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## Generation Gap and Work Engagement in Local Governments: Unraveling the Experience of Chief Administrative Officers

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### Abstract

Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind at work, comprises three core components: dedication, vigor, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dedication involves significance, enthusiasm, and pride in one's work. Vigor entails high energy, mental resilience, and the willingness to invest effort. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and engrossed in work, making detachment difficult. The extent of work engagement of Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) is crucial for both personal performance and organizational efficiency in Nepal's local governments. This research explores the generational divide between CAOs and elected officials and its impact on CAOs' engagement levels, identifying strategies to improve their engagement. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving 13 CAOs from various local governments. Based on Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) framework, the assessment included in-depth interviews and virtual discussions, which were transcribed, and content analyzed to obtain insights and themes and generate meaning. The study revealed that the generational gap negatively affects CAOs' vigor and absorption but has little effect on their dedication. CAOs exhibit moderate engagement with higher dedication but lower vigor and absorption. Additionally, CAOs noted that chairpersons prioritize immediate results and often make decisions using a populist approach that disregards regulatory and legal frameworks. To counteract these challenges, CAOs adopt various strategies including ethical behavior, participative decision-making, a flexible culture, people-oriented leadership, setting work priorities, clear communication, and fostering team spirit. These measures aim to enhance CAO's work engagement levels despite the generational gap.

**Key words:** Generation Gap, Local Level Governments, Nepal, Work Engagement

## Introduction

Work engagement, a pivotal determinant of organizational effectiveness, reflects employees' psychological and emotional commitment to the job roles at their workplace (Saks, 2006). It reflects the extent of an employee's connection to their job, colleagues, and the organization, influencing their self-improvement drive and their ability to harness energy and motivation for peak performance (Dash, 2013). It is further defined as an employee's positive, fulfilling state of mind at work, that is comprised of three core components: dedication, vigor, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dedication involves a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride in one's work. Vigor entails high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, along with the willingness to invest effort. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and engrossed in work, where time passes quickly, and detachment from the job becomes challenging. Employees who find purpose and meaning in their workplace are more likely to be dedicated and contribute toward organizational objectives (Ulrich et al., 2010). Therefore, engaged employees are crucial for organizations as they are typically more productive, committed, and customer-oriented (Mishra et al., 2014). However, not all organizations experience high levels of employee's work engagement. For instance, millennials are often less engaged (Roehl et al., 2013), a trend observed globally with only about 66% of employees considering themselves engaged (Oehler & Adair, 2019). In public administration, work engagement is shaped by institutional structures, leadership dynamics, and generational differences, each influencing governance efficiency and service delivery (Albrecht et al., 2015; Hakanen et al., 2019). While extensive research underscores the significance of work engagement in bureaucratic institutions (Schaufeli, 2013; Truss et al., 2013), the intersection of generational leadership disparities and work engagement within decentralized governance structures remains underexplored.

Nepal's transition to federalism in 2015 redefined local governance, granting rural municipalities increased autonomy and introducing administrative complexities (Asian Development Bank, 2022; Government of Nepal, 2017; World Bank, 2020). The Local Government Operation Act, 2017 delineates the roles of elected representatives (chairpersons) and bureaucratic administrators (Chief Administrative Officers, CAOs), mandating cooperative governance for effective public service delivery (Bhusal, 2022). However, the generational gap between these key actors—where chairpersons, often from older generations, favor hierarchical, politically driven decision-making, and younger CAOs emphasize efficiency, participatory governance, and technology integration—has given rise to operational discord (Paudel, 2021). This divide not only challenges governance synergy but also directly influences CAOs' work engagement, shaping their motivation, commitment, and capacity to drive administrative reforms (Shrestha, 2016). There is a dearth of empirical study on how generational disparities impact engagement levels in Nepal's rural municipalities, despite the fact that engagement is crucial for efficient governance. Addressing this gap is imperative to enhance administrative effectiveness and foster a collaborative governance culture.

## **Problem Statement and Research Questions**

The generational divergence between chairpersons and CAOs in Nepal's local governments presents a profound challenge to fostering an engaged and cohesive administrative workforce. Chairpersons, guided by political priorities, emphasize authority and legacy-driven leadership, while CAOs, as career bureaucrats, are expected to implement structured governance models that emphasize institutional accountability and procedural efficiency (Bhusal, 2022; Shrestha, 2016). These contrasting orientations often result in governance friction, bureaucratic inertia, and reduced engagement among municipal administrators, undermining institutional performance. Existing literature presents mixed perspectives on generational engagement; older generations demonstrate stronger institutional commitment due to tenure stability and deep-rooted governance networks (Bano et al., 2015; Hakanen et al., 2019), while younger professionals, particularly millennials, seek purpose-driven work, inclusive leadership, and innovation-driven governance structures, which traditional political leadership may not always support (Gallup, 2016; Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

Within Nepal's rural municipalities, these generational tensions may either foster collaborative engagement—where mutual adaptability exists—or exacerbate administrative inefficiencies when conflicting leadership styles prevail (Khadka, 2020; Paudel, 2021). Without addressing these generational dynamics, work engagement among CAOs may remain suboptimal, adversely affecting policy implementation, service delivery, and overall municipal governance effectiveness. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the empirical gap by critically examining how generational differences between chairpersons and CAOs affect CAOs' work engagement in Nepal's local governments. Engagement is crucial for human resource professionals, forming the foundation for strategies that drive long-term competitive advantage (Albrecht et al., 2015; Hakanen et al., 2019; Rajagopal, 2009; Schaufeli, 2013; Truss et al., 2013). In this backdrop, this research endeavors to answer the following key questions: 1. How does the generational gap between the chairperson and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) affect the CAO's work engagement in Nepal's local governments? 2. What strategic interventions can CAOs implement to enhance their engagement while navigating generational complexities in Nepal's local governance structure?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Generation**

Generations are groups categorized by birth year, sharing a collective identity shaped by significant socio-political, cultural, and economic events (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Pritchard & Whiting, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). These shared experiences influence values, attitudes, and beliefs (Twenge et al., 2010). Significant events during formative years shape worldviews (Costanza et al., 2012). Generational experiences in Indonesia differ from other countries, leading to distinct identities, although global interactions can narrow these differences (Lu et al., 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002). For global comparison, this study uses Brennan's generational taxonomy: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Currently, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y are the active workforce. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) emphasize cooperation,

loyalty, and value seniority (Doe et al., 2016; Sarraf et al., 2017). They engage when appreciated, motivated, and supported by their organization, leading to high status and career advancement (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Doe et al., 2016). Generation X (1965-1980) prefers individual work, values autonomy, and seeks immediate rewards (Sarraf et al., 2017). They are engaged by intellectual challenges, skill development opportunities, and work-life balance (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Barron et al., 2014). Generation Y (1981-1999) is independent and confident, values job autonomy, personal life pursuits, and workplace flexibility (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Sarraf et al., 2017; Twenge et al., 2010). They prioritize leisure and extrinsic values (Schullery, 2013), freedom at work (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). Generational differences influence organizational practices in recruitment, training, evaluation, promotion, and reward systems, as well as job satisfaction elements (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). Upbringing and era shape unique priorities, expectations, and behaviors (Barron et al., 2014; Smith, 2009). Each generation's work values—leisure, extrinsic, intrinsic, altruistic, and social—significantly influence interactions with their work environment (Schullery, 2013; Twenge et al., 2010).

### **Theoretical Foundation of Generation Gap**

Generational diversity in the modern workplace features employees from multiple age cohorts, each with unique values, preferences, and attitudes toward work engagement (Lyons & Kuron, 2018). Understanding these differences is crucial for organizations aiming to maximize productivity and employee satisfaction (Johnson & Smith, 2014). Generational differences in work engagement are explained by several theoretical frameworks. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from social groups, such as generational cohorts, which influence their behavioral patterns and preferences. Life Course Theory (Elder, 1985) emphasizes the role of historical and social contexts in shaping individuals' life trajectories, highlighting how generational experiences influence work engagement across the lifespan. Furthermore, the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 1995) posits that as individuals grow older, their goals and priorities evolve, leading them to emphasize emotionally meaningful pursuits. For older workers, this often includes nurturing positive relationships in the workplace, which can significantly influence their levels of engagement. This comprehensive literature review examines various factors influencing generational differences in work engagement, drawing from these theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and practical implications to provide a nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon.

### **Work Engagement**

Work engagement, also known as employee engagement, refers to an employee's dedication and persistent effort in their job, believing these attributes positively contribute to goal attainment (Hakanen et al., 2019). Scholars offer various perspectives on defining work engagement. Kahn (1990), Maslach et al. (2001), and Saks (2006) have proposed different conceptual frameworks (Banihani et al., 2013). Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe engagement as a positive mental investment in work, marked by energy, commitment, and concentration, contrasting burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Highly engaged employees deeply engage in their roles, driven by vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Social exchange theory offers another lens,

positing that interpersonal relationships are built on mutual exchanges. Employees reciprocate with engagement when they receive resources and benefits (Saks, 2006). Kahn (1990) asserts that engaged employees manifest their engagement physically, cognitively, and emotionally during work. May et al. (2004) validated engagement hinges on meaningfulness, safety, and availability.

### **Generational Cohorts and Work Engagement**

Understanding different generational cohorts' characteristics and preferences is essential for deciphering their unique approach to work engagement. Baby Boomers, known for their strong work ethic and organizational loyalty, derive engagement from a sense of duty and responsibility (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Generation X, shaped by economic uncertainty and technological advancements, values autonomy and work-life balance, seeking personal growth (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Millennials prioritize purposeful work and meaningful connections, valuing flexibility, feedback, and a supportive environment (Rigoni et al., 2018). Generation Z, the digital natives, thrives on collaboration, innovation, and constant learning, seeking dynamic and inclusive environments (Nguyen & Huang, 2021).

### **Individual Factors Influencing Work Engagement**

Generational differences in work engagement are influenced by individual-level factors like personality traits, career expectations, and motivational drivers. Traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness vary across generations, affecting engagement (Furlong et al., 2017). Career expectations differ, with Baby Boomers prioritizing job security and advancement, while Millennials seek purposeful work and growth opportunities (Perron & Chait, 2020). Motivational drivers, including intrinsic rewards, extrinsic incentives, and social recognition, reflect generational values and preferences (Lyons & Higgins, 2007).

### **Interpersonal Dynamics and Organizational Culture**

Interpersonal relationships and organizational culture significantly impact generational work engagement. Effective communication, mentorship, and adaptive leadership foster engagement across age cohorts (Twenge et al., 2010). Generational differences necessitate leadership approaches that cater to diverse needs (Sekiguchi et al., 2017). A culture of inclusivity, trust, and support is essential for promoting engagement and well-being across generations (Böhm et al., 2020).

### **Organizational Practices and Policies**

Organizational practices and policies addressing generational differences enhance work engagement. Flexible work arrangements, performance management systems, and career development programs accommodate diverse needs, promoting engagement and job satisfaction (McGregor et al., 2010; Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017). Recognition and rewards programs foster a culture of appreciation, enhancing engagement and retention (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2014).

## **Cross-Cultural Perspectives**

Cross-cultural perspectives highlight how cultural norms influence generational work engagement. Understanding these nuances is crucial for managing diversity and promoting inclusion in global workplaces. Cultural dimensions like individualism-collectivism and power distance impact generational attitudes toward engagement (Hofstede, 2001). Global leadership competencies, such as cultural intelligence and adaptability, are essential for fostering engagement in multinational organizations (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

### **2.4.5 Practical Implications**

Organizations can leverage generational differences in work engagement by implementing tailored strategies. Leadership development, flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and recognition initiatives accommodate diverse generational needs, promoting engagement, health, and well-being (Society for Human Resource Management, 2019). Recognition and rewards programs enhance engagement by celebrating contributions across generational cohorts (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2014).

### **Influence of Generation on Work Engagement**

Understanding generational traits is crucial for enhancing organizational effectiveness (Barron et al., 2014). Employee engagement, which involves meaningful work, a safe environment, and necessary resources, plays a vital role in this context (Kahn, 1990; Shuck, 2011). Engagement is fueled by energy, enthusiasm, and passion, preventing burnout (Bailey et al., 2017; Schaufeli, 2013). Additionally, gratitude for organizational rewards further drives engagement (Saks, 2006). Generational characteristics shaped by shared experiences often lead to similar work responses. This study focuses on government organizations where career progression is generation-based. Baby Boomers, occupying senior roles, receive greater rewards, fostering higher engagement (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Consequently, Baby Boomers exhibit greater work engagement than Generations X or Y. In high power distance cultures, respect for superiors is integral (Hofstede et al., 2010). Younger generations may face increased stress, leading to lower engagement compared to older generations. Thus, recognizing and addressing these generational dynamics is imperative for fostering an engaged and effective workforce across all generational cohorts.

### **Study Methods**

The study employed a qualitative method to explore employee engagement perceptions among different generational cohorts within local government settings. This method was chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena and rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences and perspectives (Gupta et al., 2020). Guided from an inductive approach, a case study method was used as a strategy of inquiry in which multiple cases were considered to reflect diverse viewpoints, selected for their ability to offer contextual understanding (Yin, 2018), gather multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995), and provide flexibility in data collection methods (Merriam, 1998). The detailed examination facilitated theory development (Eisenhardt,

1989) and in generation of practical implications (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Participants of the study were 13 Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) from various local governments, appointed by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) after completing the 36th Basic Administration Training (BAT-36) (fiscal year 2079/80). They were identified through purposive sampling. The selection considered geographic, demographic, provincial, and socio-cultural diversity. In-depth interviews, face-to-face and virtual; fostered open dialogue, allowing candid insights from the participants. The researcher maintained privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, adhering to ethical standards, and transcribed interviews to identify themes and subthemes using the Utrecht Work Engagement (UWES-17) framework by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

## Results

### 4.1 Generation Gap and Employee Engagement

Work engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work. It is a critical determinant of individual and organizational success. CAOs have principally acknowledged the importance of balanced mix of these characters in their actions, decisions and behavior. However, in practice, CAO's mentioned that their dedication to workplace commitments is higher than other two characters- vigor and absorption as a result of generation gap between the chairperson of the local government and them.

---I feel proud of the work I do because it instills in me an enormous sense of meaning and purpose no matter what. (Participant 3).

--- I feel challenged while I seek to enhance by job role and that inspires me to put more energy and effort effectively into my job (Participant 1).

Even amidst the time of downs and despair I remain enthusiastic with the innate belief and confidence that good things are down the way---(Participant 13).

---I get motivated and inspired when I evaluate the overall purpose my efforts are dedicated and meant for (Participant 7).

The above assortments made by CAOs' substantiate for a higher level of dedication towards their work, signifying that they feel proud of their work and get inspired by what they have been doing being in the professional role at the capacity of CAO.

In addition to this, CAOs' insights and perspectives revealed moderate extent of their character in terms of vigor as a result of the generation gap between chairperson of the local government and them. As a result, CAOs are not sure whether their level of energy and effort in their workplace has remained intact over time.

---many times, I feel like going to work every new morning. However, these feelings often diluted along with time (Participant 6).

I tried to persevere and remain consistent while performing my roles at the initial months of my appointment as a CAO in this local government--- (Participant 9).

---putting continuous and prolonged efforts over the same issue and having little or no meaningful outcomes impedes the level of my future effort on the similar issue. (Participant 2).

Prolonged obstacles stemming from the differences in priorities because of generational divides leading to poor results in my efforts to bring about the desired change in my office makes me feel lethargic and often exhausted---(Participant 11).

--- I am not sure whether I am as strong and resilient as I used to be while paving avenues towards innovative and citizen centric service delivery (Participant 8).

Absorption is another crucial characteristic that attributes to the engagement of CAO's. It refers to the extent to which CAO's are deeply engrossed in their work, to the point where time seems to fly, and they forget about the world around them. This state is akin to the psychological concept of "flow," where individuals are fully immersed and focused on the activity at hand. However, CAO's mentioned that their extent of work absorption as a part of engagement was noticeably poor.

--- I still have a hard time adjusting myself in the office since this is the first time I have ever stood far and often detached from my family (Participant 1).

Even I know that Nepal is a small country where we can reach to our family within couple of hours, I am having difficulties to focus on my job ---(Participant 12).

---In many instances during my work, I have often realized that office hours were too long for me (Participant 6).

Being a newly appointed officer, I am trying to immerse myself into every nitty-gritty of my work, yet I often feel a sense of distraction --- (Participant 10).

--I have felt extremely gratified in my work since my appointment at this office. Gradually things and dynamics changed, which has gradually faded my intense efforts towards work. (Participant 2).

CAOs mentioned their enhanced character in terms of their dedication to the workplace. However, the remaining two characteristics, i.e. vigor and absorption, are found to be lower compared to dedication resulting in a moderate level of workplace engagement. It is noteworthy to mention that the generation gap that exists between the chairperson and them is the reason why their extent of vigor and absorption was relatively poor compared to their level of dedication. Apart from this, insights from CAOs revealed how their workplace behavior changed given the generation gap issues between them and the chairperson of the local governments, after undergoing content and thematic analysis of the insights obtained from them as discussed in the following section.

### **Generation Gap and Interpersonal Communication**

CAOs accepted that the generation gap affected their interpersonal communication styles in both personal and professional interactions. The generational gap can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts due to differing communication styles, values, and preferences for communication mediums. These differences can create challenges in the workplace, where effective communication is crucial for collaboration and productivity. Apart from this it emphasized the pressing need to



harmonize the communication gap to foster an environment of mutual respect and understanding between them and the chairperson at the workplace.

--- I have faced some unexpected disputes with the chairperson just because of the way I expressed my views and the ways he perceived and reacted to it (Participant 1)

They prefer face-to-face communication, value directness, and formality. In contrast, I feel more comfortable and connected with more informal communication over formality--- (Participant 4).

--- my communication style has changed since I realized that there is a generation gap between us. (Participant 8).

### **Generation Gap and Work Culture**

CAOs recognized the ways how generation gap has shaped their work culture and highlighted the importance of open communication, flexibility, and a willingness to understand and accommodate diverse perspectives and preferences. Apart from this, they emphasized that organizations that successfully bridge this gap can leverage the strengths of each generation to create a more dynamic and productive work culture and environment.

---my belief over importance of conducive work culture has become even more intense than ever since I began to work as a CAO. (Participant 1)

Now I realize that having a comprehensive action plan at hand could hardly bring about radical changes until and unless the culture of the organization is supportive---(Participant 8).

### **Generation Gap and Team Spirit**

CAOs mentioned that the generation gap can both enrich and challenge team spirit within an organization. They shed light on the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique dynamics and preferences of each generation to effectively leverage the strengths of generational diversity to foster a more cohesive and high-performing team culture.

---most often we collectively defend the radical ideas of chairpersons by using established bureaucratic laws and provisions. I usually call staff meetings at regular intervals to ensure this. The process has helped me a lot to foster team spirit in my team members. (Participant 2).

My team of subordinates has always been my backbone to help me ensure compliance and adhere to the rule of law while tackling undue political pressures guided by vested interests of chairpersons representing other generations--- (Participant 7).

---as an administrative head and having considerable generation gap with the chairperson, establishing a team culture and team spirit apparently seems to be a must require prerequisite (Participant 11).

Fostering a culture of team spirit has been perceived as a measure to collectively defend undue pressures apart from gaining operational efficiency in routine work.

## Generation Gap and Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is often perceived as a bloodstream that avails and empowers employees to put extra effort into accomplishing work. In the aspects of employee motivation, CAOs mentioned that the generation gap posits little influence except for fueling their workplace motifs with inspirational words and well wishes.

--- cordial and friendly dialogues, interaction, and conversation between us in the workplace setting are the major attributes which make me feel empowered. But I don't think this is sufficient to instill and foster sense of motivation in me (Participant 4).

Difference in priorities and interests emerging out of generation gap between us often leads to deadlocks and this in turn reduces interpersonal communication between us. Having said this, I do not say my motivation level has declined out of this---(Participant 13).

--- I think my level of workplace motivation has remained intact despite having generation gap between us (Participant 5)

CAOs' acknowledgment of the cordial dialogues from the chairperson that have been instrumental in performing the tasks. Beyond that, CAOs could not underscore significant instincts of motivation as a result of a generational gap between the chairperson and them.

## Generation Gap and Decision Making

Acknowledging making decision-making as a lifeline to bring operational and strategic efficiency to local governments, CAOs shed light on the importance of understanding and navigating the influence of the generation gap on decision-making processes. They highlighted that decision-making is equally essential for promoting collaboration, innovation, and effective leadership within organizations. CAOs believe that by embracing diversity and leveraging the strengths of each generation, local governments can make more informed and inclusive decisions that drive success in an ever-evolving business landscape. In addition to this, CAO's also emphasized that aligned wavelength over the nuances of making decision-making perspective between the chairperson and them is the determinant of the way a decision is effectively made. Although CAOs find their decision-making perspectives more aligned with that of chairpersons in operational and routine operations, they mentioned that this alignment stifles while dealing with policy-level issues, interpreting legal provisions and streamlining development projects.

---I feel more aligned perspectives of decision making between us while dealing with operational and routine tasks, yet we share enormous deviations between our decision perspectives and priorities when dealing with policy level issues (Participant 7).

---they tend to influence and convince us to obtain approval so that policy and project-based decision of the local governments goes their way (Participant 9).

Sometimes I feel often confused failing to recognize their hidden motif behind the way the chairperson puts forward his decision-making perspectives especially when it comes to policy level issues, interpreting laws and legal provisions---(Participant 12).

---we often experience different perspectives and nuances when it comes to deciding over streamlining development projects which have gained the interest of multiple stakeholders, and sometime also the ones which require for significant amount of budget (Participant 5).

Apart from this, CAO's mentioned that chairpersons are more concerned with immediate results and are often less hesitant to make decisions using the populist approach for ensuring immediate outcomes without bothering much about the regulatory and legal frameworks.

### **Generation Gap and Leadership Style**

Effective leadership in the context of the generation gap involves understanding and embracing generational diversity, adapting leadership styles to meet the needs and preferences of diverse team members, and fostering an inclusive and collaborative organizational culture. By leveraging the unique strengths of each generation, leaders can drive organizational success in an ever-changing business landscape. Leadership styles may differ based on generational attitudes toward organizational vision and purpose. Younger leaders may prioritize social responsibility, sustainability, and purpose-driven goals, aligning their leadership approach with broader societal values whereas older leaders may focus on legacy-building, stability, and profitability, emphasizing the importance of tradition and continuity in leadership practices (Larsson & Björklund, 2021).

---internalizing the fact that we represent different generations having varying interests, priorities and expectations, I have become more flexible, democratic, and people oriented (Participant 11).

I used to be more authoritative while performing my roles and responsibilities. Now, I have realized that two authoritative leaders could not co-exist in an organization and thus I have adopted a more flexible approach---(Participant 8).

Over time, I came to realize that different leaders and leadership style also bring more dynamics within organizations and teams---(Participant 13).

CAOs accepted that the generation gap between chairperson and them differs as both have distinct interests, priorities, preferences and expectations. They mentioned about their adoption of collaborative and participative leadership styles that empower team members, while their counterparts prefer authoritative leadership with clear hierarchies. They further pinpointed over dynamics within teams and organizations as an outcome of differing leadership style.

### **Generation Gap and Individual Performance**

CAOs accepted that their individual performance could only be as good as their extent of engagement at local levels. Among the various drivers of their engagement, the generation gap between the chairperson and them and the associated aftermath thereof was given priority. CAOs emphasized over input and process variables to elucidate their individual performance. Apart from this, CAOs mentioned that it is crucial to have congruent generational nuances between the chairperson and them to optimize their engagement level thus accelerating their individual performance.

---My performance is dependent upon my engagement. My engagement level: to a large extent depends upon the degree of congruence between the chairperson and my work generation ---(Participant 6).

I think the generation gap between us often creates obstacles in organizational processes which ultimately hinders my performance at large --- (Participant 9).

--- difference in interests, styles, personality, values, and orientations featuring in us as an outcome of generational divides often impedes my work efficiency---(Participant 12).

---the only option I have as a CAO is either to rationally adjust myself with chairpersons' work orientation harmonizing the organizational processes and keeping progressive track of my individual performance or to quit or get transferred (Participant 1).

### **Strategies Adopted by CAO's to Increase Their Work Engagement**

CAOs have adopted different strategies to deal with the influence of generation gaps between chairperson and them with the aim to enhance their work engagement. They believed that these strategies help them to minimize negative impact stemming from generational issues while staying focused on their workplace engagement.

#### **Developing Effective Communication and Fostering Team Spirit**

CAOs have mentioned that their positive attitude, clear and persuasive communication skills, and their team spirit are central to enhance their engagement level at local governments.

First, I clearly communicate for clarifying about regulatory and legal provisions and the potential negative outcomes to the chairpersons---(Participant 2)

--- I try to unite the office staff to collectively defend against undue pressures---(Participant 3).

---stay humble with the person but hard with the problem adopting persuasive communication skills --- (Participant 11)

--- I believe that my positive attitude and effective communication are the keys to enhancing my work engagement (Participant 1)

#### **Shaping Work Culture and Leadership Style**

CAOs have emphasized the importance of reshaping their leadership style and work culture to negate the negative consequences stemming from the generation gap. For this, they have adopted a flexible work culture<sup>1</sup> and people-oriented leadership style. They believe that the combination of these two strategies harnesses a positive work environment and fosters team spirit which helps abate the influence of the generation gap to a large extent.

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<sup>1</sup> A flexible work culture is one that allows employees to have greater control over when, where, and how they work and can include options like remote work, flexible hours, and customized career paths. It aims to create a work environment where employees could balance their work and personal lives more effectively, leading to their increased job satisfaction, productivity and work engagement.

---creating a flexible and healthy work culture, a supportive environment, and adopting people-oriented leadership is central to enhancing engagement---(Participant 8).

I believe in positive work culture and supportive work environment are my secrets of effective engagement---(Participant 1).

---developing better team spirit and flexible work culture are the central tenets of effective engagement (Participant 12).

### **Practicing Ethical Behavior and Participative Decision Making**

CAOs have mentioned that ethical behavior and participative decision making is the key to remain focused and stay unbiased over the undue pressures coming out of various interest groups and stakeholders. They have mentioned that this strategy not only empowers them to act ethically but also creates a conducive environment to streamline procedures that foster organizational efficiency. Apart from this, they believe that participative decision making builds a sense of ownership in stakeholders which facilitates the effective implementation of decisions in risk free environment. On the other hand, CAO's believed that their perceived sense of ethical behavior is their impetus to sharpen their focus over their work. As a result, negativity coming out of generation gap tends to be subsided.

---I have adopted the rule of law approaches to ensure ethical decision making (Participant 6).

I believe my ethical behavior is the key to remain focused on my work--- (Participant 10).

---if my behavior is premised over the solid foundation of ethics and integrity, I can hold confidence for whatever I am doing and it in turn upholds my engagement no matter what---(Participant 7).

---participative decision-making and ethical behavior are gateways to staying focused on my job (Participant 3).

### **Setting Priorities**

CAOs have mentioned that they have set priorities to stay focused and attuned with the immediate and future performance results expected out of them. They believed that setting priorities for the work enhances their time management skills, allows sharper focus on what is strategically important, accelerates their productivity, boosts morale, reduces stress, and supports work-life balance. Apart from this, priorities navigate CAOs to shape their vision and direct their overall behavior to achieve it efficiently without getting distracted from generational issues.

Prioritizing tasks allows me to concentrate on the most important tasks first, reducing the risk of being overwhelmed by less critical responsibilities---(Participant 1).

---by identifying key tasks, I can allocate my time and resources more effectively, leading to increased productivity, engagement and performance (Participant 9).

Completing important tasks can provide a sense of accomplishment, which in turn can boost my morale and engagement level to work---(Participant 5).

---priorities allow me to manage time better, ensuring that deadlines are met, and work quality is intact---(Participant 7).

---priorities provide me with required information about what needs to be done and how it helps me reduce work-related stress, as I have a clear roadmap to follow---(Participant 12).

## Discussion

The contemporary workplace, including Nepal's local government, features unprecedented generational diversity, with employees from various age groups characterized by unique values, preferences, and attitudes toward work engagement (Lyons & Kuron, 2018). Generational differences in work engagement are rooted in diverse theoretical frameworks. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals derive identity and belonging from social groups, such as generational cohorts, resulting in distinct behavioral tendencies and preferences. Life course theory (Elder, 1985) emphasizes the impact of historical and social contexts on life trajectories, influencing work engagement throughout the lifespan. Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995) proposes that as individuals age, their goals and priorities shift, with older workers prioritizing emotionally significant activities, such as nurturing positive relationships at work, affecting engagement levels.

This study critically analyzed governmental organizations where promotional opportunities are predominantly contingent upon performance evaluations and seniority. This structure leaves little room for lateral entry, subsequently creating a generation-based career progression framework. In these organizations, Baby Boomers typically occupy upper-level management positions (echelon<sup>2</sup> II), Generation X members are found in echelons II or III, and Generation Y members fill lower-level management roles (echelon IV).

Within this hierarchical structure, two distinct generational cohorts were particularly notable: Generation X chairpersons and Generation Y Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs). Generation X leaders generally prefer working independently and seek challenging environments that offer opportunities for personal and professional growth. This cohort values autonomy and immediate rewards over hierarchical seniority (Doe et al., 2016; Sarraf et al., 2017). They are motivated by intellectual challenges, skill enhancement, and a balanced work-life arrangement (Barron et al., 2014; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008;).

Conversely, Generation Y values independence, confidence, and the ability to express themselves (Sarraf et al., 2017). Their engagement is primarily driven by job autonomy, opportunities for personal pursuits outside of work, and workplace flexibility (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Twenge et al., 2010). For Generation Y, leisure activities are a top priority, followed closely by extrinsic

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<sup>2</sup>The meaning of the term 'echelon' used in this study include: Echelon II refers to upper-level management positions, typically held by senior executives or directors involved in high-level decision-making, strategic planning, and policy formulation, commonly occupied by Baby Boomers. Echelon III consists of mid-level management roles responsible for overseeing specific departments or units and acting as intermediaries between upper and lower management, often filled by Generation X members. Echelon IV includes lower-level management positions focused on managing day-to-day operations, supervising small teams, and ensuring task execution, with Generation Y members typically occupying these roles and having limited decision-making authority compared to higher echelons.

values (Schullery, 2013). Work engagement, or employee engagement, refers to an employee's commitment and sustained effort in their job, contributing positively to achieving goals (Hakanen et al., 2019). Scholars have various perspectives on defining work engagement, with Kahn (1990), Maslach et al. (2001), and Saks (2006) proposing different conceptual frameworks (Banihani et al., 2013). Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe engagement as a state of positive mental investment in work, characterized by energy, commitment, and concentration, contrasting it with burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Highly engaged employees exhibit vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2006). However, this study's findings contradict with this assertion presenting varying degrees of dedication, vigor, and absorption. These differences can be analyzed through social exchange theory, suggesting that CAOs reciprocate engagement to their organization when they receive resources and benefits (Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness, safety, and availability, empirically validated by May et al. (2004), are influenced by peer effects among CAOs, potentially due to perceived unpredictable and unfair placement, transfer, and treatment mechanisms.

The strategies adopted by CAOs to mitigate the negative impact of the generational gap align with scholars like Barron et al. (2014), emphasizing the importance of recognizing generational traits to enhance organizational effectiveness. Understanding these nuances allows local governments to tailor strategies for bolstering employee engagement and improving overall performance. However, the multidimensional association between the generation gap and work engagement must be locally contextualized rather than analyzed as a linear relationship between attributing factors.

## **Conclusion**

Upon analyzing the key insights, it becomes evident that the generation gap between Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) and the chairpersons of local governments significantly affects CAOs' work engagement level at local governments. The generational divide diminishes their vigor and absorption which are crucial for driving employee engagement. However, workplace dedication remains unaffected by this gap. The influence of the generation gap extends across various levels—from individual and interpersonal interactions to team dynamics and the overall organizational structure. Moreover, CAOs noted that chairpersons often prioritize immediate results and are likely to make decisions using a populist approach that disregards regulatory and legal frameworks. To effectively face this situation, CAOs implement strategies that aim to alleviate these populist priorities and maintain focus to elevate their work engagement within local governments. These strategies include ethical behavior, participative decision-making, flexible culture, people-oriented leadership style, setting work priorities, establishing clear communication channels, and fostering team spirit to abate the negative influences stemming from generational divides. Successfully adopting these strategies can foster a more engaged and productive work environment within local governments, ensuring CAOs maintain focus and elevate their engagement levels.

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