

# Strategic Leadership and Generational Differences: Effects on Employee Commitment and Performance in Malaysian Organizations

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**Abstract:** - This study investigates the effects of three strategic leadership styles such as coaching leadership, shared leadership, and ambidextrous leadership on employee commitment and employee performance in Malaysian organizations, with generational cohort (Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z) examined as a moderating variable. As Malaysian workplaces become increasingly multigenerational, differences in values and expectations may influence how employees respond to leadership behaviours. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 150 employees across multiple industries in Malaysia. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed due to the exploratory nature of the study and the complexity of the proposed moderation model. The findings indicate low indicator reliability, largely attributable to homogeneous response patterns that may reflect collectivist cultural norms within Malaysian organisations. The structural model revealed no statistically significant direct effects between the examined leadership styles and employee commitment or performance. Furthermore, generational cohort did not significantly moderate the relationships under investigation. These results suggest that leadership effects in the Malaysian context may operate indirectly through relational mechanisms such as trust, communication quality, and team climate rather than through direct behavioural pathways. The study underscores the importance of culturally adaptive measurement instruments and highlights the need for future research incorporating mediating variables, larger samples, and multi-group analytical approaches.

**Key-Words:** - Strategic leadership, Coaching leadership, Shared leadership, Ambidextrous leadership, Generational cohort, Employee commitment, Employee performance, PLS-SEM.

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## 1 Introduction

Leadership has continued to be a critical determinant of organisational performance, especially in organisations that are marked by digital transformation, diverse workforce, and change, [1], [2]. Malaysian organisations currently experience the coexistence of several generations (Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z) sharing socio-economic experiences and cultural settings, [3], [4], [5]. These generations come with different expectations, values, and preferences of communication in the work

environment, and the question arises whether the leadership across various generations can change their effectiveness.

Strategic leadership, which combines long-term vision, agility, and human capital development, is generally seen as a requirement in overcoming modern workplace challenges, [1]. Within this broader framework, there has been increasing interest in coaching leadership, shared leadership, and ambidextrous leadership due to their suitability to the contemporary dynamic workplace environment [6], [7], [8], [9]. Broader evidence likewise links leadership style to organisational

performance and employee satisfaction across varied contexts, [10].

What makes it even more challenging is that the Malaysian culture is collectivist: leaders anticipate predicting harmony, respect for authority and relational sensitivity instead of individualistic leadership behaviours, [11], [12]. Similar patterns have been reported among public-sector employees, where cultural and leadership factors jointly shape job performance in collectivistic contexts, [13]. Therefore, a leadership style tested in the Western world cannot necessarily play out the same way in Malaysia.

Based on this background, this study addresses two research questions:

- (1) Do coaching, shared, and ambidextrous leadership influence employee commitment and performance?
- (2) Are these relationships moderated by generational cohort?

These questions contribute to ongoing debates regarding the contextualisation of leadership, the relevance of the generational theory, and the power of leadership in Asian environments.

## 2 Literature Review and Hypotheses

Of increased importance in organisational research has been strategic leadership as organisations face the competition that is both mounting and digitalisation, accompanied by diversity in the workforce. Strategic leadership takes a different approach to leadership, due to its nonconformity to the classic leadership models that require the focus on control, hierarchy, or short-term results, and it incorporates the elements of visionary foresight, flexibility, human development, and organisational learning to maintain the competitive advantage, [3]. Classic leadership frameworks, such as the Full-Range Leadership Model, illustrate this earlier emphasis on control, hierarchy, and short-term results, [14]. In the broader paradigm, coaching leadership, shared leadership, and ambidextrous leadership provide three key paradigms that act as contemporary organisational demands of empowerment, collaboration, and agility.

### 2.1 Coaching Leadership

The coaching style of leadership focuses on feedback, development, and capacity building, allowing employees to achieve their potential through facilitated learning, [6]. This is in line with Social Exchange Theory. Understanding of the

practice of support leadership results in the creation of reciprocity in attitudes like commitment and engagement. The empirical studies associate coaching leadership with better performance and intrinsic motivation, especially in the ones requiring autonomy and development, [6], [15], [16]. The Malaysian employees, in their turn, would perceive coaching as hierarchical, which will perhaps weaken its effect, [11], [12].

### 2.2 Shared Leadership

Shared leadership spreads the influence among team members and encourages empowerment, collective responsibility, and teamwork [7], [9]. The meta-analytic data indicate that shared leadership is beneficial in promoting performance and innovative efforts in the team [7], [9]. Such collaborative forms are frequently preferred by younger generations, and collectivist cultures and high power distance might limit the readiness of employees to take shared decision-making roles [11], which makes their effects dependent on their circumstances. This mirrors findings that democratic and participative leadership styles influence employee innovative behaviour differently across collectivistic cultural settings, [17].

### 2.3 Ambidextrous Leadership

To maintain balance between innovation and performance, ambidextrous leaders will switch between innovation and performance with the help of opening behaviours (autonomy, exploration) and closing behaviours (discipline, structure) [8], [9]. The existing research proves that ambidextrous leadership enhances creativity, involvement, and performance in fluid situations [15], [16], [18], [19]. However, generational differences might influence how employees view this flexibility, with Gen Z and Gen X favouring more open and more stable behaviours, respectively [3], [4], [5].

### 2.4 Generational Cohort as a Contingency Factor

The generational theory argues that work values and leadership expectations are formed by similarity in their formative experiences [3], [5], [20]. However, the modern-day knowledge challenges the scale of generational differences, which focus more on the cultural drivers of work attitudes as immensely important, [12], [21]. Collectivist cultural norms may override generational differences in Malaysia.

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 displays the proposed conceptual framework that shows the relationships between strategic leadership styles, employee outcomes, and the moderating effect of generational cohort. In particular, coaching leadership, shared leadership, and ambidextrous leadership are conjectured to have an impact on employee commitment and employee performance. These leadership styles capture major aspects of strategic leadership, which focuses on growth, teamwork and flexibility in changing organizational settings.

In addition, generational cohort (Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z) is included as a moderating variable, reflecting the possibility that employees from different generational groups may respond differently to leadership behaviours. This is particularly relevant in the Malaysian context, where multigenerational workforces and collectivist cultural values may influence leadership effectiveness.

The model is based on the strategic leadership theory that focuses on the importance of leadership in harmonizing organizational vision, human capital, and performance outcomes, [1], [2], [8].

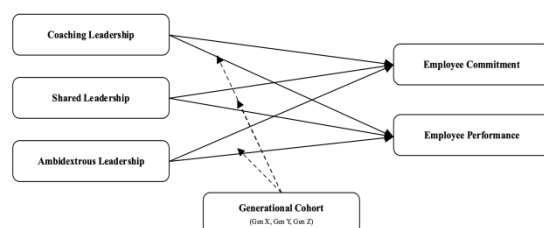


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study  
Source: Developed by the authors based on [1], [2], [8]

## 3 Methodology

A cross-sectional quantitative survey was conducted on 150 employees in various industries in Malaysia. There was a generational distribution based on accepted cohort boundaries, [3], [5]. The choice of PLS-SEM was related to the exploratory nature of the model, the low reliability values, and the high number of constructs and moderation paths that the model contains, [21], [22], [23].

The coaching leadership scale was adapted from [6], shared leadership from [7], and ambidextrous leadership from [8]. Employee commitment was measured using the three-component organizational commitment scale [24], while employee performance was assessed using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, [5].

Measurement model evaluation involved composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), and indicators loadings, [22], [23]. Cultural response patterns contributed to ceiling effects and reduced reliability, [11], [12]. Bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) was the method used in structural-model evaluation to test direct and mediating effects, [23].

### 3.1 Sampling Procedure and Participants

One hundred fifty employees of Malaysian organisations took part in the research. Convenience sampling was used to recruit the respondents by recognizing realistic limitations to recruitment based on a completely randomised sample of organisations. Although convenience sampling has a limitation on generalisability, it has become a commonplace in exploratory research in leadership (as well as in PLS-SEM) where a focus is on explaining variance rather than the precision of parameters. The participants were the representatives of a broad field of industries, including education, services, hospitality, finance, and technology sectors. This ecological validity increases because of this diversity, which represents a wide range of leadership exposure and organisational situations.

The sample included three generations of people, and it was classified based on the proven generational theory, [3], [5]:

- Generation X (1965–1980): 18 %
- Generation Y / Millennials (1981–1996): 56 %
- Generation Z (1997–2012): 26 %

The distribution is reflective of the workforce demographics in Malaysia, in which Millennials make up the largest percentage of the labour market. The factor of generational cohort was entered into the structural model as a categorical moderator, which had to be captured in the model through terms of interaction.

### 3.2 Measurement Instruments

The measures were taken with reflective attributes of five concern scales, with strong (strongly disagree) to strong (strongly agree), over a total of 5. The leadership style operationalised was coaching by the adaptation of the items [6] with an emphasis on developmental support and feedback. Joint leadership objects were modified on the basis [7] to reflect distributed influence and joint decision-making. The range of ambidextrous leadership was measured through the items formed based on the

initial and final behaviours as stated, [8]. Employee commitment was measured using the established Meyer and Allen scale [24], while the employee performance was assessed using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, [5].

Improved indicator reliability in preliminary diagnostics was lower than standard levels. Instead of removing things or remaking scales, all indicators were retained in the study, in order to maintain the theoretical wholeness and in order to acknowledge the real-world perceptual complexities. This choice is correct, as the notion of low reliability tolerance during the exploratory stage of PLS-SEM allows the structural model to be tested despite imperfections in the measurements.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of data was performed in SmartPLS. The data analysis followed the established PLS-SEM, [15], [23]. To verify the measurement model, the indicator loadings, composite reliability, rho A, and average variance extracted (AVE) were considered. Even though the reliability values were lower than the suggested recommendations because of low response variance, there was no loss of discriminant validity as affirmed by the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) that ensured construct conceptual separation.

Then the structural model was evaluated to identify the significance and strength of hypothesized relationships. The bootstrapping process using 5,000 subsamples produced t-statistics and p-values of all the direct and moderational paths. Also checked were coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) and effect sizes (f). Moderation was studied through interaction terms between each of the leadership styles and the generational cohort. Considering the exploratory nature of the research, focus was given to the interpretation of effect sizes and theoretical relevance as opposed to the statistical significance.

## 4 Results

This part is the result of the measurement and structural analysis that was conducted through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The analysis was conducted in accordance with the two-step recommended approach that consists of (1) measuring the measurement model and (2) measuring the structural model, including the moderating effects. Since the situation is exploratory and the diagnostic reliability is low, the results are taken cautiously with a focus

on theoretical understanding rather than conclusive causations.

### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of the conventional PLS-SEM measures of reliability and validity, such as reliability of indicators, internal and convergent validity, as well as discriminant validity, [11], [12]. Although PLS-SEM is appropriate when there is a need to explore and in complex conditions of moderation, a few aspects of the measurement model demonstrated a number of limitations, indicating that responses were homogeneous in the sample, [22], [23].

#### 4.1.1 Indicator Reliability

The indicator loadings define the extent to which an item of the survey will capture the latent constructs under it. Preferably, the loadings must be above 0.70; in exploratory studies, 0.40 to 0.70 can be accepted provided that they have a substantive contribution to content validity. Most of the items had low loadings in this study, which is in line with observations by reviewers that there was low response variance. There was a lack of discrimination between items based on homogeneous ratings, which were mostly concentrated at the upper side of the scale. Although these loadings did not match the conservative thresholds, they were not dropped because of the conceptual importance of the constructs and the need to maintain fullness in the orientation of leadership styles and employee performance. Removing a large number of items would have affected conceptual integrity and comparability with prior literature.

#### 4.1.2 Internal Consistency Reliability

Composite Reliability (CR) and rho A were used to assess internal consistency, which is better than Cronbach's alpha in PLS-SEM. The values of CRs of the majority of constructs were less than the recommended minimum of 0.70, with rho A showing the same trends. These results are a reflection of the homogeneity of responses and limited variance. Instead of indicating analytic incoherence, the low reliability may be explained through the cultural surveying pattern, typical of Malaysian samples, e.g., acquiescence bias or a positive-leadership-appraisal-bias.

Despite the decrease in values of reliability in comparison to traditionally accepted standards, the constructs are theoretically decipherable, and it enables entering the next stage of structural assessment with the view that the magnitude of

effect and significance are likely to be diminished by measurement limitations.

#### 4.1.3 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was measured with the help of Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Ideal values of AVE are above 0.50, but, as was the case with indicator reliability, the AVE in this case was below ideal values. This result is a resultant combination of low loadings and poor response variance. In the exploratory type of modeling, as is the case in this analysis, low AVE does not necessarily nullify the analysis, particularly when the purpose of the analysis is to build theory rather than to test the theory strictly. The objective of the study was to explore possible relationships and the moderation effects of generations instead of obtaining high levels of statistical accuracy. In turn, convergent validity was considered to be acceptable to exploratory interpretation.

#### 4.1.4 Discriminant Validity

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was used to test the discriminant validity. The value of all HTMTs fell beneath the set value of 0.90, which resulted in the finding that the constructs were distinctly different from each other. This observation supports the theoretical distinction between coaching leadership, shared leadership, ambidextrous leadership, employee commitment, and employee performance.

Although there were reasons of limitations in the measurement, discriminant validity establishes that respondents had uniquely understood the meaning of each leadership style and leadership outcome construct, which supports the conclusion to retain all the constructs to be thoroughly evaluated later.

### 4.2 Structural Model Assessment

All the direct relationships between coaching, shared, and ambidextrous leadership and commitment and performance were non-significant, which supported the recent assertions that leadership can act indirectly via filtering agents such as trust or communication, [1], [9], [16], [21].

The generational moderation was also not significant, unlike studies that indicate that differences in collectivism do not appear in cohort-based societies, [3], [5], [12].

$R^2$  values ranged between 0.05 and 0.06, and this is expected within the restrictions created by measurement variance.

#### 4.2.1 Direct Relationships

The current investigation challenged that coaching leadership, shared leadership, and ambidextrous leadership would have a beneficial effect on employee commitment and employee performance. The structural model, however showed that all the direct pathways were not statistically significant.

- Coaching leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee commitment ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.281$ )
- Coaching leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee performance ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.334$ )
- Shared leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee commitment ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.244$ )
- Shared leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee performance ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.412$ )
- Ambidextrous leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee commitment ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p = 0.261$ )
- Ambidextrous leadership  $\rightarrow$  employee performance ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.309$ )

These results are in contrast to a great volume of available literature that reports positive relationships between leadership styles and employee results. The absence of any visible impacts can be explained by the fact that:

1. Such limited measurement variance makes the test lacking in statistical sensitivity.
2. Cultural aspects, where leadership behaviours can have an indirect effect through relational trust or communication, but not directly.
3. Contextual homogenisation, which means that employees of different generation groups have a common expectation of the leadership due to the common organisational norms.

This means that the non-significant direct effects cannot be interpreted to mean that leadership is ineffective, but it is just that leadership effects could be mediated or relative to situations.

#### 4.2.2 Moderation Effects of Generational Cohort

The moderation analysis examined whether the generational cohort (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) transformed the strength of the leadership-outcome relationships. Each leadership style and outcome variable was the subject of interaction terms construction. All the effects in the interactions were not significant ( $p > 0.10$ ).

These findings suggest that differences between generations might not significantly alter perceptions or responses of the employees in Malaysia towards the leadership behaviours. This is in accordance with the current academic criticism of generational stereotypes that argues that workplace differences based on age groupings can actually be based on

career level, internal corporate culture, or even technological exposure.

#### 4.2.3 Explained Variance ( $R^2$ )

The  $R^2$  values for both dependent variables were low:

- Employee commitment:  $R^2 = 0.06$
- Employee performance:  $R^2 = 0.05$

These values show that the leadership styles are only a minor error in the outcome variables. The low values of  $R^2$  are not unusual when studies of exploratory leadership are considered, but they support the fact that Malaysian leadership effects could be indirect and have no direct impact on behaviour.

#### 4.2.4 Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

All effect sizes were small ( $f^2 < 0.02$ ). This also supports the conclusion that there is little direct explanatory power as displayed by leadership styles in the data set, which in its turn proves the need for models to include mediators like trust, communication climate, team cohesion, or HRM system strength.

### 4.3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

All twelve hypotheses were rejected (six direct effects and six moderation effects). The lack of any meaningful relationships does not diminish the theoretical importance of the constructs; it only demonstrates that there is a multitude of contextual, cultural, and methodological issues that influence leadership relationships in the Malaysian workplaces.

This research inquired into whether three strategic leadership styles, coaching, shared, and ambidextrous, influence employee commitment and performance in Malaysian organisations, and whether generational cohort moderates such associations. Against theoretical expectations and previous empirical research findings, all the direct effects were not found to be significant, and the generational cohort did not moderate any of the relationships. Such findings require interpretations in terms of methodological, cultural, and theoretical approaches.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Interpretation of Non-Significant Direct Effects

These non-significant findings contrast with prior literature where strategic leadership behaviours are identified as improvements of staff attitudes and performance, [6], [7], [8], [9]. Part of the reason could be that leadership effects are indirect and not direct. Modern studies are also showing that leadership can have an impact with the help of trust, the quality of communication, or psychological safety or organisational culture as mediators, [1], [2], [16], [21]. Without these means of mediation, even a direct course can seem diminished, despite a pragmatic leadership influence.

The second potential reason is measurement limitations. The reliability coefficients of the current study were weak, which is explained by incredibly homogenous responses that can be characterized by ceiling effects or social desirability prejudices characterizing collectivist Malaysian work cultures, [18]. Organisational culture may itself mediate the relationship between leadership and performance, particularly under conditions of environmental uncertainty, [25]. Limited variance also reduces the statistical sensitivity of the analysis to establish significant relationships. Therefore, the non-significant effect might be an expression of measurement constraints, as opposed to the lack of leadership influence.

Third, the demands on leaders in Malaysia might not be the same as Western conceptualisations. Leaders also can be assessed by employees concerning the relational warmth, respect, and harmony, not necessarily concerning the coaching, shared, or ambidextrous behaviours put forward by the Western frameworks. As a result, the problem of the failure of Western developed scales to reflect the specifics of local leadership in the aspects of leadership will occur.

### 5.2 Generational Cohort as a Non-Significant Moderator

This is predicted by the theory of generation cohort, according to which the values of work are different among GenX, GenY, and GenZ, [3], [5]. However, in the current results, there was no generational moderation. This is in line with the emerging evidence that shows that there are no stereotypical generational differences. Organisational norms can override cohort-based preferences in collectivist cultures, such that similarly responsive reactions to age groups occur. Besides, the large percentage of Millennials in the sample could have limited the variation that could have identified moderating effects.

### 5.3 Theoretical Implications

The results support the need to adopt context-specific leadership theories in Malaysia. Without the consideration of the culture, indirect processes, and organisational climates, Western leadership styles might not be directly translated into results. The insignificant effect of the moderation findings also indicates that the generational differences can be overrated and that leadership practices need to focus on more universal relational or motivational processes.

### 5.4 Practical Implications

Although non-significant results are displayed, one can draw various implications for the practice. Organisations are not supposed to make the assumption that adopting certain leadership styles will have a direct positive impact on commitment or performance. Rather, the development of leadership must place more emphasis on the quality of communication, trust building, and relational competence. Systemic support, including HRM processes, team climate, and organisational culture, may prove to be more critical to leadership performance than specific behaviours alone. Moreover, the HR policies must not be overgeneralised in terms of the stereotypes of the generational differences, but they need to be inclusive in terms of the leadership.

### 5.5 Methodological Implications

The paper highlights the necessity to culture-customize measurement tools and reduce ceiling effects in the name of improving data reliability. Future studies must include mediators and adopt full structural equation modelling (SEM) or multi-group SEM in investigating more complex processes of leadership. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was also a suitable method of exploratory analysis; nevertheless, the validity of the instruments requires more stringent testing to form more conclusive arguments.

## 6 Managerial Recommendations

Organizations should:

- Mix strategic focus and relationship dimensions of leadership behaviours.
- Integrate performance systems, communication, and feedback cycles with the objectives of the leadership.
- Assess training requirements on leadership blindly without referring to the generational stereotypes.

- Use proven measurement instruments in conducting internal surveys to ensure reduced bias in the response.

## 7 Limitations

- Indicator reliability: Low indicator reliability limits interpretability.
- Convenience sampling interferes with the generalisability. Cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences.
- There was an unequal sample of generational groups.

## 8 Future Research

Future studies should:

- Re-test instruments in systematic pilot testing.
- Use more diverse samples that are large.
- Interrogate indirect effects with full SEM or PROCESS mediation models.
- Research intermediates, including trust, communication climate, and job engagement.
- Multigroup SEM to compare the generations.

## 9 Conclusion

This exploratory research showed that there are no statistically significant differences that coaching, shared or ambidextrous leadership have on employee commitment or performance in Malaysian organisations, and that generational cohort does not moderate the existing relations. Despite the limitations in measurement that limited the results, the findings provide an insight into the dynamics of leadership, which is complex in a multigenerational work environment. Organisational outcomes need to be combined with strategic, relational, and staff-aligned practices to improve employee performance.

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