

Mind the Gap: Employer Beliefs Versus Gen Z Realities in the Thai Workplace

IRB Research Proposal — Short Form

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Last update: 2026-07-26

Abstract

As Generation Z enters the Thai workforce, employers describe them with confidence as disloyal, impatient, entitled, and lacking commitment, yet rigorous evidence finds the measured differences between cohorts small, inconsistent, and confounded with age and career stage. This study shifts the object of inquiry from the generational difference itself to the belief and its divergence from self-report, which shapes hiring, development, and supervision regardless of whether it is warranted. Using a convergent mixed-methods design with qualitative priority, it compares three views of Gen Z as workers across two independent Thai samples: employer belief (E1), Gen Z self-report (G1), and the Gen Z meta-stereotype (G2, what Gen Z believe employers think of them). A primary qualitative strand surfaces belief content inductively, giving a culturally specific seniority-based deference dimension (อาวุโส) a fair chance to emerge. A supplementary, exploratory quantitative strand places the three referents on a common metric over seven candidate dimensions to describe the size and direction of the divergence, with the meta-accuracy comparison as its focal expectation. The study recruits roughly 190 per group to retain about 150 analyzable per group. It contributes the first Thai belief-self-report divergence profile, the first test of Gen Z meta-accuracy in the Thai employer-Gen Z pair, and the first treatment of seniority-deference as belief content.

Keywords: Generation Z, stereotype content, meta-stereotype, meta-accuracy, seniority-based deference, Thai workplace, mixed methods

Background and Rationale

As Generation Z, the cohort born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, enters the Thai workforce in growing numbers, employers and human-resource professionals increasingly ask what these younger employees are like as workers. The question is usually answered with confidence: Gen Z are described as quick to change jobs, impatient for feedback, resistant to pressure, and less committed than the generations before them. Some of this may reflect genuine managerial experience, and the loyalty-and-commitment strand is documented in the generational-review literature (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

The difficulty is that rigorous evidence does not support that confidence. A growing body of meta-analytic and qualitative-review work finds that the measured differences in work values, attitudes, and behaviors attributed to generations are small, inconsistent, and hard to separate from age, career stage, or period (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Rudolph, Rauvola, Costanza, & Zacher, 2020). The claim concerns measured trait-level differences, not whether the

cohort is real: in Mannheim's (1952) sense a generation is a cohort shaped by shared formative experience, and Gen Z's formative context, growing up with smartphones and social media and entering the labor market amid economic precarity and a pandemic, is genuinely distinct. The puzzle that motivates this study is therefore not whether Gen Z are a real cohort, which we take as given, but why the managerial belief that they are a very different kind of worker is so much stronger than the modest measured differences warrant, and what that gap does.

Why belief-divergence is the right object

If the underlying differences are modest but the beliefs about them are strong, then what matters, scientifically and practically, is the belief and its divergence from self-report. Beliefs about Gen Z are consequential even when the differences they describe are small, because they shape hiring decisions, work assignments, developmental opportunities, and everyday supervision. Consistent with the self-fulfilling-prophecy and behavioral-confirmation tradition in social perception (Jussim, 2012), a manager who believes younger employees lack effort, resilience, or commitment may quietly restrict their opportunities and create relational distance, and the employee may then confirm the belief the manager's own conduct helped produce. More importantly, this reframing turns a tired question about "Gen Z traits" into a tractable study of social perception. We take one discipline from the constructionist critique that "generation" is a discourse with social effects (Foster, 2013): we treat "Gen Z" as a category whose meaning is part of what is in question, rather than a settled fact whose properties merely await measurement.

The three-view framework

The divergence this study examines has three layers, not the customary two. The first is the **employer belief (E1)**: what employers, as a group, hold to be true of Gen Z employees in general. The second is the **Gen Z self-report (G1)**: how Gen Z employees describe themselves on the same terms. The third, and the study's leading concern, is the **Gen Z meta-stereotype (G2)**: what Gen Z employees believe employers think of them. A meta-stereotype is a group's belief about how another group stereotypes it (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998), and age-based meta-stereotypes at work are documented and consequential (Finkelstein, Ryan, & King, 2013). Most prior work has measured only the first two layers, often on different instruments, so the divergence has been inferred rather than estimated. By contrast, a recent German dual survey, though a non-peer-reviewed discussion paper, measured employer proxy-estimates against Gen Z self-reports on matched dimensions and found a directionally specific miscalibration: employers overestimated Gen Z's appetite for flexibility and underestimated their concern for security (Böhlich & Axmann, 2020). The present study builds on that parallel-item logic and extends it by adding the meta-stereotype layer and a culturally specific hierarchy dimension the existing instruments do not contain. Two gaps organize the comparison: Gap 1, the divergence between employer belief and Gen Z self-report (E1 – G1); and Gap 2, the meta-accuracy gap between employer belief and the Gen Z meta-stereotype (E1 vs G2), which asks whether Gen Z read their employers correctly and is the leading contribution because it does not depend on a real generational difference existing.

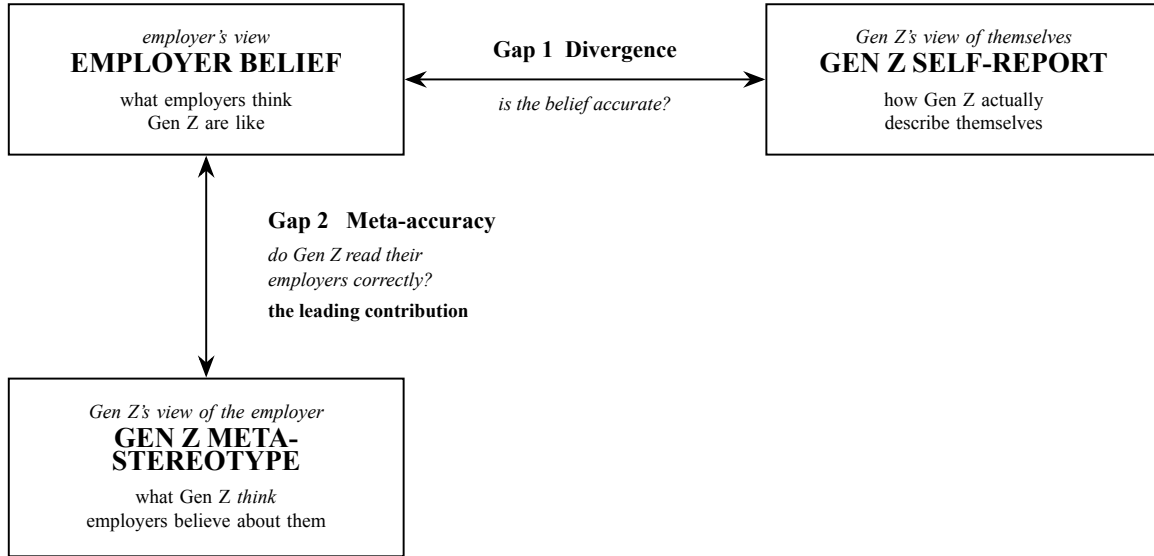


Figure 1. The belief–self-report divergence framework. The study compares three views of Gen Z as workers: the employer belief (E1), the Gen Z self-report (G1), and the Gen Z meta-stereotype (G2). Gap 1 asks how far employer belief diverges from Gen Z self-report; Gap 2, the leading contribution, asks whether Gen Z correctly read how employers see them.

The Thai context and why seniority-deference matters

Thailand is not merely the setting; it changes the substance of what employers can believe about Gen Z, for three reasons. First, the belief content itself is different. Thai workplace relationships are governed by seniority-based deference (อาวุโส) and gratitude (กตัญญู), and the operative deference is not simple acceptance of hierarchical distance but a reciprocal, moral bond built from *bunkhun* (a gratitude debt) and *kreng jai* (a considerate reluctance to impose). Thai value research built from national surveys locates the driver of deference in these relational obligations rather than in an abstract acceptance of inequality (Komin, 1990), and field studies show that *kreng jai* can be named by Thai employees themselves as the reason for their behavior, in explicit preference to power distance (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013). Western stereotype-content models, developed in low-power-distance settings, contain no dimension for this deference, so a belief central to the Thai workplace would be invisible to an imported instrument.

Second, the Thai evidence complicates the assumption that younger employees will simply conform to hierarchy. Student-sample evidence suggests Thai Gen Z may tend toward low power distance while retaining collectivism, despite the high-power-distance national culture (Farrell & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). We hold this open rather than settled, because workplace socialization may raise deference above a student baseline. If it holds, the divergence is widest precisely where a Thai manager assumes it is narrowest: the employer expects deference, the Gen Z employee does not grant it, and neither side recognizes the mismatch.

Third, there is enough Thai-specific evidence to anchor the study. For example, thirteen employers in Thai workplaces were satisfied with Gen Z on creativity, speed, and technological facility but concerned about commitment, patience, and basic office skills (Ngotngamwong & Suvannasing, 2024), and a narrative study finds a Thai Gen Z value profile weighted toward universalism and benevolence (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya, & Solnet, 2021). These local anchors also warn

against flattening: a single “Gen Z” stereotype can collapse several distinct subgroups into one portrait (Leslie et al., 2021), so a Thai employer’s belief about “Gen Z” may be inaccurate even within Gen Z, before any comparison with self-report is made.

Research Gap, Objectives, and Questions

The gap

Three gaps motivate the study. First, parallel-item measurement of employer belief against Gen Z self-report exists (Böhlich & Axmann, 2020; Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012), but has not been extended to the Thai context, to an emic hierarchy dimension, or to the meta-stereotype layer. Second, the meta-accuracy question, whether Gen Z employees correctly anticipate how employers view them (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993), has not been applied to Thai employer-Gen Z belief pairs at all, even though such meta-perceptions are likely to drive defensiveness and disengagement independently of any real difference. Third, seniority-based deference has been studied as a feature of Thai work culture but not as belief content that employers hold about Gen Z and that Gen Z hold about themselves.

Objectives

The **primary objective** is to characterize, from employers’ and Gen Z employees’ own accounts, the three views defined above, and to identify inductively the belief dimensions salient in the Thai workplace, in particular whether hierarchy and deference form a distinct one, following an emic-etic logic in which constructs are surfaced from the target population before being compared against imported instruments (Cheung, van de Vijver, & Leong, 2011). The **secondary, exploratory objectives** are to describe how the three views diverge, whether contact and beliefs relate to the size of the gap and to management intentions, and whether Gen Z self-reports are internally heterogeneous.

Research questions

The study is qualitatively driven: its primary questions (RQ1-RQ3) are interpretive and answered through the qualitative strand; a set of exploratory questions (RQ4-RQ7) is examined descriptively through the supplementary quantitative strand. Consistent with the exploratory status of the quantitative strand, all questions are framed to describe rather than to confirm.

- **RQ1.** What do Thai employers believe about Gen Z employees as workers, and how do Gen Z employees describe themselves on the same terms?
- **RQ2.** What belief dimensions are salient in the Thai workplace, and does a hierarchy-and-deference concern surface spontaneously in participants’ open-ended accounts, of a kind Western stereotype-content models do not contain?
- **RQ3.** What do Gen Z employees believe employers think about them (the meta-stereotype), and how does that compare with what employers actually report? (The leading contribution.)
- **RQ4.** On the dimensions surfaced above, how do employer beliefs, Gen Z self-reports, and Gen Z meta-stereotypes appear to diverge, descriptively, in size and direction?
- **RQ5.** Are managers’ contact with Gen Z (quantity and quality) and their beliefs descriptively associated with the size of the gap and with their management intentions toward Gen Z (training, promotion, retention, willingness to work with, and preferential selection)?

- **RQ6.** Do Gen Z self-reports cluster into distinct subgroups, and does the employer belief correspond to any actual subgroup or only to a flattened composite of the cohort?
- **RQ7.** Setting birth year aside, which generation do Gen Z-aged respondents feel they belong to, and do those who do not subjectively identify as Gen Z show a different self-report or meta-stereotype pattern?

Loose predictions

Because the quantitative strand is exploratory, the study advances directional predictions rather than formally tested hypotheses; none is powered or error-rate-controlled.

- **P1 (meta-gap direction).** Gen Z employees' meta-stereotype of how employers view them will be more negative than employers' own reported beliefs, that is, Gen Z will tend to overestimate the negativity of employer belief (Finkelstein et al., 2013). We examine this as a signed group-level difference (E1 vs G2) per focal dimension, reported with its uncertainty.
- **P2 (meta-insight vs projection).** Where a negative meta-gap appears, we tentatively expect it to reflect a reading of the ambient "kids these days" stereotype rather than projection from the respondent's own self-view. We probe this descriptively by reporting the meta-gap alongside the self-view-to-meta association (Carlson, Vazire, & Furr, 2011).

The employer-belief versus self-report divergence (RQ4) is reported descriptively as the signed gap $E1 - G1$ per dimension with its confidence interval; prior parallel-item work leads us to expect dimension-specific rather than uniform directions (Böhlich & Axmann, 2020). We deliberately do not frame this gap as an "exaggeration ratio" of perceived to actual generational difference, which a two-sample design without a shared non-Gen-Z benchmark cannot identify.

Conceptual Framework

Stereotype Content Model and the BIAS map

If the object of study is what employers believe about Gen Z, we need a theory of what such beliefs are made of. The keystone is the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), which holds that stereotypes about any social group are organized along two near-universal dimensions: warmth (perceived intent: is this group friendly, loyal, on our side?) and competence (perceived ability: can this group deliver?). The SCM gives the study a theory-derived structure for the employer belief and is directly operationalizable, supplying validated warmth and competence item sets and a standard rating instruction that this study adapts to elicit belief and self-report on a common metric. A data-driven refinement, the ABC model, recovers a third axis of beliefs (perceiving a group as traditional or progressive in its values) alongside agency and communion (Koch, Imhoff, Dotsch, Unkelbach, & Alves, 2016); much of the Gen Z stereotype, the sense that they seek purpose and hold that respect must be earned, is arguably a values stereotype, so we carry the beliefs axis as a candidate. Cross-cultural SCM work also finds that collectivist samples lodge groups in mixed, ambivalent cells rather than the uniformly positive one (Cuddy, Fiske, Kwan, et al., 2009), warning against coding the employer belief as a simple good-or-bad verdict.

A stereotype matters only insofar as it shapes action, and here we rely on the BIAS map, which extends the SCM from perception to behavior (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007): warmth and competence perceptions produce distinct intergroup emotions, which in turn produce facilitation or

harm. A low-warmth stereotype of Gen Z as disloyal or entitled is likely to produce passive harm, such as withholding mentoring, investment, and promotion, even without open hostility. This is the theoretical warrant for asking whether employer beliefs predict management intentions (RQ5). We take the map's central claim, that stereotypes license behavioral tendencies, but deliberately do not attempt a full affect-mediation test; RQ5 is scoped as an association.

Meta-stereotype and meta-accuracy

The contribution we regard as most important concerns not what employers believe but what Gen Z believe employers believe. Meta-stereotypes have documented affective consequences, including reduced anticipated enjoyment of intergroup contact (Vorauer et al., 1998), and younger workers have been found to hold “overly bleak” meta-stereotypes, more negative than older colleagues’ actual views (Finkelstein et al., 2013), which anchors P1. Whether such second-order beliefs are correct is the question of meta-accuracy, and its pedigree supplies two disciplines. First, consensus is not accuracy: agreement among perceivers can arise from shared response tendencies rather than shared truth (Kenny & Albright, 1987), a caution that applies with force to a group-level mean comparison. Second, meta-accuracy is not one quantity; people are more accurate at the generalized level than the dyadic level (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Therefore, with independent, unlinked samples and a single meta-target, this study estimates mean-level (elevation) accuracy and profile accuracy, and reports them as such. A further caution is that apparent meta-insight can be projection of one’s own self-view; when this projection is controlled, genuine meta-insight is nonetheless found to remain (Carlson et al., 2011), and the study estimates the Gen Z self-view-to-meta association directly and reports the meta-accuracy comparison net of it (P2).

Seniority-based deference as a Thai emic construct

The study’s second contribution treats Thai seniority-deference (อาวุโส) as belief content rather than background culture. The stereotype-content literature, developed almost entirely in Western low-power-distance settings, contains no dimension for workplace deference. Two distinctions keep this dimension from collapsing into an imported one. First, the driver of Thai deference is not abstract acceptance of inequality but *bunkhun* (a gratitude-debt bond) and *kreng jai* (a considerate reluctance to impose), a relational grounding a Hofstede power-distance item cannot represent (Komin, 1990; Andrews & Chompusri, 2013). Second, the deference at issue has a moral, reciprocal structure, so the study reads it through the distinction between reciprocal filial piety, grounded in genuine care, and authoritarian filial piety, grounded in submission to hierarchy (Yeh & Bedford, 2003, used as an analytic lens only); Thai employers who complain that Gen Z “have no respect” may be reacting to the decline of the authoritarian form while Gen Z retain the reciprocal one, in which case the two sides describe different constructs rather than disagree about one. Whether deference behaves as a distinct content dimension, a status antecedent of perceived competence, or a relational-exchange construct is left for the qualitative strand and an exploratory discriminant check to adjudicate.

The seven fielded candidate dimensions

The framework lets the study’s candidate dimensions follow from theory and prior evidence. Applying an honest evidence grade reveals that for several popular Gen Z beliefs the peer-reviewed evidence that employers actually hold them is thin, which is itself the rationale for a qualitatively-driven design. Seven dimensions are fielded as parallel rating scales, each drawn from a validated

source scale for the self-report side:

1. **Seniority-based deference (อาวุโส, emic)**: the focal contribution; emic items written from the Thai values literature (Komin, 1990), with the reciprocal-vs-authoritarian distinction (Yeh & Bedford, 2003) as an analytic frame only.
2. **Loyalty / organizational-mobility preference**: Organizational Mobility Preference subscale, Boundaryless Career Attitudes Scale (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006); strongest employer-belief provenance (Van Rossem, 2019; Böhlich & Axmann, 2020).
3. **Workplace entitlement and expectations**: Measure of Employee Entitlement (Westerlaken, Jordan, & Ramsay, 2017), with the Psychological Entitlement Scale (Campbell et al., 2004) as a construct reference only.
4. **Work-life segmentation preference**: Segmentation Preference Scale (Kreiner, 2006).
5. **Learning adaptability**: I-ADAPT (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006).
6. **Power distance (etic anchor)**: CVSCALE (Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz, 2011; Dorfman & Howell, 1988), paired with deference as an etic discriminant.
7. **Motivation to lead (supplementary)**: Affective-Identity subscale of the Motivation-to-Lead scale (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), read as aspiration to lead and matching the “conscious unbossing” narrative; kept as a supplementary measure despite thin employer-belief evidence, and may not enter the main analysis.

Four further candidate dimensions from the literature review, **work effort, feedback-seeking, greater-good / prosocial value, and PsyCap / resilience**, are judged too thin on the employer-belief side to field as rating scales and are carried in the **qualitative strand only**, where their thematic presence or absence is itself informative. Importantly, a naming discipline applies throughout: because the popular stereotype and the available self-report scales do not always denote the same construct, each dimension is named for what its items measure, not for the stereotype that motivated it, and every result flags where the measured construct is a cousin of the stereotype rather than the stereotype itself.

Methodology

Research Design

The study uses a convergent mixed-methods design with qualitative priority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morse, 1991). Each participant completes both strands in one online session: an open, written free-response strand and a set of closed rating items written in parallel referent forms. The two strands are collected at the same time, analyzed on their own terms, and then merged, rather than run as sequential phases. The qualitative strand carries the interpretive priority and the study’s leading contribution; the quantitative strand adds descriptive magnitude across a larger sample and supplies the meta-accuracy comparison as its focal directional expectation, examined descriptively rather than as a powered confirmatory test. The central construct is a belief-self-report divergence rather than stereotype accuracy, because Gen Z self-report is not an objective criterion of truth; the aim is to describe and interpret the gap, not to certify one side as correct.

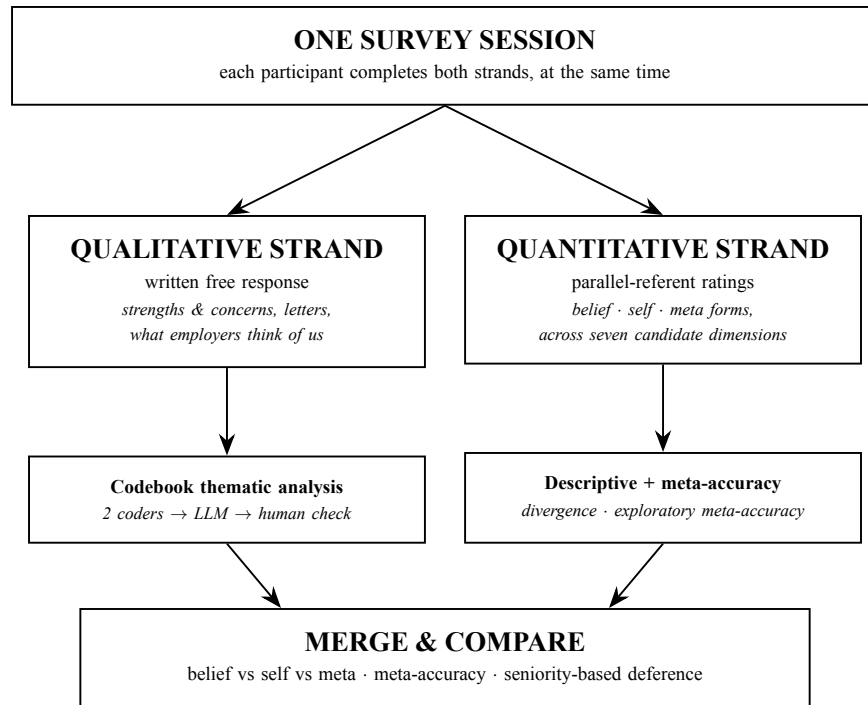


Figure 2. The convergent design. Each participant completes one online session that produces both strands at once: an open written free-response strand (interpretive priority) and a parallel-referent rating strand across the seven candidate dimensions. The two strands are analyzed on their own terms and then merged in a joint display.

Collecting both strands together has a specific rationale: the belief content that matters here includes a culturally specific expectation of deference that Western scales do not contain, so the quantitative bank cannot be assembled from imported scales alone. The design resolves this by triangulation rather than sequencing. The deference dimension enters the rating bank as a theory-motivated candidate written from the Thai values literature, while the same construct is left free to surface in its own terms in the free-response, so the two readings can be compared within the same participants (Cheung et al., 2011). Where they converge, the deference belief is corroborated across methods; where the free-response contradicts or reshapes the pre-written items, the qualitative reading takes priority.

One design constraint applies to the whole study. Because the design is cross-sectional and compares an older employer sample with a younger Gen Z sample, it cannot by itself separate a cohort effect from an age or career-stage effect; this age-period-cohort confound is unsolvable by any single cross-sectional design (Parry & Urwin, 2011). We do not claim to solve it. Because employer and Gen Z ages barely overlap, age cannot serve as a covariate that purges the between-group gap; we therefore covary age and organizational tenure within each sample for description, hold region and sector as constant as recruitment allows, and report the most age-sensitive dimensions descriptively rather than as generational findings.

Participants and Sampling

The study has two groups, and each participant completes both strands in the same session.

Employers are Thai working adults who work with Gen Z, defined as people whose cur-

rent role brings them into contact with Gen Z employees: owners, senior executives, HR, direct managers and supervisors, and colleagues who work closely with Gen Z but hold no formal people-authority. Only those who do not work with Gen Z at all are screened out. The depth of involvement, whether the respondent holds managerial authority and the amount and recency of Gen Z contact, is recorded and used as a moderator rather than an eligibility gate, so that variance in Gen Z contact is preserved for RQ5.

Gen Z are employed Thai adults aged eighteen or older in the Gen Z birth cohort (born approximately 1997-2012). The eighteen-or-older floor avoids enrolling minors.

Recruitment is purposive with quotas across organization type and sector, so that emerging themes do not reflect a single industry, and region and sector are held comparable across the two groups so that an apparent employer-Gen Z gap is not in fact a Bangkok-versus-province difference (Komin, 1990). One safeguard is specific to this study's logic: because an employer who is themselves close to the Gen Z cohort compresses the very gap being measured, employer age is recorded, recruitment spans the full age range, and the divergence is reported both with and without supervisors who fall within or adjacent to the Gen Z cohort, as a sensitivity analysis. Self-selection into a reflective, incentivized online task may skew the belief distribution toward the more engaged; the recruitment funnel is described and this is carried as a limitation.

Because both strands draw on the same participants, the sample is sized by the more demanding quantitative precision requirement, well above the point at which qualitative themes saturate. To fix a precision target for the focal meta-accuracy comparison (RQ3), we anchor the smallest difference of interest at a moderate standardized mean difference of about $d = 0.4$, drawn from the “overly bleak” age-metastereotype effect; an analyzed sample on the order of 150 employers and 150 Gen Z respondents estimates a difference of that size with adequate precision. Because online screening and incomplete responses attrite the raw sample, **we recruit approximately 190 respondents per group to retain roughly 150 analyzable cases per group (about 300 in total)**. We frame this as a precision target for an exploratory estimate, not a confirmatory power analysis.

Interview participants are drawn from the same two populations through a recontact-consenting subsample of survey respondents and fresh purposive recruitment (the interview instrument and its sampling are described under Measures below).

Measures

The study is qualitatively driven, so its two qualitative instruments, the written free-response in the survey and the semi-structured interviews, are described first and carry the interpretive weight; the parallel-referent rating strand that follows is the supplementary, exploratory quantitative measure.

Written free-response (in the survey)

Participants complete an anonymous, written free-response task. The anonymous written format is chosen because managers discussing generational differences tend to perform an egalitarian identity, understating negative beliefs in face-to-face talk even as they act on them, and respondents express negative beliefs more readily in writing. Employers list strengths and concerns regarding Gen Z employees in general and write a short letter to Gen Z describing what they most want them to understand. Gen Z complete a parallel task about themselves, write a letter to employers, and respond to a prompt asking what they believe employers think about Gen Z, which provides the

qualitative basis for the meta-stereotype (G2). Both groups then answer a written follow-up prompt tuned to relational and hierarchy content (a moment when a Gen Z employee and an older colleague or boss saw a situation differently), which invites deference-relevant material without naming the construct and so without priming it (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013). Two safeguards are deliberate: the referent is framed by role and context rather than by cohort label, because naming targets by generation amplifies archotyping and inflates the gap (Van Rossem, 2019); and the order in which strengths and concerns are requested is randomized.

Semi-structured interviews (the primary qualitative arm)

The written free-response is efficient but cannot probe; the study's primary vehicle for belief content is a set of individual semi-structured interviews, conducted separately with employers and with Gen Z. Each interview runs roughly forty-five to sixty minutes, is audio-recorded in Thai with separate written consent (these participants are identifiable, unlike the anonymous survey), and follows a guide whose every core question maps to a research question and whose analysis makes the qualitative arm an independent, publishable contribution rather than a set of open-ended survey items. Two elicitation choices are load-bearing. Hierarchy and seniority-based deference are surfaced through a concrete relational episode, a time a younger employee and a more senior colleague or boss saw a situation differently, and never by naming the construct, so a tacit norm that Thai respondents rarely volunteer has a fair chance to appear (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Komin, 1990). And the Gen Z meta-stereotype is asked at the group level, what Gen Z believe employers think of Gen Z as a group, while the employer's belief is elicited as a first-person view, so the meta-accuracy comparison has a clean criterion. Sampling is purposive with a maximum-variation frame (Patton, 2015) and sized by information power, the amount of relevant information the sample holds, rather than a fixed number (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016), with roughly twelve to twenty interviews per group. The full employer and Gen Z guides, with their probes and referent discipline, are a separate instrument in this packet (07c, Interview Protocol).

Parallel-referent rating strand

The quantitative strand uses a fixed item bank covering the seven dimensions above. For each dimension, items are drawn from a validated source scale (see Conceptual Framework) so the self-report side has established psychometric provenance, except the emic deference dimension, whose items are written from the Thai values literature (Komin, 1990). Because the full bank is too long to administer in three referent forms, we select a small number of the strongest items per dimension rather than administering whole scales; **the scales are therefore item-reduced to build an exploratory instrument, not revalidated, and internal-consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) is reported for every retained scale at pilot and at live administration**, with any scale below .70 flagged as a measurement limitation. Item selection proceeds on stated criteria (factor loading or item-total correlation, content validity for the specific belief, referent-portability across all three forms, and removal of near-duplicates and cross-loaders), followed by an expert content-validity review.

Each retained dimension is written in three parallel forms differing only in referent: an **employer form** (rate Gen Z employees in general, E1), a **Gen Z self-report form** (rate oneself, G1), and a **Gen Z meta-stereotype form** (rate what employers are believed to think, G2). Within a dimension the three forms share an identical response scale and item order is counterbalanced.

Because the operational construct is a signed cross-form difference, we budget enough items per dimension to test configural, metric, and scalar invariance, make at least metric invariance a stated precondition for interpreting cross-form differences, and pre-specify the fallback: where scalar invariance fails, we report within-form relative patterns rather than cross-form mean gaps and route the substantive divergence claim to the qualitative strand. The employer belief (E1) uses a single personal-belief framing (the manager's own view), not a perceived-consensus framing, to protect the meta-accuracy criterion.

Managers additionally complete two contact measures and a management-intention measure. Contact is measured at two levels: quantity (years, number, proportion, role) and quality, using an adaptation of the Intergroup Contact Interactions Scale (ICIS; Karataş, Rubini, Prati, Schwartz, & Crocetti, 2023), a validated positive/negative contact measure. Management intentions use a five-item personnel-decision scale adapted from Chiu, Chan, Snape, and Redman's (2001) validated discriminatory-attitude measure (training, promotion, retention, willingness to work with, and preferential selection), reverse-referenced from older workers to Gen Z. Both adapted instruments are treated as new exploratory measures, not revalidated scales, and receive expert item-objective-congruence review and a cognitive pretest. Because the study is conducted in Thai while most source scales are English-origin, every imported item and every prompt passes through Brislin-style translation and independent back-translation, bilingual reconciliation and decentering, and think-aloud cognitive interviews with roughly six to ten Thai Gen Z and employers.

Procedure

Participants complete the study online. After providing informed consent and reporting demographic information, they complete the qualitative free-response task first, then the fixed item-bank ratings; the free-response comes first so the spontaneous account is never primed by a rating prompt. Employers rate their beliefs about Gen Z in general; Gen Z complete the self-report and meta-stereotype items in counterbalanced blocks to reduce common-method effects. Managers additionally complete the management-intention and two contact measures. After the birth-year screener, one exploratory item asks Gen Z-aged respondents which generation they feel they belong to, setting age aside (RQ7); this felt-generation item is descriptive and does not reassign anyone or gate eligibility. For an incentivized, anonymous online survey we include attention checks, screen for careless, speeded, duplicate, or bot responding, and state the data-quality exclusion rule in advance. Any incentive is described within the survey, and a response quota is set in advance so the total incentive cost is bounded.

Data Analysis

Qualitative. The free-response corpus is analyzed with a codebook approach to thematic analysis compatible with a shared coding frame and inter-coder reliability, and the interview corpus, the study's primary qualitative source, with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Coding is abductive: an a priori frame from the SCM and ABC axes (warmth, competence, beliefs) orients the first pass, kept open with an additional category so a Thai-specific belief such as deference can emerge rather than be forced into a preexisting category (Koch et al., 2016). For the written corpus, two human coders develop the codebook on an initial subset; a large-language-model tool then applies the agreed codebook to the full corpus offline, after data collection. Reliability is established through several safeguards: per-code reliability (raw agreement, Cohen's kappa, and a prevalence-robust index such as Gwet's AC1 or Krippendorff's alpha) rather than a

single pooled coefficient, because the contribution-bearing codes are low in prevalence and kappa is depressed by low base rates (McHugh, 2012). A human coder independently codes at least forty percent of statements as a random audit and in full every statement in the low-prevalence, novel, and derogation categories, blind to the model's labels; disagreements are adjudicated by a third coder against a written rule and fed back into a versioned codebook. Trustworthiness follows Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility through member checking, transferability through thick description, dependability through the versioned codebook, and confirmability through the dual-coding audit trail. Reporting follows COREQ (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

Quantitative. This component is descriptive throughout and reports only quantities the design can support, read alongside the qualitative findings rather than as hypothesis tests. For each dimension we describe, on a common scale, the employer belief (E1), Gen Z self-report (G1), and Gen Z meta-stereotype (G2), and, where invariance permits, report the signed differences among them with their uncertainty. The signed gap **E1 – G1** per dimension is reported with its confidence interval and interpreted descriptively, not as an exaggeration ratio (not identified in a two-sample design). The **meta-accuracy comparison (RQ3)** is the focal expectation: on each focal dimension we compare the Gen Z average meta-stereotype against the employer average belief (mean-level accuracy) as a signed difference with its confidence interval, and across dimensions report the correspondence between the two profiles (profile accuracy). We apply the consensus-is-not-accuracy caution to our own estimate, report the comparison net of the Gen Z self-view-to-meta-stereotype projection covariate (Carlson et al., 2011), and do not claim dyadic accuracy. We describe, exploratorily, whether the quantity and quality of managers' contact are associated with the size of the gap and with beliefs, and whether beliefs are associated with management intentions (the adapted Chiu et al., 2001, index); these associations are descriptive and cross-sectional, not tests of a mediation model. Finally, we examine whether Gen Z self-reports are internally heterogeneous, using person-centered clustering to ask whether they form subgroups the employer belief flattens (RQ6), reporting the result as tentative where class stability is limited. Social-desirability pressure is addressed by design, not by a covariate.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

Participation is voluntary and preceded by informed consent. Consent is obtained through an **in-survey consent gate**: before any study content, participants read a plain-language information sheet covering purpose, procedures, the anonymous and voluntary nature of participation, the right to decline any item and to withdraw without penalty, data handling, and the offline AI-assisted coding of open-ended responses, and must actively indicate consent to proceed. Because the survey is anonymous, online, and self-administered and collects no signature or identifying information, the study requests a **waiver of documented (signed) consent**: requiring a signed form would be the only record linking a participant to their responses and would undermine the anonymity that protects them, while the research is minimal risk. Interview participants, who are identifiable, give separate written informed consent covering audio recording, de-identification, secure storage, and the PDPA provisions.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The survey is anonymous and results are reported only in aggregate; no personally identifying information is retained beyond coarse demographic categories, and no organizational identifier is collected. The study is designed to meet the Thai Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA, B.E. 2562). Because the free-response data are coded with a language-model tool after collection, the data flow is specified for the review board: free-response text is de-identified and screened for identifying content before it is processed; the identity of the processor, whether it runs on a no-retention or in-country endpoint, whether text is used for model training, and whether any transfer crosses a border are documented; and consent is PDPA-specific about automated processing, retention, and cross-border transfer. The coding is performed offline after collection, not as real-time adaptive AI during the survey. Interview recordings and identifiers are stored separately under pseudonymous codes, with only de-identified extracts reported. De-identified data are retained for possible use in future related research on cross-generational workplace perception, as disclosed in the consent.

Risks and Benefits

The study is minimal risk. It involves reflecting on and rating workplace perceptions, with no sensitive personal data beyond coarse demographics, full anonymity for the survey, and the right to skip items or withdraw. The main foreseeable discomfort is mild, expressing candid views about another generation, which the anonymous, self-administered format mitigates. Benefits are primarily societal: a Thai-workplace stereotype-content profile naming where employer belief and Gen Z self-report diverge, a manager-facing debrief of what Gen Z actually think employers think, and onboarding and feedback guidance scoped to the dimensions where the gap is largest, framed through a strengths-based rather than a deficit lens to support fairer cross-generational management.

Social-desirability mitigation by design

Social-desirability pressure is mitigated procedurally rather than partialled out statistically. We do not include a social-desirability scale as a covariate, because partialling such a measure out of self-reports does not reliably improve validity and can remove substantive variance (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996; Uziel, 2010), procedural remedies are preferred to post-hoc statistical ones (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and no Thai-validated instrument exists. We instead rely on full anonymity with explicit confidentiality, self-administration with no interviewer present, neutral and indirect (“Gen Z in general”) wording, and non-forced response (Nederhof, 1985). Any residual inflation would fall mainly on the Gen Z self-report, which the study treats as a fallible index rather than ground truth, so it is part of the divergence being described rather than a confound to be purged.

Timeline

The study runs over approximately one year. **Phase 1 (qualitative, roughly months 1-4)** develops and pilots the instruments and prompts, conducts the linguistic-equivalence procedure, and begins qualitative coding to confirm the salient belief dimensions, including whether seniority-deference surfaces spontaneously. **Phase 2 (survey collection, roughly months 4-8)** launches the online convergent survey to both groups until the recruitment quotas (about 190 per group) are met, followed by the planned semi-structured interviews with a recontact-consenting and purposively recruited subsample. **Analysis (roughly months 8-11)** completes reflexive and codebook thematic analysis, the descriptive divergence and meta-accuracy estimation, and the integration of the two

strands in a joint display. **Reporting (roughly months 11-12)** produces the thesis and manuscripts, with the qualitative strand carrying the leading and second contributions and the quantitative strand reported as exploratory throughout.

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