

# ***The Intergenerational Theoretical Perspective on Motivation in the Medical Workplace, a Literature Review***

**Yangming Tu<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>School of Psychological Science, Oregon State University, Reed Lodge, 2950 SW Jefferson Way, Corvallis, United States of America  
a. yangmingtu1229@gmail.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Psychodynamics profoundly influences society, where intrinsic motivations, extrinsic motivations, job engagement, and orientations toward public service play key roles in shaping organizational structures. This review article explores the intersections of psychodynamic principles and generational theory, particularly their applications in the medical field during the COVID-19 pandemic. By referencing academic databases such as Frontiers in Psychology, MDPI, GALE ACADEMIC ONEFILE, IEEE Xplore, and Oregon State University Library, this study delves into how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, along with job resources and motivations for public service, impact job engagement and occupational well-being across different generations. The article highlights the unique attitudes and expectations of Generations Y and Z, gathering observed changes in their career values and work-life balance preferences. The study examines how these intergenerational theoretical views interact with motivational dynamics, especially under the prolonged pressures of the pandemic. Integrating psychodynamic theories with empirical data on motivational factors and generational differences, this review aims to provide insights into the evolving nature of job engagement and its implications for future workforce management.

**Keywords:** motivation, job resources, job engagement, intergenerational theory

## **1. Introduction**

Psychodynamic research is a field of significant impact on both social and personal well-being. Studies of its crucial aspects, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and job engagement, provide references for the operational structures of real organizations. Definitions in this area reveal overlapping points of positive stimulation derived from individuals' emotional states, subjective emotions, and attitudes toward work. These elements, originating from personal perspectives, receive feedback in the work environment and subsequently impact one's work efforts. Although some psychologists in the last century regarded subjective emotions as accessories and considered observable behavior as most crucial, psychodynamics values individuals' internal emotions and thoughts, not merely the effects of external stimuli [1]. With the development of generational theory, more explicit boundaries are emerging among the populations of various eras, including views on personal achievements, lifestyles, and receptiveness to new things. Despite controversies over the reliability of generational theory, its content undoubtedly provides a time-focused perspective for psychodynamic research. This article aims to sift through the main concepts of psychodynamics and

generational views on Generations Y and Z, combining these to examine the current medical field workforce. At the end of 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 placed immense pressure on the healthcare systems of many countries, a pressure that lasted years rather than months. This sustained pressure brought significant negative psychological impacts to the medical workforce, also providing an opportunity to test generational theory's views on contemporary workers and speculate about the future. This paper refers to records of medical workers during the pandemic in several countries, including personal accounts, resource provision, psychological issues, changes in the work environment, employment references, and job expectations of medical students, integrating this information to discuss the psychodynamics from a generational theory perspective and the outlook for Generation Z, the future labor force.

## **2. Public Service Attributes, Job Engagement, and Occupational Well-being Interactions**

### **2.1. Public Service Attributes**

Civil servants possess public service attributes; although some hospitals are private and profit-driven, the medical field inherently includes public service aspects. These employees, doctors, and nurses usually serve a community or even a nation, and when they work for the benefit of others, they are likely motivated by public service, which may also be one of their reasons for choosing their profession [2]. Employees driven by public service motivations pursue intrinsic motivational satisfaction and exhibit more pro-social behavior. It is predictable that medical personnel are likely motivated by the values inherent in their profession. Studies from Pakistan and China demonstrate this; in a study of Pakistani intern doctors, the majority of the sample group engaged in honor work, motivated by the importance of their work and the sense of accomplishment it brings [3]. In China, basic psychological needs were highly related to learning motivation, which in turn affected intrinsic motivation, manifesting as changes in job engagement [4].

### **2.2. Possible Causes and Consequences of Job Engagement**

Job engagement is an essential aspect of assessing the effectiveness of company policies. When employees are in a state of motivation and display high enthusiasm for their work, it is often considered a manifestation of job engagement [5]. Internally, many aspects are highly related to job engagement, including intrinsic motivation stemming from public service attributes, personal efficacy, emotional stability, and emotional commitment; externally, the rewards of extrinsic motivation, and ample support from superiors and colleagues provide sufficient work resources, also increasing job involvement [5]. Notably, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are not entirely separate; sometimes, extrinsic incentives need to rely on intrinsic motivation. Employees' needs for personal growth require corporate assistance. Generally, the more invested employees are in their work, the more likely they are to achieve efficient results, but if a company implements high-pressure policies, it may force employees to perform superficially without genuinely motivating them. Employees' job status also significantly affects their level of job engagement, with those in permanent positions feeling more secure and happier, showing greater interest in tangible, pragmatic rewards [6].

### **2.3. Occupational Well-being**

Occupational well-being falls into two categories: well-being related to the workplace and well-being related to the individual. The deterioration of workplace well-being can lead to production losses and even medical errors and legal costs in the medical field; personal well-being relates to doctors' mental health, involving personal and family harmony and also reflecting in the work environment. However,

in the long run, improving workplace well-being brings greater benefits than focusing solely on the personal concerns of medical staff [7].

### **3. Generational Theory Perspective in the Medical Workforce**

#### **3.1. Development of Generational Theory**

Early in the last century, people began to broadly categorize individuals born in different intervals, often related to the characteristics of their times. For example, the World War generation, the Baby Boomers, followed by Generations X and Y, and now Generation Z, born after 2000 [8]. In earlier studies, it seemed that each generation had its unique traits, distinct from other generations, and these traits also influenced their behavior in the workplace [9]. Some scholars believe that current generational effects largely overlook the factor of age, with researchers ignoring the impact of life processes in empirical studies—people born later may adopt the same views as previous generations as they age [8]. However, different social backgrounds also cannot be ignored; social changes bring environmental changes that affect the thoughts and habits of the newer generations. Generation Y (Millennials) grew up with better welfare, their sense of security satisfied, making them more willing to focus on and pursue their value systems; their core values in the workplace tend to favor fairness, respect, and tolerance [10]. As the latest-born group, Generation Z grew up alongside communication technologies, experiencing a childhood different from previous generations [11]. Despite the undeniable diversity within each generation, this still observe differences in thought between generations overall [9].

#### **3.2. Workplace Perspectives of Generation Y (Millennials)**

Modern global labor forces are primarily composed of Generation Y, expected to comprise 75% by 2025 [9]. Before Generation Z rises, workplace policies in various sectors should consider the ideational traits of this generation. Especially as Generation Z's growing environment is closer to that of the current Generation Y, their use of networks and smart technologies brings the two generations closer together, facilitating the continuity of policies as Generation Z grows and begins to replace Generation Y. Existing research often observes that Generation Y employees, compared to their older colleagues, display different ethical concepts and are more interested in balancing work and life rather than focusing solely on one; they crave feedback, desiring maximum control over their work flexibility [9]. This need for feedback may stem from their upbringing, as Millennials, compared to their predecessors, experienced a higher quality welfare environment, receiving more praise and encouragement on a macro level, shaping their expectations for personalized feedback; they are also more motivated by work achievement and adapt better to technological changes [12]. Compared to the Baby Boomer generation, Generation Y employees are more interested in external values, desiring fair compensation for their work; they may not value a sense of belonging to their work group or company as much, reflecting in a reduced demand for social rewards, speculated by some scholars to be because Generation Y separates work and life more distinctly, favoring more privatized social relationships [9].

#### **3.3. Generation Z Entering the Workplace**

Currently, Generation Z is gradually joining the workforce, and like Generation Y, they will become the main force in future workplaces, making their observation and analysis extremely necessary and forward-looking. Although the oldest members of Generation Z have already entered society, many are still in training. First is the matter of Generation Z's expectations for future work. In a survey conducted among medical students in Poland, it was found that Generation Z places professional

future job stability as their top consideration; in their expectations for future employment, they hope to gain recognition from others and are very willing to adopt helping others as a professional value [13]. When choosing a profession, Generation Z considers salary as a criterion, but salary factors are not the main reason for Generation Z's departure from a job; the Polish study may suggest the weight of intrinsic motivational work values in Generation Z's value system [10]. One of the defining characteristics of Generation Z is the transformative developments at the time of their birth, growing up amid the rapid development of communication technology, superbly adapting to the information age. Such changes have altered their communication methods compared to their predecessors and foreshadow changes in future workplace interpersonal relationships. Their mastery of technology sets high expectations for their performance in the workplace, or perhaps because of their young age when surveyed, Generation Z holds overly high and unrealistic expectations for the work environment [11]. While there is overlap between Generations Y and Z, there are also differences; the birth times of the two are close, and their receptiveness to new things in the future is more aligned. They both have more idealistic expectations for work, valuing the inherent worth of work itself and intending to clearly differentiate between personal life and work. However, Generation Z values the worth of work more than Generation Y.

Moreover, the evolving technological landscape and its impact on workplace dynamics are crucial in understanding the interaction between generational cohorts. As digital tools and telemedicine become more integrated into daily practices, it is essential to evaluate how these changes affect the expectations and performance of different generations. This technological shift requires ongoing training and adaptation, which can be particularly challenging for older generations, yet offers a unique opportunity to foster intergenerational collaboration and knowledge sharing within medical teams.

## **4. Medical Staff**

### **4.1. Characteristics of Medical Work**

Most activities in the medical industry place high demands on relevant personnel, requiring medical staff to make as few mistakes as possible and maintain high standards; individual value is greatly magnified here, with each person's work having a strong independent attribute, demanding high social skills; measuring the quality of work is more challenging; doctors are the backbone of the entire medical service, thus desiring more autonomy; general company employees are loyal only to their own company, but medical staff serve the entire community [14].

### **4.2. General Motivational Sources for Medical Staff**

In recent years, this study has found that the medical community places great importance on feedback, reflecting their desire for professional value realization. A study in Poland found that achievement was the most emphasized motivation; when income and job stability were threatened, the medical community would express strong dissatisfaction, but the key determinant of job satisfaction was the value of the work itself and the status it brought to doctors [14]. Previously, a large number of newly trained young doctors in the UK chose to develop in other countries, with reports showing that the most critical reason was personal life quality and future economic development, with the second concern being personal development opportunities [15].

### **4.3. Performance of Medical Staff During the Covid-19 Period**

Firstly, medical work itself is high-pressure, requiring constant interaction with patients, exposure to many negative emotions, and the risk of infection; even under normal circumstances, the proportion

of mental illness among medical staff is not low. During the Covid-19 period, these dangers were magnified, making the pressure even more unbearable; however, at the same time, Covid-19 is also a societal crisis, with personal professional value as one of the main motivations being amplified, making the performance of Generation Y, close to Generation Z, in the crisis worth analyzing. In a large-scale study in China, nurses faced a more serious risk of mental illness, with significant economic concerns, and the ward became a source of anxiety; the poor medical environment played an extremely negative role, with some medical workers complaining that they did not have adequate personal protective equipment, and the work environment had a key impact on workers' mental health [16]. Generation Y has higher expectations for fairness in work, with significant effort and inadequate professional support potentially taken into consideration, thereby affecting the perception of professional value. The problem of occupational grief has intensified, and personal grief issues have not been well resolved; because of lockdown policies, funerals or mourning could not be held, creating a huge gap in psychological support, potentially further increasing the risk of mental illness [17]. A considerable number of doctors in Ireland showed signs of occupational burnout, with the cause of burnout possibly due to the lack of informal support; burnout makes people lack a sense of achievement, but some doctors expressed positive emotions and a sense of accomplishment in their work, encouraged and supported by their peers; the medical community displayed their sense of responsibility for their profession during this crisis. Due to the nature of their work, infection is difficult to avoid, but even so, some doctors felt guilty for taking leave [7]. In the Irish study, when reporting their situations, individual doctors were more afraid of the lack of safety in the work environment than salary issues; additionally, their work caused disharmony in their private lives. For example, nannies fearing that the home was unsafe, medical staff unable to have close contact with family members, and conducting distressing Covid tests on the elderly also brought psychological pressure [7].

Leadership within medical institutions played a pivotal role during this crisis. Effective communication from hospital management about the evolving nature of the pandemic and the institution's response reassured staff and reduced uncertainty. Leaders who maintained transparency and provided regular updates helped cultivate trust and a sense of security among the workforce. Leadership training to equip health managers with skills in empathy, communication, and crisis management became more prevalent, recognizing that the way leaders respond in crises can significantly impact the morale and productivity of their teams.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the actual work responses of Generation Y and the expectations and ideals of Generation Z for future careers, this study sees a dynamically changing work environment landscape. The workplace performance of Generation Y reflects their high attention to work value and life quality, while Generation Z, while pursuing career stability, holds higher expectations for the social significance and personal identity of their profession. These characteristics indicate that the future medical industry needs to pay more attention to employees' intrinsic motivations and provide supportive work environments to meet the career needs and mental health of these emerging generations. Generation Z's expectations for the workplace differ from any previous generation; they have grown up in a highly digitalized and globalized world, with a reliance on technology and information processing capabilities surpassing any previous generation. As they gradually become the main body of the labor market, this study can foresee how they will reshape the work environment and professional roles. They tend to pursue rapid feedback and flexible work arrangements, which may drive the future design of workplaces to be more flexible and responsive. Additionally, Generation Z's high expectations for the intrinsic value and social impact of their profession will prompt employers to pay more attention to the social significance and personal achievement of work

roles when designing work roles and career development paths. This point is particularly important for the medical industry, as it is a field centered around high humanitarian care and professional spirit. Furthermore, workplace culture and team interactions also need to focus on diversity and inclusivity. Generation Z's diverse backgrounds and demands for fairness and transparency will necessitate the cultivation of increasingly open and innovative work environments, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable professional landscape. For management, understanding and adapting to these changes, as well as effectively stimulating the potential of Generation Z, will be important topics for future human resource management and organizational development. The future medical industry will need to continuously adapt and meet the career expectations and psychological needs of emerging generations amidst the ongoing changes in social and technological backgrounds. This is not only a challenge but also an opportunity, crucial for the global medical system and public health management. It should be noted that the definition of Generation Z may not apply to all national and social environments; as previously mentioned, the definition of these generations depends on changes in the times, and some less developed countries may not have truly experienced these changes, meaning their contemporary youth may not have adapted to new technologies as broadly defined Generation Z has. However, as these countries continue to develop, the experience of other countries in psychodynamics can be borrowed from them.

## References

- [1] Berridge, K. C. (2018). *Evolving Concepts of Emotion and Motivation*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1647–1647. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01647>
- [2] Ding, M., & Wang, C. (2023). *Can public service motivation increase work engagement?—A meta-analysis across cultures*. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 1060941. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1060941>
- [3] Khalid, A., & Rathore, K. (2018). *MEDIATING EFFECT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE ON WORK MOTIVATION OF POST-GRADUATE TRAINEE DOCTORS IN PUBLIC SECTOR HOSPITALS: EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN*. *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, 56(1), 93–11
- [4] Xu, L., Wang, Z., Li, Z., Lin, Y., Wang, J., Wu, Y., & Tang, J. (2022). *Mediation role of work motivation and job satisfaction between work-related basic need satisfaction and work engagement among doctors in China: a cross-sectional study*. *BMJ open*, 12(10), e060599. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-060599>
- [5] Scheepers, Renée A. MSc, PhD; Lases, Lenny S.S. MD; Arah, Onyebuchi A. MD, PhD; Heineman, Maas Jan MD, PhD; Lombarts, Kiki M.J.M.H. MSc, PhD. *Job Resources, Physician Work Engagement, and Patient Care Experience in an Academic Medical Setting*. *Academic Medicine* 92(10):p 1472-1479, October 2017. | DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000001719
- [6] Shkoler, O., & Kimura, T. (2020). *How Does Work Motivation Impact Employees' Investment at Work and Their Job Engagement? A Moderated-Moderation Perspective Through an International Lens*. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 38. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00038>
- [7] Creese, J., Byrne, J. P., Conway, E., Barrett, E., Prihodova, L., & Humphries, N. (2021). *"We All Really Need to just Take a Breath": Composite Narratives of Hospital Doctors' Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(4), 2051. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042051>
- [8] Schröder, M. *Work Motivation Is Not Generational but Depends on Age and Period*. *J Bus Psychol* (2023). <https://doi-org.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10869-023-09921-8>
- [9] Rank, S., & Contreras, F. (2021). *Do Millennials pay attention to Corporate Social Responsibility in comparison to previous generations? Are they motivated to lead in times of transformation? A qualitative review of generations, CSR and work motivation*. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 6(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-020-00058-y>
- [10] Kuzior, A., Kettler, K., & Rač, E. (2022). *Great Resignation—Ethical, Cultural, Relational, and Personal Dimensions of Generation Y and Z Employees' Engagement*. *Sustainability*, 14(11), NA. <https://link-gale-com.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A784034708/GRNR?u=s8405248&sid=bookmark-GRNR&xid=e758df969>.
- [11] Janssen, D., & Carradini, S. (2021). *Generation Z Workplace Communication Habits and Expectations*. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 64(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2021.3069288>
- [12] Desy, J. R., Reed, D. A., & Wolanskyj, A. P. (2017). *Milestones and millennials: a perfect pairing—competency-based medical education and the learning preferences of generation Y*. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 92(2), 243+.

<https://link-gale-com.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A484460620/ITBC?u=s8405248&sid=bookmark-ITBC&xid=4c5e09e8>

- [13] Kiedik, D., Grzebieluch, J., Chomatowska, B., Janiak-Rejno, I., & Zarczynska-Dobiesz, A. (2023). Representatives of generation 'Z' as future doctors-results of research among final year students at medical universities in Poland. *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine*, 30(1), 177–182. <https://doi.org/10.26444/aaem/156575>
- [14] Chmielewska, M., Stokwiszewski, J., Filip, J., & Hermanowski, T. (2020). Motivation factors affecting the job attitude of medical doctors and the organizational performance of public hospitals in Warsaw, Poland. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20(1), NA. <https://link-gale-com.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A631913127/AONE?u=s8405248&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=17581811>
- [15] Ooi, S. Z. Y., Ooi, R., Godoi, A., Foo, E. F., Woo, T., Ganesanathan, S., & Li, C. H. (2021). 1559 Motivations of Medical Students and Doctors Leaving the NHS Explored in a Residency Training Application Webinar Series. *British Journal of Surgery*, 108(Supplement\_6). <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjs/znab258.007>
- [16] De Kock, J. H., Latham, H. A., Leslie, S. J., Grindle, M., Munoz, S.-A., Ellis, L., Polson, R., & O'Malley, C. M. (2021). A rapid review of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of healthcare workers: implications for supporting psychological well-being. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1). <https://link-gale-com.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A650601603/AONE?u=s8405248&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=6516bae4>
- [17] Dawood, B., Tomita, A., & Ramlall, S. (2022). 'Unheard,' 'uncared for' and 'unsupported': The mental health impact of Covid -19 on healthcare workers in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. *PLoS ONE*, 17(5), e0266008. <https://link-gale-com.oregonstate.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A702489152/HRCA?u=s8405248&sid=bookmark-HRCA&xid=94ba2da0>