LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION AS SENSE-MAKING: A PARALLEL INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ACROSS GENERATIONAL COHORTS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

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Abstract
Purpose: This study explores how transformational leadership practices are experienced and interpreted through leadership communication across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z professionals in the pharmaceutical industry.

Design/methodology/approach: Adopting an interpretivist qualitative approach, the study employs **Parallel Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with pharmaceutical industry professionals from three generational cohorts (Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z). Analysis followed a strict IPA sequence, beginning with idiographic, line-by-line coding for each participant, followed by emergent theme development at the individual level, cohort-level thematic clustering, and cross-cohort synthesis to identify convergent and divergent meaning structures.

Findings: Five final selective themes emerged: (1) leadership communication as sense-making, (2) trust as the core currency of leadership relationships, (3) recognition and psychological safety as drivers of engagement, (4) leadership as mediation across hierarchy and generations, and (5) evolving psychological contracts across generational cohorts. Findings reveal generationally distinct interpretations of leadership communication and highlight the pivotal mediating role of Generation Y middle managers.

Originality/value: This study advances transformational leadership, psychological contract, and generational cohort theories by grounding them in lived experience. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of Parallel IPA for examining generational leadership dynamics without compromising idiographic depth.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Communication and leadership practices remain central to organizational effectiveness, particularly in knowledge-intensive and highly regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals. In recent years, the workforce composition of pharmaceutical organizations has evolved into a multi-generational structure, creating both opportunities and challenges for leadership and communication alignment. In light of this context, the organizations are heavily relying on transformational leadership to foster motivation, engagement, and cohesion across diverse generational groups (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Nurtjahjani, 2022).

In past 10 years, the workforce arrangement of pharmaceutical companies has evolved into a distinctly multi-generational structure. Mostly senior leadership positions are held by members of Generation X, middle management positions are held by members of Generation Y, and frontline and supervisory roles are fast being filled by members of Generation Z. Each generation with distinct properties brings generationally shaped expectations regarding leadership, communication style, authority, feedback, and work relationships (Mannheim, 1928; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Parry & Urwin, 2011). Because of this fact, leadership practices particularly transformational leadership practices are not uniformly experienced across generations but are interpreted through generationally specific lenses. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as key mechanisms through which leaders influence followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). However, these leadership practices do not operate in abstraction. They are lived, enacted, and interpreted through communication, which includes medium of communication like meetings, conversations, feedback exchanges, informal interactions, and symbolic acts. Consequently, understanding transformational

leadership in practice requires attention to how leadership is communicated and how such communication is experienced by different generational cohorts (van Manen, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Within this multi-generational context, the middle managers, predominantly belonging to Generation Y, occupy a pivotal position within the organizational hierarchy of the pharmaceutical industry. Their structural position enables continuous interaction with two distinct generational cohorts: top management, largely comprising Generation X, and frontline managers, increasingly represented by Generation Z. As a result, Generation Y middle managers serve as the principal bridge for hierarchical communication between strategic leadership and operational execution. This bridging role becomes more effective when organizations provide structured leadership training and developmental initiatives that equip middle managers to manage intergenerational expectations and work values (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

Generation Y middle managers are recognized as an influential and adaptive cohort, capable of naturally motivating and aligning generationally diverse teams. Consequently, they shoulder the responsibility of mitigating generational differences through transformational leadership behaviors and communication-intensive engagement. Over time, sustained motivation from top management is required to empower middle managers, who subsequently transmit this motivational influence to frontline managers. This cascading motivational process from Generation X to Generation Y and further to Generation Z facilitates psychological contract fulfillment, empowerment, and trust across generational lenses (Kahn, 1990; Jehanzeb, 2025; Twenge, 2010). Ultimately, effective communication and transformational leadership coordination among the three generations are commonly associated with experiences of engagement, commitment,

and perceived performance effectiveness (Xiaoqing, 2025; Dwivedula et al., 2025).

In the pharmaceutical industry of Pakistan, where competition, regulatory compliance, and supply chain reliability are critical, effective leadership communication across managerial levels is increasingly vital. However, limited empirical research currently exists examining how intergenerational communication and transformational leadership practices operate within middle management roles in Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector. This study therefore seeks to qualitatively explore communication and transformational leadership practices through a three-generational lens to understand how middle managers experience their role in supporting organizational alignment and engagement (Ahmed, 2020; Jameel et al., 2025).

1.1.   Problem Statement

Despite widespread adoption of transformational leadership as a preferred leadership model, *"pharmaceutical organizations continue to face persistent challenges related to unclear expectations, inconsistent feedback, reduced trust, and motivational decline particularly at workplaces that include multiple generational cohorts"*. Existing leadership studies largely explains transformational leadership through standardized behaviors and measurable outcomes, but it provides limited insight into how leadership communication is actually experienced, interpreted, and made meaningful by employees from Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z within regulated, high-pressure contexts such as the pharmaceutical industry.

Further, while intergenerational communication issues are frequently discussed, empirical studies rarely examine these differences through an interpretivist lens that captures lived experience, and even fewer studies focus on the role of Generation Y middle managers who must translate leadership intent across hierarchical and generational boundaries. As a result, organizations lack evidence-based understanding of why the

same leadership messages build motivation and trust for some cohorts while creating ambiguity, anxiety, or psychological contract strain for others. Accordingly, the problem addressed in this study is the limited phenomenological understanding of how transformational leadership practices are enacted through communication and how these communication experiences shape trust, motivation, and psychological contract perceptions across generational cohorts in the pharmaceutical industry.

1.2.   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore how leadership communication and transformational leadership practices are enacted, experienced, and interpreted by Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z professionals within the pharmaceutical industry of Pakistan. The study seeks to understand how transformational leadership practices are lived through everyday communication, how meanings attached to leadership communication vary across generational cohorts, and how Generation Y middle managers experience their role in bridging leadership expectations and communication practices between senior and frontline management. Generation Y is analytically central due to its intermediary organizational role, but all generational cohorts are examined as distinct and equally valid experiential lenses.

By embracing a phenomenological perspective, the study aims to move beyond abstract descriptions of leadership behaviors and instead capture the lived experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes through which leadership influence is negotiated across generational boundaries.

1.3.   Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1.3.1.   Explore how transformational leadership practices are experienced through communication

across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z.

1.3.2. Examine generational differences and similarities in the interpretation of leadership communication within pharmaceutical organizations.

1.3.3. Understand how Generation Y middle managers experience their role in translating leadership intent and expectations across hierarchical and generational boundaries.

1.3.4. Investigate how leadership communication experiences shape trust, motivation, and psychological contract perceptions across generational cohorts.

1.4.   Research Questions
1.4.1.   Main Research Question
How do Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z professionals experience and make sense of communication and transformational leadership practices within the pharmaceutical industry?

1.4.2.   Sub-Research Questions:
a)   How are transformational leadership practices experienced and interpreted through communication by professionals from different generational cohorts?

b)   How do meanings attached to leadership communication converge and diverge across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z?

c)   How do Generation Y middle managers experience their role in enacting and translating transformational leadership practices through communication between senior leadership (Generation X) and frontline employees (Generation Z)?

d)   How do experiences of leadership communication influence trust, motivation, and psychological contract perceptions across generational cohorts?

1.5.   Significance of the Study

1.5.1.   Academic Significance
This study contributes to leadership and organizational communication literature by offering a phenomenological account of how transformational leadership practices are lived and interpreted across generational cohorts (Smith et al., 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). By integrating transformational leadership theory with generational cohort theory and psychological contract theory, the study extends existing leadership research beyond outcome based models to experiential and interpretive understanding.

1.5.2.   Practical Significance
Findings will provide pharmaceutical organizations with insight into how leadership communication is experienced across generations, enabling the design of leadership development programs and communication strategies that are sensitive to generational differences and supportive of middle managers' bridging roles.

1.5.3.   Policy Significance
The study may inform HR and leadership policy by highlighting the importance of generationally responsive communication practices in succession planning, leadership development, and organizational continuity.

1.6.   Scope of the Study
The study focuses on professionals from Generation X (Top Management), Generation Y (Middle Managers), and Generation Z (Frontline Managers) working in pharmaceutical organizations in Pakistan. While Generation Y middle managers remain central due to their bridging role, Generation X and Generation Z are treated as independent experiential lenses rather than merely contextual informants. The study is limited to managerial and supervisory communication within pharmaceutical

organizations and does not extend to clinical or research leadership contexts.

1.7. Theoretical Foundation
1.7.1. Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory was originally developed by Burns (1978) and further advanced by Bass (1985), transformational leadership focuses on inspiring followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. In intergenerational workplaces, transformational leadership enables leaders to adapt communication styles and motivational strategies to align diverse expectations.

1.7.2. Generational Cohort Theory

Generational cohort theory suggests that individuals shaped by similar socio-economic and technological environments share common work values and communication preferences. Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z display distinct leadership expectations, making intergenerational communication a critical managerial competency.

1.7.3. Psychological Contract Theory

Psychological contract theory explains mutual expectations between employees and organizations. Effective communication and motivational alignment across managerial levels strengthen psychological contract fulfillment and employee commitment. These theoretical lenses jointly underpin the study's conceptual foundation.

1.8. Context: Pharmaceutical Industry of Pakistan

Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry is among the fastest-growing manufacturing sectors, serving domestic healthcare needs and expanding export potential. The industry operates under strict regulatory requirements, competitive market pressures, and increasing demand for supply chain efficiency. In this environment, middle managers play a vital role in translating strategic decisions into operational outcomes. However, rapid generational shifts in the workforce have introduced communication and leadership challenges that require adaptive and transformational leadership practices. Investigating these dynamics within Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector offers valuable context-specific insights for both academia and industry.

1.9. Summary

This chapter introduced the background and context of the study by addressing the communication and transformational leadership practices within the multi-generational structure of the pharmaceutical industry. The chapter further highlighted how leadership influence is enacted and experienced through communication and how such experiences are interpreted differently by Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z professionals occupying distinct hierarchical positions. Particular attention was given to the pivotal role of Generation Y middle managers, who experience and negotiate the responsibility of bridging leadership expectations and communication practices between senior and frontline management.

The chapter articulated the research problem as an experiential and interpretive gap in understanding how transformational leadership practices are lived and made meaningful across generational cohorts, especially within Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector. It presented the purpose, objectives, and research questions of the study, all of which are aligned with a phenomenological focus on lived experience and meaning-making rather than abstract leadership behaviors. The academic, practical, and policy significance of the study was outlined, alongside a clearly defined scope and contextual grounding in the pharmaceutical industry.

The chapter also established the theoretical foundation of the study by integrating

Transformational Leadership Theory, Generational Cohort Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory as sensitizing lenses for interpretation. Collectively, these frameworks provide a coherent foundation for examining how leadership communication and transformational practices are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated across generations.

Collectively, these elements establish a phenomenological foundation for the study and provide a clear basis for the subsequent literature review, which examines leadership, communication, and generational dynamics to further justify the study's methodological approach.

2.   Literature Review

This study is theoretically grounded in **Transformational Leadership Theory**, **Generational Cohort Theory**, and **Psychological Contract Theory**, which together provide a comprehensive framework for examining communication and leadership practices across three generational lenses in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry.

2.1.   Transformational Leadership Theory with focused Empirical Support

Transformational Leadership Theory was originally proposed by **Burns (1978)** and later developed by **Bass (1985)**, explains how leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest for collective organizational goals through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These leadership behaviors foster trust, motivation, and commitment, making the theory particularly relevant in compliance-driven and performance-sensitive environments such as pharmaceutical organizations. In the present study, transformational leadership serves as the principal lens for understanding how Generation Y middle managers motivate and align Generation X top management expectations with Generation Z frontline execution through communication-intensive leadership practices.

Recent empirical studies from the selected literature list provide direct evidence supporting the transformational leadership mechanism central to this study. **Sharma and Lenka (2024)** empirically confirmed that transformational leadership behaviors significantly influence organizational change success through enhanced employee motivation and communication alignment. Their findings demonstrate that transformational leaders effectively translate strategic intent into employee engagement by clarifying vision and fostering participative communication precisely the bridging role expected of Generation Y middle managers in this study. Similarly, **Yang et al. (2025)** found that transformational leadership strengthens employee resilience and adaptability through empowerment-oriented communication, validating that transformational leadership enables motivation transfer across hierarchical levels.

Further empirical validation comes from **Malik et al. (2025)**, who established a strong relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, confirming that employees respond to transformational leadership through higher psychological investment in work roles. This evidence directly supports the present study's proposition that **Generation Y middle managers apply transformational leadership behaviors to sustain engagement among Generation Z frontline managers while maintaining alignment with Generation X senior leadership.** Likewise, **Ahsan (2025)** demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters innovation and learning culture by promoting open communication and individualized support, reinforcing the theory's emphasis on communication as the operational mechanism of leadership influence.

Digital transformation research further strengthens the applicability of transformational leadership in contemporary organizational contexts. Buonocore et al. (2024) reported that

transformational leadership communication significantly facilitates digital transformation by encouraging knowledge sharing and adaptability across employee groups. This is particularly relevant to Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry, where digital quality management systems and data-driven production environments require leaders to inspire acceptance of technological change across generational cohorts.

Collectively, these recent empirical studies confirm that transformational leadership behaviors operate through communication, empowerment, and individualized support to shape employee motivation, engagement, and adaptability. Therefore, Transformational Leadership Theory in this study is not treated as a generic leadership framework, but as an empirically validated explanatory model for analyzing how Generation Y middle managers in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry enact communication-intensive leadership to bridge intergenerational expectations and sustain organizational effectiveness.

While existing empirical studies robustly demonstrate the positive outcomes of transformational leadership in terms of engagement, innovation, and performance, they offer limited insight into **how transformational leadership practices are experienced and interpreted by employees in their everyday organizational interactions**. Much of the current literature treats transformational leadership as a set of observable behaviors or outcomes, rather than as a lived and relational phenomenon enacted through communication. Consequently, there remains a need for qualitative inquiry that explores the **subjective experiences, emotional responses, and meaning-making processes** through which transformational leadership is lived across different organizational roles and contexts.

2.2. Generational Cohort Theory and Its Expansion with focused Empirical Support

Generational Cohort Theory provides the foundational explanation for why leadership communication and motivation strategies must differ across age-based workforce groups. The theory was first introduced by **Karl Mannheim (1928)** in his foundational essay *"The Problem of Generations."* argued that individuals born within the same historical period share socio-cultural experiences that shape their collective values, attitudes, and interpretations of authority. This theoretical proposition justifies examining workplace behavior through generational lenses. **Howe and Strauss (2000)** expanded Mannheim's work by defining modern generational cohorts and highlighting their distinct behavioral and workplace characteristics. Their categorization of Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z provides the structural basis for this study's three-generational framework.

Empirical evidence from recent leadership and organizational studies directly supports this proposition in workplace contexts. Imjai et al. (2024) demonstrated that leadership empowerment practices produce significantly different engagement responses across generational cohorts, confirming that employees' motivation and performance are shaped by cohort-specific expectations. This finding validates the core assumption of Generational Cohort Theory that leadership behaviors are not uniformly interpreted across generations. Similarly, Del Vecchio et al. (2025) found that generational dynamics strongly influence how employees respond to leadership communication during organizational transformation, indicating that communication strategies must be tailored to generationally shaped work values.

Further reinforcing this theoretical position, Dwivedula et al. (2025) reported that Generation Z employees exhibit strong preferences for autonomy, continuous feedback, and supportive leadership communication, whereas older cohorts

display greater acceptance of structured authority and formal communication channels. This empirical distinction confirms that generational membership directly affects leadership interpretation and communication expectations. Hooi and Chan (2023) likewise established that digital communication and leadership effectiveness vary significantly across generational groups, further evidencing that generational identity shapes how employees engage with managerial communication. These findings collectively provide empirical validation for applying Generational Cohort Theory in examining intergenerational leadership communication.

Within the present research context, these studies substantiate the theoretical claim that Generation X senior leaders, Generation Y middle managers, and Generation Z frontline managers interpret leadership communication and motivational practices differently. Consequently, Generation Y middle managers must adopt adaptive leadership communication to align Generation X strategic expectations with Generation Z operational needs. These contemporary findings explain why communication-intensive transformational leadership is increasingly essential for engaging younger employees while maintaining alignment with senior management expectations. In Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry, where Generation X commonly occupies senior leadership, Generation Y dominates middle management, and Generation Z is emerging rapidly in frontline roles, generationally shaped expectations create communication and leadership challenges that require adaptive managerial approaches.

Although generational research has extensively documented differences in values, expectations, and work preferences across cohorts, comparatively little attention has been given to **how these generational differences shape lived experiences of leadership and communication practices.** Existing studies largely categorize generational characteristics without examining how individuals from different generations experience the same leadership practices in distinct and nuanced ways. This gap highlights the importance of an interpretive approach that captures generationally situated meaning-making rather than relying solely on cohort-level generalizations.

2.3. Psychological Contract Theory

Psychological Contract Theory explains the unwritten reciprocal expectations between employees and organizations regarding trust, support, fairness, and development. The theory was initially introduced by Argyris (1960) and later formalized by Rousseau (1989, 1995), who emphasized that employees form beliefs about organizational obligations based largely on leadership behavior and communication practices. When these perceived obligations are fulfilled, employees demonstrate higher trust, engagement, and commitment; when breached, disengagement and withdrawal behaviors emerge. In the present study, Psychological Contract Theory provides the explanatory lens for understanding '**how motivation and trust are transferred from Generation X top management to Generation Y middle managers and subsequently to Generation Z frontline managers through leadership communication**' in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry.

In organizational settings, psychological contract fulfillment occurs when employees perceive that leaders and organizations deliver promised resources such as career development, recognition, fairness, and supportive communication. Conversely, psychological contract breach leads to reduced trust, disengagement, and lower performance. This theory has become central in explaining how leadership behaviors and communication practices shape employee engagement and organizational loyalty. Kahn's (1990) engagement framework similarly emphasized psychological safety and

meaningfulness as conditions under which employees invest their full selves in work roles, closely aligning with psychological contract fulfillment mechanisms.

Empirical research provides strong support for the core assumptions of Psychological Contract Theory in contemporary organizational contexts. Salvadorinho et al. (2025) found that employee engagement strategies grounded in continuous communication, recognition, and managerial support significantly strengthen employees' organizational commitment. This finding confirms that perceived organizational support and leadership communication play a decisive role in shaping psychological contract fulfillment. Similarly, Ahsan (2025) demonstrated that leadership behaviors fostering a culture of learning and developmental support enhance employees' perceptions of fairness and growth opportunities, which represent key elements of psychological contract expectations. These results verify that leadership communication and supportive managerial practices are primary drivers of trust and reciprocal employee commitment.

Further evidence is provided by Tvedt et al. (2023), who established that alignment between organizational values and leadership practices significantly strengthens employees' trust and sense of belonging. Their findings support the proposition that psychological contract fulfillment emerges when leadership behavior consistently reflects communicated organizational values. Likewise, Malik et al. (2025) confirmed that employee engagement is strongly predicted by leadership behaviors that provide recognition, autonomy, and constructive feedback — conditions directly associated with fulfilled psychological contract expectations. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that psychological contract fulfillment is shaped largely by leadership communication and relational practices rather than formal employment agreements alone.

Therefore, Psychological Contract Theory provides a powerful explanatory lens for this study

by clarifying how communication and transformational leadership behaviors enable motivation transfer across hierarchical levels. When Generation X leaders empower Generation Y middle managers through trust, autonomy, and recognition, middle managers experience psychological contract fulfillment and reciprocate by motivating and supporting Generation Z frontline employees. This cascading fulfillment of expectations strengthens trust, engagement, and intergenerational coordination — outcomes that are essential for sustaining performance and compliance culture in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry.

Prior research on psychological contract fulfillment has primarily focused on its relationship with employee outcomes such as commitment and engagement. However, fewer studies have examined **how psychological contracts are formed, fulfilled, or perceived as breached through everyday leadership communication experiences,** particularly within multi-generational organizational contexts. Understanding these processes requires attention to employees' lived experiences of leadership interaction, rather than solely examining post-hoc outcomes.

2.4.   Integration of Theoretical Frameworks
Collectively, these theories provide an integrated foundation for the present study. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leadership behaviors inspire and motivate employees; Generational Cohort Theory explains why different generations respond differently to leadership and communication practices; and Psychological Contract Theory explains how trust, empowerment, and engagement are sustained through fulfilled expectations. Together, they offer a coherent explanatory framework for investigating how Generation Y middle managers in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry apply transformational leadership and communication practices to bridge Generation X strategic intent

with Generation Z operational execution, thereby strengthening intergenerational coordination, employee engagement, and organizational effectiveness.

2.5.   Relevance to the Present Research

The theoretical foundation directly aligns with the purpose of this study. Since the research investigates communication and transformational leadership practices through three generational lenses, these theories jointly provide the explanatory structure to:

● Interpret leadership behaviors used by middle managers

● Understand generational communication differences

● Explain motivation transfer and trust-building across hierarchical levels

Therefore, this theoretical foundation ensures that the study is theory-driven, analytically coherent, and academically rigorous, while also offering practical insight for leadership development in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry.

2.6.   Phenomenological and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in Leadership and Organizational Research

Phenomenological methods, particularly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), have become increasingly recognized in organizational and leadership research for their capacity to explore how individuals make sense of lived experiences within complex social settings (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). IPA is grounded in phenomenology and hermeneutics, emphasizing detailed analysis of how participants interpret their experiences and the meanings they assign to them. Recent methodological discussions reaffirm that IPA facilitates rich, contextual insight into phenomena where personal interpretation, emotion, and meaning-making are central to the research focus (Relja, 2026; Rajasinghe et al., 2024).

This approach has been adopted in recent empirical leadership studies where the aim is to understand practices and experiences rather than predict outcomes. For example, Aquino et al. (2025) used IPA to explore organizational leaders' lived experiences of effective leadership practices, highlighting how interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies emerge through reflective meaning-making processes in diverse organizational contexts. Similarly, qualitative IPA research in education contexts has illustrated how professional experiences, such as teacher supervision, are richly interpreted by participants, generating deep insight into emotional, relational, and contextual dynamics associated with leadership roles. These studies demonstrate IPA's suitability for unpacking nuanced experiences of leadership and communication practices, which supports its adoption in the present study to examine transformational leadership communication through generational lenses.

2.7.   Summary of Literature and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that transformational leadership, effective communication, and psychological contract fulfillment play a critical role in shaping employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. Empirical studies further confirm that generational differences influence how leadership practices and communication strategies are perceived and enacted within contemporary organizations. However, the majority of existing research approaches these relationships from an outcome-oriented or behavioral perspective, offering limited insight into how leadership and communication practices are experienced, interpreted, and made meaningful by individuals across generational cohorts.

Moreover, while generational cohort research identifies broad differences among Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, there remains a lack of empirical understanding of how these

cohorts experience the same leadership practices differently within shared organizational contexts, particularly in hierarchical and regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals. Existing studies seldom explore how leadership communication is lived across generational and hierarchical boundaries or how middle managers experience their role in translating leadership intent between senior and frontline employees.

Accordingly, a clear research gap exists in the form of an experiential and interpretive understanding of communication and transformational leadership practices across generations. To address this gap, the present study adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of how Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z professionals experience and make sense of leadership communication and transformational leadership practices within the pharmaceutical industry. The research questions of the study are therefore designed to capture these lived experiences and generationally situated meanings, providing a foundation for the methodological approach outlined in the following chapter.

3.   Research Methodology
This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to explore communication and transformational leadership practices across three generational lenses in Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry.

3.1.   Research Paradigm
This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that organizational realities are socially constructed through interaction and meaning-making. Communication and transformational leadership practices are understood as subjective experiences shaped by generational identity, hierarchical position, and organizational context. An interpretivist stance is therefore appropriate for exploring how participants experience and interpret leadership practices rather than measuring leadership as an objective construct.

3.2.   Research Approach
A qualitative research approach is adopted to capture the depth, complexity, and contextual nature of leadership communication experiences. Qualitative inquiry enables exploration of participants' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations, which are central to understanding how transformational leadership practices are lived across generational boundaries.

3.3.   Research Design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
This study employs a Parallel Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Parallel IPA) design. IPA is a phenomenological and hermeneutic methodology concerned with how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The term "parallel" is used to describe the analytic sequencing across generational cohorts rather than to denote a distinct phenomenological methodology. Consistent with IPA's idiographic commitment, participants from Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z are analyzed as three distinct, homogeneous groups.

Each generational group undergoes independent IPA analysis to capture cohort-specific meaning-making related to communication and transformational leadership practices. Only after completing within-group analyses is a cross-generational interpretive synthesis conducted to identify convergence, divergence, and tension in leadership communication experiences. This design aligns directly with the research questions, which seek to understand both generationally situated experiences and cross-generational patterns.

Parallel IPA is the most appropriate design for this study because it preserves phenomenological depth within each generational lifeworld while

enabling theoretically informed interpretation across cohorts. Leadership communication is thus examined as a lived, relational phenomenon rather than a generalized organizational process.

3.4. Research Setting

The study will be conducted in pharmaceutical companies operating in Pakistan. The pharmaceutical sector provides a relevant context due to its hierarchical management structures, compliance-driven operational environment, and increasingly multi-generational workforce. These characteristics make it an appropriate setting for examining leadership communication, motivation transfer, and intergenerational coordination.

3.5. Population and Sampling

The study population consists of professionals working in pharmaceutical organizations in Pakistan. Purposive sampling is used to recruit participants with direct experience of leadership communication across generational boundaries.
Generation X (senior leadership): 3 participants
Generation Y (middle management): 5 participants
Generation Z (frontline or supervisory roles): 5 participants
Sample size is guided by the principle of idiographic depth and information power rather than statistical saturation, consistent with IPA methodology.

3.6. Data Collection

Data are collected through in-depth, semi-structured phenomenological interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of lived leadership communication experiences. Interviews focus on concrete communication episodes rather than abstract opinions, encouraging participants to describe specific situations, interactions, emotions, and interpretations related to transformational leadership practices.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis follows a two-phase Parallel IPA procedure:
Phase 1: Within-Group Analysis
Each interview transcript is analyzed through repeated reading, initial noting (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual), development of emergent themes, and clustering of themes within each generational group.

Phase 2: Cross-Generational Synthesis
Following within-group analyses, generational theme structures are compared to identify shared meanings, divergent interpretations, and intergenerational tensions. Theoretical lenses are used as sensitizing concepts to support interpretive insight without imposing predefined categories.

3.8. Use of AI Tools

AI-based tools were used to support the organization and articulation of qualitative analysis based on interview transcripts provided by the researcher. All analytic decisions, interpretive judgments, theme development, validation, and theoretical integration were conducted by the researcher, who retains full responsibility for the research process and findings.

4. Data Analysis
4.1. Analytical Approach and Structure of Findings

This chapter presents the findings derived from a Parallel Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Each interview was treated as a distinct idiographic case and analyzed independently before proceeding to cohort-level thematic clustering (Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z) and cross-cohort interpretive synthesis. This structure preserves the phenomenological depth of individual meaning-making while enabling comparison across generational cohorts.

The data analysis is done following below step by step process in accordance with strict IPA compliance:

Step 1: Internal Segmentation of interviews by defining the identity to each respondent corresponding to respective generation like "RESPONDENT 1 – GEN Z" each respondent was treated as separate ideographic case.

Step 2: Initial Coding (IPA- Meaning-Focused) developed line-by-line following IPA principles.

Step 3: Emergent Theme Development following Strict IPA Sequence by doing idiographic clustering of initial codes into EMERGENT THEMES for EACH RESPONDENT, done case by case, with no cross-respondent mixing.

Step 4: Systematically Cluster Emergent Themes into Cohort Level Themes ((Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) by assigning interpretative explanation (IPA)

Step 5: Cross-Cohort Synthesis (Parallel IPA) across all Generations (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z)

Step 6: Generation of Final Selective Themes Emerged from Across Generations

Step 7: Explicit Theory Mapping of Final Selective Theme with TLT, PCT, and GCT.

4.1.1. Step 1: Internal Segmentation of Interview

For analytical clarity and methodological rigor, all interview transcripts were internally segmented by assigning a unique respondent identity linked to the participant's generational cohort. Each participant was anonymized and labeled using a standardized format (e.g., Respondent 1 – Gen Z, Respondent 2 – Gen Y, Respondent 3 – Gen X.). This internal labeling system enabled systematic analysis while preserving participant confidentiality.

4.1.2. Step 2: Initial Coding (Raw Data → Initial Meaning Codes)

4.1.2.1. INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 1 (GEN Z)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Based)
"He listened to me and took my stance... supported me with an additional person."	Feeling valued through being listened to
"After that conversation, I was more clear about my role."	Clarity reduces uncertainty
"There should be clear communication... no one had idea what is going on."	Ambiguity creates insecurity
"Because I am a Gen Z... she is a kid, she cannot do more."	Age-based stereotyping
"Your gestures matter, your tone matters."	Tone creates emotional safety
"I get anxious... I need to discuss it directly."	Direct dialogue as anxiety regulation
"Monthly one-on-one meetings."	Need for structured reassurance
"My HOD kept us motivating when appraisals were late."	Leader buffering uncertainty
"Rigid behavior of other leaders demotivated me."	Harsh communication causes disengagement

4.1.2.2. INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 2 (GEN Y)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Based)
"I set the goals myself... it feels empowering."	Autonomy as motivation
"Management has nothing to do with my department."	Leadership distance
"I feel depressed communicating with Gen Z... no future plans."	Generational frustration
"Friendly communication works better than professional language."	Relational over formal communication
"Management doesn't understand my department."	Perspective gap with senior leadership

"I avoid what made me feel bad as a subordinate."	Learning leadership through negative experience
"Threatening job loss doesn't work anymore."	Traditional control ineffective
"We need to change according to them."	Adaptation pressure on leaders

4.1.2.3.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 3 (GEN X)

Verbatim Extract	*Initial Code (Meaning-Based)*
"We communicate verbally and then we document it."	Documentation ensures accountability
"Define purpose, objective, how to achieve, and fruits."	Motivation through purpose–reward linkage
"I act as a buffer."	Leader absorbs pressure
"Communication was not passed correctly downward."	Message distortion risk
"We filter messages before transmitting."	Intentional message shaping
"We start with what you can earn."	Incentive-first framing
"Fairness matters... one person's motivation should not demotivate others."	Equity sensitivity
"Over-expectation creates frustration."	Unrealistic demands demotivate

4.1.2.4.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 4 (GEN Y)

Verbatim Extract	*Initial Code (Meaning-Based)*
"I always try to bring my team on the same page."	Alignment work
"Different thinking styles between management and team."	Cognitive gap
"WhatsApp makes projects move faster."	Speed through informal channels
"I give training, webinars, exposure."	Developmental leadership
"Motivation comes from appreciation letters."	Recognition as reinforcement
"Friendly gesture works better than bossy nature."	Soft leadership preference
"I sit and explain discussions with management."	Translating strategy downward

4.1.2.5.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 5 (GEN Y)

Verbatim Extract	*Initial Code (Interpretive / Meaning-Based)*
"Worked in different capacities... able to work with different people."	Leadership identity shaped through longitudinal exposure
"Good feedback from the director... we are on the right track."	Validation reinforces role confidence
"Clear communication helps communicate with stakeholders."	Clarity enables external coordination
"If projects are completed timely, I am more motivated."	Achievement-driven motivation
"Sometimes projects are confidential... not everything is communicated."	Strategic opacity accepted
"I remain calm... frustration will not give you anything."	Emotional self-regulation
"I manipulate myself to give understanding to my team."	Message adaptation under constraint
"Team wants clarity... they ask questions."	Information-seeking behavior
"Gen Z wants very clear communication."	Clarity as generational expectation

"Management expects ownership."	Responsibility internalization
"Gen Z expectations are sometimes beyond."	Perceived entitlement gap
"Hybrid model is needed to deal with X and Z."	Adaptive leadership necessity
"Fast feedback and data analysis is important for Gen Z."	Speed and evidence orientation
"Trust and confidence from management motivates me."	Psychological safety through trust

4.1.2.6.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 6 (GEN Z)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Interpretive / Meaning-Based)
"Expectations should be discussed more often."	Desire for explicit expectation-setting
"Things are not discussed clearly in Pharma."	Systemic communication deficiency
"Monthly one-on-one meetings should happen."	Need for structured leader access
"I initiate conversations myself."	Self-advocacy
"Decisions are with HOD... line manager can't change things."	Power distance awareness
"Lack of communication makes me anxious."	Uncertainty-induced anxiety
"I need my work communicated directly to HOD."	Visibility need
"In previous role, HOD sat for two hours."	Time investment as care
"Leader must not demotivate team."	Emotional protection expectation
"Leader has to be diplomatic sometimes."	Acceptance of leadership trade-offs
"If it affects my mental health, I address it."	Boundary-setting behavior
"Older generations don't communicate directly."	Perceived generational avoidance
"Gen Z believes in confrontation and speaking up."	Assertive communication norm
"You have to sugarcoat but stand up for your team."	Ethical mediation
"Direct communication is the key."	Transparency as core value
"Ambiguity should not exist."	Zero-tolerance for unclear expectations
"Potential should not go unseen."	Recognition need
"I will do my best but cannot go beyond authority."	Realistic leadership self-concept

4.1.2.7.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 7 (GEN X)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Interpretive / Meaning-Based)
"Started as a medical representative."	Ground-up leadership trajectory
"I am part of top management but also report."	Dual accountability
"We define objectives and pass them down."	Hierarchical goal cascade
"Market realities require molding strategy."	Contextual flexibility
"People come from different backgrounds."	Cognitive diversity awareness
"I act as a buffer."	Emotional and structural mediation
"Management sees big picture; individuals see themselves."	Perspective asymmetry
"Motivation must be balanced across people."	Equity-focused leadership
"Communication must change according to age."	Generational sensitivity
"Straightforward does not mean rude."	Reframing transparency
"Sometimes manipulation is necessary."	Pragmatic realism
"Uniform policies reduce conflict."	Structural fairness belief
"Motivation fluctuates but does not stop work."	Professional resilience
"Gen Z must be kept busy."	Activity-based engagement belief
"Too much peace makes Gen Z restless."	Stimulation requirement assumption

4.1.2.8.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 8 (GEN Z)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"When expectations are not clearly communicated, it becomes difficult to understand what exactly is required from me."	Unclear expectations creating role ambiguity
"Sometimes we are doing the work, but we don't know if it is aligned with what leadership actually wants."	Lack of feedback creating uncertainty about alignment
"I feel more confident when my manager explains the purpose behind the task."	Purpose explanation increasing confidence
"If there is no feedback, you start doubting your own performance."	Absence of feedback leading to self-doubt
"I prefer when my manager talks openly rather than giving instructions indirectly."	Preference for direct and open communication
"Delayed communication affects motivation because you don't know where you stand."	Communication delays reducing motivation
"When leaders listen, it feels like your work actually matters."	Being listened to as validation of worth
"Sometimes decisions are made without informing us, which feels unfair."	Exclusion from information creating perceived unfairness

4.1.2.9.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 9 (GEN Z)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"My current role is that I work as a senior officer in a pharmaceutical company."	Early-career professional identity
"My main role is to generate an idea for the company."	Role framed around idea generation
"I have completed 1.5 years in the company I am in now."	Limited tenure shaping experience
"Mainly I communicate with my boss managers."	Upward-focused communication pattern
"I control the communication from the directors level."	Responsibility for filtering upward communication
"I have to tell them what I want to communicate."	Ownership of message framing
"I have to give them knowledge to clear their communication."	Sense-making role toward seniors
"Yes sir, I received guidance."	Guidance acknowledged from leader
"I went to my boss and he told me that it is fine, you can do it."	Leader approval as reassurance
"There should be some work in that deadline... there should not be any waste of time."	Deadline framed as productivity control
"He told me that you have done a great job."	Appreciation as validation
"This is the first time that I have done a very decent job."	First strong confidence experience
"At the level of marketing directors, I got to learn a lot."	Exposure to senior-level interaction
"How you enter the room, how do you dress, how do you look."	Learning professional norms
"What sort of communication they will require to you."	Adjusting communication to audience
"I am a little bit hesitant towards what should I talk."	Initial communication anxiety
"So that they don't get confused in my words."	Fear of miscommunication
"When my preparation was complete, I communicated with them very clearly."	Preparation reducing anxiety
"I didn't get any delays in our task."	Clear communication enabling efficiency

"Whether or not appreciation is the most important towards me."	Strong motivational dependence on appreciation
"It motivates me whenever the management listens to your ideas."	Being listened to as motivation trigger
"They tell you to work upon your ideas."	Empowerment through idea endorsement
"Quality of handing tasks of ownership and responsibilities."	Leadership defined as trust and ownership
"You don't have to worry... I have owned your mistakes."	Leader protection creating psychological safety
"I don't want to let my manager down."	Loyalty driven by trust
"The hierarchy system should be important and should not be important."	Ambivalence toward hierarchy
"If I have to come to a director's room, I have to wait."	Experiencing hierarchical distance
"That should be a controllable effect."	Desire for balanced hierarchy

4.1.2.10.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 10 (GEN Y)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"I am working as a procurement manager in Searle Pharma and I am working in this industry for 10 years, more than 10 years."	Long-term professional identity in procurement
"My job role is related to procurement, then my communications are mostly with juniors, team members and also with seniors."	Multi-directional communication responsibility
"I also communicate with my sub-parts, so I communicate with a lot of seniors."	Boundary-spanning communication role
"Obviously, if I have understood you correctly, we have annual KPIs."	Formalized performance expectations
"Every person related to that phase has some or the other main KPIs."	Individual accountability within collective targets
"After everything is connected, they will reach the target that we are aiming for."	Interdependence in goal achievement
"Procurement used to happen in cost saving. But now it has become a value generation."	Shift in role meaning from cost control to value creation
"So we are definitely generating value for the company."	Work framed as strategic contribution
"Yes, we are getting guidance on a monthly basis."	Regular leadership guidance
"All the new initiatives are from our boss."	Top-down initiation of change
"We are getting clear direction from our boss."	Clarity from leadership
"So this is clear direction."	Reinforcement of perceived clarity
"Everything is based on AI."	Technology as decision-support
"So it is very easy to know that if you have to depend on a product."	Data reducing uncertainty
"So we work on that basis."	Alignment with leadership direction
"Obviously, our advice is also included in this."	Voice and participation in decisions

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code
"Communication is very clear. And very transparent communication."	Transparency as valued leadership behavior
"So far so good."	Positive evaluation of leadership communication
"Obviously, your leaders have experience in the industry."	Authority linked to experience
"Whatever guidance we get... we see an increase in our learning curve."	Guidance as learning facilitator
"Clarity of work. So it becomes very easy to communicate."	Clarity enabling smooth execution
"What do we have to do?"	Task certainty
"You can define your objective."	Objective clarity
"You can define your ingredients."	Specificity in expectations

4.1.2.11.　　　INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 11 (GEN Z)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"Currently, I'm an executive officer in Regularity Affairs International, and my total experience is about 2 years."	Early-career professional identity
"I communicate with my line manager."	Primary reliance on direct supervisor
"He expected me to work with the embassy."	High responsibility entrusted by leader
"I was the only one who directly communicated with the embassy."	Singular ownership of critical task
"This was my 1st experience."	Novelty of responsibility
"I really learned a lot with this."	Learning through exposure
"I was not expecting that he will choose me."	Surprise at being trusted
"Before he guided me a lot."	Leader providing preparatory guidance
"After that, it was the only me who was just doing the things."	Autonomy following guidance
"I did it well."	Self-assessed competence
"There was hurdles in the attestation and there was many problems."	Experiencing operational challenges
"It was new for me and it was also new for the line manager also."	Shared uncertainty
"I personally went to the embassy and communicated with their professionals."	Direct external engagement
"He chose me."	Perceived intentional trust
"This leadership that he trust me."	Trust as defining leadership quality
"This made my views very clear."	Clarity emerging from trust
"In my last company... manager and the head of the department, he didn't trust us."	Prior experience of mistrust
"He thought that if we learn everything, then the persons... will leave the company."	Perceived control through knowledge restriction
"The whole Gen Z thus resigned in 2 months."	Collective disengagement due to mistrust
"This is not the way we should be treated."	Moral evaluation of leadership behavior

4.1.2.12.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 12 (GEN X)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"My current role is I'm working as a Group Director Technical Operations."	Senior leadership identity
"As far as my experience is concerned, I have over 22 years of experience."	Long tenure shaping leadership perspective
"Starting from multi-national and national pharmaceutical organizations."	Exposure to diverse organizational systems
"The team leaders."	Primary communication focus on immediate leadership layer
"I communicate with the team leaders."	Hierarchical but proximate communication style
"Straightforward does not mean this transparency."	Distinction between bluntness and true clarity
"Be transparent. Be clear. And there is no bias in it."	Transparency and fairness as leadership values
"Normally in an organization, there is a lot of politics."	Awareness of organizational politics
"This is a very good thing."	Positive evaluation of low-politics environment
"Normally in an organization, there is a lot of politics."	Comparison with prior organizational experiences
"This is not that kind of environment."	Valuing ethical organizational culture

4.1.2.13.   INITIAL CODING – RESPONDENT 13 (GEN Y)

Verbatim Extract	Initial Code (Meaning-Focused)
"Currently, I am working as a manager in the pharmaceutical industry."	Mid-level managerial identity
"I have more than 12 years of experience in pharma."	Long tenure shaping professional confidence
"Mostly I communicate with senior management and my team."	Dual-direction communication responsibility
"Leadership communication is very important for us."	Centrality of communication to role
"If communication is not clear, then problems start."	Clarity linked to operational stability
"My manager always tells us what is expected from us."	Explicit expectation-setting by leader
"This makes our work easy."	Clarity reducing work complexity
"Whenever we achieve something, appreciation is given."	Recognition as reinforcement
"This motivates the team a lot."	Motivation driven by appreciation
"Sometimes decisions are delayed from top management."	Experiencing upward decision lag
"This creates pressure on us."	Delay translating into stress
"But we try to manage the situation."	Coping through role responsibility
"Different generations think differently."	Awareness of generational differences
"Young people want quick feedback."	Perception of Gen Z feedback expectations
"Senior people are more patient."	Contrast in generational patience
"We have to balance both."	Mediating role across generations
"Leadership should be flexible."	Flexibility as leadership requirement
"One style does not work for everyone."	Rejection of one-size-fits-all leadership

"Trust from management is very important."	Trust as foundational leadership element
"If there is trust, people perform better."	Trust linked to performance
"Overall, my experience with leadership is positive."	Positive overall leadership appraisal

4.1.3.   Step 3: Emergent Theme Development
4.1.3.1.   Emergent Theme Respondent 1 – Gen Z

Clustered Initial Codes	*Emergent Theme (Interpretive Label)*	*Meaning Statement (IPA)*
Being listened to; leader supporting her stance; additional team support; clarity after discussion	Feeling Valued Through Voice and Support	Leadership communication is experienced as empowering when the respondent's voice is acknowledged and translated into tangible support.
Continuous encouragement; productive conversations; emotional reassurance	Motivation Through Relational Communication	Motivation emerges from relational, human-centered leadership rather than formal authority.
Appraisal delays; lack of HR transparency; organizational silence	Uncertainty Caused by Organizational Silence	Absence of clear organizational communication creates anxiety and emotional instability.
Being labeled "kid"; age-based assumptions	Struggle for Legitimacy as a Young Professional	Generational stereotyping undermines professional identity and confidence.
Leader reassurance during demotivating phases	Leader as Emotional Anchor	The leader functions as a stabilizing emotional presence during uncertainty.
Comfort-based communication; polite tone; open access	Psychological Safety Through Approachability	Psychological safety is constructed through leader accessibility and respectful interaction.

4.1.3.2.   Emergent Theme Respondent 2 – Gen Y

Clustered Initial Codes	*Emergent Theme*	*Meaning Statement (IPA)*
Autonomy in goal setting; no reporting dependency	Empowerment Through Independence	Leadership is experienced as empowering when autonomy replaces micromanagement.
Appreciation for creative work	Recognition as Primary Motivator	Recognition validates competence and sustains intrinsic motivation.
Conflict over hiring decisions	Perspective Gap With Senior Leadership	Misalignment arises when strategic distance limits senior leaders' understanding of operational realities.
Friendly communication preference	Relational Leadership as Effective Practice	Informal, relational communication is perceived as more effective than formal authority.
Discomfort with boss–subordinate hierarchy	Rejection of Authoritarian Leadership Norms	Traditional hierarchical leadership is viewed as counterproductive.
Observations of Gen Z behavior	Navigating Generational Work Style Shifts	Leadership involves adapting to evolving generational work norms.

4.1.3.3.   Emergent Theme Respondent 3 – Gen X

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Performance reviews; documentation; structured feedback	Structured and Purpose-Driven Communication	Leadership communication is effective when anchored in structure, purpose, and follow-through.
Clear objectives and outcomes	Clarity as Foundation of Leadership Effectiveness	Clear articulation of goals shapes motivation and execution.
Communication distortion across layers	Risk of Message Breakdown in Hierarchies	Meaning is vulnerable to distortion as messages move downward.
Adapting expectations to capability	Situational Interpretation of Leadership	Leadership requires tailoring expectations to individual capacity.
Incentive-based messaging	Evolving Leadership Logic for New Generations	Leadership communication must evolve from directive to motivational framing.
Concern about Gen Z loyalty	Anxiety About Declining Organizational Commitment	Generational shifts are perceived as threatening traditional commitment norms.

4.1.3.4.   Emergent Theme Respondent 4 – Gen Y

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Collective decision-making	Collaborative Leadership Experience	Leadership communication is experienced as shared sense-making.
Training and exposure	Leadership as Capability Development	Leaders are viewed as facilitators of learning and growth.
Aligning management and team thinking	Bridging Cognitive Gaps Across Levels	Leadership involves translating strategic intent into operational understanding.
Appreciation after success	Performance Reinforced by Recognition	Recognition strengthens commitment and performance.
WhatsApp and rapid channels	Acceleration of Communication Norms	Speed and immediacy redefine effective communication.
Rejection of bossy behavior	Preference for Adaptive, Human Leadership	Human-centered leadership is preferred over authoritarian control.

4.1.3.5.   Emergent Theme Respondent 5 – Gen Y

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Positive feedback on projects	Validation Through Strategic Trust	Leadership validation affirms professional credibility.
Ownership expectation	Responsibility as Indicator of Confidence	Being trusted with ownership signals leadership confidence.
Confidentiality constraints	Tension Between Secrecy and Transparency	Restricted information challenges clarity and autonomy.
Managing Gen Z expectations	Adjusting Leadership Pace for New Generations	Leadership requires recalibrating speed and feedback cycles.
Emphasis on trust	Trust as Central Leadership Currency	Trust underpins effective leader–follower relationships.

4.1.3.6.   Emergent Theme Respondent 6 – Gen Z

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Lack of regular HOD contact	Anxiety From Leadership Distance	Distance from authority generates emotional uncertainty.
Desire for one-on-one meetings	Desire for Direct Engagement With Authority	Direct access to decision-makers is essential for reassurance.
Emotional impact of unclear expectations	Psychological Strain From Ambiguity	Ambiguity disrupts emotional well-being and performance.
Speaking up	Assertive Communication Identity	Self-advocacy is central to professional identity.
Transparency and confrontation	Expectation of Honest and Direct Leadership	Directness and honesty define effective leadership.
Learning from good and bad leaders	Selective Internalization of Leadership Behaviors	Leadership identity forms through reflection on observed behaviors.

4.1.3.7.   Emergent Theme Respondent 7 – Gen X

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Acting as buffer	Middle Leadership as Emotional Filter	Leadership involves absorbing tension between organizational layers.
Message manipulation	Pragmatic Mediation for Stability	Leaders strategically adapt messages to preserve harmony.
Balancing needs	Leadership as Equilibrium Management	Leadership is experienced as constant balancing of competing demands.
Transparency without bluntness	Controlled Clarity as Leadership Skill	Effective communication blends honesty with tact.
Views on Gen Z discipline	Directive Assumptions About Younger Workers	Younger employees are perceived as requiring control and structure.

4.1.3.8.   Emergent Theme Respondent 8 – Gen Z

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Being trusted	Confidence Built Through Trust	Trust enables confidence and engagement.
Learning through exposure	Growth Through Stretch Assignments	Development occurs through challenging opportunities.
Appreciation	Validation-Driven Motivation	Motivation depends on acknowledgment.
Fear of disappointing leader	Reciprocal Loyalty Formation	Loyalty emerges as a response to trust.
Hierarchical awareness	Respectful Yet Tense Hierarchical Awareness	Hierarchy is respected but emotionally constraining.

4.1.3.9.   Emergent Theme Respondent 9 – Gen Z

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Preparation before senior interaction	Self-Regulation to Meet Authority Expectations	Self-discipline is used to navigate power structures.
Appreciation dependency	Dependence on Positive Feedback	Confidence relies heavily on external validation.

| Leader owning mistakes | Psychological Safety Through Protection | Leader protection fosters risk-taking and trust. |
| Conflicted hierarchy view | Ambivalence Toward Power Distance | Hierarchy is both necessary and restrictive. |

4.1.3.10.   Emergent Theme Respondent 10 – Gen Y

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Regular guidance	Stability Through Structured Leadership	Predictability and structure create stability.
Transparency	Trust Anchored in Openness	Openness strengthens trust.
Learning curve	Leadership as Continuous Learning Driver	Leadership accelerates professional growth.
Participation	Participative Decision Environment	Inclusion enhances commitment.

4.1.3.11.   Emergent Theme Respondent 11 – Gen Z

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Being chosen	Trust as Identity-Affirming Experience	Trust validates professional self-worth.
Autonomy post-guidance	Empowered Independence	Autonomy follows preparation.
Past mistrust	Leadership Trust as Retention Determinant	Trust directly influences retention.
Gen Z resignation	Consequences of Knowledge Hoarding	Control-driven leadership causes disengagement.

Emergent Theme Respondent 12 – Gen X

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Transparency emphasis	Ethical Clarity as Leadership Core	Leadership is grounded in fairness and clarity.
Low politics	Moral Leadership Orientation	Ethical environments enhance trust.
Broad experience	Leadership Shaped by Comparative Exposure	Leadership philosophy emerges from cumulative experience.

4.1.3.12.   Emergent Theme Respondent 13 – Gen Y

Clustered Initial Codes	Emergent Theme	Meaning Statement (IPA)
Clear expectations	Clarity-Driven Performance	Clear communication directly enhances performance.
Appreciation	Recognition as Energy Source	Recognition fuels motivation.
Generational balancing	Leadership as Intergenerational Mediation	Leadership bridges generational differences.
Trust	Trust–Performance Linkage	Trust strengthens effort and outcomes.

4.1.4.   Step 4: Systematic Cohort-Level Thematic Clustering (Parallel IPA)

The analytic rule followed in this study involved clustering individual emergent themes within each cohort separately at the initial stage of analysis. No cross-cohort mixing was conducted during this phase to preserve

the uniqueness of each group's experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, the language used throughout the analysis remained interpretive and phenomenological in nature rather than theoretical, ensuring that the focus stayed on participants' lived experiences and meanings.

4.1.4.1.   Gen Z – Cohort-Level Thematic Clustering
(Respondents: R1, R6, R8, R9, R11)

Emergent Themes (from individuals)	Cohort-Level Theme	Interpretive Explanation (IPA)
Feeling valued through voice; trust as identity-affirming; being chosen; appreciation-driven motivation	**Leadership as Validation of Self-Worth**	Gen Z experiences leadership communication as deeply tied to personal value and identity; being heard and trusted affirms their legitimacy in the organization.
Psychological safety through approachability; leader protection; anxiety from ambiguity	**Emotional Safety as a Precondition for Performance**	Communication is interpreted emotionally; clarity and reassurance regulate anxiety and enable engagement and effort.
Desire for direct engagement; expectation of honest and transparent leadership; assertive communication identity	**Directness and Transparency as Respect**	Gen Z interprets clear, direct communication as a sign of respect rather than authority; ambiguity is experienced as neglect.
Mistrust leading to disengagement; Gen Z resignations; struggle for legitimacy	**Fragile Psychological Contract**	When trust, transparency, or respect is violated, Gen Z rapidly disengages, indicating a highly relational psychological contract.
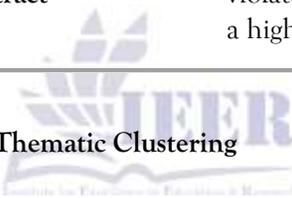
4.1.4.2.   Gen Y – Cohort-Level Thematic Clustering
(Respondents: R2, R4, R5, R10, R13)

Emergent Themes (from individuals)	Cohort-Level Theme	Interpretive Explanation (IPA)
Bridging cognitive gaps; intergenerational mediation; participative decision environment	**Leadership as Translational Mediation**	Gen Y experiences leadership communication as a balancing act—interpreting senior intent while making it workable for teams.
Recognition as motivator; validation through strategic trust; clarity-driven performance	**Performance Enabled by Relational Clarity**	Motivation arises when expectations are clear and recognition reinforces effort; communication is task-anchored but relational.
Friendly communication preference; rejection of bossy leadership; adaptive communication channels	**Humanized, Flexible Leadership Norms**	Gen Y values informality, friendliness, and adaptability as effective leadership behaviors in dynamic contexts.
Adjusting leadership pace for Gen Z; managing speed and feedback expectations	**Adaptive Leadership Across Generations**	Gen Y consciously modifies leadership style to accommodate Gen Z while maintaining accountability to senior management.

4.1.4.3.   Gen X – Cohort-Level Thematic Clustering
(Respondents: R3, R7, R12)

Emergent Themes (from individuals)	Cohort-Level Theme	Interpretive Explanation (IPA)
Structured communication; documentation; clarity of objectives	**Leadership as Systemic Control and Structure**	Gen X interprets leadership communication as a mechanism for order, predictability, and organizational alignment.
Acting as buffer; pragmatic mediation; message filtering	**Leadership as Hierarchical Sense-Making**	Communication is experienced as layered and requires active translation to protect stability and morale across levels.
Ethical clarity; reduced politics; transparency without bluntness	**Moral Authority and Responsible Communication**	Gen X frames effective leadership as ethically grounded, fair, and strategically restrained rather than emotionally expressive.
Concern over Gen Z commitment; directive assumptions	**Anxiety Over Evolving Work Values**	Generational shifts are interpreted as threatening traditional loyalty norms, prompting more controlled communication strategies.

4.1.4.4.   Cross-Case Patterning (All 13 Respondents)
4.1.4.4.1.   Table 4A.1 Cross-Case Convergence Map

Cross-Case Pattern Cluster	What it captures (shared meaning)	Respondents showing this pattern
Clarity & Expectation-Setting	Clarity reduces anxiety, increases execution confidence, and supports alignment	R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R10, R13
Trust & Empowered Ownership	Trust is experienced as identity-affirming; ownership signals confidence and strengthens commitment	R5, R8, R9, R11, R13
Recognition & Appreciation as Motivation	Validation (praise/acknowledgement) becomes an energy source and affects commitment	R1, R2, R4, R8, R9, R13
Psychological Safety & Approachability	Comfort, respectful tone, openness, and leader accessibility enable speaking up and performance	R1, R2, R6, R9, R11
Message Filtering / Mediation Across Levels	Leaders act as buffers; messages must be adapted to avoid demotivation or misinterpretation	R3, R7, R13
Communication Breakdown / Silence / Delay	Lack of timely information (HR/appraisals/decisions) creates frustration, demotivation, and uncertainty	R1, R2, R3, R13
Generational Difference Awareness	People perceive meaningful differences in expectations, communication style, and work norms by age cohort	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R13
Adaptive Channels & Speed Norms	Shift toward faster, informal channels (WhatsApp/calls) changes expectations of responsiveness	R2, R4, R5, R13
Ethical / Fair Communication Values	Transparency, reduced politics, and fairness are part of "good leadership"	R10, R12

4.1.4.4.2.   Table 4A.2 Cross-Case Divergence (Key Contrasts)

Domain of Divergence	How it differs	Who differs and how
Hierarchy / power distance	Some accept hierarchy as normal; others experience it as tense or limiting	Gen Z cases (R8/R9) show **ambivalence**; Gen X (R7) treats hierarchy as **managed reality**
Leadership style preference	Friendly/relational vs structured/documented vs direct confrontation	Gen Y tends toward **friendly relational** (R2/R4); Gen X tends toward **structured/buffered** (R3/R7); Gen Z tends toward **direct clarity + safety** (R1/R6/R11)
Interpretation of Gen Z	Some view Gen Z as needing support; others view as needing control; Gen Z describes stereotyping	Gen X (R7) leans **directive**; Gen Y mixed (R2: "hard to handle" but must adapt); Gen Z (R1/R6/R11) emphasize **respect/clarity/trust**
Handling unclear leadership	Some seek clarity actively; others normalize ambiguity or accept diplomacy	R6 actively escalates/requests clarity; R2 "blank/irrelevant" to top leadership; Gen X (R7) normalizes **message shaping**

4.1.5.   Step 5: Parallel Cohort Matrix (Cross-Cohort IPA)
Table X. Cross-Cohort Interpretive Phenomenological Matrix
- Gen Z: R1, R6, R8, R9, R11
- Gen Y: R2, R4, R5, R10, R13
- Gen X: R3, R7, R12

Thematic Dimension	Gen X Interpretation	Gen Y Interpretation	Gen Z Interpretation	Cross-Cohort Insight (IPA)
Meaning of Leadership Communication	Leadership communication is experienced as a system for structure, control, and organizational alignment.	Leadership communication is experienced as a practical mechanism for enabling coordination and performance.	Leadership communication is experienced as personal validation and emotional reassurance, signaling respect and worth.	Leadership communication is a shared phenomenon but is lived systemically (Gen X), operationally (Gen Y), and psychologically (Gen Z).
Clarity & Expectation-Setting	Clarity ensures objective alignment, documentation, and predictability.	Clarity supports execution efficiency and task alignment.	Clarity reduces anxiety and creates psychological safety; ambiguity is emotionally destabilizing.	The same leadership practice fulfills different experiential needs across cohorts.
Trust & Ownership	Trust is embedded in systems, procedures, and formal validation mechanisms.	Trust is demonstrated through delegation and autonomy, strengthening accountability.	Trust is identity-affirming ("being chosen"); mistrust quickly leads to disengagement or exit.	Trust operates structurally (Gen X), relationally (Gen Y), and personally (Gen Z).

Recognition & Appreciation	Recognition is secondary to goals, incentives, and outcomes.	Recognition reinforces performance and team morale but is not the sole motivator.	Recognition is a central motivational driver that stabilizes confidence and commitment.	Recognition holds unequal motivational weight across generations.
Psychological Safety & Approachability	Psychological safety is managed indirectly through buffering and controlled communication.	Psychological safety emerges through friendly tone and respectful interaction.	Strong need for approachable leaders and reassurance to speak openly.	Psychological safety is constructed procedurally (Gen X), relationally (Gen Y), and emotionally (Gen Z).
Hierarchy & Power Distance	Hierarchy is normalized, inherent, and actively managed as part of leadership.	Hierarchy is accepted as functional and navigated pragmatically.	Hierarchy is experienced as tense and emotionally loaded; respected but questioned.	Power distance is assumed (Gen X), negotiated (Gen Y), and emotionally experienced (Gen Z).
Role in Communication Flow	Acts as a gatekeeper and filter, phasing messages downward to maintain stability.	Serves as a translator between senior leadership and teams.	Primarily receivers who expect fairness, clarity, and transparency from leaders.	Communication roles vary systematically across cohorts.
Response to Communication Breakdown	Breakdowns are addressed through documentation, escalation, or system correction.	Breakdowns are managed pragmatically through mediation or workaround.	Breakdowns result in emotional withdrawal, frustration, and reduced engagement.	Reactions to breakdown reflect distinct psychological contracts.
View of Generational Differences	Concerned about declining loyalty, discipline, and commitment norms.	Acknowledge generational differences and advocate adaptive leadership.	Experience stereotyping and feel underestimated due to age.	Generational awareness itself becomes a leadership challenge.
Implicit Psychological Contract	Transactional, stability-oriented, and system-based.	Balanced between relational expectations and performance delivery.	Relational, respect-based, and fragile.	Divergent psychological contracts explain generational responses to leadership communication.

4.1.6.   Step 6: Final Selective Theme (Across Generations)

Final Selective Theme	Core Interpretive Meaning (IPA)	Gen X Orientation	Gen Y Orientation	Gen Z Orientation
Leadership Communication as Sense-Making	Leadership communication is experienced as the primary mechanism through which individuals understand expectations, priorities, and their role within the organization.	Emphasizes structure, alignment, documentation, and control to create shared understanding.	Focuses on coordination, clarity, and execution to enable performance.	Focuses on emotional reassurance and clarity to reduce anxiety and uncertainty.
Trust as the Core Currency of Leadership Relationships	Trust shapes how leadership communication is interpreted, internalized, and acted upon across generations.	Trust is embedded in systems, roles, and procedural validation.	Trust is demonstrated through delegation and autonomy, strengthening accountability.	Trust is identity-affirming; mistrust leads rapidly to disengagement or exit.
Recognition and Psychological Safety as Drivers of Engagement	Engagement emerges when leadership communication provides recognition and a psychologically safe environment.	Recognition is secondary but fairness and respect are essential.	Recognition reinforces performance and team morale.	Recognition is a central motivator that stabilizes confidence and commitment.
Leadership as Mediation Across Hierarchy and Generations	Leadership communication is experienced as an active mediating practice that translates and adapts messages across hierarchical and generational boundaries.	Acts as gatekeeper and buffer to maintain stability and alignment.	Functions as a bridge between senior leadership and frontline teams.	Expects leaders to mediate fairly, transparently, and without bias.
Evolving Psychological Contracts Across Generational Cohorts	Leadership communication reflects and shapes distinct psychological contracts that define expectations, loyalty, and tolerance for ambiguity.	Transactional, system-oriented, and stability-focused psychological contract.	Hybrid psychological contract balancing relational expectations with performance demands.	Relational, respect-based, and fragile psychological contract.

4.1.7. Step 7: Explicit Theory Mapping of Final Theme with TLT, PCT, and GCT

FINAL SELECTIVE THEME	TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY	PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY	GENERATIONAL COHORT THEORY
1. LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION AS SENSE-MAKING	Aligns with *Idealized Influence* and *Inspirational Motivation*, where leaders create meaning and direction through vision-oriented communication.	Communication acts as a signal that defines role clarity and perceived obligations between employee and organization.	Different cohorts rely on different sense-making cues: Gen X prefers structured clarity, Gen Y collaborative interpretation, Gen Z emotional reassurance.
2. TRUST AS THE CORE CURRENCY OF LEADERSHIP RELATIONSHIPS	Reflects *Idealized Influence*, where credibility and consistency in communication build follower trust.	Trust represents fulfillment (or breach) of implicit psychological contracts.	Gen X places trust in systems; Gen Y in autonomy; Gen Z in relational affirmation and transparency.
3. RECOGNITION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AS DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT	Corresponds with *Individualized Consideration*, where leaders attend to individual needs through supportive communication.	Recognition fulfills relational and socio-emotional aspects of the psychological contract.	Gen Z is most sensitive to recognition; Gen Y values performance-linked appreciation; Gen X prioritizes fairness over overt praise.
4. LEADERSHIP AS MEDIATION ACROSS HIERARCHY AND GENERATIONS	Reflects *Intellectual Stimulation* and *Individualized Consideration* enacted through translation and adaptation of leadership messages.	Middle managers actively manage psychological contract expectations upward and downward.	Gen Y occupies a liminal cohort position, translating Gen X expectations for Gen Z while managing intergenerational tensions.
5. EVOLVING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS ACROSS GENERATIONAL COHORTS	Highlights limits of one-size-fits-all transformational leadership communication.	Core theoretical anchor: contracts vary from transactional (Gen X) to hybrid (Gen Y) to relational and fragile (Gen Z).	Demonstrates cohort-specific values shaped by socio-historical context, influencing loyalty, tolerance for ambiguity, and expectations from leaders.

5.   Results and Discussions

5.1.   Overview of the Analytical Process

This study employed a parallel Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to examine how leadership communication is experienced across generational cohorts within pharmaceutical organizations. For the purpose thirteen semi-structured interviews were analyzed following a strict IPA sequence, beginning with idiographic treated each respondent as independent case, initial coding meaning-focused line-by-line developed for respondent.

Emergent themes for each respondent as individual were first developed case-by-case following IPA sequence then systematically cluster emergent themes into Cohort Level Themes generational level (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) by assigning interpretative explanation, with no cross-generation mixing. Finally, cross-cohort analysis enabled the identification of shared and divergent experiential patterns, resulting in five final

selective themes that capture the essence of leadership communication experiences across generations.

The findings presented below reflect participants' sense-making processes, emphasizing how leadership communication is interpreted, internalized, and enacted in daily organizational life.

5.2. Final Selective Themes Across Generations

Analysis revealed five interrelated selective themes that describe how leadership communication is experienced across generational cohorts:

1) Leadership Communication as Sense-Making
2) Trust as the Core Currency of Leadership Relationships
3) Recognition and Psychological Safety as Drivers of Engagement
4) Leadership as Mediation Across Hierarchy and Generations
5) Evolving Psychological Contracts Across Generational Cohorts

Each theme is presented with cohort-specific interpretations, illustrating both convergence and divergence in meaning.

5.2.1. Theme 1: Leadership Communication as Sense-Making

Across all generational cohorts, leadership communication was experienced as a primary sense-making mechanism through which individuals understood expectations, priorities, and their organizational role.

Gen X Interpretation

Generation X participants emphasized clarity, structure, and documentation. Leadership communication was valued when it provided clear objectives, defined processes, and measurable outcomes. Ambiguity was experienced as inefficiency rather than emotional discomfort.

Participants described effective leadership communication as "clear direction," "defined targets," and "knowing exactly what is expected."

Gen Y Interpretation

Generation Y participants experienced leadership communication as a coordination tool, enabling them to align tasks, teams, and timelines. Sense-making occurred through ongoing dialogue rather than one-time instructions.

Communication was described as effective when it allowed them to "connect different teams," "translate expectations," and "keep things moving."

Gen Z Interpretation

For Generation Z, leadership communication carried a strong emotional and psychological dimension. Sense-making was closely tied to reassurance, transparency, and clarity about personal contribution.

Unclear communication generated anxiety, self-doubt, and reduced motivation, whereas clear communication enhanced confidence and focus.

5.2.2. Theme 2: Trust as the Core Currency of Leadership Relationships

Trust emerged as a foundational element shaping how leadership communication was interpreted and acted upon.

Gen X Interpretation

Trust was rooted in systems and consistency. Leadership communication was trusted when it aligned with formal structures, policies, and historical precedent.

Participants emphasized fairness, consistency, and procedural integrity over emotional reassurance.

Gen Y Interpretation

For Generation Y, trust was built through autonomy and delegation. Communication that signaled confidence in their capability strengthened trust and commitment.

Trust was experienced when leaders "let go," "gave ownership," and avoided excessive control.

Gen Z Interpretation
Generation Z participants experienced trust as relational and immediate. Leadership communication that lacked transparency or empathy was quickly interpreted as mistrust.
Perceived mistrust led to disengagement and, in some cases, contemplation of exit from the organization.

5.2.3. Theme 3: Recognition and Psychological Safety as Drivers of Engagement
Leadership communication was experienced as motivating when it fostered recognition and psychological safety.

Gen X Interpretation
Recognition was less central for Gen X participants; however, respect and equitable treatment were considered essential for sustained engagement.

Gen Y Interpretation
Generation Y participants viewed recognition as a performance reinforcer. Appreciation validated effort and strengthened commitment to team outcomes.
Recognition was described as energizing when linked to contribution and results.

Gen Z Interpretation
For Generation Z, recognition was a core psychological need. Leadership communication that acknowledged effort and provided emotional support was directly linked to motivation and retention.
Lack of recognition was experienced as personal invalidation rather than mere dissatisfaction.

5.2.4. Theme 4: Leadership as Mediation Across Hierarchy and Generations
This theme was particularly salient for Generation Y middle managers, who experienced leadership communication as an act of mediation.

Gen Y Interpretation (Central Theme)
Generation Y participants described themselves as buffers and translators, responsible for adapting senior leadership messages to frontline realities while managing upward expectations.
They reported absorbing tension from both sides, often modifying tone, content, and delivery to maintain balance.

Gen X and Gen Z Perspectives
Gen X expected messages to be implemented faithfully, with minimal distortion.
Gen Z expected leaders to advocate on their behalf, ensuring fairness and transparency.
This theme highlights the relational and emotional labor embedded in middle-management communication roles.

5.2.5. Theme 5: Evolving Psychological Contracts Across Generational Cohorts
Leadership communication was experienced as a key mechanism shaping psychological contract perceptions, with notable generational variation.
Gen X Interpretation
Psychological contracts were predominantly transactional, emphasizing stability, role clarity, and long-term commitment.

Gen Y Interpretation
Generation Y exhibited a hybrid psychological contract, balancing loyalty with expectations of growth, autonomy, and fairness.

Gen Z Interpretation
For Generation Z, psychological contracts were relational and fragile. Communication breaches—such as unclear expectations or perceived disrespect—were quickly interpreted as contract violations.

This cohort demonstrated low tolerance for ambiguity and perceived injustice.

5.3.   Summary of Results

The findings demonstrate that leadership communication is not experienced uniformly across generations. Instead, it functions as a sense-making, trust-building, and contract-shaping process, interpreted through generational lenses and role positions. While shared themes emerged across cohorts, their meanings varied significantly, particularly regarding trust, recognition, and expectations from leadership.

Importantly, the role of Generation Y middle managers emerged as a critical connective mechanism, highlighting leadership communication as an active, relational, and interpretive practice, rather than a unidirectional transmission of information.

6.   Discussions

6.1.   Reframing Leadership Communication as a Sense-Making Process

The findings of this study extend existing leadership literature by demonstrating that leadership communication is not merely a transmission of information but a sense-making process through which transformational leadership practices are experienced and interpreted differently across generational cohorts. While transformational leadership theory emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration, the present findings reveal that these elements are filtered through generational meaning structures, shaping how leadership intent is understood in practice.

Across cohorts, leadership communication functioned as the primary mechanism through which individuals constructed clarity about expectations, role identity, and organizational purpose. This aligns with prior work emphasizing leadership as a communicative and interpretive process rather than a static set of behaviors. However, this study adds nuance by showing that sense-making is cohort-contingent, thereby challenging implicit assumptions of universality embedded in much transformational leadership research.

6.2.   Transformational Leadership Through a Generational Lens

6.2.1.   Transformational Leadership Is Not Experienced Uniformly

Although transformational leadership theory posits broadly positive outcomes, the findings indicate that the same leadership communication practices are experienced differently by Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z.

Generation X participants interpreted transformational leadership communication primarily through structure, clarity, and procedural alignment, emphasizing stability and predictability.

Generation Y experienced transformational leadership as a coordination and translation process, focusing on alignment, autonomy, and execution.

Generation Z interpreted transformational leadership communication through a relational and emotional lens, placing high importance on transparency, recognition, and psychological reassurance.

This generational differentiation extends transformational leadership theory by illustrating that its effectiveness depends not only on leader behavior but also on recipient interpretive frames shaped by generational context.

6.3.   Trust and Psychological Contract as Central Mediating Mechanisms

6.3.1.   Leadership Communication as a Builder or Breacher of Trust

Trust emerged as a central mediator between leadership communication and employee engagement across cohorts. Consistent with psychological contract theory, leadership communication served as a key signal through which employees assessed organizational reliability and leader intent.

For Generation X, trust was embedded in systems and consistency, whereas Generation Y associated trust with delegation and autonomy. Generation Z, however, experienced trust as relational and immediate, making it highly sensitive to communication tone, transparency, and perceived fairness. These findings suggest that leadership communication plays a critical role in either reinforcing or undermining trust, particularly among younger cohorts.

6.3.2. Generationally Distinct Psychological Contracts

The study reveals that psychological contracts differ substantially across generational cohorts, supporting and extending psychological contract theory.

Generation X exhibited predominantly transactional psychological contracts, emphasizing stability and long-term reciprocity.

Generation Y demonstrated hybrid psychological contracts, balancing relational expectations with performance-based outcomes.

Generation Z displayed relational and fragile psychological contracts, characterized by low tolerance for ambiguity and heightened sensitivity to perceived contract breaches.

Leadership communication thus functions as a contract-shaping mechanism, with misalignment leading to anxiety, disengagement, or turnover intention particularly among Generation Z.

6.4. The Central Role of Generation Y as Translational Leaders

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its illumination of Generation Y middle managers as mediators of leadership communication across hierarchical and generational boundaries.

Generation Y participants experienced their role as one of translation, buffering, and emotional labor, adapting senior leadership messages to frontline realities while simultaneously managing upward expectations. This aligns with emerging literature on middle managers as sense-givers but extends it by highlighting the generational positioning of Gen Y as a liminal cohort.

These findings suggest that Gen Y leaders are not merely implementers of strategy but active constructors of meaning, shaping how transformational leadership is enacted across the organization. This has important implications for leadership development, as failure to support Gen Y in this mediating role may weaken organizational cohesion and trust.

6.5. Re-conceptualizing Leadership Communication in the Pharmaceutical Context

The pharmaceutical industry's regulatory complexity and performance pressures intensify the importance of effective leadership communication. The findings indicate that leadership communication must balance precision and empathy, particularly when operating across generations with differing expectations and tolerance for ambiguity.

The study demonstrates that directive communication styles that may have been effective for Generation X are increasingly ineffective for Generation Z, potentially resulting in disengagement or attrition. This highlights the need for adaptive, cohort-sensitive communication strategies, particularly in highly regulated industries.

6.6. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important theoretical contributions:

a. **Transformational leadership theory** is extended by demonstrating that its communicative enactment is interpretively contingent on generational context.

b. **Psychological contract theory** is enriched by identifying leadership communication as a dynamic, ongoing mechanism of contract negotiation, rather than a static expectation.

c. **Generational cohort theory** is advanced by grounding generational differences in lived

meaning-making processes, rather than surface-level attitudes or stereotypes.
d.   The study introduces Parallel IPA as a robust methodological approach for examining generational differences without sacrificing idiographic depth.

6.7.   Summary of Discussion
In summary, the findings reveal that leadership communication operates as a sense-making, trust-building, and contract-shaping process, interpreted differently across generational cohorts. Transformational leadership practices are not inherently effective but must be communicatively adapted to generational meaning structures. Generation Y middle managers emerge as pivotal actors in sustaining intergenerational alignment, highlighting leadership communication as an inherently relational and interpretive phenomenon.

7.   Conclusion and Implications
7.1.   Conclusion
This study set out to explore how transformational leadership practices are experienced and interpreted through communication across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z within pharmaceutical organizations. Using a Parallel Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the study revealed that leadership communication is not experienced as a neutral or uniform phenomenon but rather as a sense-making process shaped by generational context, hierarchical position, and psychological expectations.

The findings demonstrate that leadership communication functions as the primary mechanism through which transformational leadership is enacted, understood, and evaluated by employees. While leadership intent may originate from senior leadership, its effectiveness depends on how messages are interpreted, translated, and emotionally processed by different generational cohorts. Importantly, the study shows that misalignment in leadership communication does not merely create misunderstanding but actively shapes trust, motivation, and psychological contract perceptions, particularly among Generation Z.

A central contribution of this research is the identification of Generation Y middle managers as critical mediators of leadership communication. Positioned between Generation X senior leaders and Generation Z frontline employees, Gen Y managers experience leadership as a translational and emotionally demanding role, requiring continuous adaptation of leadership intent to meet generationally distinct expectations. This highlights leadership communication as an active, relational, and interpretive practice, rather than a one-way transmission of authority.

Overall, the study contributes to leadership scholarship by demonstrating that transformational leadership is experienced through communication, and that its impact is contingent upon generational meaning structures. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, cannot be separated from how leadership messages are communicated, interpreted, and negotiated across generational cohorts.

7.2.   Theoretical Implications
This study offers several important theoretical contributions. First, it extends Transformational Leadership Theory by demonstrating that transformational behaviors are not universally experienced. Instead, their effectiveness is mediated through leadership communication and interpreted differently across generational cohorts. This challenges the implicit assumption of universality often present in transformational leadership literature and calls for greater contextual sensitivity.

Second, the study advances Psychological Contract Theory by positioning leadership communication as a dynamic mechanism through which psychological contracts are continuously formed, reinforced, or breached. Rather than being static expectations, psychological contracts

emerge through everyday leadership interactions, with generational variation in tolerance for ambiguity and perceived breaches.

Third, the study contributes to Generational Cohort Theory by grounding generational differences in lived experience and interpretive processes rather than stereotypical traits. By employing Parallel IPA, the research demonstrates how generational cohorts construct meaning differently from the same leadership communication, offering a phenomenological foundation for generational leadership research.

Finally, methodologically, the study contributes to qualitative leadership research by demonstrating the value of Parallel IPA and cross-cohort synthesis as a rigorous approach for examining shared and divergent meaning structures across theoretically meaningful groups.

8. Practical Implications for Leaders and HR Professionals

8.1. Implications for Senior Leaders (Generation X)

Senior leaders should recognize that clarity and structure alone are no longer sufficient to ensure leadership effectiveness across generations. While procedural clarity remains important, particularly for Generation X, leadership communication must also incorporate empathy, transparency, and relational engagement to meet the expectations of younger cohorts.

Leaders should:

● Explicitly articulate expectations and rationale behind decisions

● Avoid assuming that silence or ambiguity will be interpreted positively

● Recognize that lack of communication may be perceived as mistrust or disengagement by Generation Z

8.2. Implications for Middle Managers (Generation Y)

Generation Y middle managers occupy a critical but often unsupported leadership position.

Organizations should formally recognize their translational role and provide targeted leadership development focused on:

● Communicative sense-making

● Managing upward and downward psychological contracts

● Navigating intergenerational tensions

● Emotional labor and boundary-spanning leadership

Failure to support Gen Y managers in this role risks leadership fatigue, message distortion, and erosion of trust across levels.

8.3. Implications for HR and Talent Management

Human Resource functions play a vital role in operationalizing generationally sensitive leadership communication. HR practitioners should:

● Design leadership development programs that emphasize adaptive communication, not generic leadership behaviors

● Embed psychological safety and recognition practices into performance management systems

● Train leaders to understand generational differences in trust formation and motivation

● Move away from one-size-fits-all leadership frameworks

In the pharmaceutical industry, where regulatory pressure and performance demands are high, such interventions are essential for sustaining engagement and retention, particularly among Generation Z professionals.

9. Limitations and Future Research Directions

9.1. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. First, the research was conducted within the pharmaceutical industry, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other

sectors. Second, the study relied on self-reported experiences, which reflect subjective interpretations rather than objective leadership behavior. Third, although the sample was appropriate for IPA, future studies with larger samples may explore additional nuances.

9.2. Future Research Recommendations
Future research could:

● Examine leadership communication across additional generational cohorts or cultural contexts

● Replicate the study in other industries or sectors to enhance transferability

● Conduct longitudinal studies to explore how psychological contracts evolve over time

● Integrate leader perspectives to complement employee sense-making

● Compare IPA findings with quantitative models to test emergent relationships

10. Ethical Considerations
The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for qualitative research. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Data were handled securely and used solely for academic purposes.

10.1. Use of AI Tools in Literature Review
AI-based tools were used to assist with organizing, synthesizing, and articulating the literature review based on articles and abstracts selected and provided by the researcher. Decisions regarding literature inclusion, theoretical framing, interpretation, and integration with the study's findings were made solely by the researcher, who retains full responsibility for the scholarly content.

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