



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Generational diversity and reporting of unethical practices: A cross-country analysis

Manuel Nuno de Azevedo Lopes

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By

Manuel Nuno de Azevedo Lopes

under the supervision of
Prof. Helena Gonçalves
Prof. Mariana Cunha

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Resumo

Esta tese explora as complexidades da tomada de decisões éticas de trabalhadores de diferentes gerações em 13 países, utilizando dados do inquérito *Ethics at Work 2021* do Institute of Business Ethics do Reino Unido. Ao focar-se nas atitudes de consciencialização e nas respostas a más condutas éticas nos locais de trabalho, o estudo desafia as suposições tradicionais sobre a superioridade relacionada com a idade no raciocínio ético. Baseando-se numa extensa literatura, os resultados sugerem que as gerações mais jovens podem, de facto, possuir valores éticos mais sólidos, o que reflete mudanças sociais que priorizam a ética em contextos profissionais.

Contrariamente às teorias geracionais convencionais, que afirmam que o julgamento ético é superior nos trabalhadores mais velhos, este estudo propõe uma teoria contraditória: que os trabalhadores mais jovens podem superar os seus colegas mais velhos quanto à consciencialização ética e ao comportamento proativo. Através de uma análise dos dados do inquérito e de uma discussão sobre as dinâmicas diferenciadas da voz dos trabalhadores em diferentes gerações e países, o estudo esclarece os fatores que influenciam o *speak up*, as consequências do *speak up* e o papel da diversidade cultural.

Este estudo evidencia a interação complexa entre as diferenças geracionais, a consciência ética e os comportamentos dos trabalhadores. Ao reconhecer e implementar estas dinâmicas, as organizações podem promover ambientes de trabalho mais inclusivos e éticos, propícios ao bem-estar dos trabalhadores e ao sucesso organizacional.

Palavras-chave: Tomada de decisão ética, diferenças geracionais e culturais, ética no local de trabalho, consciência ética.

Abstract

This thesis delves into the complexities of ethical decision-making among employees of different generations across 13 countries, using data from the UK Institute of Business Ethics' Ethics at Work 2021 employee survey. Focusing on the awareness and response behaviors towards ethical misconduct within workplaces, the study challenges traditional assumptions regarding age-related superiority in ethical reasoning. Drawing upon an extensive body of literature, the findings suggest that younger generations may indeed possess stronger ethical values, indicative of societal shifts prioritizing ethics in professional settings.

Contrary to conventional generational theories, which posit older employees' superior ethical judgment, this study proposes a contradictory hypothesis: that younger employees may surpass their older counterparts in ethical awareness and proactive behavior.

Through an analysis of survey data and a discussion of nuanced dynamics of employee voice across different generations and countries, the study sheds light on factors influencing speak up behavior, consequences of speaking up, and the role of cultural diversity.

This study shows the intricate interplay between generational differences, ethical awareness, and response behaviors. By recognizing and addressing these dynamics, organizations can strive towards fostering more inclusive and ethically sound work environments conducive to employee well-being and organizational success.

Keywords: ethical decision-making, generational and cultural differences, workplace ethics, ethical awareness.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Generational diversity in today's workplaces has emerged as a critical area of investigation, driven by its potential to shape organizational dynamics and culture. This thesis embarks on an exploration of the intricate relationship between generational differences and ethical decision-making among employees, navigating through diverse cultural backgrounds. This study aims to enrich existing literature by unraveling how different generations, from different countries, perceive and respond to ethical issues, particularly in the context of reporting unethical practices.

In an era where ethical considerations are increasingly central to organizational agendas, understanding employees' ethical awareness and behaviors holds paramount importance. This work delves into the concept of generational diversity, shedding light on the distinct values and perspectives held by generations such as Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Such understanding is crucial for effectively managing intergenerational dynamics within workplaces.

The reporting of unethical practices is essential for both organizational performance and employee well-being, represented by the acts of employee voice. Yet, barriers such as fear of retaliation and skepticism about the efficacy of voicing concerns often hinder this vital process. Nurturing a culture of open

communication becomes imperative in fostering an environment where employees feel empowered to voice their concerns without hesitation.

This work expands current understandings of the complex relations between generational diversity, ethical decision-making, and the reporting of unethical practices in workplace settings. By crossing diverse cultural contexts, organizations can achieve the insights needed to cultivate ethical cultures and amplify employee voice, thereby fostering sustainable organizational success.

In line with this investigation, two main research questions guide this study:

1. Are employees of different ages and from different countries equally likely to speak up about ethical issues or report unethical behavior in the workplace, and what stops them from doing so?
2. Do employees of different ages and from different countries exhibit similar levels of awareness when it comes to identifying ethical misconducts in the workplace?

To address these questions, a quantitative approach is deemed the most appropriate methodology. Considering the research problem which involves analyzing answers to a questionnaire with only defined options and no open-ended questions, a quantitative methodology is ideal. This approach allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data, facilitating a structured examination of the phenomena under investigation.

In this study we find that Millennials consistently exhibit the highest awareness of ethical misconduct in the workplace across various countries, with Gen Z closely following. Both generations also demonstrate the most proactive behavior

in speaking up about ethical concerns. On the contrary, Baby Boomers and Veterans consistently exhibit the lowest levels of awareness and are least likely to speak up.

The fear of jeopardizing one's job is a prevalent deterrent across all generations, while skepticism about corrective action being taken and concerns about alienation or retaliation also influence employees' decision not to speak up. Millennials express the greatest satisfaction after addressing misconduct they've noticed, followed by Gen Z. However, both generations are also most likely to experience retaliation for speaking up, particularly in countries like the US and South Africa.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on generational diversity and the reporting of unethical practices, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of how different generations perceive and respond to ethical dilemmas in the workplace, and the factors influencing employees' decisions to speak up or remain silent about unethical behavior. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed in this study, detailing the quantitative approach used to analyze responses to the structured questionnaire and establish causal relationships within the framework developed. Chapter 4 presents the main findings. Chapter 5 discusses the previous results and concludes, highlights the theoretical and practical implications, the main limitations, and recommends future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The concept of generational diversity and its influence on workplace dynamics has gained significant attention in both academic literature and the mainstream media. Understanding how different generations perceive and respond to ethical issues in the workplace is crucial for organizations aiming to foster ethical cultures and effective reporting mechanisms. This literature review aims to explore relevant studies and insights related to generational diversity and the reporting of unethical practices and to frame the topic of this thesis in the broader context of existing research.

2.1. Theories and Key Concepts

In recent years, there has been a growing influence from civil society and stakeholders on organizations, compelling them to prioritize ethical considerations. This includes integrity, transparency, and accountability (Elkington and Rowlands, 1999; EC, 2011). The recognition of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of ethical practices has reinforced the need for companies to integrate social, environmental, and ethical considerations into their operations and core strategies in collaboration with stakeholders. Employees, as key stakeholders, play a significant role in this integration (Chen *et al.*, 2020; Greenwood and Anderson, 2009).

Contemporary research indicates an increasing ethical awareness among employees as organizations incorporate ethics and sustainability into various aspects of their business strategy, including human resources (Braga *et al.*, 2021; Greenwood and Simmons, 2004). However, not all employees exhibit the same level of interest and knowledge regarding ethical issues. Variations are observed based on gender, education, age, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and other factors (Weber *et al.*, 2019). Gender and age, in particular, have been subjects of scholars' attention, but their findings have been contradictory.

Previous studies, drawing from gender socialization (Gilligan *et al.*, 1993), life stage (Kohlberg, 1981), and generational theories (Inglehart, 1977; Strauss *et al.*, 1991), have explored the ethical associations with gender and age. Age-related research has reported that older individuals tend to exhibit stronger ethical beliefs. Contradictory findings suggest that younger groups, especially Millennials, may display higher ethical values (Glover *et al.*, 2022; Peterson *et al.*, 2001; Ruegger and King, 2013; Boyd, 2010; Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2017; Meriac *et al.*, 2010; Weber, 2017). However, studies simultaneously considering cross-cultural, gender, and age/generation differences have been limited (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Cugin, 2012; Curtis *et al.*, 2012; Egri and Ralston, 2004; Ober-Domagalska and Czernecka, 2019).

The theoretical framework builds on organizational ethics, emphasizing the importance of ethical decision-making in preventing unethical conduct. Cognitive moral development theories, such as Kohlberg's stages (1969, 1981), inform the understanding of ethical decision-making as a developmental process influenced by individual experiences. Treviño's person–situation interactionist model extends this understanding to organizational contexts, highlighting the role of situational variables in moderating the cognition/behavior relationship,

particularly for managers who serve as moral guides for employees (Treviño and Brown, 2005; Weber, 1990, p. 93).

The age dimension is examined through the perspective of Kohlberg's life stage theory, considering moral development as a process that progresses with life experiences. Socialization theories are invoked to explain age-related differences in ethical reasoning, attributing them to ongoing social influences shaping ethical behaviors (Thalmayer *et al.*, 2019; Milfont *et al.*, 2016; Gouveia *et al.*, 2015; Robinson, 2013; Glover *et al.*, 2022). The formulated hypothesis suggests that older employees will score higher on ethical judgment in the workplace than younger employees. Generational theories, based on the work of Mannheim (1970) and Inglehart (1977), suggest a contradictory hypothesis that younger employees may score higher on ethical judgment in the workplace than older employees.

Currently, the American workforce comprises a significant number of Baby Boomers, influenced by various factors like reduced fertility rates, unstable retirement systems, and advancements in healthcare (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2015). This unique demographic mix presents a compelling need to examine if generational disparities exist concerning the endorsement of the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), which plays a pivotal role in 21st-century skill development.

PWE, initially described by Max Weber (1958), underscores principles like egalitarianism, diligence, and the significance of hard work in economic prosperity. Although initially associated with Protestant Christianity, PWE's contemporary concept is non-religious and emphasizes attributes like work centrality, time efficiency, and ethical conduct (Miller *et al.*, 2002). Various studies have shown that high PWE correlates with better job performance, commitment,

and lower social loafing (Meriac *et al.*, 2013; Smrt and Karau, 2011).

In addition to these findings, many researchers have underlined the necessity of studying precursors to 21st-century skills, with PWE being a crucial precursor. Griffin *et al.* (2012) identified five essential collaborative problem-solving skills: participation, perspective-taking, social regulation, task regulation, and learning and knowledge building. High PWE supports the optimization of these skills by fostering perseverance, goal setting, and a mindset of delayed gratification (Griffin *et al.*, 2012).

Existing literature has shown mixed results concerning generational differences in PWE endorsement. While some studies found minimal differences (Hite *et al.*, 2015; Khosravi, 2014; Real *et al.*, 2010), others reported significant disparities (Jobe, 2014; Meriac *et al.*, 2010). However, Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) highlighted the methodological limitations in studying these differences, calling for a more nuanced approach to interpreting cross-generational data.

In summary, gender and age are identified as important factors influencing ethical decision-making, and this thesis aims to contribute to existing knowledge by focusing on age similarities/differences in ethical judgment at work using data from a diverse set of countries.

2.2. Generational Diversity

Generational diversity has gained increased attention globally over the past two decades, spurred by significant shifts in global demographics. The aging reality faced by several Western countries contrasts with India's demographic dividend, where the average age is 28 (Worldometer). This demographic landscape poses challenges for both domestic and multinational organizations in India, particularly in the context of rapid growth. Rapid-growth firms, defined as those with a three-year compounded sales growth rate of 80% or above, face unique challenges (Barringer *et al.*, 2005; p. 664). Such companies, prevalent in sectors like IT services, retail, financial services, and healthcare, experience notable growth in employment and sales.

The term "generation" has been a subject of exploration across various disciplines, with scholars attempting to unravel its complexities (Joshi *et al.*, 2010). Despite skepticism from some, generational studies have a well-established history in the social sciences, aiming to identify the distinct characteristics of different generations. A generation is defined as an "identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66).

Generational cohorts are identifiable groups sharing birth years, age location, and experiencing significant life events during critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). These cohorts form unique societal frameworks and perspectives based on the historical context that shapes their formative years. Although individual differences exist within generations, there is a relative consensus among members regarding shared values and personality traits, especially in areas such as work values and personality (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generational differences are theorized to stem from major influences during early socialization, impacting the development of personality, values, beliefs, and expectations that persist into adulthood. Shifts in the socio-cultural environment over time, including significant events experienced by one generation but not others, contribute to these differences (Noble and Schewe, 2003; Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Research in this field has predominantly focused on the US, UK, and Canada, using the widely accepted practitioner definition of generations: Veterans, Baby boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Veterans

Veterans, also known by various names such as the Adaptive generation, Loyalists, Traditionalists, pre-Baby boomers, Silent generation, Matures, Greatest generation, Builders, Industrialists, Depression babies, Radio babies, and the GI Joe generation, constitute a group with an ambiguous timeframe. The period between 1920/22/25 to 1943/45 is often considered as a cutoff for this generation. Shaped by the Great Depression, World War II, and the advent of television networks and mass marketing, Veterans hold education as a dream and leisure as a reward for hard work. Their aspirations include life stability, a predictable career ladder, loyalty, consistency, and a high value on integrity (Kim, 2008). This generation is characterized by dedication, hard work, and a respect for authority (Rood, 2011). Security and status stand out as the primary motivators for Veterans (Schaming, 2005).

Baby Boomers

The generation often referred to as Baby Boomers, also known as the Woodstock generation, Sandwich generation, and Vietnam generation, is a cohort that experienced both post-war stress and prosperity. Born between 1940/42-46 and 1960/63-64, Baby boomers were actively engaged in significant social changes,

including the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam War, and women's movement. This generation grew up in two-parent households, and they are often described as being idealistic and optimistic, always seeking opportunities for progress (Chen and Choi, 2008).

However, Baby boomers are sometimes labeled as 'self-absorbed,' facing pressures related to caring for aging parents and their own children. This generation exhibits a lack of respect for loyalty, authority, and social institutions, often prioritizing self-gratification. Their primary motivators are money, a corner office, and self-realization (Schaming, 2005).

Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boomer generation was profoundly influenced by pivotal events such as the Vietnam War, the struggle for Civil Rights, and the tragic assassinations of iconic leaders like President Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Smola and Sutton, 2002). As a cohort born during times of economic expansion, Baby Boomers embraced a sense of entitlement and questioned societal norms. They viewed work as a meaningful pursuit leading to self-fulfillment and exhibited a fierce loyalty to employers, possibly extending from the loyalty displayed by their parents toward each other (Wong *et al.*, 2008). Baby Boomers' definition of maturity challenged conventional norms, emphasizing childlessness and dual careers. Technology, for them, was seen as a commodity rather than an integral part of life (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generation X

Generation X, also known as Baby busters, Post boomers, Slackers, the Shadow generation, Generation 2000, and the MTV generation, spans birth years from 1961/64-65 to 1975-83. Having endured periods of economic prosperity, the early 1980s recession, downsizing, and family insecurity due to high divorce rates, Gen

X are characterized by social liberalism, environmentalism, conservative family values, realism, self-reliance, entrepreneurship, independence, market savvy, a fun-loving nature, and techno-literacy (Rood, 2011). Seeking a balance between work and leisure, Gen X is described as realistic, though some studies characterize them as aimless and apathetic (Morgan and Ribbens, 2006).

Born between 1965 and 1980, Generation X emerged from a different socio-economic landscape shaped by events such as the first Iraq War, President Bill Clinton's sex scandal, and a climate of school shootings (Smola and Sutton 2002). This generation experienced economic challenges and emphasized independence, extending adolescence by frequently leaving and returning home. Their hesitance towards long-term commitments was possibly influenced by the increasing divorce rates during their childhood (Wong *et al.* 2008). Unlike Baby Boomers, Generation X viewed technology as a fact of life and prioritized a work-life balance. Independence and autonomy at work were highly valued, and they aimed for a balance between professional and personal spheres (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Twenge *et al.*, 2010).

Millennials

Generation Y, also known as Millennials, Next generation, Generation me, Echo boomers, Nexters, the Boomlet, Digital generation, Dot com generation, Net Generation, N-Gens, Generation WWW, Digital natives, Nintendo generation, Sunshine generation, the Do or Die generation, the Wannabes, the Nothing is sacred generation, Cyberkids, the Feel good generation, and Non-nuclear family generation, is just beginning to enter the workforce with birth years ranging from 1977/79/81/82/84/94/97/2000. Growing up in the era of globalization, employment outsourcing, foreign investments, and advanced information and communication technologies, Millennials are characterized by confidence, assertiveness, entitlement, optimism, goal orientation, idealism, a penchant for

voicing opinions, and a strong work orientation. Connected “24*7” on social networking sites, they are technologically adept and perceived as healthier and more economically secure than earlier generations. Millennials have high expectations of themselves and their employers, believing in work-life balance (Armour, 2005).

The Millennial generation, typically born between 1981 and 1999 (Meriac *et al.* 2010), has been shaped by transformative events like the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the second Iraq war, and the election of America's first African American president. Compared to the Baby Boomers and Generation X, Millennials are relatively new to the workforce, resulting in fewer studies exploring their generational characteristics. Millennials are often described as full of promise, confident, team-oriented, and achievement-oriented. They value work-life balance, the flexibility enabled by technology, and collaborative, team-oriented work environments. Technology is a central aspect of their lives, distinguishing them from earlier generations (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Job security holds less importance for Millennials, and they seek transparency in decision-making processes within organizations (Hart, 2006).

Generation Z

Generation Z also known as Gen Z, Post-Millennials and iGen can be defined as a cohort characterized by their tech-fluent abilities, strong social media connections, entrepreneurial/self-reliant interests, and unique retail spending habits (Palley, 2012; Turner, 2015; Deep Focus, 2015; Beall, 2017; The Center for Generational Kinetics - CGK, 2016). They are described as individuals who value face time with their boss, seek flexible career paths, and desire to explore various industries and roles simultaneously (Tysiac, 2017).

Born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s, Gen Z members expect

competitive salaries and prioritize hard work, ambition, and self-starting attitudes (Schwieger and Ladwig, 2018). They are motivated to plan for their future and value skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, communication, and a strong work ethic (Schwieger and Ladwig, 2018).

They represent 32% of the global population and constitutes a significant portion of entry-level employees (ManpowerGroup, 2023a). They prioritize work-life balance, mental health support, and seek organizations that champion diversity, equity, and inclusion (Deloitte, 2023; Gurchiek, 2023; Monster, 2023). Tech-savvy and independent, they prefer digital communication and individual work, yet value social connections and feedback (Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021; Pichler *et al.*, 2021). Their career decisions align with personal values, emphasizing the importance of a multicultural and inclusive workplace (Deloitte, 2023).

Recent political and social unrest, along with the impact of COVID-19, have led to the normalization of mental health challenges among Gen Zers, who prioritize work-life balance and mental health support (Greenwood and Anas, 2021; Deloitte, 2023). They actively seek social connections, regular feedback, and mentorship-like relationships in the workplace (Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021; Pichler *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, they express interest in organizations that actively champion diversity, equity, and inclusion, expecting genuine manifestations of these values rather than mere marketing claims (Graczyk-Kucharska and Erickson, 2020; Pichler *et al.*, 2021; Deloitte, 2023).

Despite variations in defining generations, the focus remains on inter-generational differences, impacting various aspects of people management. Five categories of variables related to work, employment, and organizations—work and life values, motivators, professional growth, attitudes to rules and authority, and attitudes to learning and work environment—show significant differences

across generations. These differences can lead to conflicts within the workplace (Karp and Sirias, 2001).

The aging workforce introduces challenges to economic policies, with a pertinent concern being labor productivity. The potential negative impact on overall economic growth arises if older workers, on average, exhibit lower productivity than their younger counterparts. Previous empirical research has lent support to this concern. This challenge is amplified at the organizational level, where the age structure is often dominated by baby boomers, posing potential human resource management challenges. The simultaneous retirement of numerous senior experts may create difficulties in effectively and equitably replenishing the workforce, necessitating proactive planning to anticipate these exits and facilitate smooth transitions.

2.3. Reporting of unethical practices

In 2010, a national campaign titled “If You See Something, Say Something” was initiated by the US Department of Homeland Security. This slogan is prominently displayed on signs and billboards across the nation. The concept embodied by this campaign appears straightforward, not only within the realm of national security but also in the context of employer-employee relationships. The underlying principle is that if individuals observe potential issues, they should communicate these concerns to someone in a position of authority. However, within various work environments, the act of speaking up about observed concerns is far from simple. Employees routinely encounter situations during their work, interacting with customers and colleagues, where they identify brewing problems, inefficiencies, inappropriate activities, opportunities for improvement, or strategic issues. Despite these observations, they may refrain from communicating these insights to relevant individuals within their

organization, opting for silence instead of engaging in voice.

The term "voice" has a rich history in organizational sciences, particularly in procedural justice literature (e.g., Bies and Shapiro, 1988; Folger, 1977). It is crucial to establish a clear definition for the purpose of this discussion. Aligning with recent research, employee voice is defined as the informal and discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions related to work issues. This communication is directed towards individuals who can take appropriate action, with the intent of bringing about improvement or change (Detert and Burris, 2007, Morrison, 2011, Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008, Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). It constitutes a form of extra-role upward communication behavior that challenges the status quo, aiming for constructive change (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). The content of the message can vary, encompassing ideas for improvement or information about serious problems, referred to as promotive or suggestion-focused voice and prohibitive or problem-focused voice, respectively (Liang *et al.*, 2012; Morrison, 2011).

The target of the voice message can also vary, but the focus here is on upward and internal voice, directed at a supervisor or another higher-positioned individual. The discussion is further restricted to informal voice, with a suggestion to refer to Klaas *et al.* (2012) for a comprehensive review of formal voice mechanisms such as suggestion systems, grievance procedures, or unions.

On the other hand, silence, a more recent construct, pertains to withholding potentially important input or instances where an employee refrains from sharing their thoughts (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Unlike mere lack of speech, silence denotes not speaking up when one possesses suggestions, concerns, information about a problem, or a divergent point of view that could be valuable. The reluctance to speak up is a crucial aspect of silence

(Milliken *et al.*, 2003, Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

The question of why employees choose to speak up or remain silent when holding valuable information is complex, given the multitude of factors influencing this decision. Nevertheless, it is a crucial query for organizational scholars, as the withholding of voice within an organizational context can have significant repercussions on performance and employee morale. Evidence suggests that voice is often stifled in many organizations, particularly when the information conveyed may be perceived as negative or threatening (Detert *et al.*, 2010, Milliken *et al.*, 2003).

Organizational leaders may be unaware of this tendency toward silence, assuming that “no news is good news” and that they are well-informed about everything within the organization. This lack of awareness may lead to a distorted understanding of organizational performance and support for decisions and practices. Recognizing the reluctance and fear that employees may experience when it comes to upward voice is crucial, as highlighted by Detert and Treviño (2010, p. 264), who noted that “Many well-meaning leaders are unintentionally reinforcing an authority-ranking social frame that is so pervasive and fundamental that most employees enter organizations expecting to ‘tread lightly’ around those in power.”

Given these dynamics, there is a need to not only comprehend the factors motivating employees to speak up but also to understand the factors inhibiting employee voice. While these may sometimes be two sides of the same coin, a focused examination of the latter may reveal factors not immediately apparent when studying the former. The dynamics also underscore the importance of understanding the individual and organizational implications of both voice and silence.

Promoting a culture of open communication holds inherent value as it can contribute to organizational performance and competitive advantage through enhanced learning processes (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2004). This is supported by studies indicating that improved organizational learning can lead to sustainable competitive advantage (D'Aveni *et al.*, 2010; Edmondson, 2008). Different learning modes, such as exploratory divergent learning and exploitative convergent learning, are believed to have distinct effects on organizational capacities (De Geus, 2002; Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Jansen *et al.*, 2006).

To counteract the constraints associated with convergent learning, which fosters "shared beliefs about speaking up" (Bashshur and Oc, 2015), employees are encouraged to propose ideas that generate new organizational knowledge (Salge and Vera, 2013; Burns *et al.*, 2014). Employee voice challenging the status quo is considered beneficial for organizational improvement (LePine and Van Dyne, 1998), providing an opportunity for individuals to address concerns and disagreements within the workplace (McCabe and Lewin, 1992). Speaking up becomes particularly crucial in the context of whistleblowing on corporate wrongdoing, closely associated with employee voice (Dundon *et al.*, 2004).

However, a fear of speaking up can lead to a detrimental organizational culture (Brown and Worthington, 2017). Instances such as the Volkswagen case highlight how fear may prevent whistleblowing and contribute to a climate of insecurity among employees (McGee and Wright, 2016). Various factors, including perceptions of relevance, identity, and discourse, may inhibit employees from expressing their concerns (Bashshur and Oc, 2015).

PsySafe, defined as the freedom to speak up and promote verbal communication (Edmondson and Lei, 2014), plays a crucial role in fostering a culture, where

speaking up is legitimized rather than viewed as risky behavior (Detert and Burris, 2007). However, organizational elites may perceive PsySafe as problematic (Jones and Kelly, 2014), leading to variations in voice behavior within the same organization (Detert and Edmondson, 2011). Individual differences and contextual conditions further contribute to the complexity of PsySafe practices (Schreurs *et al.*, 2015; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

Recognizing that PsySafe operates at various levels, including organizational, team, and individual levels, highlights the need for a dynamic understanding (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Encouraging PsySafe at one level does not necessarily translate to other levels, and contradictions at one level can lead to paradoxical tensions at other levels (Edmondson, 2008). Therefore, the positive effects of speaking up need to be critically examined, considering the potential paradoxes that may arise within an organization (Cohen, 1950; Heller, 1961).

Voice behavior, characterized by suggesting improvements to the existing situation (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998), presents a complex dilemma for contemporary organizations. In highly competitive environments, organizations increasingly depend on employee voice for early identification of issues and opportunities (Burris, 2012), as well as for enhancing unit performance (Detert, Burris, Harrison, and Martin, 2013). Nevertheless, prevailing research indicates that voice behavior, given its change-oriented nature, is less prevalent compared to affiliative behaviors like helping (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001; Van Dyne, Kamdar, and Joireman, 2008). The reluctance to engage in voice behavior is often attributed to employees perceiving it as futile and unlikely to make a difference (Detert and Treviño, 2010; Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin, 2003; Morrison, 2000). Conversely, when employees believe that their voice can yield desired outcomes (high instrumentality), they are more inclined to express their opinions (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, and Dutton, 1998; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2012).

From the perspective of voice instrumentality, the challenge of voice behavior is intensified by cultural diversity. While cultural diversity enhances the value of employee voice for organizations (Dahlin, Weingart, and Hinds, 2005), it may also contribute to the ambiguity of norms governing effective voice, diminishing the belief in its efficacy. This ambiguity arises because individuals from different cultures may behave based on diverse scripts in the absence of explicit role-related guidelines (Stone-Romero, Stone, and Salas, 2003, p. 331). Given that voice behavior is often considered discretionary and lacks clear role prescriptions (Morrison, 2011), voice norms become more uncertain as cultural differences between the voicer and the voice target increase.

Despite the extensive body of work on voice (refer to the meta-analysis by Chamberlin, Newton, and LePine, 2017), most studies have overlooked the cultural backgrounds of both the voicer and the voice target. This gap limits our comprehension of voice dynamics in culturally diverse settings and how to harness the diverse perspectives of a culturally varied workforce. An exception is the study by Troster and van Knippenberg (2012), revealing that subordinates culturally dissimilar to other team members were less likely to voice their opinions to the leader, unless the leader shared their nationality. This underscores the challenge of speaking up to culturally dissimilar voice targets and highlights that the leader's openness can mitigate the negative impact of cultural dissimilarity on member voice behavior.

In summary, it is essential for employees to speak up about potential issues in the workplace, as silence can have detrimental effects on organizational performance and employee morale. A culture of open communication, or PsySafe, is crucial for fostering an environment, where speaking up is encouraged. However, promoting voice behavior may face challenges,

particularly in culturally diverse settings, where voice norms are ambiguous. Understanding the dynamics of voice and silence is essential for organizational leaders and scholars, as it can have significant implications for performance and employee well-being.

2.4. Main findings and conclusions

This literature review explores the concepts of generational diversity, ethical decision-making, and the reporting of unethical practices in the workplace. It covers theories and key concepts related to generational diversity and how they might shape individual and organizational perspectives on ethical behavior and reporting.

Furthermore, it examines factors influencing voice behavior in the workplace, including cultural diversity, cultural intelligence (CQ), and psychological safety (PsySafe), and how these factors might influence the likelihood of employees speaking up or remaining silent about ethical issues.

Within this literature, we find that:

1. Generational differences do exist, but they are complex and multifaceted. While older employees may have more experience and maturity that could contribute to stronger ethical judgment, younger employees may exhibit higher levels of confidence and idealism that could also impact their ethical decision-making. Additionally, cultural differences may play a role in shaping individual perspectives on ethical behavior and reporting.

2. The concept of voice in the workplace is essential but can be influenced by

various factors, including cultural diversity and the perceived effectiveness of speaking up. Employees may feel more comfortable speaking up in psychologically safe environments or when they possess cultural intelligence that allows them to navigate diverse cultural contexts.

3. There is a need for more research that considers the interactions between generational diversity, cultural diversity, and voice behavior in the workplace. Understanding how these factors intersect could provide valuable insights into how organizations can promote ethical behavior and effective reporting mechanisms.

In conclusion, this literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge related to generational diversity, ethical decision-making, and the reporting of unethical practices in the workplace. It highlights the complexity of these issues and the need for further research to better understand how organizations can promote ethical behavior and reporting mechanisms in diverse cultural contexts.

This work adds to the existing literature by highlighting the complex nature of generational diversity and its impact on ethical decision-making and reporting in the workplace. By examining the relationship between generational diversity, cultural diversity and voice behavior, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing ethical behavior and reporting in the workplace.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Data

This chapter describes several phases of the research. First, the research questions will be defined. Subsequently, the methodological procedures relating to the characterization of the sample data and the statistical analysis methods will be described.

3.1. Research Questions

The main objective of this work is to study the dynamics of employees' ethical behavior and awareness when faced with compromised ethical standards, by answering the following research questions:

1. Are employees of different ages and from different countries equally likely to speak up about ethical issues or report unethical behavior in the workplace, and what stops them from doing so?
2. Do employees of different ages and from different countries exhibit similar levels of awareness when it comes to identifying ethical misconducts in the workplace?

3.2. Methodology

Considering the research problem which involves analyzing answers to a questionnaire with only defined options and no open-ended questions, a quantitative approach is the most appropriate choice.

The nature of the research problem necessitates a quantitative approach. The goal is to analyze the responses to a structured questionnaire, where the questions are limited to defined options and do not encourage open-ended responses. A quantitative methodology is ideal for this scenario because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data.

Quantitative research is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. The final written report has a set structure consisting of introduction, literature and theory, methods, results, and discussion. In the quantitative method, quantifiable factors and numerical data are highlighted. This method aims to measure the incidence of different points of view and opinions within a chosen sample (Park and Park, 2016). The structured questionnaire has produced data that can be readily quantified, categorized, and statistically analyzed. By using numerical data, it will be possible to obtain objective statistics and metrics, which align well with the objectives of quantitative research. This will allow for clear and objective conclusions from the data, which can be tested for statistical significance.

Furthermore, a quantitative approach allows for the precise measurement of variables and the establishment of causal relationships between variables. This

makes it possible to test specific hypotheses and theories, providing a rigorous and systematic framework for this study.

Additionally, the structured nature of a quantitative research design ensures that biases are minimized, and the research findings can be generalized to a larger population. This is particularly important in this investigation, as it aims to draw conclusions that can be applied beyond the immediate sample.

In summary, the quantitative approach is the most suitable to answer this research problem because it enables the collection and analysis of numerical data from a structured questionnaire. This will allow for the objective testing of hypotheses, the establishment of causal relationships, and the generalization of findings to a larger population.

3.3. Data and Sample

To address the research questions of this study, we use data from the "Ethics at Work: 2021 International Survey of Employees" conducted by the Institute of Business Ethics (IBE). The survey provides comprehensive insights into employees' attitudes towards ethics in the workplace across 13 different countries. By leveraging this dataset, the study aims to analyze generational differences in reporting unethical practices and perceptions of business ethics in diverse cultural contexts.

The survey encompassed a total of 9834 respondents across 13 different countries (United States, Spain, United Kingdom, Netherlands, South Africa, Australia, France, New Zealand, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and Portugal) with

roughly 750 working adults (aged 18 and above) in each country forming the sample. Data collection took place in May 2021. During the fieldwork, loose nationally representative quotas were established in each market, considering factors such as age, gender, and region. These quotas ensured that the composition of the working adult population in each market remained faithful to reality, avoiding under- or over-representation of any specific subgroup. Consequently, the sample is deemed to be a reliable representation of the working adult population in the countries under scrutiny (IBE, 2021, p. 39).

The survey was conducted online, in the native language of each surveyed country. To eliminate potential biases in responses to sensitive questions, the questions were randomized. In some cases, the percentages may not sum to an exact 100% due to factors such as rounding, multiple response options, or selections like "don't know" or "prefer not to say."

This sample comprised 4675 male and 5139 female individuals, with 1121 respondents categorized as young (aged 18–24 years), 4259 as middle-aged (25–44 years), and 4454 as older adults (45+ years). Additionally, within the dataset, there was a subset of 3727 participants identifying themselves as managers, consisting of 2082 under the age of 45 and 1645 over the age of 45. Moreover, the respondents work in a variety of different sectors, with the majority being in the Health, Education, and Retail sectors.

The identification and definition of generations suggested by the literature have many variations (Maloni *et al.*, 2019), especially regarding age limits, although the existence of five generations is commonly accepted (see Table 1).

Generations	Age
Veterans, Traditionalists, Silent generation (before 1945)	78+
Baby Boomers, Boomers (1946–1964)	59-77
Generation X, Gen X (1965–1979)	44-58
Generation Y, Gen Y, Millennials (1980–1994)	29-43
Generation Z, Gen Z, Post-Millennials, iGen (1995–2012)	11-28

Table 1: Commonly accepted generations

The sample consisted of 1835 individuals from Generation Z, 3367 Millennials, 2902 Generation X, 1693 Baby Boomers and 37 Veterans.

3.4. Procedure

Two questions from the Ethics at Work 2021 survey were utilized to gauge individuals' likelihood of speaking up about ethical issues or reporting unethical behavior in the workplace: "Q4. During the past year at work, have you been aware of any conduct by your employer or colleagues that you thought violated either the law or your organization's ethical standards?" and "Q6. Did you raise or speak up about any of your concerns with management, another appropriate person, or through any other mechanism?". The possible responses to these questions included: 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Prefer not to say.' These questions help us analyze whether individuals' age influences their willingness to speak up and report unethical conduct in the workplace, and whether these tendencies vary across different countries.

The next phase involves understanding the potential reasons influencing employees' decisions not to report unethical behaviors and share their concerns. For this, we examine the following question: "Q9. Which of the following, if any, influenced your decision not to raise or speak up about your concerns?" This question offers multiple options as answers:

- a) I felt it was none of my business.
- b) I felt I might jeopardise my job.
- c) I did not believe that corrective action would be taken.
- d) I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues.
- e) I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker by management.
- f) I did not know who to contact.
- g) I thought that it was common practice.
- h) I thought it would be raised by someone else.
- i) I thought that they already knew about it.
- j) I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time.
- k) Other.
- l) Prefer not to say.

Finally, using the following two survey questions, we aim to understand the mindset of employees who spoke up and reported misconducts and whether they felt it had any negative impact on their careers: “Q7. After raising or speaking up about your concerns, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the outcome?”, in which “Very satisfied”, “Fairly satisfied”, “Fairly dissatisfied”, “Very dissatisfied” and “Don’t know” were the possible responses and “Q8. After raising or speaking up about your concerns, did you experience any personal disadvantage or any form of retaliation for doing so?”. The possible responses to this question included: 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Prefer not to say'.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings

The findings depicted in Figure 1, pertaining to the question posed in Q4: "During the past year at work, have you been aware of any conduct by your employer or colleagues that you thought violated either the law or your organization's ethical standards?", underscore the level of awareness employees possess regarding the ethical climate within their workplace.

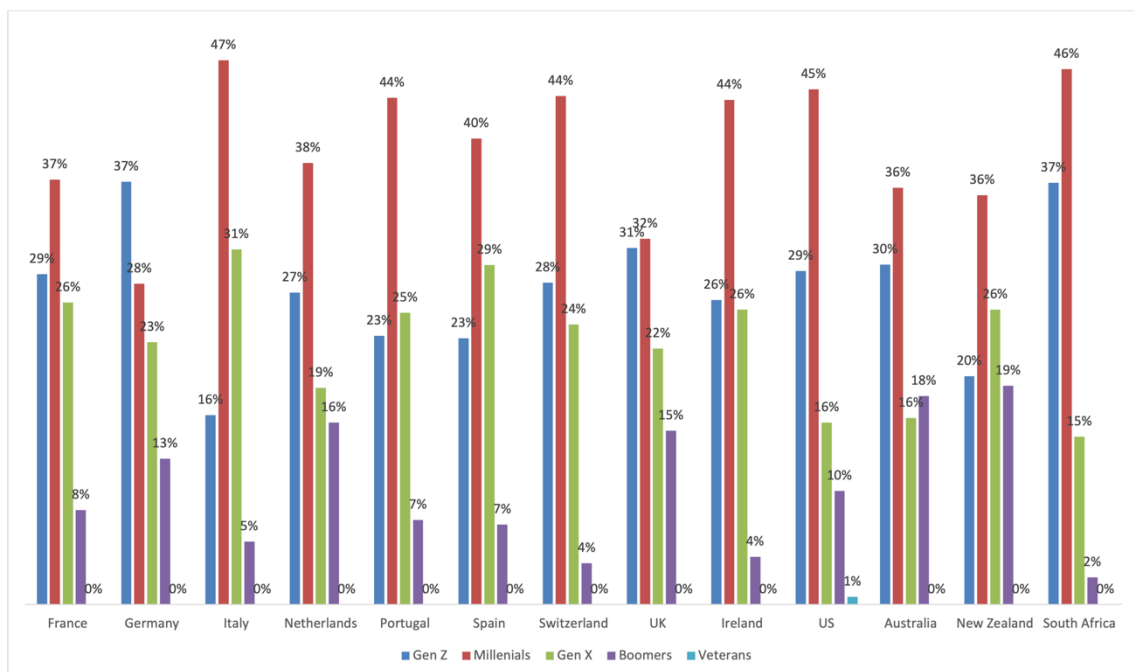


Figure 1: Ethical Misconduct Awareness by Generation and Country

Source: Author's work. IBE data: affirmative responses to Q4 (full sample = 9834)

In this cross-country analysis, Millennials stand out as the demographic group most attuned to ethical misconduct, scoring an average awareness rate of 40% across nations. However, there's a notable outlier: in Germany, Gen Z takes the lead with a 37% awareness rate. Across all countries surveyed, Gen Z and Gen X consistently claim either the second or third positions in awareness levels. Conversely, Baby Boomers and Veterans consistently exhibit the lowest levels of ethical misconduct awareness, averaging 10% and 0%, respectively, across all nations—except for Australia. In Australia, Boomers defy the trend, displaying a higher awareness rate of 18% compared to Gen X at 16%.

By analyzing the results of Q6: "Did you raise or speak up about any of your concerns with management, another appropriate person, or through any other mechanism?" (Figure 2), it becomes feasible to assess whether employees take action when confronted with violations of ethical standards.

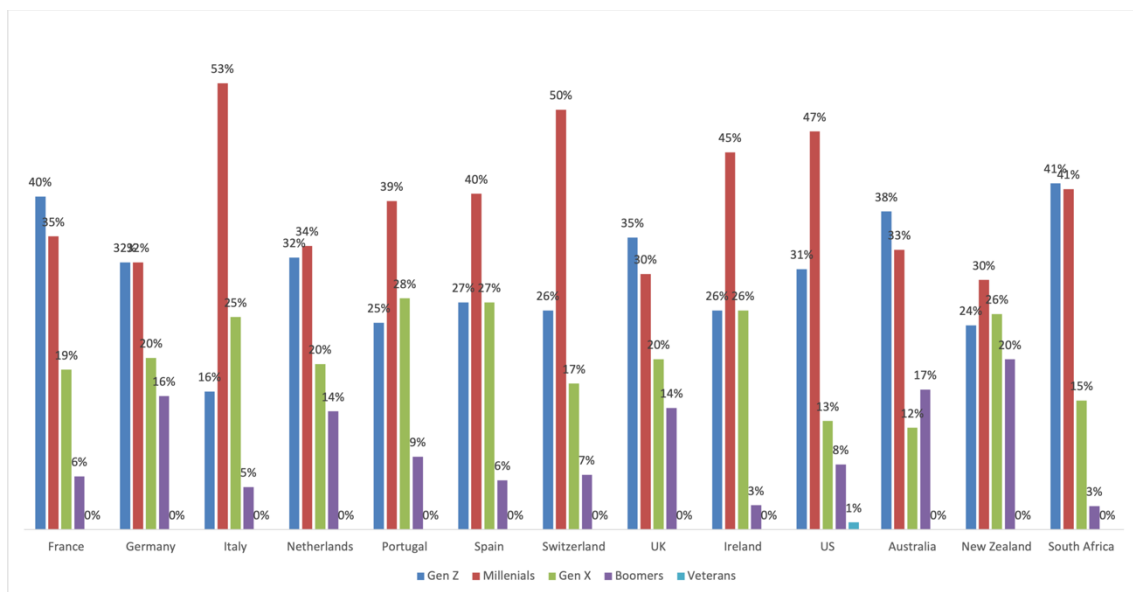


Figure 2: Speak Up by Generation and Country

Source: Author's work. IBE data: affirmative responses to Q6 (full sample = 9834)

Millennials not only boast the highest level of ethical awareness but also emerge as the most proactive in voicing concerns, averaging a 39% engagement rate across all countries. Following closely behind are Gen Z individuals, with an

average of 30%, particularly notable in the United Kingdom (35%), France (40%), Australia (38%), and South Africa (41%). Across most nations, Gen X typically occupies the third position in proactive behavior, with exceptions found in Italy (25%), New Zealand (26%), and Portugal (28%), where they rank as the second most likely to voice concerns. Notably, in Australia, they are surpassed by Baby Boomers (17%), a demographic that typically ranks lowest in proactive engagement about ethical matters, alongside Veterans, in all other countries."

In Figures 3-6, the results of the 12 potential answer options to Q9: "Which of the following, if any, influenced your decision not to raise or speak up about your concerns?" are presented, categorized by generation and country.

Gen Z	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Switzerland	UK	Ireland	US	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Total
I thought that it was common practice	0%	0%	5%	4%	8%	7%	2%	7%	0%	8%	0%	0%	3%	4%
I did not believe that corrective action would be taken	6%	18%	10%	4%	16%	10%	12%	27%	6%	8%	0%	33%	9%	12%
I did not know who to contact	13%	4%	15%	8%	4%	7%	0%	10%	11%	0%	18%	0%	3%	6%
I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker by management	13%	4%	20%	15%	16%	21%	12%	10%	11%	13%	9%	0%	17%	13%
I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time	0%	7%	5%	12%	0%	0%	5%	0%	11%	13%	0%	0%	0%	4%
I felt I might jeopardise my job	19%	25%	15%	12%	20%	14%	15%	7%	17%	13%	45%	0%	20%	17%
I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues	25%	11%	5%	15%	0%	7%	20%	13%	6%	17%	0%	17%	23%	13%
I felt it was none of my business	6%	14%	5%	15%	16%	24%	15%	17%	22%	17%	9%	0%	6%	14%
I thought it would be raised by someone else	13%	4%	0%	8%	4%	3%	2%	0%	6%	4%	9%	0%	6%	4%
I thought that they already knew about it	6%	11%	15%	4%	8%	7%	7%	7%	0%	8%	9%	0%	9%	7%
Other	0%	4%	0%	4%	8%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%	3%	3%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	5%	3%	11%	0%	0%	17%	3%	3%

Figure 3: Reasons not to Speak up for Gen Z and by Country

Source: Author's work. IBE data: Gen Z responses to Q9 (sample = 1835)

Millennials	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Switzerland	UK	Ireland	US	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Total
I thought that it was common practice	7%	0%	7%	6%	4%	3%	4%	3%	5%	0%	4%	3%	4%	4%
I did not believe that corrective action would be taken	16%	13%	20%	11%	25%	18%	14%	26%	13%	9%	13%	0%	14%	16%
I did not know who to contact	5%	13%	9%	11%	12%	8%	11%	0%	0%	6%	0%	9%	3%	6%
I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker by management	16%	13%	14%	13%	10%	6%	11%	18%	13%	19%	13%	15%	16%	13%
I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time	5%	7%	2%	6%	4%	5%	7%	3%	16%	6%	9%	9%	6%	6%
I felt I might jeopardise my job	14%	13%	21%	15%	15%	17%	18%	18%	11%	28%	17%	15%	19%	17%
I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues	11%	13%	7%	11%	7%	11%	11%	11%	11%	9%	13%	6%	14%	10%
I felt it was none of my business	14%	7%	7%	4%	10%	17%	7%	8%	13%	6%	13%	9%	7%	10%
I thought it would be raised by someone else	9%	7%	2%	9%	4%	5%	0%	3%	11%	3%	9%	6%	2%	5%
I thought that they already knew about it	2%	7%	7%	13%	3%	8%	4%	8%	3%	9%	9%	9%	9%	7%
Other	0%	7%	2%	2%	1%	3%	11%	3%	5%	3%	0%	12%	2%	3%
Prefer not to say	2%	0%	2%	0%	3%	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	2%	2%

Figure 4: Reasons not to Speak up for Millennials and by Country

Source: Author's work. IBE data: Millennials responses to Q9 (sample = 3367)

Gen X	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Switzerland	UK	Ireland	US	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Total
I thought that it was common practice	3%	8%	6%	0%	4%	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	10%	3%
I did not believe that corrective action would be taken	23%	8%	23%	20%	32%	20%	19%	34%	12%	24%	7%	24%	24%	22%
I did not know who to contact	3%	0%	6%	7%	7%	4%	4%	0%	12%	0%	7%	4%	5%	4%
I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker by management	15%	0%	8%	13%	7%	15%	7%	13%	8%	18%	7%	8%	14%	11%
I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time	3%	17%	6%	0%	0%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
I felt I might jeopardise my job	15%	0%	19%	7%	14%	20%	19%	19%	15%	35%	14%	16%	24%	18%
I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues	20%	8%	8%	13%	7%	9%	0%	6%	15%	12%	14%	12%	0%	10%
I felt it was none of my business	5%	17%	4%	13%	14%	11%	22%	9%	15%	0%	7%	4%	5%	9%
I thought it would be raised by someone else	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	4%	7%	3%	4%	0%	14%	0%	5%	3%
I thought that they already knew about it	8%	17%	15%	7%	4%	4%	7%	6%	12%	6%	7%	16%	10%	9%
Other	3%	8%	2%	13%	7%	7%	7%	6%	4%	0%	14%	8%	0%	6%
Prefer not to say	5%	17%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%	3%	4%	6%	7%	4%	5%	3%

Figure 5: Reasons not to Speak up for Gen X and by Country
Source: Author's work. IBE data: Gen X responses to Q9 (sample = 2902)

Baby Boomers	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Switzerland	UK	Ireland	US	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Total
I thought that it was common practice	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	20%	0%	0%	8%	0%	3%
I did not believe that corrective action would be taken	25%	0%	25%	0%	29%	11%	33%	17%	20%	40%	19%	23%	0%	19%
I did not know who to contact	13%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker by management	13%	50%	17%	0%	14%	0%	0%	22%	0%	0%	14%	8%	0%	11%
I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	15%	0%	4%
I felt I might jeopardise my job	38%	0%	8%	0%	29%	11%	0%	11%	40%	20%	10%	15%	33%	15%
I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues	0%	0%	17%	20%	14%	22%	0%	11%	20%	0%	24%	8%	0%	14%
I felt it was none of my business	0%	0%	8%	30%	0%	33%	33%	6%	0%	0%	19%	8%	0%	12%
I thought it would be raised by someone else	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	20%	5%	0%	0%	3%
I thought that they already knew about it	13%	50%	0%	10%	0%	22%	33%	6%	0%	20%	10%	0%	0%	9%
Other	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	15%	0%	4%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	67%	3%

Figure 6: Reasons not to Speak up for Baby Boomers and by Country
Source: Author's work. IBE data: Baby Boomers responses to Q9 (sample = 1693)

For Gen Z, the most prevalent response was "I felt I might jeopardize my job" (17%), particularly notable in Australia (45%) and Germany (25%), followed by "I felt it was none of my business" (14%), which gained popularity in Spain (24%) and Ireland (22%). Conversely, the least common responses were "Prefer not to say" and "Other" (both 3%), predominantly observed in New Zealand and Ireland.

Interestingly, while Gen Z in Australia expressed the highest concern about job security, Gen Z in Germany showed a relatively lower percentage, indicating potential differences in workplace culture and perceptions of job risk across these countries.

Similar patterns emerge for Millennials, with "I felt I might jeopardize my job"

(17%) being the predominant answer, especially in the US (28%) and Italy (21%), closely trailed by "I did not believe that corrective action would be taken" (16%), which was highly favored in the UK (26%) and Portugal (25%). As with Gen Z, "Prefer not to say" and "Other" were among the least chosen responses (2% and 3%, respectively), particularly noticeable in New Zealand.

Comparatively, Millennials in the US and Italy showed a higher concern about jeopardizing their jobs, while those in the UK and Portugal were more skeptical about the effectiveness of corrective actions.

Examining Gen X, the most prevalent response was "I did not believe that corrective action would be taken" (22%), prominently observed in the UK (34%) and Portugal (32%), followed by "I felt I might jeopardize my job" (18%), which was widespread in the US (35%) and South Africa (24%). Uncommon responses included "I thought that it was common practice", "I didn't think it was a serious issue at the time", "I thought it would be raised by someone else", and "Prefer not to say" (each worth 3%).

Interestingly, similarly to what was observed with the Millennials, Gen X in the US showed a notably higher concern about job security compared to other countries, while those in the UK and Portugal expressed more skepticism about the effectiveness of corrective actions.

Lastly, within the Baby Boomer generation, the most frequent response was "I did not believe that corrective action would be taken" (19%), predominantly noted in the US (40%) and Switzerland (33%), followed by "I felt I might jeopardize my job" (15%), mostly in Ireland (40%) and France (38%), and "I felt it might alienate myself from my colleagues" (14%), most common in Australia (24%) and Spain (22%). Notably, there were no affirmative responses to Q9

among the Veterans generation.

After comprehending which generations exhibit the highest awareness and the factors that may deter them from taking action, we delve into the findings of Q7: "After raising or speaking up about your concerns, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the outcome?" (Figure 7). The data reveals that Millennials express the greatest satisfaction after addressing misconduct they've noticed, closely trailed by Gen Z, primarily observed in the US and South Africa, where overall satisfaction levels were notably high.

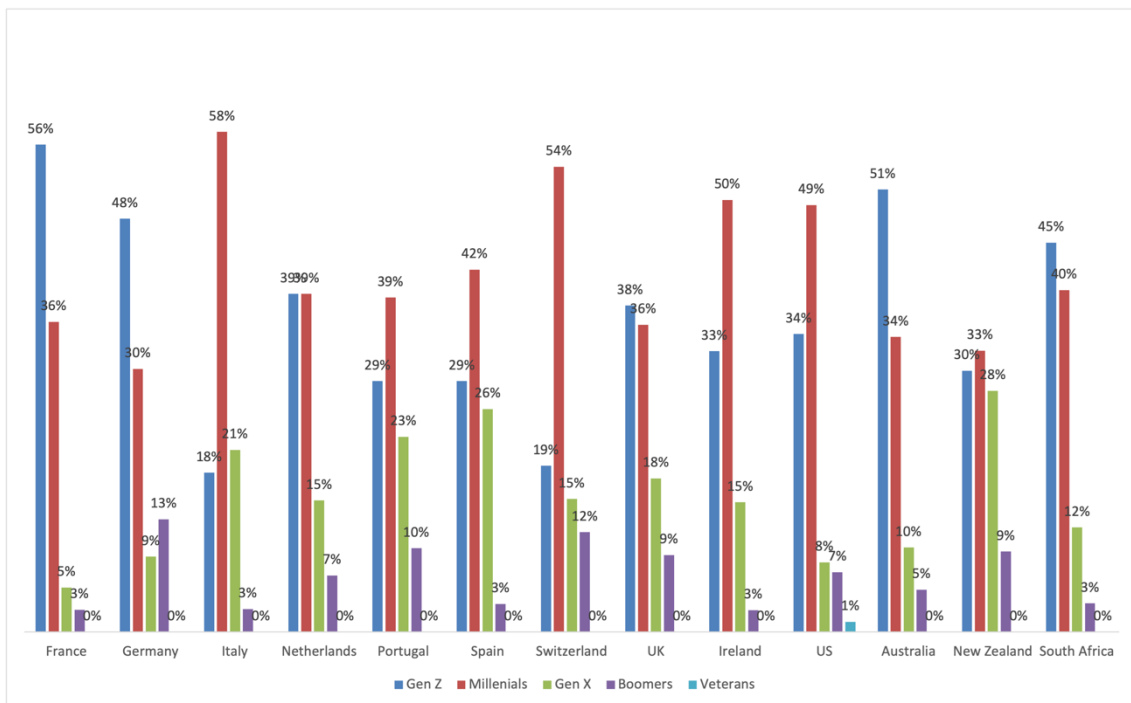


Figure 7: Satisfaction after Speaking Up by Generation and Country

Source: Author's work. IBE data: Respondents who answered either Very Satisfied or Fairly Satisfied to Q7 (answered "Yes" to Q6 sample = 994)

In most countries, Millennials and Gen Z occupy the top positions in job satisfaction after speaking up, averaging 41% and 36% across all countries, respectively, followed by Gen X (averaging 16%), with Baby Boomers ranking last. However, exceptions arise, such as in Italy, where Gen X (21%) reports higher satisfaction than Gen Z (18%), and in Germany, where the Baby Boomer generation (13%) surpasses Gen X (9%) in satisfaction levels.

Comparatively, the satisfaction level after Speak Up in Italy reveal a noteworthy divergence from the typical pattern observed in other countries, suggesting unique factors influencing job satisfaction among different generations within the Italian workforce.

Similarly, the higher satisfaction level after Speak Up reported by Baby Boomers in Germany compared to Gen X points towards distinctive generational dynamics within the German labor market, potentially influenced by cultural or economic factors unique to the region.

Interestingly, the Veterans registered their only respondent to Q7 as a Fairly satisfied employee from the US. This solitary response highlights the rarity of Veterans within the workforce and provides insight into their perception of job satisfaction, despite being limited by the small sample size.

Moving on to Figure 8, we analyze the results of Q8: "After raising or speaking up about your concerns, did you experience any personal disadvantage or any form of retaliation for doing so?". We find that the generations most likely to experience retaliation for speaking up align with the findings from the previous question: Millennials and Gen Z (averaging 43% and 33%, respectively). Similarly, the countries where individuals felt the most disadvantages after voicing concerns were the US and South Africa (each corresponding to 12% of affirmative answers to Q8).

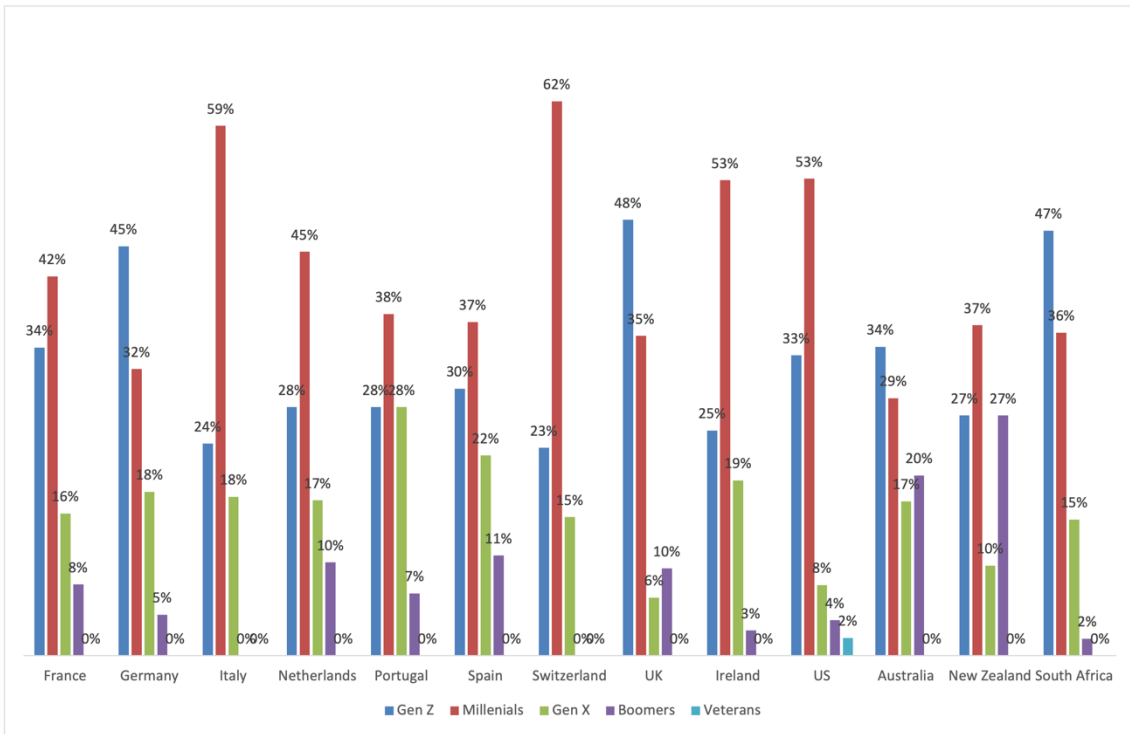


Figure 8: Retaliation after Speak Up by Generation and Country

Source: Author’s work. IBE data: Affirmative responses to Q8 (answered “Yes” to Q6 sample = 994)

These findings indicate a consistent trend across most countries, with Millennials and Gen Z occupying the top positions in experiencing retaliation, followed by Gen X (16%), and Baby Boomers (8%) trailing behind.

However, there are notable exceptions. In Australia and New Zealand, the Baby Boomer generation surpasses Gen X for the third position, indicating a unique dynamic in these countries. Similarly, in Portugal, Gen X ties with Gen Z as the generation experiencing the second-highest level of repercussions.

These exceptions shed light on the varying degrees of vulnerability to retaliation across different generational cohorts and geographic regions, suggesting the influence of diverse cultural, organizational, and societal factors on the experience of speaking up in the workplace.

4.2. Discussion

These findings are aligned with the increasing body of literature that challenges the assumption of age-related superiority in ethical reasoning (Glover *et al.*, 2022; Peterson *et al.*, 2001). Instead, they support the notion that younger generations may indeed exhibit stronger ethical values, indicative of broader societal shifts prioritizing ethics in professional settings (Ruegger and King, 2013; Boyd, 2010; Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2017; Meriac *et al.*, 2010; Weber, 2017).

To contextualize these findings, we draw upon socialization theories, which emphasize the role of ongoing social influences in shaping individuals' ethical behaviors (Thalmayer *et al.*, 2019; Milfont *et al.*, 2016; Gouveia *et al.*, 2015; Robinson, 2013; Glover *et al.*, 2022). From this perspective, the heightened ethical consciousness observed among younger employees can be attributed to evolving social norms and cultural dynamics that emphasize ethical considerations within the workplace.

Interestingly, the results also challenge the assumptions put forth by generational theories, which typically posit that older employees exhibit superior ethical judgment due to accumulated experience and wisdom (Mannheim, 1970; Inglehart, 1977). Instead, this thesis proposes a contradictory hypothesis: that younger employees may surpass their older counterparts in terms of ethical awareness and proactive behavior within organizational contexts.

The findings presented in Figures 3-8 shed light on the nuanced dynamics of employee voice across different generations and countries, contextualized within the broader literature on organizational communication, procedural justice, and cultural diversity. In this section, we discuss the implications of our results in

relation to the existing literature, focusing on factors influencing voice behavior, the consequences of speaking up, and the role of cultural diversity.

Additionally, the analysis revealed distinct patterns in the factors influencing employees' decisions not to raise or speak up about their concerns. Across all generations, the fear of jeopardizing one's job emerged as a prominent deterrent, particularly notable among Gen Z and Millennials. This finding resonates with prior research emphasizing the role of perceived risk and retaliation in inhibiting employee voice (Detert *et al.*, 2010; Milliken *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, variations across countries underscore the influence of cultural and organizational contexts on voice behavior (Detert and Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2000).

The satisfaction levels reported after addressing concerns align with expectations, with Millennials and Gen Z expressing higher satisfaction compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the positive outcomes associated with voice behavior, including improved organizational performance and employee well-being (Detert *et al.*, 2013; Edmondson, 2008). However, the exceptions observed in certain countries emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of contextual factors shaping the outcomes of voice behavior (Detert and Treviño, 2010; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

Furthermore, the results on personal disadvantages or retaliation experienced after speaking up corroborates previous research, indicating that Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to face repercussions for voicing their concerns (Burris, 2012; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2012). The impact of cultural diversity on the prevalence of retaliation warrants further investigation, considering the role of cultural norms and expectations in shaping employee behavior (Dahlin *et al.*, 2005; Stone-Romero *et al.*, 2003).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study uses data from the Ethics at Work 2021 employee survey conducted by IBE to explore employees' ethical decision-making and investigate potential variances between generations across 13 countries.

The focus of this study was on the awareness and response behaviors of employees regarding ethical misconduct within their workplace. Through an analysis of the survey data, the results revealed how generational differences influence ethical awareness, willingness to speak up, satisfaction with outcomes, and experiences of retaliation.

The results show that Millennials consistently exhibit the highest awareness of ethical misconduct in the workplace across various countries, with Gen Z closely following. Both generations also demonstrate the most proactive behavior in speaking up about ethical concerns. On the contrary, Baby Boomers and Veterans consistently exhibit the lowest levels of awareness and are least likely to speak up.

The fear of jeopardizing one's job is a prevalent deterrent across all generations, while skepticism about corrective action being taken and concerns about alienation or retaliation also influence employees' decision not to speak up. Millennials express the greatest satisfaction after addressing misconduct they've

noticed, followed by Gen Z. However, both generations are also most likely to experience retaliation for speaking up, particularly in countries like the US and South Africa.

The findings challenge traditional assumptions regarding age-related superiority in ethical reasoning, suggesting instead that younger generations may exhibit stronger ethical values and proactive behaviors. This contradicts conventional generational theories and highlights the importance of ongoing social influences in shaping individuals' ethical behaviors. By contextualizing our results within socialization theories, we emphasize the evolving societal norms and cultural dynamics that prioritize ethics in professional settings.

Understanding the nuanced dynamics of employee voice across different generations and countries has practical implications for organizations. Recognizing the heightened ethical consciousness among younger employees can inform strategies for fostering a more ethical workplace culture. Organizations should prioritize creating environments where employees feel empowered to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation. Moreover, addressing the factors influencing employees' decisions not to speak up, such as the fear of jeopardizing one's job, is crucial for promoting ethical behavior and organizational integrity.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Additionally, the study's scope was limited to a specific moment in time, which may not fully capture the dynamic nature of ethical awareness and behaviors within organizations.

Moving forward, future research could explore alternative methodologies, such

as observational studies or experimental designs, to complement self-reported data and mitigate response biases. Additionally, qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into the underlying motivations and experiences of employees regarding ethical misconduct and speaking up.

Moreover, considering the influence of cultural and organizational contexts, future studies should examine how cultural diversity impacts ethical awareness, response behaviors, and the prevalence of retaliation within organizations.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to the growing body of literature on organizational ethics by shedding light on the complex interplay between generational differences, ethical awareness, and response behaviors in the workplace. By recognizing and addressing these dynamics, organizations can strive towards fostering a more ethical and inclusive work environment conducive to employee well-being and organizational success.

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