaviours (Nwobodo & Weissmann, 2023). This theory states that technological, social and cultural influences will inevitably shape an individual's perceptions of how they view their lives, work and society (Jonck et al., 2016). It attempts to explain the differences and similarities between generations; it assists in understanding the different behaviours and perspectives of different age groups.

The theory attempts to show how perspectives and behaviours change over time. Pasko et al. (2020) writes that a generational cohort is a group of individuals whose perspectives are shaped by the historical experiences that they have shared. This theory states that individuals from different generations have different perspectives; therefore, the factors influencing their retention may differ as well. An innovative scholar in the formulation of this concept was the German sociologist, Karl Mannheim. In his 1923 essay "The Problem of Generations," Mannheim established the groundwork for what later developed as the widely acknowledged "generational cohort theory" (Mannheim, 1952).

According to the Generational Cohort Theory, generational perspectives may be shaped by various events that have occurred (Mannheim, 1952). Due to individuals being born within a specific time frame, their shared environmental influences, attitudes and preferences lead to distinct generational characteristics (Nwobodo & Weissmann, 2023). Individuals within the same generation often exhibit similar expectations and worldviews due to their exposure to comparable societal contexts (Nwobodo & Weissmann, 2023). These unique generational traits arise from the different societal contexts each generation experiences (Nwobodo & Weissmann, 2023). Understanding these generational differences is crucial for fostering effective communication and collaboration across age groups (Nwobodo & Weissmann, 2023).

3.2.3 Multi-Generational Cohorts in South Africa

South Africa is a country with a rich history, as it comprises various religions, cultures, races and ethnicities, which is why it is commonly known as the rainbow nation (Uys, 2022). As the study is based in KwaZulu-Natal, it is important to highlight the events that have occurred (see Table 3) in line with the Generational Cohort Theory that will provide a framework for this research. Based on the theory of generational cohorts, events of historical significance may have impacted a generation's perspective. The historical events described in Table 3 highlight the richness of the history of South African, which includes the Apartheid era (Thompson, 2014). Generation Z is the first generation in South Africa to be completely born into a

democratic society (Thompson, 2014). Mannheim’s (1952) theory of generational cohorts postulates that these significant events in South Africa may have had a defining impact on each specific generation and the characteristics they have developed.

Table 3: Historic Events Influencing Generational Traits

Generation	Year	Events that have occurred during the time frames of each generation that may have influenced individuals’ perceptions
Baby Boomers	1944–1964	During this era, the National Party won the general election, Apartheid legislation was developed and enforced. The Sharpeville massacre which killed sixty-nine Black individuals had taken place. Nelson Mandela, the leader of the newly established ANC campaign, had been given a life sentence of imprisonment.
Generation X	1965–1980	Henderik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, was assassinated. The Soweto uprising had taken place which had killed six hundred individuals (mostly students).
Generation Y (Millennials)	1981–1996	F.W de Klerk was announced president and Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Apartheid laws were rescinded. The first democratic election in South Africa was held.
Generation Z	1997–2012	ANC continued winning the general elections, President Thabo Mbeki was announced president. President Mbeki resigned after there were allegations brought forward of his interference in a corruption case. President Zuma was elected. South Africa entered its very first economic recession.

Source: Brookes (2022, pp. 1–268) and Simpson (2021, pp. 1–198)

3.2.4 Generational Differences in the Workplace

In the 21st century, generational differences are often viewed as contributing factors to various organisational challenges, including the perceived decline of work ethic and increased employee turnover. Accordingly, it is important for organisations to understand these

generational distinctions in order to address such issues effectively (Rudolph et al., 2020). Organisations and employers need to create a productive working environment, taking into account the values of each generational cohort. This begins with organisations understanding the needs of each generational cohort (Seifert et al., 2023).

Known for their strong work ethic and dedication, Baby Boomers have consistently strived to improve their lives and those of their families, all while maintaining active roles within their communities (Abraham et al., 2023). In South Africa, there is no legally mandated retirement age, and, because of this, Baby Boomers remain the oldest generation still participating in the workforce. Although most organizations set retirement between the ages of 60 and 65, many individuals from this cohort have either reached or surpassed this age bracket (Truxillo et al., 2014).

Rather than embracing modern trends, Baby Boomers tend to favour traditional communication methods and place high importance on job security (Seifert et al., 2023). Their professional identity is often deeply intertwined with the roles they occupy, emphasising how central work is to their sense of self (Seifert et al., 2023).

Demonstrating strong commitment and integrity in their professions, this generation is widely regarded as reliable and productive in the workplace (Simonyan Aramays, 2023). Additionally, Baby Boomers generally show a high level of respect for authority and thrive in structured environments, traits that distinguish them from Generation X, who tend to challenge conformity (Mahmoud et al., 2021).

Generation X retains their strong work ethic from their parents (Baby Boomers), despite their financial situations (Simonyan Aramays, 2023). Generation X individuals attempted to achieve higher material success than their parents, reflecting increased expectations (Mahmoud et al., 2021). Achieving a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives is a key priority for Generation Y (Njoroge et al., 2021). Although they are sometimes unfairly labelled as lazy or self-centred, members of this generation are highly collaborative and tend to thrive in flexible work settings that support creative thinking and meaningful engagement (Njoroge et al., 2021).

Rather than settling for any available job, Generation Y individuals actively seek work environments that nurture teamwork and align with their personal passions (Mahmoud et al., 2021). They place strong emphasis on self-care and lifelong learning, viewing these as essential to long-term career development. Unlike previous generations, they are motivated

less by material gain and more by opportunities for personal and professional fulfilment, which stands out as a defining trait of this cohort (Njoroge et al., 2021).

Individuals within Generation Y usually align themselves with companies, employers and brands that share their values (Njoroge et al., 2021). Generation Y is seen to be more available because they are more technologically advanced, leading their colleagues and clients to believe that they are always available, unlike Baby Boomers (Mahmoud et al., 2021).

Generation Y is characterised by being family-oriented and the ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance even if it means placing less importance on career advancement (Balon, 2024). Generation Y is confident and ambitious, often demonstrating a strong desire to succeed and a readiness to question authority, which distinguishes it from older generations such as the Baby Boomers (Balon, 2024). While members of this generation appreciate working within a team, they also value personal recognition and seek affirmation for their individual efforts (Balon, 2024). These individuals value teamwork and appreciate the input of their teammates but also seek constructive feedback and guidance to increase their contributions (Balon, 2024).

As organisations navigate the complexities of the rapid rise in technological advancements and changing societal norms, understanding Generation Z's unique approach to work becomes more important (Zahra et al., 2025). This generational cohort is characterised by its digital fluency (including the ability to use and adapt to new technology), global consciousness and commitment to social impact, bringing a transformation to the workplace that is much needed (Zahra et al., 2025). For organisations aiming to succeed in this new environment, recognising and using the strengths of Generation Z is not merely beneficial but vital (Zahra et al., 2025).

Technology plays a central role in the lives of Generation Z and they place high value on hybrid or flexible working arrangements that support their lifestyle and career goals (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025). These setups offer the ability to work from home and manage flexible hours, which supports the preference for autonomy, independence and control over time (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025). With this flexibility, members of Generation Z are better equipped to manage both professional responsibilities and personal goals, allowing for a more balanced approach to life and career development (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025).

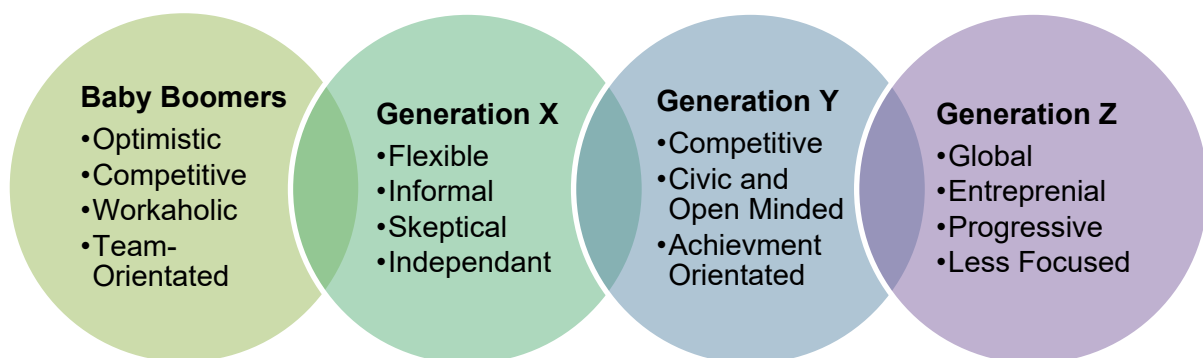
Looking after their mental health and overall well-being is a clear priority for this generation (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025). They recognise the importance of taking breaks to prevent burnout

and maintain productivity over the long term (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025). Inclusivity is another defining value, as Generation Z actively promotes diversity and expects employers to embrace social responsibility and ethical practices (Wanjari & Kadam, 2025).

Financial independence is highly important to this cohort. Their focus on stability has contributed to the rise of side hustle culture, which is common among young professionals in this age group (Rubin et al., 2024). Their natural adaptability to use digital tools and platforms gives them a significant advantage in tech-driven environments. Compared to older generations, they learn and apply new technologies more quickly, making them valuable contributors to innovation (Saeedikiya et al., 2024). Rather than being restricted by traditional norms or structures, Generation Z is known for its fresh, forward-thinking mindset and openness to new ways of working (Saeedikiya et al., 2024).

It is important to understand that each generational cohort brings unique perspectives and perceptions to the workplace (see Figure 5). Employers and organisations that invest in understanding these differences can create a collaborative and productive environment (Ravid et al., 2025). By placing value on the diverse strengths of all generational cohorts, companies/organisations can enhance teamwork and achieve shared success (Ravid et al., 2025).

Figure 5: *Description of Characteristics per Generational Cohort*



Source: Kinger and Kumar (2023, pp. 206–218)

3.2.5 Driving and Inhibiting Factors of Retention Amongst These Multi-Generational Cohorts

Generational cohorts faced many different socio-economic challenges and shifts during their respective eras, which have not only shaped their personalities but also prepared them for a work environment (Bielińska-Dusza, 2022). The environment is currently unstable as some individuals grew up in an economic crisis whilst others grew up during the COVID-19 pandemic (Maqbool et al., 2023). The current workforce contains four specific generational cohorts which all have unique characteristics: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z; these cohorts bring about their own unique perspectives and workplace preferences as portrayed by their retention factors in Figure 6 (Chiswa & Mpundu, 2024).

Figure 6: Summary of Driving Factors that Influence Retention Within the Multi-Generation Cohorts.

Baby Boomers	Sense of Purpose	Baby Boomers value roles that provide a sense of purpose and impact
	Autonomy	They appreciate autonomy and trust from their managers
	Quality of Work Life	A high quality of work life is crucial for their retention
	Benefits	As they approach retirement, benefits such as pension plans and healthcare become increasingly important
Generation X	Trust in Leadership	Trust and stability from management are key retention factors
	Work-Life Balance	They value a clear balance between work and personal life
	Career Progression	Opportunities for career advancement and development are important
	Direct Communication	They prefer straightforward communication methods like emails and SMS
Generation Y	Work-Life Balance	Millennials prioritise a work-life balance that allows flexibility
	Career Development	They seek opportunities for career progression and development
	Purpose and Flexibility	They look for jobs that offer purpose and flexibility
	Regular Feedback	A collaborative environment with regular feedback is important
Generation Z	Competitive Salary	Competitive pay is a significant retention factor
	Career Growth	Opportunities for rapid career advancement are crucial
	Flexible Working Arrangements	They value flexible project roles and rotational assignments
	Ethical Standards	They prioritise employers who demonstrate a commitment to ethical standards and social responsibility

Source: Benítez-Márquez et.al (2022, pp. 2–15); Krishna and Agrawal (2024, pp. 2–26); Lopes et al., (2024, pp. 1–8); and Vieira et al. (2024, pp. 7–21)

Ambition, creativity and a strong sense of teamwork are defining traits of the Baby Boomer generation. Their competitive nature and commitment to excellence have shaped them into effective leaders with a well-established work ethic (Chiswa & Mpundu, 2024). Many within this group prefer structured and traditional workplace environments, which support their sense of stability and familiarity (Nichols & Smith, 2025). They also place great importance on the overall quality of work life and are more inclined to stay with organisations where they feel a deep sense of purpose (Nichols & Smith, 2025).

Independence plays a significant role in how Baby Boomers operate, as they prefer environments where managers trust in their ability to work autonomously (Nichols & Smith, 2025). Key factors that influence their retention include a sense of purpose, autonomy and trust in leadership, all of which contribute to their long-term commitment to an organisation (Nichols & Smith, 2025). As they near retirement, financial benefits such as pension schemes, retirement annuities, provident funds and healthcare options become increasingly important (Nichols & Smith, 2025). They also tend to value face-to-face communication and appreciation for their experience and expertise in the workplace (Jenei & Machova, 2024). On the other hand, a lack of recognition or inadequate benefits may lead to dissatisfaction and decreased retention (Olckers, 2021).

When considering Generation X, similar motivators for retention emerge. Trust in leadership is one of the most critical factors for this cohort, often outweighing other considerations such as work-life balance or compensation (Sharma & Singh, 2024; Snyman et al., 2023). A trustworthy and supportive management team fosters a sense of stability, which this generation values alongside clear opportunities for career progression and skill development (Sharma & Singh, 2024).

Independence and the ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life are also essential to Generation X (Arceo et al., 2024). Communication preferences often lean toward practical methods such as email and SMS, which provide efficient updates and task coordination (Arceo et al., 2024). If members of this group perceive instability or lack confidence in leadership, they may consider leaving the organization in search of a more secure and growth-oriented environment (Arceo et al., 2024).

Members of Generation Y are at a stage in their lives where family becomes a priority (Mabaso, 2022). Consequently, they seek a work-life balance that allows them the flexibility to spend time with their loved ones (Mabaso, 2022). Flexible working arrangements are a significant retention factor for this generation (Mabaso, 2022).

Career development and progression are top priorities for Generation Y. Although earning a competitive salary holds financial significance, it is often considered secondary to achieving a healthy work-life balance (Marozva, 2024). Purpose and flexibility are highly valued in their professional lives, with many seeking roles that align with their personal values and offer autonomy (Marozva, 2024). This generation flourishes in collaborative environments where constructive feedback is provided consistently, helping to foster growth and engagement (Marozva, 2024). Flexible work arrangements and clear career development pathways serve as major drivers of retention among Generation Y employees. Conversely, rigid workplace structures and limited advancement opportunities may reduce the likelihood of long-term commitment (Marozva, 2024).

As Generation Z begins to establish its presence in the workforce, competitive compensation and opportunities for career advancement are particularly influential in employment decisions (Csiszárík-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2024). Flexibility in work arrangements is frequently cited as the most important factor affecting their retention (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Members of this cohort actively pursue roles that encourage learning and growth, often preferring fast-paced environments that support rapid development (Zahra et al., 2025). Access to real-time information and efficient communication tools also plays a key role in keeping them engaged.

In addition to growth opportunities, Generation Z is drawn to organizations that prioritise ethics, inclusivity and social responsibility (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Project-based roles and rotational assignments are particularly effective in maintaining their focus and motivation (Csiszárík-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2024). Primary drivers for retention include flexible work options, advancement opportunities and competitive salaries (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). On the other hand, poor digital integration and stagnant career paths are among the most significant factors that may reduce retention within this group (Zahra et al., 2025).

Recognising the distinct factors that influence retention for each generational cohort is essential for developing effective workplace retention strategies (Olivetti, 2024). Baby Boomers appreciate stability and benefits, Generation X values work-life balance and career advancement, Generation Y seeks flexibility and meaningful work and Generation Z prioritises rapid career growth and ethical practices (Olivetti, 2024). Focusing on retaining female employees is important, as they often confront unique challenges such as balancing work and personal life and overcoming gender biases in the workplace (Olivetti, 2024). Addressing these factors allows organisations to create a more inclusive and supportive environment, which improves retention rates among females (Olivetti, 2024).

3.3 FEMALES WITHIN MULTI-GENERATIONAL COHORTS

Terpstra-Tong and Kwok (2025) draw data from thirty-five societies, highlighting the fact that females' experiences in organisations are shaped not only by societal norms and workplace demographics but also by the generational cohort they belong to. Older generational cohorts such as Baby Boomers and Generation X may place value on career stability and recognition, while younger generational cohorts such as Generation Y and Generation Z prioritise inclusivity, diversity and equitable workplace dynamics (Terpstra-Tong & Kwok, 2025).

Organisations with higher female representation tend to create greater job satisfaction for females, regardless of their age; however, the level of satisfaction varies by the generational cohort that these females belong to, with younger generational cohorts (Gen Y and Generation Z) showing increased sensitivity to gender equality and inclusive management practices (Terpstra-Tong & Kwok, 2025). The study also illustrates that females from all generational cohorts are more fulfilled in organisations that promote gender balance, support improvement and reduce structural barriers (Terpstra-Tong & Kwok, 2025).

Terpstra-Tong and Kwok (2025) suggest that while generational ideals differ between generational cohorts, commonalities do exist, supporting the need for gender-aware policies adapted to generational expectations. Zhao et al. (2024) highlight that younger generational cohorts, such as Generation Y and Generation Z, value emotional support and flexible working conditions (hybrid working environments) more than older generational cohorts, who prioritise job security and long-term organisational devotion. All females from multi-generational cohorts prefer managers or leaders who are supportive of family responsibilities, which also contributes to a sense of thriving and satisfaction at work (Zhao et al., 2024). Having management that is supportive enhances motivation and reduces burnout (Zhao et al., 2024).

According to Kirsh (2021), female Baby Boomers view retirement as a phase of redefining purpose and continuing their identity through part-time work and volunteering. This generational cohort values stability and autonomy and their decisions are often influenced by a yearning for continued contribution and personal satisfaction (Kirsh, 2021).

Zahra et al. (2025) found that Generation Z females place a high emphasis on flexibility, purpose-driven work and technological integration. In contrast to Baby boomers, Generation Z females, who are just beginning to enter the workforce, exhibit a different set of priorities and behavioural traits (Zahra et al., 2025). Members of Generation Z are the true digital natives who value inclusion, diversity and career development (Zahra et al., 2025). Mental health,

work-life balance and ethical leadership are key driving factors that influence retention for this generational cohort, showing a shift away from the loyalty-focused values of earlier generations toward more fluid, values-aligned career expectations (Zahra et al., 2025). These generational differences suggest that HR policies should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to policy making. Instead, HR needs to acknowledge the unique characteristics of each generational cohort.

3.4 RETENTION OF FEMALES IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

3.4.1 Key Challenges Faced by Females in the Workforce

It is essential to understand the unique challenges females face in the workplace when addressing the driving and inhibiting factors that influence retention (Olivetti, 2024). These challenges include gender biases, difficulties in balancing work and personal life and limited opportunities for career advancement (Olivetti, 2024). Recognising these challenges allows organisations to develop retention strategies that foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment (Olivetti, 2024).

There are still gender disparities in employment and salaries between male and females, despite societal advancements (Olivetti, 2024). Females are usually given lower-paying jobs compared to males, contributing to the gender wage gap (even if both males and females have the same skill, qualification and experience) (Olivetti, 2024). This wage gap is driven by the various roles females and males take on, as well as potential discrimination and societal expectations (Olivetti, 2024). This imbalance has effects on a female's career growth, as they have less time and energy to give to professional development and career advancement (Codd, 2024).

Societal norms significantly impact a female's career advancement (Olivetti, 2024). Traditional gender roles often place the bigger burden of caregiving and household responsibilities on females, limiting their career opportunities and progression (Olivetti, 2024). Females remain underrepresented in senior positions due to systemic biases within organisations (Ely & Padavic, 2020). These biases manifest in various forms, including the assumption that females are less committed to their careers because of family responsibilities or wanting to have children (Ely & Padavic, 2020).

Females may find it difficult to balance professional and personal responsibilities (Olivetti, 2024). These difficulties can lead to career interruptions, reduced work hours, or even leaving the workforce (Olivetti, 2024). The observed uneven distribution of household duties often influences females to make career sacrifices, affecting their long-term professional growth and earning capacity (Olivetti, 2024). Workplace stress substantially impacts females' mental health, where the pressure to perform and balance several roles can lead to increased stress and burnout (Ma & Zhang, 2025). While both males and females may struggle with this issue, females are more likely to face career hindrances due to societal expectations and the additional burden of household responsibilities (Ely & Padavic, 2020). The percentage of males unemployed for long periods is lower compared to females (Dutta & Mishra, 2021).

Non-inclusive behaviours and discrimination in the workplace also remain as a major challenge (Codd, 2024). These behaviours create a hostile work environment and hamper females' ability to succeed professionally (Codd, 2024). Females continue to face restricted access to leadership roles and decision-making positions (Codd, 2024). Systemic biases and an absence of support for female leadership may contribute to this ongoing problem (Codd, 2024) and these biases can manifest in various forms, including unequal pay, limited opportunities for progression.

Females have been attempting to remove themselves from societal norms and standards, which can be seen when they are fighting for equal rights in the world through movements such as #MeToo (Goncharenko, 2022). The #MeToo movement exposed several cases of females facing sexual and non-sexual harassment in the workplace, ranging from verbal, visual, non-verbal or physical harassment (Goncharenko, 2022).

Females are underrepresented at every level, from entry-level jobs to more senior roles (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). When comparing females to males in managerial positions, fewer females have progressed to be managers (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). Many males feel threatened by female managers, which can contribute to the lack of representation, where an insufficient number of female leaders are at the top who can inspire and support entry-level female employees (Dutta & Mishra, 2021).

A recent report by Statistics South Africa shows that females are more likely to face unemployment and are less likely to participate in the workforce compared to males, despite organisational policies aimed at promoting inclusion (Statistics South Africa, 2024). The economically active population in South Africa has grown over the past decade, but gender inequalities in the labour market remain, where males have higher levels of participation in the

labour force compared to females. While both male and female employment rates have declined, male employment rates surpass female employment rates (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Females with tertiary qualifications are increasingly entering male-dominated fields, but self-employed females are more likely to be in the informal sector compared to their male counterparts in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2024). South Africa’s unemployment rates have risen, with females facing higher rates than males, specifically among those aged 25–34 (Generation Z and Generation Y) and those with five or more children (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

It is essential for females that organisations achieve gender equity in decision-making roles (Statistics South Africa, 2024). While female representation has improved in middle and senior management roles in the public sector, these roles are still primarily held by males (Statistics South Africa, 2024). There are significant challenges which remain when aiming to achieve gender equality in South Africa's labour and leadership roles (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Aiming to address these challenges requires confronting multiple forms of discrimination and inequality (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Table 4 highlights the key challenges faced by females in the workplace.

Table 4: Key Challenges Faced by Females in the Workplace

Key Challenge	Description
Gender Biases	Females face systemic biases that limit career progression and result in unequal pay despite equal qualifications and experience (Olivetti, 2024).
Work-Life Balance Difficulties	Females struggle to balance professional duties with household and caregiving responsibilities, leading to career interruptions or reduced work hours (Wly & Padavic, 2020).
Gender Wage Gap	Females generally earn less than men for the same roles due to societal expectations, discrimination and role segregation (Dutta & Mishra, 2021).

Underrepresentation in Leadership	Females are underrepresented at all levels, particularly in senior and decision-making roles, limiting their influence and role models for other females (Codd, 2024).
Societal Norms and Expectations	Traditional gender roles place caregiving and household burdens primarily on females, restricting career advancement opportunities (Wly & Padavic, 2024).
Workplace Discrimination and Harassment	Females face non-inclusive behaviours, discrimination and harassment (including sexual harassment), creating hostile work environments (Ma & Zhang, 2025).
Mental Health and Stress	Balancing multiple roles and pressures leads to increased stress and burnout among females more than men.
Higher Unemployment and Informal Sector Work	Females have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to be self-employed in the informal sector compared to males (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Source: Author's Own Work

3.4.2 Gender-Specific Retention Factors for Females in the New World of Work

A Global Outlook survey by Deloitte reveals both improvements and challenges for females within organisations (Codd, 2023). While there has been some progress in reducing burnout, exclusion of hybrid working and non-inclusive behaviours, many issues remain within organisations (Codd, 2023). The progression of females in the workplace is beneficial for everyone, potentially increasing global GDP by 20%, according to the World Bank (Geldard, 2024). The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 implies that while progress for females has slowed overall, employment rates have risen (Geldard, 2024).

Females make up 42% of the global labour force and 31.7% of senior management, but they are behind males in most industries (Geldard, 2024). Females hold 50% of entry-level job roles, they fill only 25% of top positions (Geldard, 2024). Females are making strides in AI knowledge and their participation in sectors like Technology, Information and Media is increasing (Geldard, 2024). Retention of females within an organisation is relatively important;

hence, we need to understand the key driving and inhibiting factors that influence their retention, as per Figure 7 and Figure 8.

The driving factors influencing retention include improved mental health support, as females reported better mental health and reduced burnout compared to the previous year (Codd, 2023). Flexible working arrangements are important for retaining females, as they help balance work and personal responsibilities and offer meaningful development and progression opportunities, empowering females to flourish and stay longer with their employers (Codd, 2023). Inhibiting factors influencing their retention still exist (Codd, 2023). A substantial number of females still rate their mental health as poor and feel uncomfortable discussing it at work (Codd, 2023). There are many inhibiting factors that influence retention for females, including biases and unequal pay, which hinder career progression and reduce the likelihood of females remaining in an organisation (Clerkin, 2017).

Harassment and microaggressions remain common, with many females experiencing these behaviours and feeling unsupported by their employers/managers (Codd, 2023). The lack of flexibility is an inhibiting factor influencing retention as many females believe that requesting flexible working arrangements could negatively impact their chances of promotion, leading to higher turnover (Codd, 2023). Females often carry the primary responsibility for domestic tasks, which can limit their career progression and financial prospects (Codd, 2023).

Females from under-represented groups report bad experiences and are less likely to feel supported in their work-life balance, contributing to higher attrition rates within the organisation (Codd, 2023). While some organisations are making strides in gender equality, many females still face significant challenges that influence their retention in the workplace (Codd, 2023). A lack of representation, with scarce role models and mentors, can create a sense of isolation, stopping females from staying in an organisation. Implicit bias, or unspoken assumptions about their capabilities, can also hinder progression, leading to frustration and staff turnover (Clerkin, 2017).

A positive organisational culture is crucial, as environments with a high percentage of females report a more enjoyable work environment, leading to higher engagement and retention (Coetzee & Moosa, 2025). Work-life balance is another significant driving factor influencing retention for females as they value jobs that offer flexible working arrangements, allowing them to manage personal and professional responsibilities effectively (Clerkin, 2017). Professional growth opportunities also play a critical role, as providing resources for goal accomplishment and career growth can be a driving factor influencing retention (Coetzee & Moosa, 2025).

Ensuring that females are provided with meaningful work that aligns with personal values and a general sense of job satisfaction substantially influences retention rates (Binti et al., 2025). They require access to genuine leadership opportunities, as females seek environments where they can progress and be recognised for their contributions (Coetzee & Moosa, 2025). Health and wellness programs that offer services for employees can also improve retention, as can supportive supervisors who help foster a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation (Binti et al., 2025).

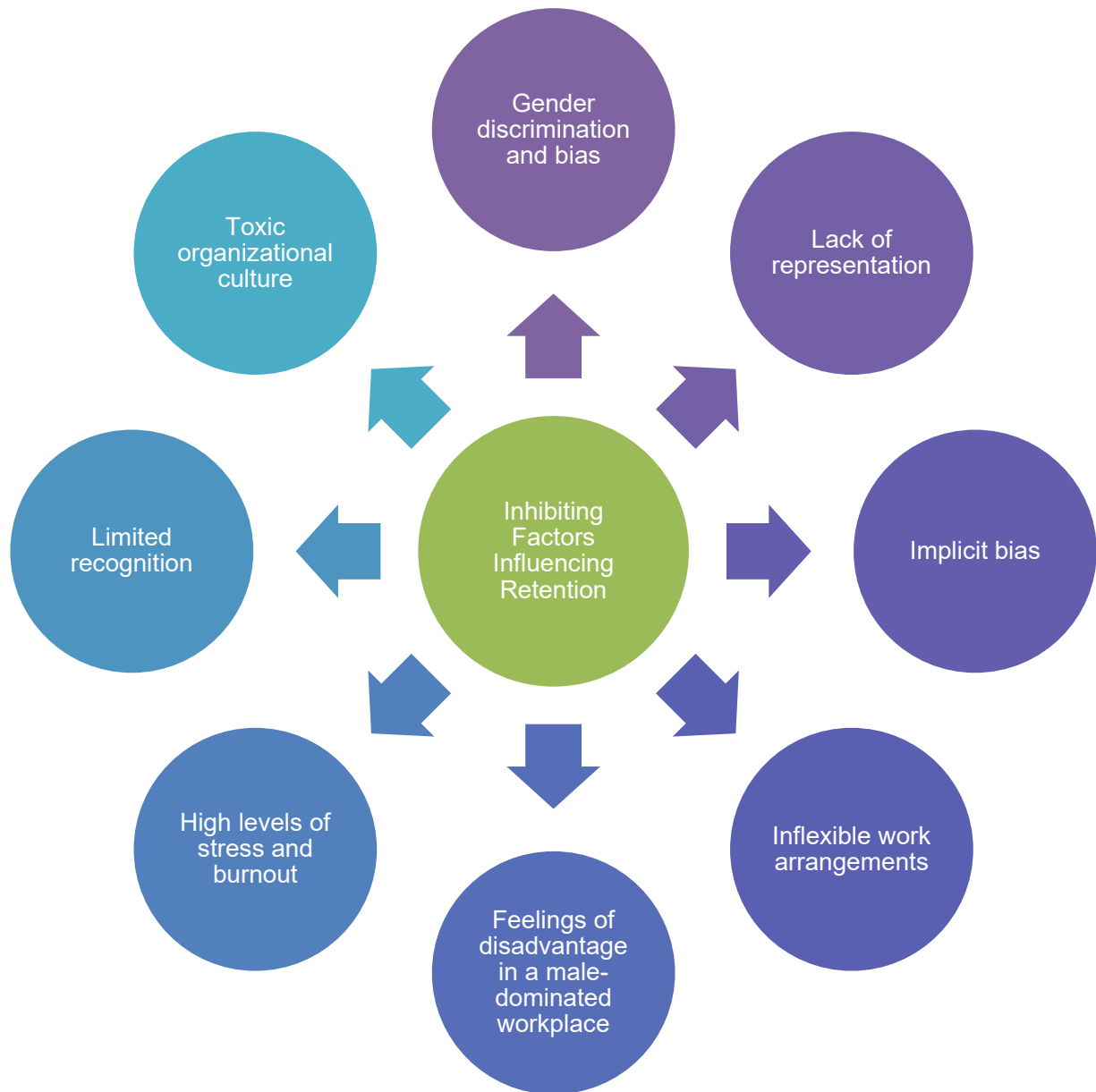
Inflexible work arrangements make it difficult for employees to balance work and personal life; this may result in them leaving organisations (Maharani & Tamara, 2024). Should females have feelings of disadvantage in a male-dominated workplace, this can lead to job dissatisfaction (Coetzee & Moosa, 2025). Females who experience high levels of stress and burnout, especially when not addressed by management/leadership, are more likely to seek other opportunities (Salma et al., 2022). Organisations/employers who provide limited recognition for contributions create a reduction in motivation to stay within an organisation; toxic organizational cultures may also struggle to retain talent, as employees seek healthier work environments (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). These challenges are visually summarised in Figure 8, which outlines the key inhibiting factors, while Figure 7 contrasts them by presenting the driving factors that influence female retention.

Figure 7: Key Driving Factors Influencing Female Retention



Source: Clerkin (2017, pp. 1–28), Codd (2023, p. 1) and Geldard (2024, p. 1)

Figure 8: Key Inhibiting Factors Influencing Female Retention



Source: Clerkin (2017, pp. 1–28), Codd (2023, p. 1) and Geldard (2024, p. 1)

3.5 RETENTION STRATEGIES AND RETENTION THEORIES

Various theories have been proposed to explain why employees choose to remain in their roles. Among these are the Social Exchange Theory, introduced by George C. Homans in his 1958 work *Social Behavior as Exchange* (Homans, 1958); Job Embeddedness Theory, developed by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski and Erez in 2001 (Mitchell et al., 2001); Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, proposed by Frederick Herzberg in 1959 in his book *The Motivation to Work* (Herzberg et al., 1959); and Equity Theory, formulated by John Stacey Adams in 1963 (Adams, 1963). Retention theories each provide a distinct perspective by emphasising the balance between employee contributions and rewards, relational and professional connections, workplace motivators and perceptions of fairness, as illustrated in Table 5, which outlines the key factors embedded in these theories and the strategies they propose for effectively retaining employees within an organisation.

Table 5: Retention Theories

Theory	How to Retain Employees	Factors
The Social Exchange Theory	Employees leave an organisation when they believe that there has been a breach in terms of exchange (Xuecheng, 2022).	A set of negotiated rules/terms being upheld. These can be physical such as money or qualities such as trust (Xuecheng, 2022).
The Job Embeddedness Theory	Employees who feel connected to the communities (social and professional) will remain at an organisation (Hussainy, 2020).	As per Hussainy (2020), community integration depends on many factors such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The link between individuals (relatives, colleagues, etc.). • Individual factors such as knowledge, personal ambitions, etc. • Organisational factors such as the culture of an organisation and/or job duties and requirements.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other factors such as entertainment, climate and activities.
Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Hygiene Theory	There are two factors (motivational and hygiene) that are responsible for employee retention (Hussainy, 2020). Motivational factors persuade employees to work harder, and the absence of hygiene factors cause unhappiness (Hussainy, 2020).	<p>Motivational Factors that promote retention are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional opportunities. • Achievements. • Recognition <p>(Hussainy, 2020).</p> <p>Hygiene Factors that promote retention are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation. • Working conditions (physical). • Supervision quality. • Policies and procedures of the company <p>(Hussainy, 2020).</p>
The Equity Theory	An employee needs to be equitably rewarded for their work (Tavoletti et al., 2024).	An employee must be rewarded fairly for their work (Tavoletti et al., 2024).

Source: Author's Own Work

The Social Exchange Theory explains that retention is determined by the balance of rewards and risks in relationships and levels of recognition (Ahmad et al., 2022). It postulates that an individual will remain engaged in relationships (such as employer–employee relationships) when the relationship is mutually beneficial and the reward outweighs the risks (Khan et al., 2024). When an employee is deciding whether to stay in an organisation or not, individuals usually weigh the rewards and risks of staying versus leaving. Social exchange theory originated in 1958 with the publication of an article titled "Social Behavior as Exchange" by the American sociologist George Homans (Homans, 1958).

The theories explained in Table 5 identify similar factors that influence retention. Employees tend to stay longer in an organisation when they feel valued and their needs are being met fairly. The theories mentioned in Table 5 relate to different aspects of how to keep employees motivated, satisfied, and engaged in their work to a certain extent. There are multiple theories

and models that are related to employee retention. There are essentially three important theories of employee retention: the Zinger Model, the ERC's Retention Model, and the Integrated System for Retention Model (Kaur, 2017).

The Zinger Model consists of many drivers, such as a result-orientated work environment/culture, employee recognition and rewards, leaders who are connected with their teams, the ability to identify with one's organisation, personal development, happiness, and success (Hussainy, 2020).

ERC's Retention Model has three main drivers, which include providing a stimulating work environment, ensuring leaders create motivating environment, and recognizing and rewarding employees (Hussainy, 2020). This model is very similar to the Zinger Model as it encompasses the same drivers.

Lastly, the **Integrated Retention System Model** consists of ensuring a healthy organisational climate, motivating employees, providing recognition and rewards for employees, providing a stimulating work environment, and enhancing knowledge through competency building and career development (Masood, 2025).

Although the Zinger Model and ERC's Retention Model share several similarities, they are not identical. The Zinger Model adopts a broader and more holistic view by incorporating elements such as personal happiness, employee success, connected leadership and the employee's sense of identification with the organisation. In contrast, ERC's Retention Model places greater emphasis on managerial behaviours and the immediate work environment, focusing specifically on stimulation, motivation and recognition. The third model referred to in this study is consistently named the Integrated Retention System Model, and it differs from the other two by explicitly incorporating competency building and career development as core components. This model therefore places stronger emphasis on long-term growth, learning and organisational climate, providing a more development-orientated approach than the other models.

All three models highlight the importance of creating a healthy and motivational working environment that stimulates and develops individuals, ensuring that employees feel valued (Hussainy, 2020), which will inevitably support employee retention within an organisation. Retaining employees has become extremely important as it assists organisations by lowering turnover, maintaining knowledge and skills within the organisation and creating employee engagement. This has become increasingly important since the rise of retrenchments in South

Africa and the digitisation of work (Hou & Sing, 2025). Some of the highlighted challenges that employers face with regard to employees are the uncertainty and dissatisfaction amongst employees, younger employees feeling more undervalued and unheard, burnout, and disconnection from other employees (An Achievers Report, 2021).

3.6 EVALUATION

Research Aim 1: To conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and the driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females.

Multi-generational cohorts are defined as groups of individuals born within specific time frames, sharing common experiences and societal contexts that shape their beliefs, values and behaviours (Ely & Padavic, 2021). The current workforce largely comprises four generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z (SHRM, 2021). Each generational cohort has been shaped by unique historical events and experiences, influencing their characteristics and workplace preferences (AIHR, 2021).

Baby Boomers are characterised by their ambition, creativity and teamwork (Nichols & Smith, 2025). They played a crucial role in integrating technology into everyday life and have notably influenced societal values and work culture through their promotion of and support for social causes (Walsh, 2023). Baby Boomers place value on job security, autonomy and trust in leadership and are more likely to stay within organisations that offer face-to-face communication and provides recognition (Walsh, 2023).

Generation X is known for its independence, resourcefulness and strong emphasis on work-life balance (Smith, 2021). This generational cohort values stability, career advancement and development opportunities (Smith, 2021). They prefer direct communication methods and are will probably stay within organisations that provide trustworthy management and career progression (Njoroge et al., 2021).

Generation Y is recognised for its strong emphasis on family values, teamwork and social responsibility (Rank & Contreras, 2021). This generational cohort aims for flexible working arrangements, career progress and meaningful work (Balon, 2024). Members of Generation Y value collaboration, regular feedback and a good work-life balance (Balon, 2024).

Generation Z is characterised by digital fluency (the true digital natives), global consciousness and devotion to social impact (Lopes et al., 2024). Members place high value on competitive remuneration, advancement opportunities and flexible working arrangements (such as hybrid working arrangements) (Balon, 2024). Generation Z prioritises employers/organisations who show commitment to ethical standards and social responsibility (Priporas et al., 2022).

Research Aim 2: To conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work.

Females face distinctive challenges in the workplace, including gender biases, difficulties in balancing work and personal life and limited opportunities for career development (Olivetti, 2024). Gender disparities in employment and earnings still exist, with females often having lower-paying jobs compared to males (Codd, 2024). Societal norms and traditional gender roles place the bigger burden of caregiving and household responsibilities on females, restricting their career opportunities (Olivetti, 2024). Non-inclusive behaviours and discrimination in the workplace also remain major challenges (Codd, 2024).

Retention of female employees is significantly influenced by both driving and inhibiting factors in the workplace (Olivetti, 2024). One of the most notable driving factors influencing retention is a positive organisational culture, where environments with a higher percentage of females tend to create a more enjoyable and supportive atmosphere; similarly, this sense of belonging increases engagement and encourages employees to remain within organisations (Codd, 2023). Flexible working arrangements are key, as they allow females to effectively and efficiently balance work and personal responsibilities, improving job satisfaction and reducing turnover (Clerkin, 2017). When organisations provide resources that help employees achieve their career goals, the retention of females within organisations improves (Clerkin, 2017).

Females are more prone to remain in roles where their work feels meaningful and aligned with personal values or passions, which increases motivation and retention (Clerkin, 2017). Job satisfaction is a meaningful determinant of retention, as employees who are content with their roles and responsibilities are less likely to leave their organisations (Clerkin, 2017). Access to leadership opportunities and programs that promote health and wellness, such as stress management, further contribute to employee retention (Codd, 2024). Finally, supportive supervisors or managers who align job responsibilities with the strengths and passions of employees help foster a sense of purpose, creating deeper commitment to the organisation (Clerkin, 2017).

Equally there are various inhibiting factors that influence retention among female employees. Persistent gender discrimination and bias, including unequal pay and limited advancement opportunities, are major limitations to retention (Clerkin, 2017). A lack of representation in management or higher-level positions contributes to feelings of isolation, particularly when there are few female mentors (Dutta & Mishra, 2021). Implicit bias, where assumptions are made about females' expertise or career ambitions, often limits their advancement within organisations (Clerkin, 2017). Additionally, inflexible work arrangements can make it difficult for females to manage their responsibilities, leading them to consider leaving the organisation (Clerkin, 2017).

Females in male-dominated environments may also experience feelings of disadvantage, where they observe unequal treatment or a lack of support, negatively impacting morale and motivation (Olivetti, 2024). Burnout, caused by excessive workload and stress, is another significant influencing factor that inhibits retention (Ma & Zhang, 2025). Lastly, a toxic organisational culture can inhibit retention within an organisation (Clerkin, 2017).

Research Aim 3: To establish conclusions that can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts and the retention of females and what are the implications for retention practices.

The analysis of multi-generational cohorts and female retention highlights the importance of understanding the unique characteristics and preferences of each generation to determine their influencing factors of retention. Baby Boomers value job security and recognition, Generation X prioritises work-life balance and career advancement, Generation Y seeks flexibility and meaningful work and Generation Z values career growth and ethical practices (Ely & Padavic, 2021). The key driving factors that influence the retention of females include positive organisational culture, work-life balance, professional development opportunities and supportive supervisors (Codd, 2024). Inhibiting factors include gender discrimination, lack of representation, implicit bias and inflexible work arrangements (Clerkin, 2017).

Organisations should develop targeted retention strategies that address the unique needs of each generational cohort and female employees (Codd, 2024). Creating an inclusive and supportive work environment, offering flexible working arrangements, providing development opportunities and recognising employees' contributions are needed for improving retention rates (Codd, 2024). By addressing these factors, organisations can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, thereby improving retention rates among females and enhancing overall organisational performance (Codd, 2024).

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 3 addressed the core research aims through an in-depth review of relevant academic literature. Firstly, it provided a comprehensive understanding of multi-generational cohorts, highlighting the key factors that either support or hinder the retention of females in the workplace, thereby meeting the first research aim. Secondly, the chapter examined how the evolving dynamics of the modern work environment influence female retention, fulfilling the second aim. Finally, it synthesised the findings to draw meaningful conclusions about the relationship between generational diversity and the retention of females, offering practical insights for improving retention strategies, thus achieving the third research aim.

Chapter 4 provides clarity on the research methodology with emphasis on frameworks, methods and sampling techniques.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the research methodology used within this research study. It elaborates on the research design, data collection method and data analysis method which have been used to explore the research questions in Chapter 1. It provides a deeper understanding of the participant sampling techniques used and the data analysis procedures, such as thematic analysis and the software system used to interpret the codes and data. Lastly the ethical considerations and limitations of the research study were explained to ensure a transparent research process.

4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Research is considered to be a systematic approach to investigate new ideas or obtain a deeper understanding of what we currently know. A research approach involves collecting and analysing of data which will assist in answering research questions or testing a hypothesis. It requires careful thought by the researcher when understanding the data obtained to draw conclusions that are meaningful. Research is a systematic way to collect data and analyse data to provide insights into a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research focused on understanding a participant's lived experiences from their own unique perspective; hence, a phenomenological inquiry research design was used. This approach provides deeper insight into the valuable experiences each female participant and the subjective realities that females face. The main advantage of this type of research (phenomenological inquiry) is its ability to capture rich and detailed data about human experiences, which aids this research in understanding the "how" and "why" behind this phenomenon (Ayton, 2025).

Although these authors emphasise different elements of the research process, their definitions are closely related and point to a shared understanding of what research entails. Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlight the systematic and deliberate nature of collecting and analysing data, while other definitions emphasise the purpose of gaining insight, building understanding or exploring a phenomenon in greater depth. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that research can be understood as a structured and intentional process of gathering and

interpreting information in order to develop a clearer, evidence-based understanding of a specific issue or phenomenon.

Phenomenological inquiry was selected to investigate and explore the experiences of female employees across multi-generational cohorts within the service sector of KwaZulu-Natal. This approach granted the researcher the ability to identify the driving and inhibiting factors of employee retention that may be influenced by social and personal contexts. By investigating the experiences that females have lived through, this approach attempted to reveal the underlying motivations and challenges that females may have faced and the perceptions that either of these were the inhibiting or driving factor of whether or not to stay within an organisation. This method provided a detailed understanding of the driving and inhibiting factors of female retention across multi-generational cohorts from the viewpoint of those directly experiencing them (Hassan, 2023).

4.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of individuals by exploring the “how” and “why” behind their perceptions and behaviours rather than relying on numerical data (Tenny et al., 2022). This flexible, non-linear approach allows researchers to capture rich, detailed insights into human behaviour, revealing patterns and social contexts that may otherwise remain hidden, such as gender roles, social norms and organisational culture (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

By using methods such as interviews, observations and focus groups, qualitative research is well-suited to uncover the complex motivations and barriers influencing people’s actions (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of individual perspectives, making it particularly valuable for exploring the experiences of female employees across multiple generations in the KwaZulu-Natal service sector. This approach helps identify the driving and inhibiting factors affecting employee retention, insights that are difficult to capture through quantitative data alone (Tenny et al., 2022).

Overall, qualitative research offers the depth and flexibility necessary to thoroughly investigate the nuanced experiences of participants, providing the context needed to develop effective strategies tailored to diverse organisational and social dynamics (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

4.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY

A research strategy is a structured plan that leads the entire research process, from the development of research questions to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Saunders et al., 2021). It indicates the methods and procedures to be used to achieve the research goals, ensuring the study is conducted systematically and coherently (Saunders et al., 2021). This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences of female employees across different generational cohorts in the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal. This strategy was selected for its ability to capture the depth and complexity of participants lived experiences, which was necessary for understanding the influencing (driving and inhibiting) factors affecting employee retention.

Using a phenomenological research design, the study conducted semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed data. Convenience sampling was utilised to select accessible and willing participants, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns and themes within the data using software such as ATLAS.ti. Ethical guidelines were firmly followed to maintain participant confidentiality and informed consent. This strategy aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing female employee retention, offering beneficial insights for developing effective retention strategies.

4.4 THE RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research employed the following methods:

4.4.1 Research Setting

This study was conducted within the dynamic employment landscape of KwaZulu-Natal, with a specific focus on the service sector. The geographical emphasis enabled a detailed exploration of multi-generational disparities in employee retention, considering the unique regional dynamics and challenges. The primary objective was to uncover insights that could inform the development of targeted employee retention strategies relevant to the local employment context.

The study targeted employed females within the service industry in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Statistics South Africa (2020), this sector encompassed financial services, wholesale and

retail, tourism, professional services and healthcare. The organisation involved was headquartered in Durban (KwaZulu-Natal Province), with additional branches located in Cape Town (Western Cape Province) and Johannesburg (Gauteng Province). By focusing on KwaZulu-Natal, the research provided a geographically tailored analysis of generational differences in employee retention, enhancing the contextual relevance of the findings.

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from both the gatekeeper and the Human Resources Department of the participating organisation. Comprehensive information outlining the study was shared with the organisation to ensure transparency and informed consent.

Data collection was conducted exclusively through interviews. Participants were given the flexibility to choose the most convenient setting for their interviews, which included the boardroom of the researcher's current employer or a virtual meeting in the case where an employee was working from home. This approach was adopted to minimise disruption to participants' work schedules and responsibilities, while also providing them with a comfortable and accommodating environment to share their experiences.

4.4.2 Entrée and Establishing the Researcher's Roles

The role of the qualitative researcher in this study was distinct, as it supported a process-driven approach to research that relied on narrated and storied data to explore human experiences (Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher's primary function was to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of female employees through meaningful dialogue (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the organisation, through the Human Resources Department. The qualitative approach aimed to interpret and deeply understand the socially constructed realities of individuals by exploring their experiences, histories and, most relevant to this study, their perceptions (Githaiga et al., 2023). The research sought to uncover the perspectives of female employees regarding the factors that influenced their retention within their respective organisations.

No research methodology is exempt from ethical obligations concerning the protection of participants and their data (Moriarty, 2011). Each participant was provided with a written informed consent form that outlined their rights, detailed the study process and offered an

opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. This document served as a formal agreement between the researcher and the participant.

Within the context of this study, the researcher played a central role in ensuring the success of the research process. The importance of the researcher-participant relationship, as emphasised by Raheim et al. (2016), was acknowledged throughout. The interpretivist approach adopted in this study aligned with Pulla and Carter's (2018) view that immersion is essential in qualitative research, positioning the researcher as an active participant rather than a detached observer. This involvement allowed the researcher to make real-time adjustments and integrate more effectively into the participant community.

Given this active role, the researcher was required to navigate ethical risks, particularly those related to participant anonymity and confidentiality. These risks were addressed through careful planning, including a robust informed consent process and adherence to a comprehensive ethical framework. The researcher's responsibilities extended to fostering a respectful and transparent research environment, ensuring the well-being of participants and maintaining ethical integrity throughout the study. Ultimately, the researcher served as a vital link between the study's objectives and the lived experiences of the participants, requiring a thoughtful, ethical and participant-focused approach at every stage of the research journey.

4.4.3 Sampling

Sampling is the process whereby a researcher selects a subgroup of individuals from a larger population to address the research questions and accomplish the aims of the research (Golzar et al., 2022). It allows researchers to draw conclusions about the entire population by studying a smaller, manageable group (Golzar et al., 2022). Sampling is vital for producing reliable, representative data without needing to survey the entire population, thereby saving time and resources (Golzar et al., 2022). This method ensures that the research findings are both accurate and generalisable to the broader population (Golzar et al., 2022). Selecting a sample ensures that researchers can obtain insights that reflect the characteristics and behaviours of the larger population (Golzar et al., 2022).

In this study, convenience sampling was employed to select participants. This method involved choosing individuals who were easily accessible to the researcher, making it an efficient and cost-effective approach (Scholtz, 2021). Convenience sampling is particularly useful when time and resources are limited, as it allows researchers to quickly gather data from a readily available group of participants (Scholtz, 2021). This approach was considered appropriate for

the study as it enabled access to participants who met the defined criteria within a specific organisational and regional context, while still allowing for the exploration of diverse generational experiences.

The researcher aimed to include as many participants as possible from each generational cohort to ensure a rich and diverse sample. This approach facilitated the collection of comprehensive data across different age groups, aligning with the study's focus on multi-generational differences in employee retention factors. By targeting female employees within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal, the study was able to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing employee retention. The study involved 20 female participants from various generational cohorts within KwaZulu-Natal's service sector to ensure a diverse and meaningful exploration of employee retention factors. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, namely that they were female employees currently employed within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal and fell within identified generational cohorts, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. To ensure representation across generational cohorts, the researcher sought participants from different age groups, allowing for the inclusion of varied perspectives aligned with the generational classifications outlined in Figure 1.

Convenience sampling was chosen to efficiently obtain a diverse and representative group of female employees from multiple generational cohorts, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. This method enabled quick recruitment within time and resource limits while ensuring the sample reflected the broader service sector population. The selected participants provided detailed insights into the unique retention challenges faced by females in KwaZulu-Natal, aligning with the generational descriptions in Figure 1.

Overall, the use of convenience sampling in this study was a practical and effective approach to obtaining a representative sample of female employees within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal. By focusing on easily accessible participants, the researcher was able to gather comprehensive data that reflected the experiences and perspectives of different generational cohorts. This approach ensured that the study could provide valuable insights into the factors influencing employee retention, contributing to the development of effective retention strategies tailored to the needs of diverse generational groups.

4.4.4 Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Inclusion Criteria:

To ensure a diverse representation of generational perspectives, the study included participants from the Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z cohorts. Geographical specificity was maintained by selecting individuals employed within KwaZulu-Natal, specifically in companies offering outsourced services. Only female participants were considered for inclusion. Participation was limited to those who expressed a willingness to take part in the study and who provided informed consent. Participants eligible for this study will be those between the ages of 18 and 65 who are currently able to work. As part of the inclusion process, participants' ages were recorded to confirm generational classification.

Exclusion Criteria:

To preserve the study's focus on the service sector, individuals employed outside this industry were excluded. The generational cohorts targeted, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z, guided the selection process and those falling outside these groups were not considered. Additionally, individuals who were unable or unwilling to provide informed consent were excluded to uphold ethical standards. Individuals who are not presently employed or actively part of the workforce will be excluded from the study. Male participants were also excluded, as the study specifically focused on the experiences of females in the service sector.

4.4.5 Data Collection Methods

Data collection is a critical component of any research study, as it involves the methods used to gather relevant information from participants (Taherdoost, 2021). In this study, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method. Semi-structured interviews are a blend of structured and unstructured interviews, where the interviewer has a set of predetermined questions but retains the flexibility to explore topics in more depth based on the participants' responses (Badache et al., 2023). This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviours, making it particularly suitable for qualitative research.

An interview schedule was used to guide the semi-structured interviews, ensuring that all relevant topics were covered while still allowing flexibility in the order and phrasing of questions. The interview schedule included questions designed to elicit detailed information

about the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding employee retention factors. This wording is used because thoughts and feelings capture the cognitive and emotional aspects of participants' experiences without unnecessary repetition of similar terms. This approach enabled the researcher to follow the natural flow of conversation and probe more deeply into the participants' experiences where appropriate (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). All interviews were voice-recorded for accuracy and stored securely and confidentially by the researcher.

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study was justified by their ability to provide rich, detailed data that reflect the complexity of human experiences. The interviews ranged in duration from approximately 15 minutes to one hour, depending on the depth of the participant's responses and level of engagement. Interviews are the most used data collection method in qualitative research because they offer flexibility and familiarity when asking participants about their feelings, and thoughts (Wood, 2023). This method allows researchers to build rapport with participants, encouraging them to share their experiences openly and honestly. The semi-structured format also enables the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas of interest, uncovering insights that might not be accessible through more structured data collection methods (Wood, 2023).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the study utilised a gatekeeper to facilitate access to potential participants. Gatekeepers are individuals or groups who have the authority to grant or deny access to a research population (Andoh-Arthur, 2020). In this study, the head of Human Resources at the organisation acted as the gatekeeper. This role was crucial in ensuring that the researcher could reach a diverse and representative sample of participants. The gatekeeper's involvement helped streamline the recruitment process, making it easier to obtain voluntary participation from the targeted population. The gatekeeper acted as the middle person between the researcher and the participants. They were responsible for sending out reminders and information regarding the research when prompted.

The recruitment process involved sending out emails to potential participants, inviting them to take part in the study. The recruitment emails were sent out by the gatekeeper. These emails included detailed information about the study, the informed consent form and an outline of the interview process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, ensuring that their participation was entirely voluntary. The researcher also provided opportunities for participants to ask questions and seek clarification about the study before agreeing to participate. This transparent and ethical approach helped build trust with the participants, encouraging them to share their experiences openly during the interviews.

The data collection methods used in this study were designed to gather comprehensive and detailed information about the experiences of female employees across different generational cohorts in the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal. The use of semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview schedule, allowed for flexibility and depth in exploring participants' perceptions and behaviours. The involvement of a gatekeeper facilitated access to a diverse and representative sample, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. These methods collectively contributed to a thorough understanding of the factors influencing employee retention, providing valuable insights for developing effective retention strategies.

4.4.6 Recording of Data

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were recorded using the researcher's laptop via MS Teams for online interviews and a voice recording app on the researcher's laptop. Prior to each interview, participants provided consent for the recording of the sessions. In addition to audio recordings, the researcher took field notes to document non-verbal cues such as behavioural changes and facial expressions. All data were anonymised, with participants identified by numbers rather than names.

To ensure the security of the data, all files were stored in encrypted, password-protected formats. The file management system maintained both anonymity and confidentiality, with identifying information, such as names and dates, coded and securely stored in the researcher's personal office. Participants remained anonymous throughout the study and ethical considerations were addressed in advance.

All collected data were retained for a period of five years. After this retention period, electronic data were permanently deleted and physical materials, including written field notes, were destroyed using a professional shredding service. This process ensured compliance with ethical standards and protected the privacy and rights of all participants.

4.4.7 Strategies Employed to Ensure the Quality and Integrity of Data

High-quality data were characterised by accuracy, dependability, relevance and ethical collection. These principles were upheld through a commitment to completeness, consistency, transparency and representativeness, ensuring the data's validity and ability to address the research questions and objectives. In the context of qualitative research, quality was reflected

in the richness and rigour of the study, as well as the relevance and significance of the topic explored (Hayashi Jr et al., 2019).

The researcher demonstrated sensitivity and applied appropriate cognitive processes to interpret and capture the meaning behind behaviours and influencing factors without bias or subjectivity. This was achieved through ongoing self-reflexivity, which allowed the researcher to remain objective and ensure that the findings were not influenced by personal perspectives or assumptions.

Following the guidance of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Shenton (2004) and Mandal (2018), the study was evaluated using the following criteria.

4.4.7.1 Credibility

The researcher ensured that the study was conducted with care and precision, aiming to produce findings that were truthful and believable. Credibility was reinforced through transparent documentation of research methods and challenges encountered during data collection and analysis. The integrity of the data was preserved, with no alterations or undue emphasis placed on any aspect of the findings.

4.4.7.2 Authenticity

The researcher ensured that participants' opinions and experiences were accurately represented. This was achieved through the use of in-depth interviews, which allowed for a nuanced and faithful portrayal of individual perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mandal, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

4.4.7.3 Transferability

The study provided rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, participant profiles and procedures. This comprehensive documentation enabled others to assess the applicability of the findings to different settings and contexts, supporting the transferability of the results to other organisational and cultural environments (Hayashi Jr et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.4.7.4 Confirmability

The interpretations presented in the study were grounded in the data collected, with a clear link between evidence and conclusions. The researcher remained impartial throughout the process and employed triangulation by using multiple data sources to corroborate findings, thereby enhancing confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mandal, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

4.4.7.5 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical integrity of this study, the research adhered to the guidelines set forth by the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of South Africa (UNISA). These guidelines emphasise the importance of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and the minimisation of harm (UNISA, n.d.).

Voluntary participation was a fundamental principle in this research. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. This ensured that participants felt comfortable and uncoerced in sharing their experiences and opinions.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants through a detailed consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, potential risks and benefits and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Participants were given ample opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications before consenting to participate.

Confidentiality was rigorously maintained to protect the identities and personal information of the participants. Anonymisation techniques were employed to ensure that data could not be traced back to individual participants. This was particularly important given the study's focus on multi-generational differences in employee retention, where sensitive information about workplace experiences and personal views was shared. Data were stored securely and access was restricted to authorised personnel only. The use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details further safeguarded participant confidentiality.

The study also considered the potential risks and benefits to participants. While the risk to confidentiality was inherently low, the research design included measures to mitigate any potential risks. Participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that their anonymity would be preserved in any publications or presentations resulting from the study. The benefits of the study included contributing to a

deeper understanding of employee retention factors across different generations, which could inform organisational policies and practices.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Human Resource Management at UNISA, ensuring that the study met all institutional and regulatory requirements (Ethics Clearance Number: 3812). This clearance process involved a thorough review of the research proposal, consent forms and data management plans to ensure compliance with ethical standards. Permission was also obtained from the organisation involved in the study, demonstrating respect for organisational policies and the rights of employees.

The study's ethical considerations extended to the accurate and unbiased presentation of research findings. All data are reported truthfully, without manipulation or selective reporting, to reflect the participants' views and experiences accurately. This commitment to integrity ensured that the research findings were credible and reliable.

The ethical considerations in this study were comprehensive and aligned with contemporary ethical standards in research. By prioritising voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and the minimisation of harm, the study upheld the dignity and rights of all participants. The adherence to ethical guidelines and the rigorous ethical clearance process underscored the study's commitment to conducting responsible and respectful research. These ethical practices not only protected the participants but also enhanced the credibility and validity of the research findings, contributing valuable insights into the factors influencing employee retention across generations.

4.4.8 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This method is particularly useful for research that seeks to understand people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, focus group discussions or survey responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis involves several key steps: familiarisation with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This process allows researchers to systematically organise and describe their data in rich detail, often going beyond mere description to interpret aspects of the research topic (Nieman, 2023).

Thematic analysis involves several structured phases to ensure a thorough examination of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process begins with familiarising yourself with the data, where researchers immerse themselves in the data by reading and re-reading it to understand its depth and breadth (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The next step is generating codes, which involves identifying and labelling relevant data segments with codes that capture key ideas or concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Following this, researchers create a coding framework to organise these codes systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The subsequent phase is searching for themes, where related codes are grouped into broader patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These themes are then reviewed to ensure they accurately reflect the data. The next step involves defining and naming themes, where researchers refine the themes and assign clear, concise names that encapsulate their essence (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Finally, the report is produced, presenting the themes in a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This structured approach allows for a detailed and insightful exploration of qualitative data.

The first step in thematic analysis is familiarisation, where researchers immerse themselves in the data to understand its depth and breadth (Lochmiller, 2021). This involves reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas and patterns (Lochmiller, 2021). Coding involves assigning labels to specific data segments that capture relevant ideas or concepts (Lochmiller, 2021). These codes are then grouped into broader themes that represent patterns of shared meaning across the data set (Lochmiller, 2021). Reviewing themes involves checking the themes against the data to ensure they accurately reflect the data set (Lochmiller, 2021). Defining and naming themes involves refining the themes and giving them clear, concise names that capture their essence (Lochmiller, 2021). Finally, writing up involves presenting the themes in a coherent and compelling narrative that answers the research questions (Lochmiller, 2021).

Thematic analysis is particularly suited for this study as it allows for a flexible and detailed exploration of the multi-generational differences in female employee retention factors (Nieman, 2023). By using thematic analysis, the researcher can identify and interpret patterns in the participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviours, providing valuable insights into the factors that influence employee retention (Nieman, 2023). This method is adaptable to various types of qualitative data and can be used to uncover intricate details about a situation or to generate new research concepts (Nieman, 2023).

To assist with the thematic analysis, the researcher used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. ATLAS.ti is designed to facilitate the management, organisation and analysis of

large volumes of qualitative data (ATLAS.ti, 2024). It provides a platform for coding, visualisation and exploration of qualitative data, enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis process (ATLAS.ti, 2024). The software supports various phases of thematic analysis, including familiarisation, coding, theme development and reporting (ATLAS.ti, 2024). ATLAS.ti's features allow researchers to visualise data, making it easier to identify and interpret patterns and themes (ATLAS.ti, 2024).

ATLAS.ti uses a combination of seven phases to assist with thematic analysis: familiarising with the data, generating codes, creating a code frame, searching, reviewing and defining themes and producing a report (ATLAS.ti, 2024). The software's capabilities enable researchers to manage and analyse their data systematically, ensuring that the findings are both comprehensive and insightful (ATLAS.ti, 2024). ATLAS.ti's visualisation tools help researchers to see connections and relationships within the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of the research topic (ATLAS.ti, 2024).

The integration of ATLAS.ti in this study increased the efficiency and accuracy of conducting thematic analysis on the research findings. The software's features allowed the researcher to manage and analyse large volumes of qualitative data systematically, ensuring that the findings were both comprehensive and insightful. ATLAS.ti's visualisation tools helped the researcher to see connections and relationships within the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of the multi-generational differences in female employee retention factors. By using ATLAS.ti, the researcher was able to conduct a thorough and flexible analysis, ensuring that the findings were both comprehensive and insightful.

Overall, the use of thematic analysis and ATLAS.ti in this study provided a robust framework for exploring the multi-generational differences in female employee retention factors. Thematic analysis allowed for a detailed and flexible exploration of the participants' experiences, while ATLAS.ti enhanced the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis process. Together, these methods contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee retention, providing valuable insights for developing effective retention strategies.

4.4.9 Reporting Style

The findings of this study were presented through a comprehensive thematic analysis report, which served as the primary method of data interpretation. This approach allowed for the identification and exploration of recurring patterns, themes and insights that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and depth, enabling

the researcher to engage meaningfully with the data and uncover nuanced understandings of the participants' experiences.

To enhance clarity and coherence, the thematic report was supplemented with visual representations, including graphs and tables. These visuals were used to illustrate key trends, demographic distributions and thematic frequencies, providing readers with a structured and accessible overview of the findings. The integration of visual data supported the narrative analysis and helped bridge qualitative insights with interpretive clarity.

The interpretation of results was guided by relevant theoretical frameworks, which provided a lens through which the data were analysed and contextualised. These frameworks helped to ground the findings in existing literature and theory, ensuring that the conclusions drawn were both academically robust and practically meaningful.

In addition to presenting the core findings, the researcher provided a detailed account of the study's limitations, acknowledging factors such as sample size, geographic scope and potential biases that may have influenced the results. This critical reflection was essential in maintaining transparency and integrity throughout the research process.

Furthermore, the report concluded with recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges identified during the study. These recommendations were informed by the participants' insights and the thematic analysis, offering practical strategies for improving employee retention among female workers in the service sector within KwaZulu-Natal.

The reporting style adopted in this study prioritised clarity, depth and ethical responsibility, ensuring that the voices of participants were accurately represented and that the findings contributed meaningfully to both academic discourse and organisational practice.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research methodology and ethical framework that guided the study, which explored generational differences in employee retention among female workers in KwaZulu-Natal's service sector. A qualitative approach was adopted, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by field notes to capture non-verbal cues. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria and ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity and secure data storage, were strictly

followed. The researcher maintained objectivity through reflexivity and applied trustworthiness criteria to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

Chapter 5 will discuss the results obtained via the research that was undertaken.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the research, which examined the multi-generational differences among female employees in the service sector of KwaZulu-Natal, with particular attention to the influencing factors that drive and inhibit employee retention. The study aimed to uncover both the motivating (driving) and constraining (inhibiting) factors that influence retention decisions from the perspective of females, considering multi-generational cohorts, socio-demographic characteristics and organisational dynamics.

The chapter begins with an overview of the biographical and demographic data of participants, providing the necessary context for understanding the perspectives shared during the interviews. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the thematic outcomes derived from qualitative data analysis, conducted using ATLAS.ti and supported by AI-assisted coding of interview transcripts. The systematic coding process facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and the development of meaningful themes aligned with the study's research aims.

The study specifically sought:

- **Research Aim 1:** To identify the key factors that influence employee retention from a female perspective.
- **Research Aim 2:** To explore the multi-generational differences that influence employee retention strategies.
- **Research Aim 3:** To identify the challenges faced by female employees and how these challenges can impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs.
- **Research Aim 4:** To identify how companies can attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace.
- **Research Aim 5:** To identify how companies can adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms.
- **Research Aim 6:** To explore the socio-demographic differences that impact employee retention strategies.
- **Research Aim 7:** To identify how companies can create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and understand the impact on employee retention.

Quotes from participants are incorporated through direct quotations, providing authenticity and depth to the discussion. The findings are interpreted in light of the literature reviewed in earlier chapters, thus integrating empirical evidence with existing theoretical perspectives. Chapter 6 will present the conclusions drawn from the study, discuss the limitations and provide practical recommendations for organisations seeking to enhance female employee retention.

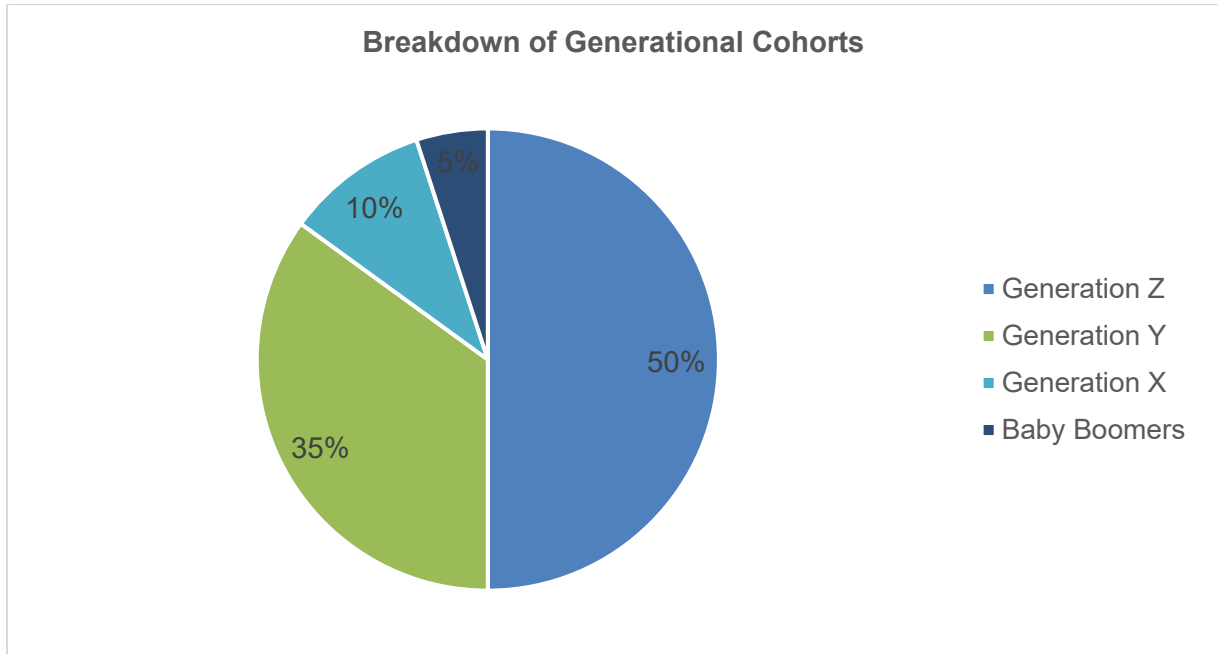
5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

To contextualise the thematic findings of this study, it is essential to first present the biographical profile of the participants. This section outlines the generational, racial and occupational composition of the sample, offering insight into the socio-demographic diversity that shaped the retention experiences of female employees within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal. The study aims to establish a foundational understanding of how age, race and organisational role interconnect to influence perceptions of career sustainability and workplace inclusion.

There were 20 participants interviewed for this study. The data include race group, age group (mapped to generational cohorts) and the position or role within the organisation. These participants were selected using convenience sampling, ensuring accessibility while attempting to maintain diversity across the multi-generational cohorts, racial groups and job roles. Figure 9 shows the biographical data of these twenty participants.

5.2.1 Generational Cohorts

Figure 9: *Breakdown of Participants' Generational Cohorts*

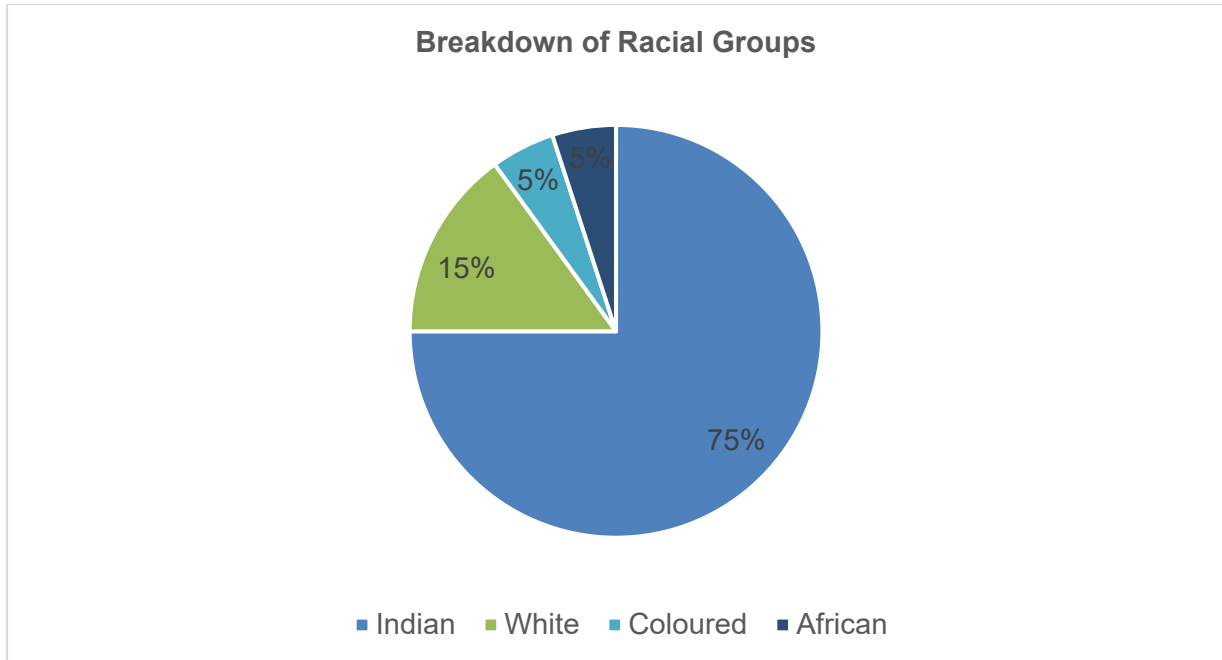


Source: Author's Own Work

The participants were categorised into four generational cohorts based on their age in 2025. As illustrated in Figure 9, the largest group comprised Generation Y (8 participants), followed by Generation Z (6 participants), Generation X (4 participants) and Baby Boomers (2 participants). This distribution mirrors the broader workforce trends in South Africa, where younger generational cohorts dominate the workforce.

5.2.2 Racial Breakdown

Figure 10: *Breakdown of Participants' Racial Groups*



Source: Author's Own Work

The racial profile of the sample was predominantly Indian (15 participants), with smaller representations from White (3), Coloured (1) and African (1) groups as highlighted in Figure 10. This reflects the demographic composition of urban service sectors in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly in fields such as human resources, finance, and administration (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Indian and African participants highlighted challenges related to cultural representation and implicit bias, underscoring the importance of inclusive leadership and culturally responsive organisational practices. In South Africa, the term Coloured refers to a population group of mixed ancestry as defined under the apartheid racial classification system (Neethling, 2020).

5.2.3 Organisational Role

Figure 11: Breakdown of Participants' Roles within the Organisation



Source: Author's Own Work

Participants held a variety of roles or positions within the organisation, ranging from internship and junior HRA (Human Resource Administrator) positions to senior consultancy and director positions, as shown in Figure 11. This allowed for a multi-level analysis of the driving and inhibiting factors of retention across organisational hierarchies. This variation enabled the study to capture varied retention experiences, from those navigating early career challenges to those managing strategic HR functions.

Table 6: Summary of Participants

Factor	Key Insights
Age & Career Stage	Generation Z focused on career growth, mentorship and psychological safety. Generation X and Baby Boomers valued stability, recognition and leaving a legacy.
Race & Inclusion	Indian and African participants emphasised cultural representation, reducing bias and fostering inclusive leadership.
Job Level & Autonomy	Senior employees (Baby Boomers, Generation X) appreciated autonomy and strategic input. Junior staff sought guidance, feedback and development opportunities.
Sample Characteristics	The sample consisted of 20 female employees working in KwaZulu-Natal's service sector who were recruited through convenience sampling. The participants represented a mix of generational cohorts, including Baby Boomers and Generations X, Y and Z, with Generation Y forming the largest portion of the group. The racial composition was predominantly Indian, with African, White and Coloured participants also included. Their positions ranged from entry-level roles to senior leadership.

Source: Author's Own Work

These factors, as show in Table 6, are particularly relevant to Research Questions 6 and 7 within this study, which explored the impact of socio-demographic differences and the creation of inclusive environments.

5.3 REPORT FINDINGS

This study explored the multi-generational differences among female employees in the service sector of KwaZulu-Natal, with particular emphasis on factors that influence employee retention. Data were obtained through 20 semi-structured interviews, with approximately 1,686 AI-coded quotations analysed using ATLAS.ti. The coding framework was hierarchically structured and covered over one hundred themes and subthemes, offering comprehensive insights into emotional, structural and behavioural factors that drive or inhibit retention.

The following sections present the findings in alignment with the research questions outlined in the empirical study. The discussion reflects the lived experiences of female employees and

considers the interplay between organisational culture, leadership, socio-demographic characteristics and generational dynamics.

The seven research questions guiding this empirical study included:

- What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective? (*Research Question 1*)
- How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies? (*Research Question 2*)
- What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs? (*Research Question 3*)
- How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace? (*Research Question 4*)
- How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms? (*Research Question 5*)
- How do socio-demographic differences impact employee retention strategies? (*Research Question 6*)
- How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention? (*Research Question 7*)

The data analysis identified several overarching themes that provide a nuanced understanding of female employee retention. Among the most prominent findings were the significance of organisational culture and leadership. Participants consistently described supportive, inclusive and psychologically safe environments as critical drivers of retention. Leadership qualities such as empathy, authenticity, openness to feedback and vulnerability were highly valued. Organisations described as family-oriented, flexible, values-aligned and growth-focused were seen as ideal workplaces.

Recognition, flexibility, emotional support and career development emerged as core retention drivers. Many participants emphasised the importance of life-phase support, particularly during motherhood or personal crises. Organisations that accommodated individual needs and respected employees' evolving circumstances were preferred over rigid, uniform approaches.

Gender dynamics and discrimination were highlighted as ongoing challenges. Unequal pay, promotion bias and societal norms shaped workplace behaviour and self-perception. Emotional labour disproportionately affected female employees, with limited recognition and access to leadership pathways compounding these challenges.

Generational diversity and integration also emerged as a key theme. Participants across five generational cohorts described varying priorities, values and expectations. Baby Boomers and Generation X valued stability and recognition, whereas Generations Y and Z placed emphasis on purpose, flexibility and rapid career growth. Effective integration required mutual respect, tailored engagement strategies and generational learning opportunities, although communication gaps and biases presented barriers.

Emotional and psychological well-being was another recurring theme. Participants described experiences of anxiety, burnout and emotional distress. Emotional support from leadership and peers, access to counselling and mental health programmes were identified as critical for retention.

Career development and transitions were influenced by non-linear career paths, personal growth, caregiving responsibilities, organisational fit and economic pressures. Participants expressed a strong desire for autonomy, meaningful work and recognition, but cited barriers such as rigid hiring criteria, lack of benefits and economic instability.

Communication dynamics and structural and economic barriers were also highlighted. Ideal communication was described as transparent, respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe. Participants noted challenges, including over-communication, unclear instructions and avoidance of constructive feedback. Economic factors such as high unemployment, caregiving responsibilities and financial stress further shaped career decisions and perceptions of organisational loyalty.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of recognising multi-generational and socio-demographic diversity in designing retention strategies. Supportive, inclusive organisational cultures that align with individual values, coupled with empathetic and flexible leadership, emerged as essential to female employee well-being, satisfaction and long-term commitment. Retention is not merely a function of policies, but a reflection of how organisations understand and respond to the lived realities of their female workforce.

The sections below present the main themes that emerged from the interviews, providing a detailed account of patterns and categories that shaped these findings.

5.4 THE MAIN THEMES DISCUSSED IN THE INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty female employees from the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal, guided by seven open-ended research questions (see section 5.3 above). All questions were addressed during the individual interviews and the data collected from participants were thoroughly analysed using ATLAS.ti with AI-assisted coding. The demographics of the participants are presented in Figures 9, 10 and 11 above.

The sections below present and discuss the main themes that emerged from the analysis. Verbatim evidence from participants is included where relevant to illustrate and support the themes identified, providing authentic insights into the factors that influence female employee retention, multi-generational dynamics and organisational practices.

5.4.1 Theme 1: Inclusive Organisational Culture

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Inclusive organisational culture emerged as a central theme influencing female employee retention. Participants highlighted the importance of leadership behaviours, psychological safety, alignment of personal and organisational values and flexibility for managing work-life responsibilities. Across multi-generational cohorts, employees consistently linked their sense of belonging, motivation and loyalty to how inclusive and supportive their workplace felt.

Table 7: *Inclusive Organisational Culture – Verbatim Evidence*

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
17	“You want to work with somebody who appreciates you. You can actually work somewhere and you're a great woman, but you're not seen.”	Supportive Leadership

14	"If you are supportive and inclusive of everybody and you're not just focusing on one group, then everyone feels valued and everybody feels like they have a place."	Inclusive Culture
1	"You need a space to be able to vent. You need a space to be able to say how you're feeling."	Psychological Safety
1	"People need to be seen and I think people need to feel valued and I think people need to be supported."	Psychological Safety
17	"You're looking at them for who they are and what they bring to the organisation, not what they look like or what gender they are."	Values Alignment
1	"I think females, a lot of females like to be in an organisation that aligns to their values... the things that they think are important."	Values Alignment
1	"When your child is sick, go and spend time with them at the hospital... we had a childcare facility."	Family Support
1	"We almost have groups of people that look after each other... you have a safe space where you are not criticised for being able to vent."	Supportive Culture

Source: Author's Own Work

Inclusive organisational culture is a critical driver of female retention. Participants consistently described how supportive leadership, psychological safety, values alignment and flexibility influence their engagement, motivation and loyalty. Across multi-generational cohorts, inclusivity was experienced differently: Generations Y and Z valued purpose-driven work and flexibility, while Generation X and Baby Boomers emphasised ethical consistency and recognition.

These findings revealed that an inclusive organisational culture is not a stationary concept, but a dynamic experience shaped by leadership, emotional safety and alignment with personal values. Supportive leadership was consistently identified as one of the key driving factors influencing retention, with participants describing leaders who were not only professionally competent but also emotionally intelligent. Psychological safety, which was an essential condition for long-term engagement, allowed females to express vulnerability, seek help and grow without fear of judgment.

Values alignment was particularly important for Generations Z and Y, who sought purpose-driven work environments. Baby Boomers and Generation X valued ethical consistency and respect. Flexibility was universally appreciated by all multi-generational cohorts, especially by mothers and caregivers, who described it as a non-negotiable factor in their decision to stay at an organisation.

Inclusive organisational culture is a powerful driver influencing female retention. Supportive leadership, psychological safety, values alignment and flexibility form a unified experience that determines whether females feel seen, heard and valued. Organisations that foster inclusivity are not only more likely to retain female talent but also to cultivate innovation, loyalty and long-term engagement.

5.4.2 Theme 2: Female Empowerment

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female’s perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?

Female empowerment emerged as a deeply personal and multi-layered theme across most interviews. Participants described how their ability to grow, lead and be recognised within their organisations directly influenced their decision to stay. Empowerment was not only about promotions or titles, but also about being trusted, supported through life transitions and given the space to lead authentically. This theme includes career growth, autonomy, mentorship, recognition, life-phase support and gender equity.

Table 8: *Female Empowerment – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes*

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
17	“She’s at this place in her life where she needs to have a stable income in order for her to grow herself, be a professional.”	Career Growth
4	“We all take accountability where we are... we have no freedom to do things the way we would prefer.”	Autonomy

17	“Everyone is very helpful and they’re very keen on helping... I never got sent away for asking a question.”	Mentorship
17	“It was reviewed after that and I was told about my mistakes and how to get it there. So it’s very supportive.”	Supportive Feedback
1	“You need a space to be able to vent... constructive criticism... I hear what you’re saying.”	Supportive Feedback
1	“Females have phases in their lives where they have different needs... we try and support people through those seasons.”	Life-Phase Support
1	“We’ve had females that have been in abusive relationships... we organise counselling so they can continue to do their jobs.”	Emotional Support
1	“You can still be successful in one space of your life where the other one’s not going so well.”	Resilience Support
17	“The balance between wanting to be taken seriously but also understanding that I am a female... I don’t want to turn myself into one of the boys.”	Gender Identity
2	“Some employers may think because she’s a female... she’s going to need time off... most employers do not like to give that time off.”	Gender Bias
2	“If she falls pregnant, that’s time off... whereas a male doesn’t have to go through all of those issues.”	Gender Discrimination

Source: Author’s Own Work

These findings revealed that female empowerment is not a singular concept; it is a collection of experiences that shape how females perceive their value within an organisation. Career growth and autonomy were especially important for Generation Z and Generation Y participants, who viewed responsibility and recognition as signs of trust. Mentorship and feedback were described as important for building confidence, particularly in early career stages.

Life-phase support was a recurring theme across multi-generations. Participants appreciated organisations that recognised the emotional and logistical challenges of motherhood, caregiving and personal crises. This support was not only practical, but it was also representative of respect and inclusion.

Gender equity was discussed both as a goal and a challenge by participants. Participants described the tension amid wanting to be recognised for their work and feeling pressured to conform to male-dominated norms. Discrimination around reproductive health and caregiving was cited as an inhibiting factor influencing retention.

Overall, empowerment was described as a relational experience. Females stayed where they felt trusted, supported and seen, not just as employees, but as whole individuals. Organisations that foster career growth, autonomy, mentorship and life-phase support and create environments where females can thrive were highlighted as ideal organisations. Gender equity is not only about policy, but also practice, perception and presence within the organisation. When females feel empowered, they are more likely to stay, lead and contribute meaningfully to the organisation’s success.

5.4.3 Theme 3: Generational and Cultural Dynamics

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 2:** How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 6:** How do socio-demographic differences impact employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female’s perspective?

Generational and cultural dynamics shape how female employees experience the workplace, interact with colleagues and respond to organisational practices. Participants across multi-generational cohorts reflected on differences in communication, adaptability, values and expectations. These differences influence collaboration, perceptions of competence and, ultimately, retention. This theme includes multi-generational learning, cultural upbringing and the impact of generational identity on workplace behaviour.

Table 9: *Generational and Cultural Dynamics – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes*

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
3	“Older generation feel left out... they have to relearn everything and the younger generation sort of have an advantage because we grew up using technology.”	Communication and Work Style Differences

3	“Some people may prefer working off paper... they might judge you for working off technology.”	Communication and Work Style Differences
3	“They work face to face... there was no Teams meetings.”	Communication and Work Style Differences
14	“The maturity level in the way we think is totally different... the things that I may not take lightly, they would take lightly.”	Values and Maturity
14	“I just speak when I need to engage... I don’t overindulge.”	Values and Maturity
14	“Younger people may not see what you see... it comes with experience.”	Values and Maturity
3	“It’s a learned behaviour... she comes from a different generation of working.”	Cultural Upbringing and Generational Conditioning
3	“To her it’s not an issue... that’s just the way things operated.”	Cultural Upbringing and Generational Conditioning
3	“Younger generation is perceived entirely differently.”	Cultural Upbringing and Generational Conditioning
10	“Everyone is very down to earth... everyone can relate to everybody.”	Multi-Generational Learning and Collaboration
10	“In our team, I wouldn’t say it’s made known... everyone is very relatable.”	Multi-Generational Learning and Collaboration
10	“We’ve been through a lot... younger generation sometimes take things for granted.”	Multi-Generational Learning and Collaboration

Source: Author’s Own Work

The findings reveal that multi-generational and cultural dynamics are complex and multifaceted. Differences in communication, work style and adaptability can create tension, but they also offer opportunities for learning and growth. Baby Boomers and Generation X often expressed concern about younger employees’ perceived lack of seriousness or

appreciation, while Generations Z and Y highlighted their technological fluency and desire for flexibility.

Cultural upbringing played a significant role in shaping workplace behaviour. Participants described how multi-generational conditioning influenced expectations around authority, communication and responsibility. These norms sometimes clashed with modern organisational practices, especially in diverse teams. Despite these differences, many participants described positive multi-generational relationships. Teams that fostered mutual respect and open communication were able to bridge multi-generational gaps and create inclusive environments. This suggests that multi-generational diversity, when managed well, can enhance collaboration and retention.

Generational and cultural dynamics significantly influence female workplace experiences and retention. Differences in communication, values and adaptability can lead to misunderstandings, but they also present opportunities for multi-generational learning. Organisations that recognise and respect these differences, while fostering inclusive team dynamics, are better positioned to retain female talent across age groups.

5.4.4 Theme 4: Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Emotional and psychological well-being emerged as a critical theme in understanding factors that drive and/or inhibit female retention. Participants described how stress, anxiety, burnout and emotional strain impacted their ability to perform and remain in their roles. Organisations that offered emotional support, counselling and flexibility were seen as safe spaces where females could thrive despite personal and professional challenges.

Table 10: Emotional and Psychological Well-Being – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
14	“I had to cry and have my husband hold me and tell me it's gonna be OK before going to work and then coming home and crying again.”	Emotional Labour and Burnout
14	“It supports me emotionally. It supports me mentally... just the environment that I'm working in, it's a supportive one.”	Emotional Labour and Burnout
14	“If I'm not OK, I have people who will be like, hey, is everything OK?”	Emotional Labour and Burnout
2	“Give them suggestions of classes or visual courses on how to manage their anxiety.”	Mental Health and Coping Support
10	“Whenever I need help, everyone is always there for me... it's a very supportive environment.”	Supportive Environment
10	“You learn how to work with different attitudes... how to deal with them.”	Supportive Environment
10	“Instead of just taking everything on for yourself and then overwhelming.”	Supportive Environment

Source: Author's Own Work

Emotional and psychological wellness emerged as a key factor influencing the retention of female employees. Participants shared stories of crying before work, feeling overwhelmed and needing emotional validation from colleagues and managers. Mental health support was not always formal. In many cases, participants described informal networks of care, colleagues checking in, managers offering flexibility and teams creating safe spaces for emotional expression. These gestures were deeply valued and often cited as a driving factor influencing retention.

Flexibility was also linked to emotional well-being. Participants appreciated when they could manage their time or take breaks when they need. This flexibility was not only practical, but also representational of trust and respect. The emotional tone of these interviews suggests that retention is not just about career progression or compensation; it is about feeling safe, supported and understood. Organisations that invest in emotional well-being are more likely to retain female talent and foster long-term engagement.

Emotional and psychological well-being is a factor that influences female retention. Emotional labour, stress and mental health challenges are part of the lived experience of many females in the workplace. Organisations that offer support through counselling, flexibility and empathetic leadership create environments where females can thrive, which leads females to stay at organisations. When emotional needs are met, females are more likely to stay, contribute and grow within the organisation.

5.4.5 Theme 5: Workplace Challenges

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female’s perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Workplace challenges emerged as a significant theme influencing female employees’ decisions to stay or leave. Participants described experiences of being undermined, excluded or emotionally drained due to toxic environments, gendered power dynamics and lack of psychological safety. These challenges were often compounded by cultural expectations and internalised limitations, particularly among Generation Z, Generation Y and less experienced females.

Table 11: *Workplace Challenges – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes*

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
11	“The people there... everybody tried to bring you down.”	Frustration and Emotional Fatigue
3	“It was one of the most horrific experiences of my life.”	Frustration and Emotional Fatigue
14	“I had to cry and have my husband hold me and tell me it’s gonna be OK before going to work and then coming home and crying again.”	Toxic Work Environment

2	“The environment was very toxic... it was mostly female who worked there, but not all females are nice to each other.”	Toxic Work Environment
4	“The manager implemented things she wouldn’t follow herself... she was stealing time from the company.”	Toxic Work Environment
2	“She felt I was too young to be a HR person... she made my life difficult.”	Discrimination and Harassment
4	“I was told my parents looked like they were crying... or I should gain more weight in that specific area... Comments like that put you in a very uncomfortable environment... you don’t feel safe.”	Discrimination and Harassment
2	“I was putting more procedures in place... she felt like I was doing things I shouldn’t have done.”	Lack of Voice and Influence
4	“When I said something to higher management, they looked at me and did nothing.”	Lack of Voice and Influence
3	“If I said something, I could have been factually correct... but they’d listen to someone 20 years older.”	Lack of Voice and Influence
5	“I don’t feel worthy of receiving more... I never asked for more.”	Internalised Oppression and Self-Doubt
5	“Instead of going to my manager, I may just withdraw and go work somewhere else.”	Internalised Oppression and Self-Doubt
5	“I just get through the day step by step.”	Internalised Oppression and Self-Doubt

Source: Author’s Own Work

The data highlighted that workplace challenges are not isolated incidents; they are systemic experiences that shape how females perceive their value and safety within an organisation. Toxic environments, whether driven by poor leadership or interpersonal conflict, were described as emotionally exhausting and demotivating. Discrimination based on age, gender or appearance was cited as a barrier to confidence and career progression which inherently presents as an inhibiting factor influencing retention. Participants also described a lack of voice, where their ideas or concerns were dismissed or ignored. This was particularly common

among Generation Z and Generation Y females or those in junior roles. The emotional impact of being unheard was profound, leading to withdrawal, resignation or internalised self-doubt.

Cultural conditioning played a role in how females reacted to these challenges. Some described avoiding conflict or doubting their worth, even when they were competent and capable. This internalised oppression suggests that retention strategies must go beyond policy; they must address the emotional and cultural realities of female employees. Workplace challenges significantly impact female retention. Toxic environments, discrimination, lack of voice and internalised oppression create emotional strain and disengagement and are all considered as inhibiting factors that influence retention. Organisations that fail to address these issues risk losing valuable talent. To retain female employees, workplaces must foster psychological safety, listen actively and challenge discriminatory norms.

5.4.6 Theme 6: Career Development and Transitions

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female’s perspective?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 5:** How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms?

Career development and transitions emerged as a key theme in understanding the driving and inhibiting factors of female retention. Participants described how opportunities for growth, the need for stability and the desire for professional fulfilment influenced their decisions to stay or leave. Transitions were often driven by life-stage changes, organisational limitations, or the pursuit of more meaningful work. This theme includes career progression, job change motivations, retrenchment and barriers to advancement.

Table 12: *Career Development and Transitions – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes*

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
8	“As much as they might like the work that they do... they’re working for money. So if there’s a better opportunity with the cost of living...”	Financial Stress and Economic Motivation

13	“Money is a good motivator... I was just thinking if I only had 500 rand extra.”	Financial Stress and Economic Motivation
16	“I realised I have two children now and I needed to do something. I needed to better myself.”	Financial Stress and Economic Motivation
2	“As being female, I would say it is mostly growth... because you become a mom, you become a wife and then your circumstances change.”	Career Progression and Growth Motivation
2	“I needed to find a job where there would be growth... opportunity for growth.”	Career Progression and Growth Motivation
6	“Probably 80% of it was... maybe 90 actually was for career progression.”	Career Progression and Growth Motivation
2	“You become a mom, you become a wife... your circumstances change.”	Job Transitions and Life-Stage Shifts
6	“You’re not looking to constantly be put on a renewal or fixed-term contract. You want stability.”	Job Transitions and Life-Stage Shifts
6	“Younger people just want to grow a lot in their career... older people want stability.”	Job Transitions and Life-Stage Shifts
6	“I left toxicity and I ended up not being paid... just because I wanted to get my foot into the door.”	Retrenchment and Organisational Change
6	“You take a contract because you just need to work... and then push and find something else.”	Retrenchment and Organisational Change
6	“You’re not looking for a fixed-term contract... you want the benefits, the medical aid.”	Retrenchment and Organisational Change
2	“Just because you are not a part of the family, your voice doesn’t get heard.”	Barriers to Advancement
4	“I was thrown in the deep end and learned to swim... I appreciate it now, but it was hard.”	Barriers to Advancement

Source: Author’s Own Work

The findings indicate that career development is a dynamic and deeply personal process for female employees. Growth was consistently shown as a reason for job transitions, particularly among Generation Z and Generation Y participants who were seeking to establish themselves

professionally. For Baby Boomers and Generation X participants, stability and benefits were more important, reflecting life-stage priorities.

Job transitions were often driven by necessity such as retrenchment, toxic environments or lack of opportunity. Participants described how these transitions were not always planned but were essential for survival and growth. The emotional impact of instability was evident, especially for those who had to accept temporary or underpaid roles to remain employed.

Barriers to advancement were also highlighted. Participants described being overlooked due to age, gender or organisational politics. Despite these challenges, many demonstrated resilience and a strong desire to learn, grow and contribute meaningfully.

These insights suggest that retention strategies must be tailored to individual career stages and needs. Organisations that offer clear growth pathways, recognise potential and support transitions are more likely to retain female talent.

Career development and transitions are central to female retention. Females seek environments where they can grow, feel secure and align their work with personal values and life stages. Job changes are often driven by the pursuit of growth or the need to escape limiting environments. Organisations that invest in career development, offer stability and remove barriers to advancement will be better positioned to retain and empower female employees.

5.4.7 Theme 7: Communication and Team Dynamics

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 2:** How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Communication and team dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping female employees' experiences and decisions to remain in an organisation. Participants described how open dialogue, respectful interactions and collaborative environments fostered trust, motivation and a sense of belonging. This theme includes diversity, feedback, transparency, respect and inter-team collaboration.

Table 13: Communication and Team Dynamics – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
11	“I would like a diverse workforce... in terms of culture, in terms of age group.”	Diversity Beyond Gender
10	“If we are both on the same page... we appreciate it more.”	Diversity Beyond Gender
7	“Younger person may be looking to find clear stability... older person may already have it.”	Diversity Beyond Gender
6	“It brings fresh ideas. I think a new perspective, if you have a diverse workforce and management team... it’s going to bring fresh ideas into any team.”	Diversity Beyond Gender
6	“You get the feedback... but it’s only ever shared with the leadership team.”	Feedback and Recognition
6	“Just being open and honest and transparent and being real and practical about what you can and can’t do.”	Feedback and Recognition
10	“There is clear communication, there’s recognition and feedback.”	Feedback and Recognition
6	“This is what the trend is showing... we can’t address them all at the same time, but this is what the plan is.”	Transparency and Trust
10	“Openness and trust... when you are able to speak to your colleagues and superiors openly.”	Transparency and Trust
10	“You want to speak about it knowing it’s not going to be held against you.”	Transparency and Trust
10	“Everyone is very helpful and they’re very keen on helping... I never got sent away for asking a question.”	Respect and Collaboration
10	“Everyone’s very helpful with each other... that does make me want to work better.”	Respect and Collaboration
10	“If the team works together, they can do it collaboratively.”	Respect and Collaboration
11	“She would always tell me that I need to go back and read through my work... make sure it is aligned.”	Feedback and Learning Culture
10	“I was told about my mistakes and how to get it there. So it’s very supportive.”	Feedback and Learning Culture
9	“I think that also drives our employees and the interns especially to work harder... to prove themselves.”	Feedback and Learning Culture

Source: Author’s Own Work

The above theme and subthemes indicate that communication and team dynamics are foundational in influencing female retention. Participants described how feedback, when shared openly and constructively, helped them feel valued and motivated. However, some noted that feedback was often restricted to leadership, leaving employees unaware of broader organisational trends or concerns.

Transparency was emphasised as a trust-building practice. Participants appreciated when leaders communicated openly about challenges, decisions and future goals. This openness reduced uncertainty and created a sense of inclusion. Respect and collaboration were described as everyday experiences that shaped workplace culture. Participants valued teams where colleagues were approachable, helpful and respectful. These dynamics not only improved performance but also created emotional safety and belonging.

Overall, communication was about connection rather than information. When females felt heard, respected and included, they were more likely to stay and contribute meaningfully. Communication and team dynamics are critical to retaining female employees. Constructive feedback, transparent leadership and respectful collaboration foster trust, motivation and belonging. Organisations that prioritise open dialogue and inclusive teamwork create environments where females feel valued and empowered to grow.

5.4.8 Theme 8: Societal Norms and Cultural Impact

Theme Question(s) Linked:

- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 5:** How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Societal norms and cultural expectations shape how females experience the workplace and perceive their roles within it. Participants reflected on how gender roles, multi-generational shifts and cultural conditioning influence retention, empowerment and organisational

engagement. This theme includes changing gender dynamics, cultural upbringing and organisational responses to evolving societal values.

Table 14: Societal Norms and Cultural Impact – Verbatim Evidence and Sub-Themes

Participant	Quoted Statement	Sub-Theme
17	“You’re looking at all of them for who they are and what they bring to the organisation, not what they look like or what gender they are.”	Changing Gender Roles and Independence
12	“Females empowerment is blooming more than ever before... females taking stands for their rights.”	Changing Gender Roles and Independence
10	“Females are becoming independent... they don't need a man to do things with them.”	Changing Gender Roles and Independence
12	“Back then, organisations were mostly run by men... now it's changing.”	Cultural Conditioning and Workplace Expectations
10	“Ensure that there is no discrimination in the workplace... all employees are treated fairly and equal.”	Cultural Conditioning and Workplace Expectations
12	“Punishment was much more severe... now we look at emotional well-being and deeper meaning.”	Cultural Conditioning and Workplace Expectations
10	“Create a comfortable workspace... offer growth opportunities... work collaboratively.”	Organisational Adaptation to Demographic Change
10	“Start by ensuring there is no discrimination... treat all employees fairly and equal.”	Organisational Adaptation to Demographic Change
12	“Companies benefit from these changes... even if they're slow.”	Organisational Adaptation to Demographic Change

Source: Author's Own Work

The data highlights that societal norms and cultural expectations are evolving and these changes have a direct impact on factors influencing female retention. Participants described how traditional gender roles, in which men dominated leadership and females were expected

to be caregivers, are being challenged. Females are increasingly asserting independence, seeking leadership roles and expecting equitable treatment according to participants.

Cultural conditioning still plays a role in shaping workplace behaviour. Participants described how past norms influenced their expectations around discipline, communication and authority. However, they also noted that organisations are beginning to prioritise emotional well-being, inclusion and fairness. Organisational adaptation was seen as essential. Participants stressed the need for inclusive policies, fair treatment and recognition of individual contributions. They described how organisations that embrace societal change are more likely to retain diverse talent and foster innovation.

These insights suggest that the creation and implementation of retention strategies must be culturally aware and responsive to societal shifts. Organisations that fail to adapt will risk alienating employees who seek modern, inclusive and equitable workplaces. Societal norms and cultural expectations significantly influence female retention. As gender roles evolve and cultural conditioning shifts, females are expecting workplaces to reflect these changes. Organisations that prioritise fairness, inclusion and emotional well-being are better positioned to retain female talent and foster long-term engagement. s

The analysis of these eight themes provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing female employee retention in the service sector of KwaZulu-Natal. The findings highlight that retention is shaped by a combination of organisational, generational, cultural and individual factors. Supportive leadership, inclusivity, psychological safety, career growth opportunities and flexibility emerged as key drivers, while workplace challenges, emotional strain, discrimination and misalignment with personal values acted as inhibitors. Multi-generational and socio-cultural differences were found to influence communication, collaboration and perceptions of fairness, underscoring the need for nuanced and tailored retention strategies.

These themes reveal that employee retention is not solely dependent on formal policies but is deeply rooted in lived experiences, organisational culture and societal norms. The insights gained set the foundation for the next section, which will discuss and interpret these findings in relation to the research aims and existing literature, providing a critical understanding of how organisations can effectively retain female talent across generations and cultural contexts.

5.5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the discussion and interpretation of findings derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with female employees across multi-generational cohorts. The thematic analysis identified eight themes, reflecting both driving and inhibiting factors influencing female retention, as well as the socio-demographic and cultural factors that shape organisational experiences.

5.5.1 Theme 1: Inclusive Organisational Culture

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

An inclusive organisational culture emerged as a foundational factor influencing female retention across all multi-generational cohorts. Participants consistently described how psychological safety, emotional support and value alignment shaped their sense of belonging and loyalty. Organisations that fostered empathy, openness and flexibility were perceived as safe spaces where females could thrive both professionally and personally. This was especially important during life transitions such as motherhood, caregiving or personal crises.

Supportive leadership was repeatedly highlighted as a driver influencing retention. Participants valued leaders who were emotionally intelligent, approachable and respectful of individual needs. The ability to express vulnerability without fear of judgment was seen as essential for long-term engagement. Career development opportunities, such as mentorship, recognition and clear growth pathways, were described as critical for maintaining motivation and commitment, particularly among younger generational cohorts.

Work-life balance and financial stability were also central to retention decisions. Participants emphasised the importance of flexible working arrangements, especially for those managing dual roles at home and work. Value alignment between personal beliefs and organisational

culture further reinforced retention, with females expressing a desire to work in environments that reflected fairness, inclusivity and emotional integrity.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Supportive leadership fosters psychological safety and emotional trust.
- Inclusive culture enhances belonging and motivation.
- Flexibility is essential for managing work-life balance, especially for mothers and caregivers.
- Career development opportunities (mentorship, recognition, growth) drive retention.
- Value alignment between personal beliefs and organisational culture strengthens loyalty.
- Financial stability (adequate compensation, benefits, job security) is a motivating factor, especially for sole breadwinners.

The findings are corroborated by the perspectives of the following authors:

- Hattangadi (2025): Retention is an organisational goal that fosters a healthy work environment, aligning with psychological safety and inclusivity.
- Charzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022): Continuous employee loss harms organisations, reinforcing the need for supportive leadership.
- Nasir et al. (2019): Retention is driven by policies that promote long-term commitment, especially relevant for females managing dual roles.
- Hassen (2022): Retention is a process of motivating employees to stay, linked to support, autonomy and recognition.
- Bharath (2023): Retention involves creating environments that instil loyalty, which are critical for females facing personal transitions.
- Sinha (2012): Job satisfaction and happiness are key to retention, supporting work-life balance and emotional integrity.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Growth opportunities, compensation and strong management relationships are fundamental retention components.
- Dwivedi et al., (2021): Burnout, lack of recognition and poor culture inhibit female retention, validating the need for emotional support.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Highlight the importance of updating organisational policies to strengthen the retention and development of female employees, with a focus on creating clear career pathways and ensuring alignment between employee and organisational values.
- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Career development, managerial support and fair HR practices are key retention factors for females.

5.5.2 Theme 2: Female Empowerment

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?

Female empowerment emerged as a deeply personal and multi-layered theme, with participants describing how their ability to grow, lead and be recognised directly influenced their decision to remain in an organisation. Empowerment was not limited to promotions or titles. It encompassed autonomy, trust, mentorship and emotional support. Participants expressed that being seen and valued as whole individuals, not just employees, was central to their retention.

Career growth and autonomy were especially important for Generation Z and Generation Y participants, who viewed responsibility and recognition as signs of trust. Mentorship and constructive feedback were described as essential for building confidence, particularly in early career stages. Participants appreciated environments where they could ask questions, receive guidance and be supported through mistakes. This relational dynamic fostered a sense of belonging and professional development.

Life-phase support and gender equity were recurring themes. Participants valued organisations that recognised the emotional and logistical challenges of motherhood, caregiving and personal crises. They also highlighted the tension between wanting to be taken seriously and feeling pressured to conform to male-dominated norms. Discrimination around reproductive health and caregiving responsibilities was cited as a barrier to retention. Empowerment, therefore, was not just about opportunity; it was about inclusion, respect and the freedom to lead authentically.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Career growth and autonomy are central to retention, especially for younger generational cohorts.
- Mentorship and constructive feedback build confidence and foster long-term engagement.

- Life-phase support (e.g. during motherhood or personal crises) is valued across all generations.
- Emotional support and resilience-building contribute to retention.
- Gender equity and identity recognition are essential for authentic leadership and inclusion.
- Discrimination and bias around reproductive health and caregiving inhibit retention.

These insights align with the literature presented by the following scholars:

- Dwivedi et al. (2021): Highlight burnout, lack of recognition and poor company culture as inhibitors of female retention, supporting the need for empowerment and emotional support.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Emphasise revising organisational policies to retain and develop female employees, especially in leadership, aligning with empowerment and career growth.
- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Identify career development, managerial support and fair HR practices as key retention factors for females, supporting mentorship and autonomy.
- Smith and Johnson (2023): Note that females seek flexibility and better financial compensation, reinforcing empowerment through economic stability.
- Williams and Smith (2022): Highlight lower female retention rates and the need for supportive environments, validating empowerment as a retention strategy.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Identify growth opportunities and strong management relationships as fundamental retention components, supporting career development and recognition.
- Nasir et al. (2019): Confirm that retention is driven by policies that promote long-term commitment, which is relevant to life-phase support and gender equity.
- Bharath (2023): Notes that retention involves creating environments that instil loyalty and commitment, which is especially critical for females navigating personal transitions.

5.5.3 Theme 3: Generational and Cultural Dynamics

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 2:** How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 6:** How do socio-demographic differences impact employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?

Generational and cultural dynamics were found to significantly shape female employees' workplace experiences and retention decisions. Participants described how generational identity influenced communication preferences, adaptability and expectations around leadership and collaboration. Differences in work style and values between the multi-generational cohorts often led to misunderstandings but also presented opportunities for learning and growth when managed effectively.

Cultural upbringing and generational conditioning played a role in shaping perceptions of authority, responsibility and emotional expression. Older participants reflected on traditional norms and hierarchical structures, while younger participants emphasised flexibility, digital fluency and emotional openness. These differences impacted how females engaged with their teams, responded to feedback and interpreted organisational culture. When organisations acknowledged and respected these generational nuances, participants reported higher levels of engagement and retention.

Multi-generational collaboration was described positively in teams that fostered mutual respect and open communication. Participants valued environments where diverse perspectives were welcomed and generational differences were not a source of conflict but a catalyst for innovation. However, when generational gaps were ignored or poorly managed, participants described feeling misunderstood, undervalued or excluded, particularly among Generation Z and younger Generation Y females.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Generational identity influences communication style, adaptability and expectations.
- Cultural upbringing shapes perceptions of authority, responsibility and emotional safety.
- Older generations value structure and recognition; younger generations seek flexibility and purpose.
- Multi-generational collaboration enhances retention when built on mutual respect.
- Poorly managed generational differences lead to disengagement and exclusion.
- Socio-demographic factors such as age and cultural background affect how females interpret organisational practices.

Similar perspectives are reflected in the work of the following authors:

- Ravid et al. (2025): Emphasise the importance of understanding generational differences to retain a diverse workforce.
- Bailey and Owens (2020): Highlight how generational diversity enhances productivity and inclusivity when managed effectively.

- Zahari and Puteh (2023): Discuss job-hopping trends among Generation Z and Generation Y, reinforcing the need for tailored retention strategies.
- Smoyer (2019): Describes how Generation X's upbringing influences their independence and work ethic.
- Balon (2024): Explores how generational conditioning affects emotional resilience and workplace expectations.
- Parker and Igielnik (2020): Identify Generation Z's emphasis on emotional safety, digital fluency and ethical alignment.
- Lissitsa (2024): Highlights critical thinking and adaptability as defining traits of Generation X.
- Abraham et al. (2023): Describe Baby Boomers' contributions to workplace culture and their emphasis on recognition and stability.
- Drange (2021): Discusses generational preferences for work-life balance, autonomy and meaningful work.
- Nichols and Smith (2025): Emphasise the importance of recognising generational needs to retain older employees.
- Zahra and Mokoena (2023): Reinforce the need for flexible, ethical and growth-oriented environments to retain Generation Z talent.

5.5.4 Theme 4: Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Emotional and psychological well-being emerged as a critical factor influencing female retention. Participants described how stress, anxiety, burnout and emotional strain affected their ability to remain engaged and productive in the workplace. The emotional toll of balancing professional responsibilities with personal challenges was evident, particularly among females managing caregiving roles, toxic environments or unsupportive leadership. Organisations that

offered emotional support, flexibility and empathetic leadership were seen as safe spaces where females could thrive.

Supportive environments were consistently linked to retention. Participants valued informal networks of care, such as colleagues checking in, managers offering flexibility and teams creating emotionally safe spaces. These gestures were often cited as reasons for staying. Emotional validation and psychological safety were not only appreciated but considered essential for long-term engagement. When females felt understood and supported, they were more likely to remain committed to their roles and contribute meaningfully.

Flexibility was closely tied to emotional well-being. Participants described how the ability to manage their time, take breaks or access mental health resources helped them cope with stress and avoid burnout. The emotional tone of the interviews suggested that retention is not solely about career advancement or compensation; it is about feeling safe, respected and emotionally supported. Organisations that prioritise mental health and emotional resilience are better positioned to retain female talent.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Emotional strain, burnout and stress negatively impact retention.
- Supportive environments foster psychological safety and emotional trust.
- Informal care networks and empathetic leadership are valued by female employees.
- Flexibility in work arrangements contributes to emotional well-being.
- Mental health support (formal or informal) is a key driver of retention.
- Emotional validation and understanding increase loyalty and engagement.

Similar perspectives are reflected in the work of the following authors:

- Dwivedi et al. (2021): Highlight burnout and lack of recognition as key inhibitors of female retention, reinforcing the need for emotional support.
- Hassen (2022): Defines retention as a process influenced by emotional and motivational factors provided by the employer.
- Sinha (2012): Notes that job satisfaction and emotional well-being are central to retention.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Advocate for policy revisions that support female development and emotional resilience.
- Ma and Zhang (2025): Discuss the impact of emotional stress and work-life conflict on female mental health and retention.

- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Identify emotional support and managerial empathy as key retention factors for senior female employees.
- Codd (2023): Reports that many females rate their mental health as poor and feel uncomfortable discussing it at work, validating the need for supportive environments.
- Clerkin (2017): Emphasises the importance of emotional safety and inclusive culture in retaining female talent.
- Bharath (2023): Notes that retention is linked to environments that instil emotional commitment and loyalty.

5.5.5 Theme 5: Workplace Challenges

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Workplace challenges were described by participants as emotionally draining, demotivating and often the primary reason for leaving an organisation. These challenges included toxic environments, gendered power dynamics, exclusion and a lack of psychological safety. Participants shared experiences of being undermined, harassed or dismissed, particularly in environments where leadership failed to address discriminatory behaviour or foster inclusive practices. These experiences were especially pronounced among younger females and those in junior roles.

Discrimination based on age, gender or appearance was cited as a barrier to confidence and career progression. Participants described how their ideas were ignored, their voices silenced and their contributions undervalued. This lack of influence and recognition led to withdrawal, resignation or internalised self-doubt. Cultural conditioning also played a role, with some participants expressing reluctance to speak up or challenge authority due to ingrained norms around gender and hierarchy.

The emotional impact of these workplace challenges was profound. Participants described feelings of frustration, anxiety and emotional fatigue. In some cases, they chose to leave rather than confront toxic environments. These findings suggest that retention strategies must go beyond policy and address the lived emotional and cultural realities of female employees. Organisations that fail to create psychologically safe and inclusive environments risk losing valuable talent.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Toxic work environments lead to emotional exhaustion and disengagement.
- Discrimination and harassment inhibit confidence and career progression.
- Lack of voice and influence contributes to withdrawal and resignation.
- Internalised oppression and self-doubt are shaped by cultural conditioning.
- Younger females and those in junior roles are more vulnerable to exclusion.
- Psychological safety and inclusive leadership are essential for retention.

The evidence from this study is consistent with the work of the following authors:

- Dwivedi et al. (2021): Identify burnout, lack of recognition and poor company culture as key inhibitors of female retention.
- Codd (2023): Reports that many females feel unsupported and uncomfortable discussing mental health at work, reinforcing the impact of toxic environments.
- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Highlight the importance of managerial support and fair HR practices in retaining senior female employees.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Emphasise the need to revise organisational policies to address gender gaps and support female leadership.
- Smith and Johnson (2023): Discuss gender disparities and the pursuit of equality, flexibility and advancement, validating the impact of exclusion and bias.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Identify organisational culture and management relationships as fundamental to retention.
- Nasir et al. (2019): Confirm that retention is influenced by policies that promote fairness and respect.
- Clerkin (2017): Emphasises the importance of inclusive environments and emotional safety in retaining female talent.

5.5.6 Theme 6: Career Development and Transitions

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 5:** How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms?

Career development and transitions were identified as central to female retention, with participants describing how opportunities for growth, stability and professional fulfilment influenced their decisions to stay or leave. The desire for career progression was especially strong among Generation Z and Generation Y participants, who viewed growth as a key indicator of organisational investment and personal value. For older cohorts, such as Generation X and Baby Boomers, stability and benefits were more important, reflecting life-stage priorities.

Transitions were often driven by necessity rather than choice. Participants shared experiences of leaving toxic environments, facing retrenchment or accepting temporary roles due to financial pressure. These transitions were emotionally taxing and often involved trade-offs between personal well-being and professional advancement. Despite these challenges, many participants demonstrated resilience and a strong desire to learn, grow and contribute meaningfully to their organisations.

Barriers to advancement were also highlighted, including organisational politics, lack of recognition and exclusion from decision-making. Participants described how these limitations affected their confidence and motivation. Organisations that offered clear growth pathways, recognised potential and supported transitions were viewed as more likely to retain female talent. Career development is not only about promotion, but also about being seen, supported and given the tools to succeed across life stages.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Career progression is a key driver of retention, especially for younger generational cohorts.
- Stability and benefits are valued by older cohorts navigating life-stage transitions.
- Financial stress and economic motivation influence job changes and retention decisions.
- Retrenchment and organisational instability lead to forced transitions and emotional strain.

- Barriers to advancement (e.g. exclusion, lack of recognition) inhibit retention.
- Support during life-stage shifts (e.g. motherhood, caregiving) enhances loyalty and engagement.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by the following researchers:

- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Identify career development and managerial support as key retention factors for senior female employees.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Emphasise the need for policy revisions to support female career growth and leadership development.
- Smith and Johnson (2023): Note that females seek flexibility and financial compensation, especially during life transitions.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Identify growth opportunities and compensation as fundamental retention components.
- Bharath (2023): Notes that retention involves creating environments that instil loyalty and support career advancement.
- Nasir et al. (2019): Confirm that retention is driven by policies that promote long-term commitment and stability.
- Marozva (2024): Discusses the importance of career development and flexible arrangements for retaining Generation Y employees.

5.5.7 Theme 7: Communication and Team Dynamics

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the key factors that influence employee retention from a female's perspective?
- **f:** How do multi-generational differences influence employee retention strategies?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Communication and team dynamics were consistently described by participants as foundational to their sense of belonging, motivation and decision to remain in an organisation. Open dialogue, respectful interactions and collaborative environments fostered trust and emotional safety. Participants valued teams where feedback was constructive, recognition was shared and transparency was prioritised. These elements were seen as essential for building inclusive cultures that support female retention.

Feedback and recognition were particularly important for younger generational cohorts, who expressed a desire for regular input and affirmation. Participants described how feedback helped them grow professionally and feel valued. However, some noted that feedback was often restricted to leadership, leaving employees disconnected from broader organisational goals. Transparency in communication was also highlighted as a trust-building practice, with participants appreciating leaders who were honest about challenges and realistic about expectations.

Respect and collaboration were described as everyday experiences that shaped workplace culture. Participants valued colleagues who were approachable and willing to help and teams that worked together toward shared goals. These dynamics not only improved performance but also created emotional safety. Communication was not just about information, it was about connection. When females felt heard, respected and included, they were more likely to stay and contribute meaningfully.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Open and respectful communication fosters trust and emotional safety.
- Constructive feedback and recognition enhance motivation and engagement.
- Transparency from leadership builds trust and reduces uncertainty.
- Collaborative team environments support inclusion and performance.
- Multi-generational teams benefit from shared learning and mutual respect.
- Communication is relational, feeling heard and valued drives retention.

These findings reflect and reinforce the views expressed by the following authors:

- Ravid et al. (2025): Emphasise the importance of understanding generational differences in communication and teamwork.
- Bailey and Owens (2020): Discuss how multi-generational workplaces benefit from inclusive communication practices.
- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Identify managerial support and feedback as key retention factors for females.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Advocate for inclusive leadership and transparent communication to retain female talent.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Identify strong management relationships and collaborative environments as essential for retention.
- Nasir et al. (2019): Confirm that retention is driven by policies that promote fairness and open communication.

- Clerkin (2017): Emphasises the importance of inclusive dialogue and emotional safety in retaining female employees.

5.5.8 Theme 8: Societal Norms and Cultural Impact

Linked Research Questions:

- **Research Question 3:** What are the challenges faced by female employees and how do these challenges impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs?
- **Research Question 4:** How can companies attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace?
- **Research Question 5:** How can companies adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms?
- **Research Question 7:** How can companies create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and what impact does this have on employee retention?

Societal norms and cultural expectations were described by participants as deeply influential in shaping how females perceive their roles within the workplace. Traditional gender roles, cultural conditioning and generational shifts were cited as factors that impact empowerment, inclusion and retention. Participants reflected on how historical expectations, such as male-dominated leadership and caregiving responsibilities assigned to females, continue to influence organisational dynamics, even as these norms begin to shift

Many participants expressed a growing sense of independence and agency, noting that females are increasingly asserting their rights, seeking leadership roles and expecting equitable treatment. However, remnants of past conditioning still affect how females engage with their organisations. Some described internalised limitations, such as hesitancy to speak up or challenge authority, while others highlighted the need for workplaces to evolve alongside societal change. Emotional well-being, fairness and recognition were seen as essential components of modern retention strategies.

Organisational adaptation to demographic and cultural shifts was viewed as critical. Participants stressed the importance of inclusive policies, fair treatment and recognition of individual contributions. Companies that embraced diversity, challenged outdated norms and created emotionally safe environments were seen as more likely to retain female talent. Retention is no longer just about benefits or job security; it is about aligning organisational practices with evolving societal values.

Key Findings from Interviews:

- Traditional gender roles and cultural conditioning continue to influence female workplace experiences.
- Females are increasingly seeking independence, leadership and equitable treatment.
- Internalised norms can inhibit confidence and assertiveness in the workplace.
- Emotional well-being and fairness are essential for retention in modern organisations.
- Organisational adaptation to societal change improves retention outcomes.
- Inclusive policies and recognition of individual contributions foster loyalty and engagement.

Similar perspectives are reflected in the work of the following authors:

- Dwivedi et al. (2021): Highlight the impact of burnout, lack of recognition and poor culture on female retention, reinforcing the need for inclusive environments.
- Gander and Sharafizad (2025): Emphasise the importance of addressing gender gaps and revising policies to support female leadership.
- Smith and Johnson (2023): Discuss how females seek flexibility and financial compensation in response to societal expectations and workplace inequality.
- Codd (2023): Reports that many females feel unsupported and undervalued, especially in environments that fail to adapt to changing norms.
- Hammond and Coetzee (2022): Identify the need for fair HR practices and inclusive leadership to retain female employees.
- Chaudhary and Sharma (2023): Highlight the importance of organisational culture and leadership in adapting to demographic shifts.
- Statistics South Africa (2024): Reveal persistent gender gaps in employment and leadership, validating the need for cultural and policy reform.
- Clerkin (2017): Emphasises the importance of inclusive environments and emotional safety in retaining female talent.

5.6 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Table 15 and Figure 12 below provide an overview of the findings described in Chapter 5.

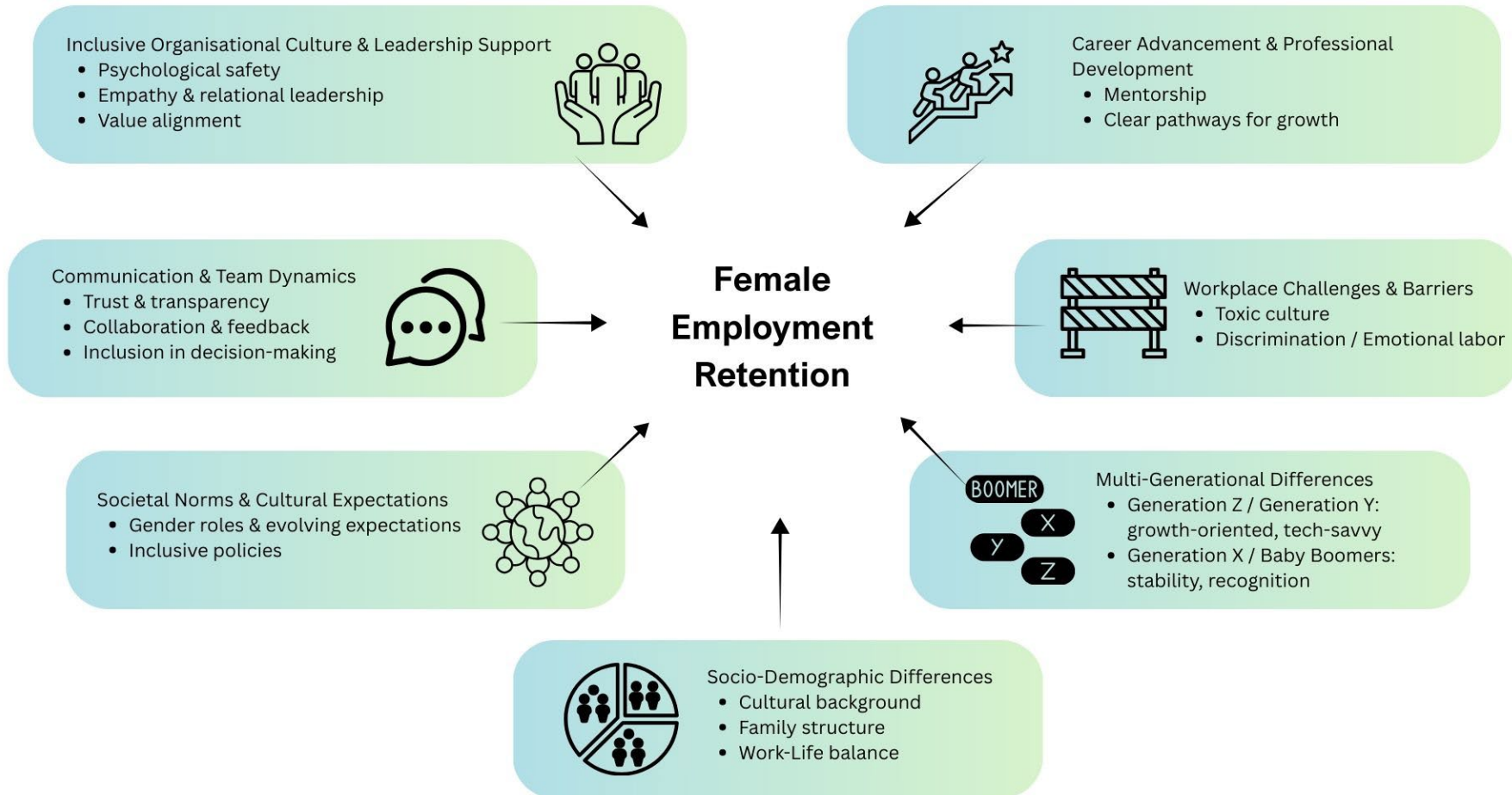
Table 15: *Summary of Findings*

Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Findings	Implications for Retention
Inclusive Organisational Culture	Supportive Leadership, Psychological Safety, Values Alignment, Flexibility, Emotional Support	Females value inclusive environments where they feel seen, heard and supported. Flexibility and ethical consistency are essential across generations.	Fosters loyalty, engagement and long-term retention. Inclusive culture is a non-negotiable factor for female employees.
Female Empowerment	Career Growth, Autonomy, Mentorship, Recognition, Life-Phase Support, Gender Equity	Empowerment is relational and includes trust, support and recognition. Discrimination and lack of autonomy inhibit retention.	Organisations that empower females through growth, support and equity are more likely to retain and develop female talent.
Generational and Cultural Dynamics	Communication Style, Cultural Conditioning, Multi-Generational Learning	Generational differences influence expectations and collaboration. Respect and understanding across age groups enhance retention.	Tailored strategies that respect generational needs improve engagement and reduce turnover.
Emotional and Psychological Well-being	Burnout, Mental Health Support, Emotional Safety, Supportive Environment	Emotional strain and lack of support lead to disengagement. Informal care networks and flexibility are highly valued.	Mental health support and empathetic leadership are essential for retaining female employees.
Workplace Challenges	Toxic Environment, Discrimination,	Females face emotional fatigue, exclusion and	Addressing systemic challenges and fostering

	Lack of Voice, Internalised Oppression	harassment. Younger females are more vulnerable to being silenced or undervalued.	psychological safety is critical to retention.
Career Development and Transitions	Growth Motivation, Financial Stress, Retrenchment, Barriers to Advancement	Career progression is a key driver, especially for younger cohorts. Stability is valued by older cohorts. Transitions are often driven by necessity.	Clear growth pathways and support during transitions improve retention across life stages.
Communication and Team Dynamics	Feedback, Transparency, Respect, Collaboration, Diversity Beyond Gender	Open communication and inclusive teamwork foster trust and motivation. Feedback and recognition are essential, especially for younger employees.	Transparent leadership and collaborative teams enhance retention and workplace satisfaction.
Societal Norms and Cultural Impact	Gender Roles, Cultural Conditioning, Organisational Adaptation	Females are challenging traditional norms and seeking equitable treatment. Cultural shifts require organisational responsiveness.	Organisations that align with evolving societal values and promote fairness are better positioned to retain female talent.

Source: Author's Own Work

Figure 12: Factors Influencing Retention



Source: Author's Own Work

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings demonstrate that female retention is shaped by a combination of organisational culture, leadership, career development, flexibility, socio-demographic realities, psychological safety and societal norms. Drivers such as supportive leadership, inclusive culture, mentorship and value alignment foster retention, while barriers such as discrimination, toxic environments and internalised oppression inhibit it. The following chapter (Chapter 6) builds on these findings to propose practical recommendations for organisations, offering strategies to improve female retention, inclusivity and adaptability across multi-generational and culturally diverse workforces.

The insights from Chapter 5 form the foundation for the recommendations and conclusions presented in **Chapter 6**.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

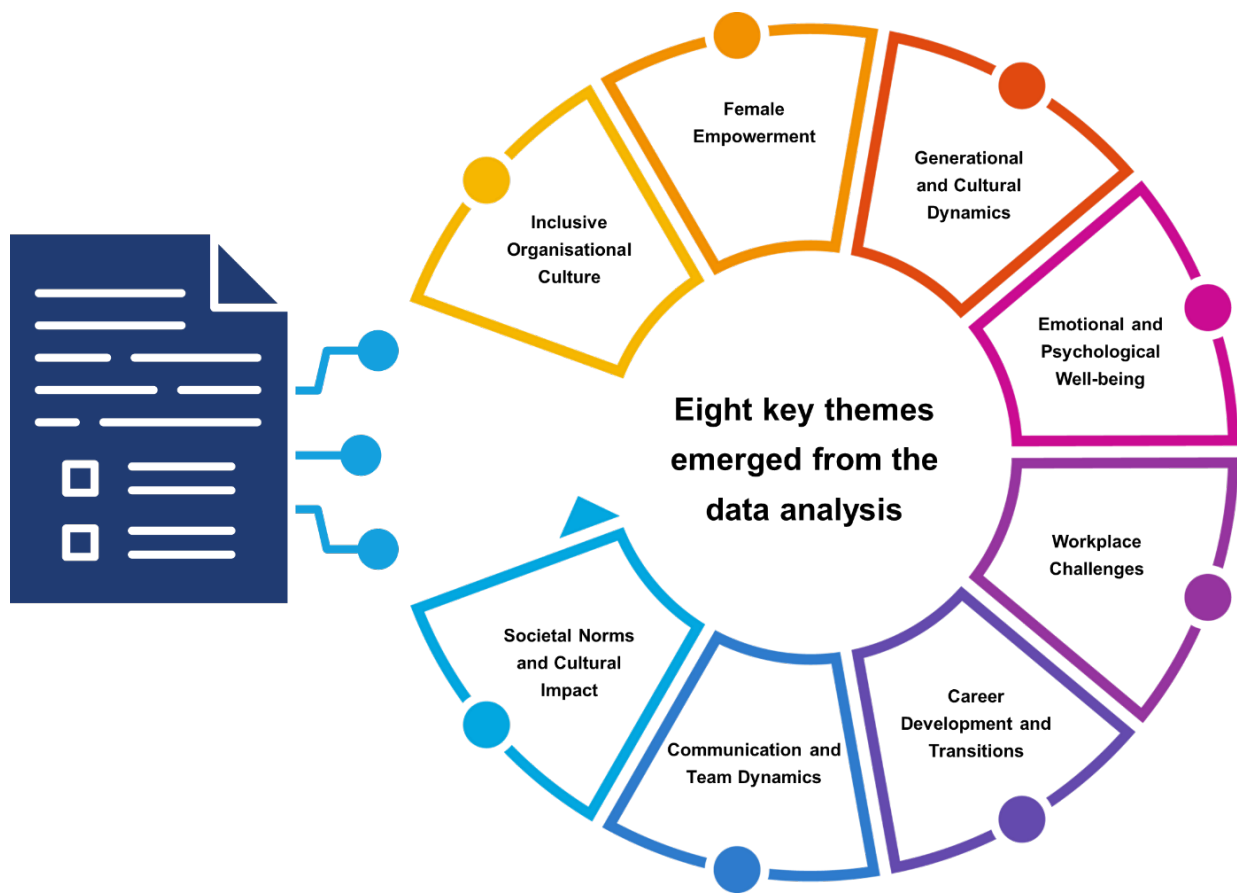
6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 presented the findings of this study and provided an interpretation in relation to the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3. In this final chapter, the conclusions drawn from the empirical data are discussed in alignment with the research questions and aims as per Chapter 1. This chapter outlines the contributions of the study to both practice and theory, acknowledges its limitations and provides recommendations for future research.

The primary aim of this study was to explore the driving and inhibiting factors influencing female employee retention within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal, with a specific focus on multi-generational and socio-demographic differences.

Through a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 female participants across multi-generational cohorts and occupational levels. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and insights, supported by ATLAS.ti coding. The study employed strategies to ensure credibility, confirmability, transferability and authenticity throughout the research process. Below (Figure 13) is a summary of the themes found within this research.

Figure 13: Summary of 8 Themes



Source: Author's Own Work

Each theme was supported by sub-themes and linked directly to the research questions. These findings produce an understanding of the driving and inhibiting factors that influence female retention and provide a base for practical and policy-based interventions in an organisation.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

This section presents conclusions drawn from both the literature review and the empirical study. The conclusions are structured according to the specific research aims outlined in Chapter 1 and reflect the amalgamation of theoretical insights and participant experiences.

6.2.1 Specific Aims: Literature Review

Research Aim 1: To conceptualise multi-generational cohorts and the driving and inhibiting factors of the retention of females.

The literature revealed that multi-generational cohorts, Generations Z, Y, X and Baby Boomers, possess distinct values, expectations and workplace behaviours. These differences influence how females experience retention strategies. Younger cohorts (Generations Y and Z) prioritise rapid growth, flexibility and purpose-driven work, while older cohorts (Baby Boomers and Generation X) value stability, recognition and emotional safety. The literature supports the need for tailor-made retention strategies that reflect generational identity and workplace expectations. Authors such as Alferjany and Alias (2020) and Alhmoud and Rjoub (2020) show that younger generational cohorts seek growth and purpose, while older generational cohorts value stability and recognition. These differences shape how females respond to retention strategies across age groups.

Research Aim 2: To conceptualise the retention of females in the new world of work.

Retention in the new world of work is shaped by evolving workplace norms, technological integration and shifting gender roles. The literature emphasised the importance of inclusive organisational cultures, flexible work arrangements and leadership that supports emotional well-being. Female retention is no longer driven solely by compensation or promotion, it is influenced by psychological safety, value alignment and the ability to navigate personal and professional responsibilities. Authors like Codd (2023) and Coetzee and Moosa (2025) highlight the importance of psychological safety, emotional support and leadership that values lived experience. Retention is no longer just about pay but about purpose and balance.

Research Aim 3: To establish conclusions that can be drawn regarding multi-generational cohorts and the retention of females and what are the implications for retention practices.

The literature concluded that retention practices must be adaptive and inclusive. Organisations must recognise generational differences, support life-stage transitions and promote diversity in leadership. Retention strategies that are rigid or generic fail to meet the nuanced needs of female employees. The implications for practice include the need for flexible policies, inclusive leadership development and continuous engagement with employees across generational lines. Authors such as Alhmoud and Rjoub (2020) and Coetzee and Moosa (2025) highlight the need to recognise generational differences and support life-stage transitions. Rigid strategies fall short, making flexible policies and inclusive leadership essential for long-term retention.

6.2.2 Specific Aims: Empirical Study

Research Aim 1: To identify the key factors that influence employee retention from a female perspective.

The empirical findings confirmed that female retention is influenced by emotional, structural and developmental factors. Key drivers that influence employee retention for females include supportive leadership, psychological safety, career development opportunities, flexibility, value alignment and financial independence. Females are more likely to remain in organisations where they feel respected, empowered and supported through life transitions. The literature supports that female retention is shaped by emotional, structural and developmental factors. Authors such as Hammond and Coetzee (2022) highlight the importance of leadership, psychological safety and empowerment. Flexibility and financial independence also play a role as shown by Magda and Lipowska (2022) and Rubin et al. (2024).

Research Aim 2: To explore the multi-generational differences that influence employee retention strategies.

Participants across multi-generational cohorts described distinct expectations. Generations Z and Y prioritised growth, mentorship and emotional support, while Generation X and Baby Boomers valued stability and recognition. These differences influenced communication styles, leadership preferences and retention outcomes. The findings support the need for generationally responsive retention strategies. The literature supports the understanding that multi-generational differences shape retention strategies. Authors such as Alhmoud and Rjoub (2020) and Alferjany and Alias (2020) show that younger cohorts value growth and emotional support, while older generational cohorts seek stability and recognition. These differences influence leadership expectations and communication styles, reinforcing the need for tailored retention approaches.

Research Aim 3: To identify the challenges faced by female employees and how these challenges can impact their decision to stay or leave their jobs.

Challenges such as toxic work environments, discrimination, emotional labour, lack of voice and internalised oppression were consistently reported. These challenges led to disengagement, emotional fatigue and potential or actual resignation. Females who felt unsupported or undervalued were more likely to leave an organisation even when passionate

about their work. The literature reflects that female employees face challenges such as discrimination, emotional labour and lack of voice. Authors such as Codd (2023) and Zhao et al. (2024) highlight how toxic environments and limited support lead to emotional fatigue and resignation. When females feel undervalued, their decision to leave is often not about the work itself, but the conditions surrounding it.

Research Aim 4: To identify how companies can attract and retain female talent, given the unique challenges faced by females in the workplace.

Retention strategies must include empathetic leadership, flexible work arrangements, mentorship and inclusive culture. Organisations that support females through life transitions and recognise their contributions are more likely to retain females. Value alignment and financial stability were also cited as important driving factors influencing retention. The literature supports that attracting and retaining female talent requires empathetic leadership, flexibility and inclusive practices. Authors such as Coetzee and Moosa (2025) and Codd (2023) emphasise the importance of mentorship and support through life stages. Value alignment and financial stability also emerged as key factors as noted by Rubin et al. (2024).

Research Aim 5: To identify how companies can adapt their retention strategies to account for changing demographics and societal norms.

Participants emphasised the need for gender-neutral policies, shared caregiving responsibilities and inclusive leadership. Organisations must respond to evolving societal expectations by promoting equity, emotional intelligence and continuous learning. Retention strategies must reflect the lived realities of a diverse workforce. The literature supports that retention strategies must evolve with changing demographics and social norms. Authors such as Codd (2024) and Gander and Sharafizad (2025) highlight the need for inclusive leadership, gender-neutral policies and shared caregiving. Emotional intelligence and equity within the organisation are key to building workplaces that reflect diverse lived realities.

Research Aim 6: To explore the socio-demographic differences that impact employee retention strategies.

Socio-demographic factors such as age, race, cultural background and family structure influenced how females experienced the workplace. Single mothers, caregivers and females from marginalised groups described unique challenges. Retention strategies must be culturally sensitive, inclusive and responsive to these differences. The literature shows that

socio-demographic factors influence how females experience the workplace. Authors such as Codd (2023) and Zhao et al. (2024) highlight how single mothers, caregivers and females from marginalised groups face unique challenges. Retention strategies must be inclusive, culturally sensitive and responsive to these differences.

Research Aim 7: To identify how companies can create a supportive and inclusive environment for female employees and understand the impact on employee retention.

Supportive environments were characterised by psychological safety, inclusive leadership, emotional support and value alignment. Females remained committed to organisations that recognised their lived experiences and created space for authenticity, growth and mutual respect. Inclusive environments directly contributed to long-term engagement and loyalty. The literature supports that inclusive environments help retain female employees. Authors such as Snyman et al. (2023) and Coetzee and Moosa (2025) highlight the role of psychological safety, inclusive leadership and value alignment. When females feel seen and supported, they are more likely to stay committed and engaged.

6.2.3 Potential Value Add

6.2.3.1 *Theoretical Significance*

This study contributes to the field of Human Resource Management by expanding the theoretical understanding of female employee retention through the lens of multi-generational and socio-demographic diversity. The research explored how generational identity influences the driving and inhibiting factors of retention, offering a nuanced perspective that integrates gender and age-based differences into existing retention frameworks.

The study also enhances theoretical discourse by aligning the findings with management theories that address organisational behaviour, inclusion and strategic talent management. It provides insight into how evolving workplace norms, such as increased female participation, flexible work arrangements and inclusive leadership, intersect with generational expectations. These insights contribute to the development of more inclusive and adaptive retention models that reflect the realities of the modern workforce.

By identifying the specific retention needs of females across generational cohorts, the study informs theoretical frameworks that support diversity, equity and inclusion. It highlights the

importance of psychological safety, emotional support and value alignment as core components of retention theory, particularly in the context of gendered workplace experiences.

6.2.3.2 Empirical Significance

The empirical significance of this study lies in its ability to provide evidence-based insights into the retention of female employees within the service sector in KwaZulu-Natal. Through qualitative data collection and thematic analysis, the study captured real-world experiences that reflect the lived realities of female employees across generational and socio-demographic lines.

The findings offer practical evidence that supports or challenges existing assumptions about female retention, particularly in relation to generational diversity. The study closes a gap in research by identifying specific driving and inhibiting factors of retention, grounded in participant narratives. These insights provide a foundation for developing targeted retention strategies that are responsive to the needs of multi-generational female employees.

By focusing on a South African context, the study adds empirical depth to the understanding of retention in diverse organisational settings. It offers a localised perspective that can inform policy and practice within KwaZulu-Natal organisations, while also contributing to broader discussions on gender and generational equity in the workplace.

6.2.3.3 Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study is reflected in its potential to guide organisations in designing and implementing retention strategies that are inclusive, responsive and effective. The findings offer actionable insights into the challenges faced by female employees and highlight opportunities for enhancing engagement, satisfaction and loyalty.

Organisations can use the outcomes of this research to improve management practices, strengthen leadership development and create supportive environments that accommodate life-stage transitions. The study provides a roadmap for integrating flexible work arrangements, mentorship programmes and inclusive policies into everyday organisational culture.

Beyond retention, the findings have implications for broader human resource functions such as succession planning, talent management and workforce diversity. By addressing the specific needs of female employees, organisations can enhance overall performance, attract diverse talent and position themselves as employers of choice in a competitive labour market.

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study offers valuable insights into the driving and inhibiting factors influencing female employee retention across multi-generational cohorts, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study was geographically limited to organisations within the KwaZulu-Natal province, specifically within the urban service sector. While this focus allowed for rich contextual analysis, it may limit the generalisability of the findings to other provinces, industries or rural settings. Organisational cultures and retention dynamics may differ in manufacturing, education or multinational environments.

Secondly, although the study aimed to explore multi-generational and socio-demographic differences the sample was not evenly distributed across racial groups or generational cohorts. The predominance of Indian participants reflects the demographic composition of the selected organisations, but this uneven representation may have influenced the diversity of perspectives captured. Similarly, the number of participants within each generational cohort was not balanced, which may have affected the depth of comparative analysis.

Thirdly, the study relied on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. While this method was effective in capturing rich, narrative-driven insights, it is inherently subjective and dependent on participant openness. Some participants may have withheld information due to discomfort or social desirability bias, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as workplace discrimination or emotional strain.

The use of ATLAS.ti for thematic analysis enhanced the rigour of the coding process, but the interpretation of codes and themes remained reliant on the researcher's judgment. While strategies such as confirmability, transferability, authenticity and credibility were employed, the potential for researcher bias cannot be eliminated.

Lastly, the study was conducted during a period of societal transition, including post-pandemic workplace restructuring and evolving gender norms. These external factors may have

influenced participant responses and shaped their perceptions of retention in ways that may not remain consistent over time.

Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful contributions to the understanding of female retention in the South African context and offers a foundation for future research and practical application.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations based on the findings and conclusions of the study. The recommendations are structured into three categories: practice, policy and future research. Each recommendation is grounded in the empirical evidence collected and aims to support organisations in enhancing female employee retention across multi-generational cohorts.

6.4.1 Recommendations for Practice

Organisations must adopt a holistic and inclusive approach to retention that reflects the diverse needs of female employees. The following practical strategies are proposed:

Implement Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexibility was consistently identified as a driving factor influencing retention. Organisations should offer remote work options, flexible hours and adaptable leave policies that accommodate caregiving responsibilities, health needs and life-stage transitions. This is particularly important for single mothers, primary caregivers and females managing dual roles.

Foster Supportive Leadership

Leadership must be empathetic, emotionally intelligent and responsive to employee needs. Managers should be trained to recognise signs of burnout, provide constructive feedback and create psychologically safe environments. Leaders who model humility, openness and respect are more likely to retain female talent.

Create Inclusive Organisational Cultures

Organisations should actively promote diversity and inclusion across all levels. This includes representation of females in leadership roles, inclusive language in policies and safe spaces

for dialogue. Cultural sensitivity and awareness of gender dynamics must be embedded into daily practices.

Provide Career Development Opportunities

Females across all generational cohorts expressed a desire for growth. Organisations should offer mentorship programmes, training initiatives and clear pathways for advancement. Younger employees seek rapid progression and meaningful engagement, while older employees value stability and recognition.

Support During Life Transitions

Organisations must recognise and respond to the personal challenges faced by female employees. Support mechanisms such as counselling services, wellness programmes and peer support groups can help females navigate transitions such as motherhood, divorce, bereavement or trauma.

Encourage Open Communication and Feedback

Regular engagement with employees through surveys, focus groups and one-on-one sessions can help identify inhibiting factors early. Transparent communication promotes trust and ensures that employees feel heard and valued.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Policy

At a policy level, organisations should consider the following:

Develop Gender-Neutral Policies

Policies should reflect the evolving roles of females and males in the workplace, including shared parental leave, equal access to flexible work and non-discriminatory promotion criteria.

Mandate Diversity and Inclusion Training

All employees, especially those in leadership, should undergo regular training on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership and generational awareness. This ensures that diversity is not only acknowledged but actively supported.

Standardise Support Structures Across Organisations

Organisations should encourage the implementation of standardised support systems such as childcare facilities, mental health resources and flexible scheduling across sectors.

Monitor and Report Retention Metrics

Organisations should track and report gender-based retention data, including turnover rates, promotion statistics and engagement scores. This transparency can drive accountability and continuous improvement.

Figure 14 is a summary of the recommendations for practice within organisations and policies for HR and Management.

Figure 14: *Summary of Recommendations for Practice and Policy*



Source: Author's Own Work

6.4.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, further research is needed to deepen understanding and broaden applicability.

Explore Male Perspectives on Retention

Including male employees in future studies could provide comparative insights into gender dynamics and help identify shared retention strategies.

Investigate Sector-Specific Retention Factors

Future research could examine retention within other sectors such as manufacturing, education or healthcare to determine whether findings are consistent across industries.

Examine Intersectionality in Retention

Studies that explore the intersection of race, gender, age and socio-economic status could provide a deeper understanding of retention challenges and strategies.

Longitudinal Studies on Retention Outcomes

Tracking retention over time could help assess the long-term impact of inclusive practices and identify trends across generational shifts.

Evaluate Post-Pandemic Workplace Shifts

Given the ongoing evolution of hybrid work models and digital transformation, future research should assess how these changes continue to influence female retention.

6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 6 provided a comprehensive overview of the conclusions drawn from both the literature review and the empirical study. The conclusions were aligned with the specific research aims and research questions, offering a clear synthesis of the study's findings. The chapter highlighted the emotional, structural and socio-demographic factors that influence female employee retention, with particular emphasis on multi-generational differences, inclusive leadership and organisational culture.

A summary of the research aims was presented, reinforcing the key insights gained from the thematic analysis. The potential value of the study was discussed across theoretical, empirical and practical dimensions, demonstrating its contribution to the field of Human Resource Management and organisational transformation.

The limitations of the study were acknowledged, including geographic scope, sample distribution and contextual influences. These limitations provide direction for future research and underscore the importance of continued investigation into female retention strategies.

Finally, the chapter offered detailed recommendations for organisational practice, policy development and future research. These recommendations aim to support organisations in

designing inclusive, responsive and effective retention strategies that reflect the diverse realities of female employees in the 21st-century workplace.

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ANNEXURE 1

Candidate Number: _____

Position/role: _____

Race:

- African
- Coloured
- Indian
- White

Age:

- 12 - 27
- 28 - 43
- 44 - 59
- 60 - 80

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to join me today and generously volunteering to participate in my research endeavour. Your willingness to contribute to this study is invaluable as we delve into the dynamics of female retention in the workplace. I want to assure you that your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary, and you retain the right to withdraw your consent at any stage of the process, without any obligation.

In the spirit of openness and transparency, I would like to inform you that our conversation will be recorded digitally. This recording will solely serve the purpose of data collection and analysis and will be securely maintained for a period of five years. Rest assured, your anonymity is paramount, and your name will not be linked to any of the information gathered. All raw data will be kept in encrypted files only by the researcher and will be destroyed after 5 years.

I want to emphasize that there are no predetermined expectations or "right" answers in this interview. Your experiences, perspectives, and insights are what I seek to understand and appreciate. By sharing your unique journey in the workplace, you contribute to a broader understanding of the driving and inhibiting factors influencing retention among females.

As we embark on this exploration together, I encourage you to express yourself openly and honestly. Your voice matters, and your input will help shape our understanding of this crucial topic. The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes long. **If you are comfortable, I will now turn on the recorded and we may begin?**

Establishing Rapport

- Would you please tell me a bit about yourself?
- Describe your working experience thus far?

Questions for Interview

- What are the reasons that you had left your prior company?
- What motivates you to stay within this organisation?
- What do you think are the reasons females stay within specific organisations?
- Are you aware of any differences personally and professionally between yourself and other employees with specific age groups?
- If yes, What are some of the outcomes or effects that these generational differences have on the workplace?
- Why do you think females change jobs?
- What are some of the challenges you believe females might have or experience when being employed?
- Do you have any suggestions on how companies might improve to address these challenges?
- What is your ideal organisation to work for?
- What can organisations or companies do to attract and retain the multi-generational age groups?
- Do you believe that the world we are living in is changing with regards to societal norms? If yes, please elaborate on the changes.
- How do you think an organisation should manage and address these changes?
- How does your current organisation support you?
- Do you believe your company is a great place to work for being a female?
- If possible, would you recommend other females to work at your organisation.
- Do you believe a supportive and inclusive organisation has an impact on retention?

Conclusion

Thank you for assisting me today and providing me with your experiences and perspectives. I appreciate your openness and honesty. Your input has provided valuable insights.

- **Do you have any further questions / comments?**

Once my research has been completed and my dissertation published, I will provide you with a copy for you to read. Once again, I extend my deepest gratitude for your participation and willingness to contribute to this important research effort.

ANNEXURE 2



Ethical clearance: Approved

Research permission: 3812

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by Denelle Gopal under the supervision of Nadia Ferreira, a Professor in the Department of Human Resource Management towards a Master of Commerce in Business Management (HRM) at the University of South Africa.

By participating in this project, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings.

It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us to understand multi- generational factors influencing employee retention of females. You are, however, under no obligation to participate and you can withdraw from the study prior to completing the interview. If you choose to participate in it will take up approx. 45 -60 minutes of your time.

You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will contribute to the field of Human Resource Management. We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing this interview. The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of our possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual. Your answers will not be linked to any individual person.

The interview will be recorded and videotaped via MSTEAMS or conducted face to face and recorded, for approx. 60 minutes. The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed hard copies will be shredded and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the interview.



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The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out our (the researcher and supervisors) possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual. Your answers will not be linked to any individual person.

The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Economics and Management Sciences (Human Resource Department). The primary researcher, Denelle Gopal, can be contacted during office hours at 0810472346. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Human Resource Department, Dr Jo-Anne Botha, Chair of College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Human Resource Department

E-mail: Bothaj1@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.



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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Research title:

Multi-Generational Differences: Females' Perspectives on Factors Influencing Employee Retention

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname : _____

Participant Signature : _____ Date _____

Researcher's Name & Surname: Denelle Gopal

Researcher's signature: _____ Date _____



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