

Mixed Methods in Management Research: From Juxtaposition to Explanatory Integration in the Study of Organizational Behavior

*Ousman Razafimamonjy Andrianimbahoaka**

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Abstract

Contemporary organizations increasingly confront multi-generational complexity that single-method designs struggle to capture, yet mixed methods studies remain more often juxtaposed than genuinely integrated, particularly in under-documented African contexts. This article addresses that gap by documenting a reproducible explanatory sequential mixed methods protocol, in which a quantitative survey phase (137 participants across thirty companies in Madagascar) identified statistical patterns requiring explanation, which then guided a purposively sampled qualitative phase of interviews and focus groups, with triangulation matrices classifying each quantitative-qualitative pairing as convergent, complementary, or divergent. Divergent pairings revealed three behavioral paradoxes concerning loyalty, recognition, and autonomy. The study's principal contribution is methodological rather than empirical: a documented, transferable procedure for converting statistical divergence into theoretically grounded meta-inferences that neither method could produce alone. This procedure in turn equips organizations and researchers with a replicable diagnostic for identifying generational misunderstandings that conventional single-method approaches would leave undetected.

Keywords: Mixed methods; Triangulation; Organizational behavior; Methodological validation; Paradoxes.

* Adjunct Professor of Management; Department: Ecole de Management et d'Innovation Technologique (EMIT), University of Fianarantsoa - Madagascar. Email: andryousman@gmail.com ID ORCID: 0009-0005-7592-5424

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Sommario

Le organizzazioni contemporanee si trovano sempre più spesso a confrontarsi con una complessità multigenerazionale che i disegni di ricerca a metodo singolo faticano a cogliere; tuttavia, gli studi a metodi misti rimangono più spesso giustapposti che realmente integrati, in particolare nei contesti africani poco documentati. Il presente articolo intende colmare questa lacuna documentando un protocollo riproducibile a metodi misti di tipo sequenziale esplicativo, in cui una fase quantitativa basata su un'indagine (137 partecipanti in trenta aziende del Madagascar) ha identificato pattern statistici che richiedevano una spiegazione, i quali hanno poi guidato una fase qualitativa condotta con campionamento mirato attraverso interviste e focus group, con matrici di triangolazione che classificano ciascuna coppia quantitativo-qualitativa come convergente, complementare o divergente. Le coppie divergenti hanno rivelato tre paradossi comportamentali riguardanti lealtà, riconoscimento e autonomia. Il contributo principale dello studio è di natura metodologica piuttosto che empirica: una procedura documentata e trasferibile per convertire la divergenza statistica in meta-inferenze fondate teoricamente, che nessuno dei due metodi potrebbe produrre da solo. Questa procedura, a sua volta, fornisce a organizzazioni e ricercatori uno strumento diagnostico replicabile per identificare incomprensioni generazionali che i tradizionali approcci a metodo singolo lascerebbero inosservate.

Parole chiave: Metodi misti; Triangolazione; Comportamento organizzativo; Validazione metodologica; Paradossi.

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations increasingly display forms of complexity, coexisting generational cohorts, evolving career expectations, and shifting psychological contracts, that challenge single-method approaches to organizational behavior research (Twenge, 2010; Ng & Parry, 2016). Quantitative designs offer statistical rigor and generalizability but often cannot capture the meanings organizational actors attach to their experience, while qualitative designs generate contextualized understanding at the cost of generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles *et al.*, 2019). Mixed methods research has emerged as a pragmatic response to this tension, combining the respective strengths of both traditions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Yet the promise of mixed methods remains only partially realized, and three gaps motivate this article. First, empirical studies tend toward juxtaposition, collecting both types of data without genuinely integrating them (Bryman, 2007; Bazeley, 2016). Second, few publications document the

full methodological process in enough detail to be reproduced, particularly for explanatory sequential designs, whose point of integration between phases is rarely specified beyond general terms (O’Cathain *et al.*, 2008). Third, mixed methods studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa remain scarce, leaving instrument adaptation and cross-cultural validation under-documented (Zoogah *et al.*, 2015; Cameron & Golenko, 2023), and published protocols more often treat divergence between strands as a threat to validity than as a source of theoretical insight (Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006).

This article is primarily methodological. It documents, step by step, an explanatory sequential mixed methods protocol, from instrument validation to final integration, applied to the study of Generation Y and Z management in thirty companies in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar. The empirical case, built from survey data on 137 participants combined with 30 interviews and 30 focus groups, is not an end in itself: it serves as an illustrative vehicle through which the protocol’s capacity to produce valid, theoretically productive meta-inferences can be demonstrated and assessed.

The central research question is: how can an explanatory sequential mixed methods design be documented and operationalized to produce valid meta-inferences in organizational behavior research? This question unfolds into three sub-questions: (1) what methodological principles govern the effective integration of quantitative and qualitative strands within this design; (2) what validation and reliability procedures secure the quality of each strand and of their integration; and (3) how does triangulation, particularly the deliberate analysis of divergence, generate meta-inferences that exceed what either method could produce in isolation?

The article’s contribution is threefold. Methodologically, it offers a detailed, reproducible protocol that addresses the documentation gap identified above. Empirically, it illustrates this protocol through three behavioral paradoxes that emerged from triangulation and would have remained invisible to a single-method approach. Pedagogically, it provides researchers, particularly doctoral students working in resource-constrained or non-Western settings, with concrete guidance on design, validation, and integration. The remainder of the article reviews the relevant literature, details the methodological protocol, presents the results through the lens of triangulation, and discusses the study’s methodological and theoretical implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Mixed methods: paradigmatic and design foundations*

The methodological debate over combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was long dominated by the "paradigm wars" between positivism and interpretivism (Gage, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), with some scholars arguing the two traditions rest on incompatible ontological assumptions (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). This position has been progressively superseded by pragmatism, which subordinates paradigmatic allegiance to the practical requirements of the research question (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007); methodological choice follows the nature of the phenomenon under investigation rather than prior epistemological commitment, although some authors caution that paradigmatic tension, while not insurmountable, should be made explicit rather than dissolved (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010).

Building on this pragmatic foundation, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) distinguish mixed methods designs along two axes, timing (sequential or concurrent) and priority (equal or unequal), yielding convergent, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, and embedded designs. The explanatory sequential design adopted in this study begins with a dominant quantitative phase and adds a qualitative phase specifically to explain or deepen unexpected quantitative results (Ivankova *et al.*, 2006). A convergent design would instead have collected both strands simultaneously for cross-validation, and an exploratory sequential design would have used qualitative data to build the quantitative instruments; neither alternative suited a study whose central aim was to explain patterns that only became visible once the quantitative phase was complete (Morse, 2003). Because its explanatory logic moves transparently from an initial quantitative finding to a qualitative account of the mechanism behind it, this design offers a structure especially well suited to documenting how meta-inferences are built, the central methodological concern of this article, a requirement addressed directly in Section 3.

2.2 *Triangulation and the integration gap in organizational research*

Triangulation is the operational core of mixed methods integration. Denzin (1978) distinguishes several forms, of which methodological triangulation, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to study the same phenomenon, is central to mixed designs. Greene *et al.* (1989) extended

this typology by identifying the purposes triangulation can serve: confirmation, when convergent findings corroborate one another; complementarity, when each method illuminates a different facet of the phenomenon; development, when the results of one method shape the design of the other; and initiation, when contradictions between methods are deliberately sought as a source of new theoretical insight. This last purpose remains underexploited: much of the literature still treats triangulation primarily as a validation device and divergence as a problem to be resolved rather than a finding in its own right (Barbour, 1998; Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006).

Assessing the quality of mixed methods studies requires criteria beyond those developed separately for quantitative and qualitative research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). O’Cathain *et al.* (2008) propose evaluating the quality of each component, of their integration, and of the study as a whole; Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) add two criteria specific to mixed designs, integration legitimation, the extent to which strands are genuinely combined rather than juxtaposed, and the quality of meta-inferences, the integrative conclusions that exceed what either method could generate alone. Genuine integration, in this sense, means that the two strands inform each other’s design, analysis, or interpretation rather than being merely reported side by side in the same article; these two criteria, integration legitimation and the quality of meta-inferences, structure the evaluation of the present protocol in Sections 3 and 4. In a review of 232 published studies, Bryman (2006) found that many mixed methods articles stop at juxtaposition without reaching this threshold, a diagnosis a decade of subsequent methodological work has continued to confirm and refine (Bryman, 2007; Bazeley, 2016).

This integration gap is especially visible in organizational behavior and human resource management, where mixed methods adoption has lagged behind other social science fields despite the manifest complexity of constructs such as leadership, commitment, and culture (Molina-Azorin, 2012). A recent handbook mapping the field confirms that management research remains disproportionately single-method and that, where mixed designs are used, integration is rarely made explicit at the level of design, analysis, or interpretation (Cameron & Golenko, 2023). Exemplary exceptions exist: Meyer *et al.* (2012) used an explanatory sequential design to explain why high organizational-commitment scores coexisted with strong turnover intentions, and Chatman *et al.* (2014) combined a validated culture questionnaire with ethnographic observation to link normative and practical dimensions of culture. Yet comprehensive, reproducible accounts of the full mixed methods process remain rare (Bryman, 2007), and studies situated in sub-Saharan Africa are particularly scarce. Where African contexts are

studied at all, attention typically centers on adapting individual instruments rather than on documenting the integration of an entire protocol, leaving open questions about how quantitative and qualitative strands should be sequenced and combined under the resource and infrastructure constraints specific to the region (Zoogah *et al.*, 2015).

2.3 Theoretical lenses for interpreting generational behavior

The Because triangulation's value lies partly in what it subsequently allows the researcher to explain, three theoretical clusters informed the interpretation of the results reported in Section 4, anticipating the discussion in Section 5.

The first concerns the changing employment relationship. Rousseau's (1995) psychological contract theory frames employment as an exchange of implicit and explicit obligations between employee and organization. More recent work reconceptualizes the security employees seek as a function of transferable skills and labor-market value rather than tenure with a single employer (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), consistent with the broader shift from bounded, organization-centered careers toward boundaryless careers structured around individual mobility across employers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Together, these frameworks offer a direct lens for reconciling stated preferences for stability with simultaneous openness to external opportunities: read against this literature, loyalty conditioned on continued learning and recognition appears less as a contradiction than as the situational logic predicted by employability-based accounts of the employment relationship.

The second concerns recognition and communication. Brun and Dugas (2008) show that workplace recognition operates along distinct formal-transactional and informal-relational dimensions, and that employee satisfaction depends less on the existence of recognition systems than on their perceived authenticity, immediacy, and human character. Whether recognition is experienced this way depends heavily on everyday supervisor-employee communication: leader-member exchange theory holds that the depth and reciprocity of this dyadic relationship, rather than the mere existence of formal procedures, determines whether employees feel valued as individuals or simply evaluated as performers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Together, these two bodies of work anticipate a recurring pattern in the data, in which managers' confidence in formal recognition systems is not matched by employees' subjective sense of being recognized.

The third concerns the cultural and hierarchical context in which these dynamics unfold. Hofstede's (2001) power distance dimension captures the

extent to which unequal authority distribution is accepted within organizations, offering a comparative lens on how autonomy is granted and perceived across hierarchical levels. African organizational contexts have been shown to combine imported bureaucratic structures with indigenous relational and communal norms, producing management practices that cannot be fully read through either lens alone (Jackson, 2004). In Madagascar specifically, the relational norm of *fihavanana*, solidarity extending beyond kinship to structure reciprocal obligation, consensus-seeking, and social harmony, has been shown to condition the acceptability and legitimacy of human resource management tools in Malagasy firms (Rasoamparany, 2015). This coexistence of hierarchical distance with strong relational obligation offers a plausible account of why managers can sincerely believe they grant autonomy while employees experience the same practices as constraining.

Read together, these three clusters, psychological contract, employability, and mobility; recognition and communication; and culture and hierarchy, provide the interpretive scaffolding subsequently mobilized in Section 5 to explain the paradoxes reported in Section 4. Their role here is illustrative of a broader methodological point: divergence between quantitative and qualitative strands yields a meta-inference, rather than an unresolved anomaly, only when the qualitative phase is read through a theoretical framework specified in advance rather than assembled after the fact to fit the data.

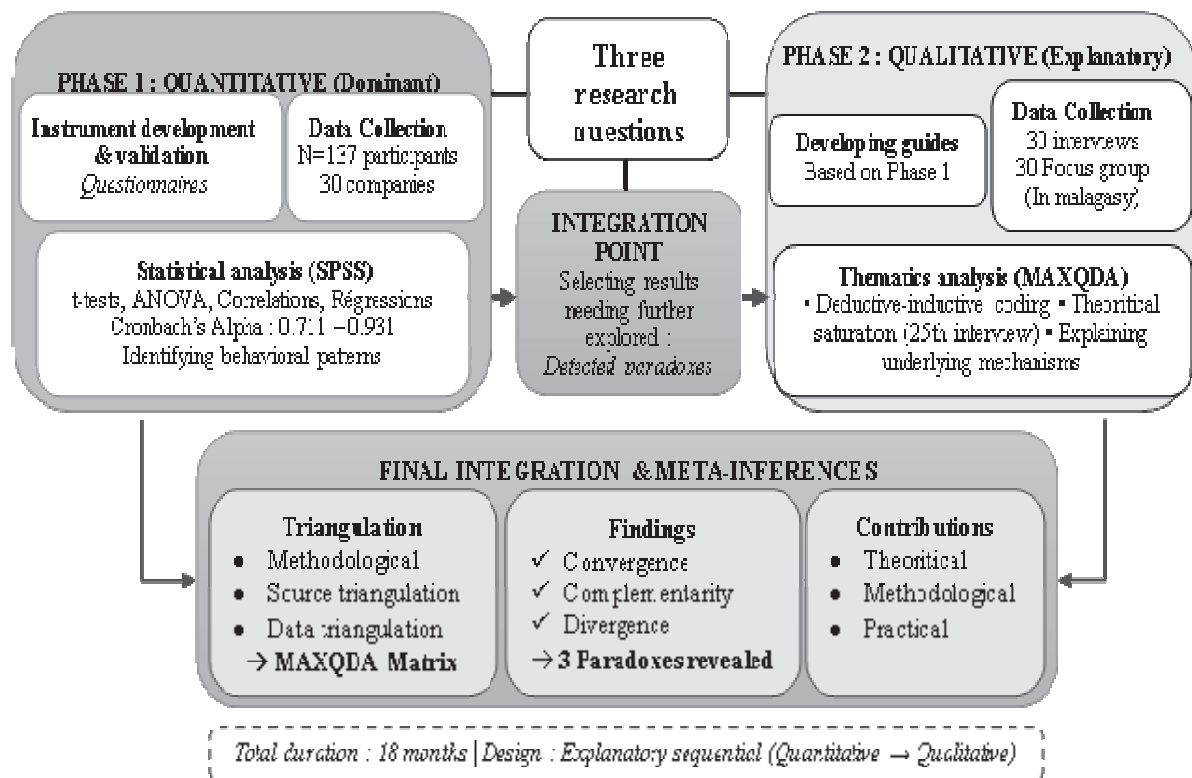
3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and integration logic

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), combining a dominant quantitative phase with a subsequent qualitative phase intended to explain and deepen its findings (Ivankova *et al.*, 2006). This design was selected for three reasons. First, it allowed unexpected or paradoxical statistical patterns to be identified before they were explained, rather than assuming their meaning in advance. Second, it allowed intensive qualitative resources, interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis, to be concentrated on the dimensions the quantitative phase identified as most revealing, an efficient use of resources within a single-researcher, eighteen-month protocol. Third, it supported methodological triangulation, the systematic comparison of findings de-

rived from different methods, as a source of both validity and theoretical insight (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2015). Figure 1 presents the full eighteen-month timeline of the design, distinguishing the two phases and the integration point between them.

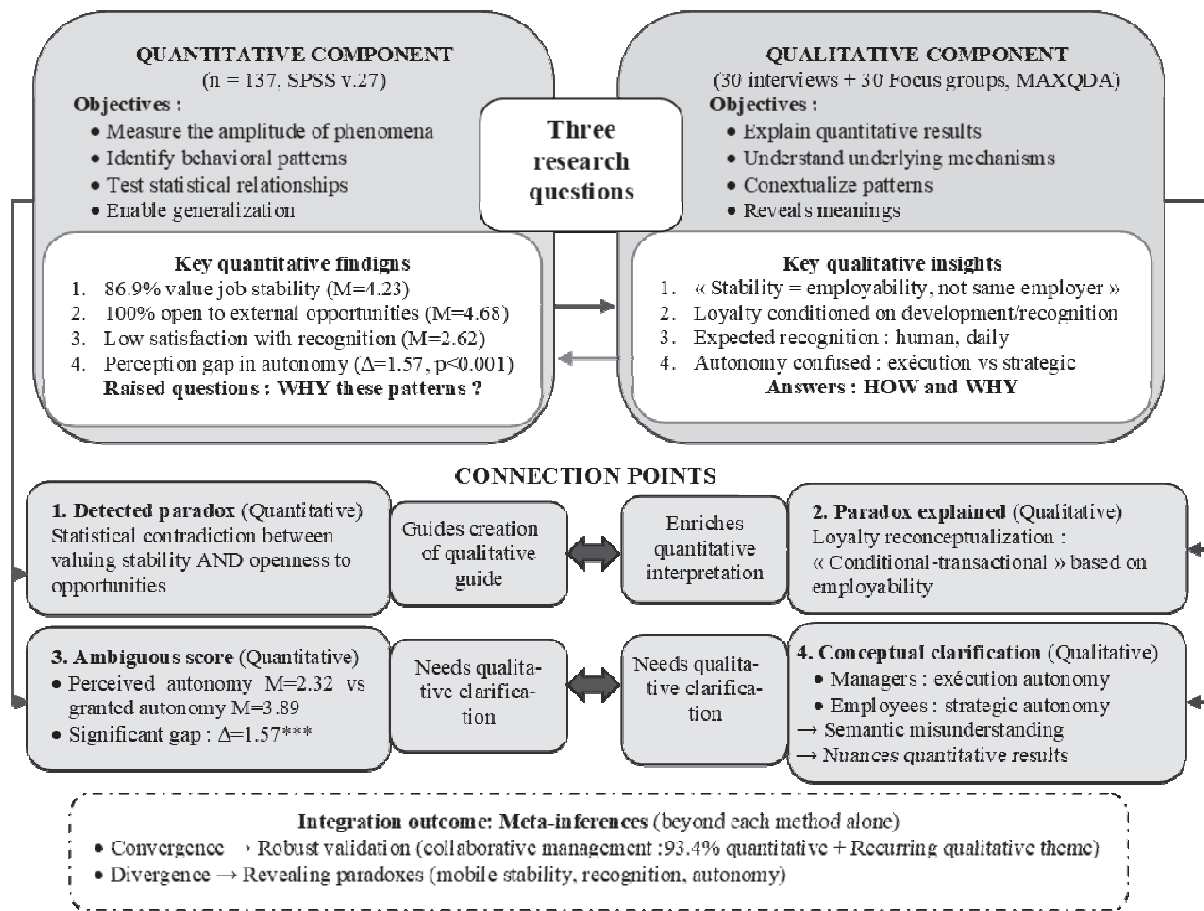
Figure 1: Timeline of the explanatory sequential design



Source: Author (2026)

The design's single main integration point occurred once the quantitative phase had been fully analyzed. At this point, statistical results directly shaped the qualitative instruments, interview guides and focus group protocols, and the purposive selection of qualitative participants. Three criteria governed which quantitative dimensions were carried forward into the qualitative phase: statistically significant results suggesting generational differences that required contextual explanation; apparent contradictions between variables or groups that challenged existing theoretical expectations; and ambiguous mean scores or high variance suggesting heterogeneous underlying realities. Figure 2 illustrates this integration model and its connection points, showing how specific quantitative findings generated qualitative questions and how the resulting qualitative themes clarified or nuanced the originating quantitative results.

Figure 2: Quantitative-Qualitative integration model with connection points



Source: Author (2026)

3.2 Sampling and participants

The target population comprised Generation Y (born 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born 1997-2012) employees, together with managers of any generational cohort, working in formal-sector companies in Fianarantsoa. A two-stage sampling strategy was used: companies were selected purposively, and individuals within companies were selected using stratified sampling (Patton, 2015). Thirty companies were retained. This number reflected a deliberate trade-off rather than an arbitrary cutoff: it was large enough to capture variation across sector (services, trade, industry, finance) and organizational size, two dimensions expected to shape generational management practices, while remaining feasible for a single researcher to access, obtain consent from, and follow through an eighteen-month protocol com-

binning a survey, thirty individual interviews, and thirty focus groups. Each company was additionally required to meet three further criteria: at least 50 employees, formally registered activity, and the presence of Generation Y and/or Z staff.

Table 1 presents the resulting sample of 137 participants: 107 Generation Y and Z employees (78.1%) and 30 managers (21.9%), with 34.3% women and 65.7% men, and a generational split among employees of 61% Generation Y and 39% Generation Z.

Table 1: Distribution of participants by status, generation, and gender

Status	Generation	Men (n)	Men (%)	Women (n)	Women (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Managers	Generation X	20	66.7	1	3.3	21	70.0
	Generation Y	5	16.7	4	13.3	9	30.0
Total managers		25	83.4	5	16.6	30	100
Employees	Generation Y	41	38.3	25	23.4	66	61.7
	Generation Z	24	22.4	17	15.9	41	38.3
Total employees		65	60.7	42	39.3	107	100
Overall total		90	65.7	47	34.3	137	100

Source: Author (2026)

Two clarifications are necessary to remove any ambiguity about how this sample was constructed. First, role and generation were independent classification criteria: managers were recruited without regard to their own generational cohort, since the object of interest for this sub-sample was managerial practice rather than generational identity. Table 1 accordingly shows that 9 of the 30 managers (30%) belonged to Generation Y, the same cohort studied among employees. This overlap was expected rather than problematic: each participant was classified once, by role, and no individual was counted in both the manager and employee totals reported above.

Second, the quantitative and qualitative samples overlapped differently for the two roles, and this difference is made explicit here rather than left implicit. All 30 managers who completed the questionnaire were subsequently interviewed individually, so the manager interviews and the manager survey drew on the same 30 individuals, permitting direct triangulation at the level of specific respondents. Employees were not restricted in the same way: because thirty focus groups of approximately 13 participants each required substantially more participants than the 107-person quantitative employee sample could supply on its own, focus group membership was drawn more broadly from the Generation Y and Z employees of the same 30 companies rather than limited to the 107 quantitative respondents. The two employee sub-samples therefore overlapped only partially, and tri-

angulation at the employee level operated at the level of the generational cohort and the organizational population rather than at the level of specific matched individuals.

Given this purposive, non-probability sampling strategy at both stages, the findings reported in Section 4 support analytical generalization, extending observed patterns to organizational contexts sharing comparable structural and cultural characteristics, and transferability, whereby readers judge applicability to their own settings based on the contextual detail provided here, rather than statistical generalization to a defined population (Yin, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3 Data collection procedures

Quantitative data collection took place over an eight-week period, from 10 January 2024 to 9 March 2024, using a mixed administration mode: 72% of questionnaires were completed online and 28% on paper, an option offered to accommodate participants with limited or inconsistent internet access. This flexible approach contributed to an 85% response rate. Each participation was preceded by written informed consent detailing the study's objectives, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without justification, and anonymity was ensured from the outset through alphanumeric participant codes. Access to the 30 participating enterprises was facilitated through a partnership agreement between the university and local enterprises, which supported participant recruitment while ensuring the independence of the research process. The complete research protocol, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative phases, spanned from January 2024 to August 2025 and was conducted in accordance with Malagasy Law No. 2014-038 on the protection of personal data. The qualitative phase began once the quantitative analysis was complete, allowing the scheduling of interviews and focus groups to be guided by the findings requiring further clarification rather than by a predetermined timetable.

3.4 Quantitative instrument development, translation, and validity

Two structured questionnaires, one for employees and one for managers, were developed from validated international scales adapted to the Malagasy context; Table 2 details their structure, including the Big Five personality inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the perceived stress scale (Cohen *et al.*, 1983) used as source instruments.

Table 2: Questionnaire structure

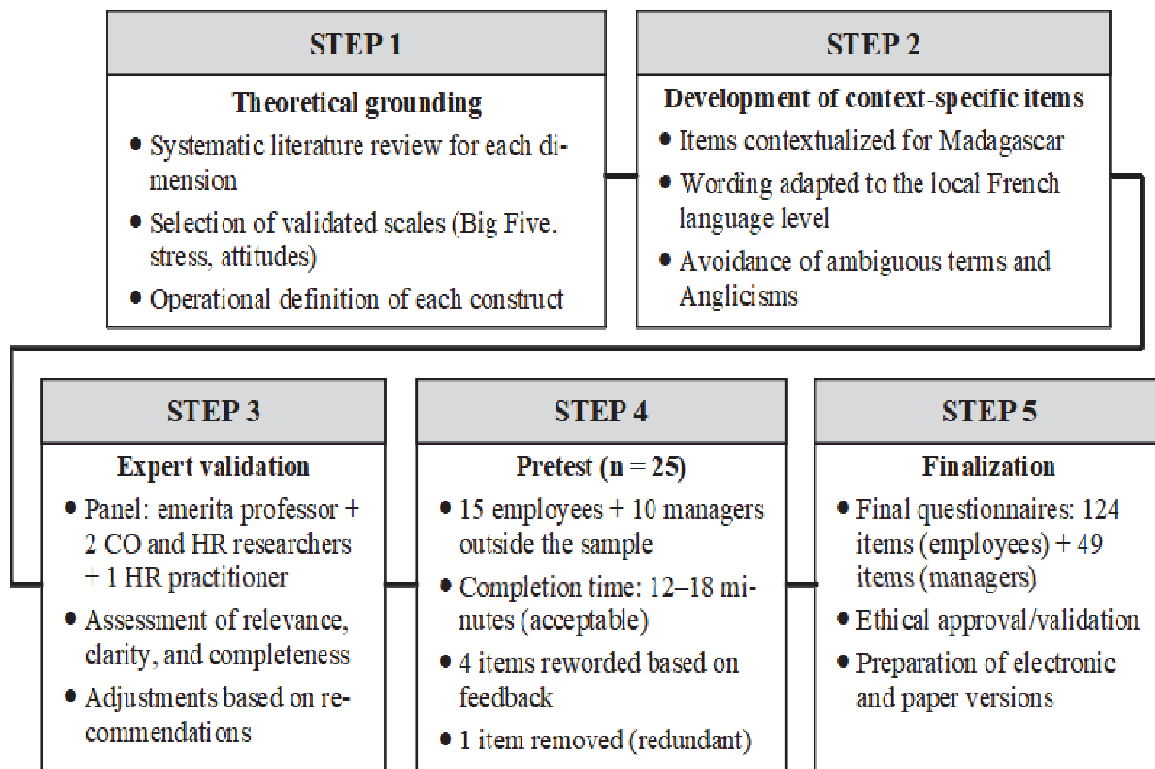
Questionnaire	Dimension	Items	Reference
Managers	Big Five	25	Costa & McCrae (1992)
	Stress	3	Cohen <i>et al.</i> (1983)
	Organizational structure	4	Developed items
	Communication mode	5	Developed items
	Management style	3	Developed items
	Decision-making method and format	3	Developed items
	Types and management of conflict	4	Developed items
	Open-ended questions	2	Developed items
Employees	Big Five	25	Costa & McCrae (1992)
	Stress	3	Cohen <i>et al.</i> (1983)
	Work attitudes	13	Porter <i>et al.</i> (1974)
	Changing expectations	10	Developed items
	Communication	9	Developed items
	Motivation and retention	10	Developed items
	Technology	7	Developed items
	Training and development	12	Developed items
	Leadership and management	11	Developed items
	Diversity and inclusion	10	Developed items
	Quality of work life	14	Developed items

Source: Author (2026)

Linguistic and cultural adaptation was addressed primarily at the item-development stage: items were drafted directly in French at a register appropriate to the Malagasy context, with explicit attention to avoiding Anglicisms and ambiguous terms, then reviewed independently by the expert panel described below and revised following the pretest. For the qualitative material, interviews and focus groups were conducted in Malagasy and transcribed in full; the principal researcher translated the transcripts into French, after which a linguistic expert independently compared each translated transcript against the original audio recording to verify semantic and cultural fidelity, with disagreements resolved by consensus. Verbatim quotations used in the results were checked against this dual-verified translation, and member checking, described in Section 3.5, gave eight participants the opportunity to confirm that translated excerpts faithfully represented their original statements.

Content validity followed a five-step process summarized in Figure 3: theoretical grounding and construct definition; development of context-specific items; independent review by a four-member expert panel comprising an emerita professor of organizational behavior, two human resource management researchers, and a senior HR practitioner; a pretest with 25 participants outside the final sample, after which four ambiguous items were reworded and one redundant item removed; and finalization of the 124-item employee and 49-item manager questionnaires.

Figure 3: Multistage questionnaire content validation process



Source: Author (2026)

This procedure provides face and content validity evidence for the instruments. A quantitative construct-validity check, such as exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis (EFA or CFA) of the retained items, was not performed in the analysis reported here. Consequently, construct validity rests strictly on the rigorous content-validation procedure described above rather than on a factor-analytic result. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for all eleven measured dimensions; Table 3 reports coefficients ranging from 0.711 (Leadership and Management) to 0.931 (Communication and Collaboration), all above the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Cronbach's alpha, however, is an internal-consistency indicator rather than a complete measure of a scale's psychometric quality: it assumes a unidimensional, tau-equivalent structure, and its value can rise with the number of items on a scale independently of how well those items cohere (McNeish, 2018). Coefficients toward the lower end of the acceptable range, such as Leadership and Management ($\alpha = 0.711$) and Technology ($\alpha = 0.741$), should accordingly be read as meeting a minimum reliability threshold rather than as confirmation that each dimension is strictly unidi-

mensional. A model-based alternative such as McDonald's omega, which does not require tau-equivalence, would offer a stronger complementary check on dimensionality. Within these limits, the coefficients obtained indicate a level of internal consistency adequate for the comparative and correlational analyses reported in Section 4.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients (α)

Dimension	α	Sample	Interpretation
Big Five (Managers)	0.856	Managers (n = 30)	Good
Big Five (Employees)	0.810	Employees (n = 107)	Good
Communication and Collaboration	0.931	Employees (n = 107)	Excellent
Work Attitudes	0.895	Employees (n = 107)	Good
Training	0.828	Employees (n = 107)	Good
Motivation and Talent Retention	0.813	Employees (n = 107)	Good
Diversity and Inclusion	0.775	Employees (n = 107)	Acceptable
Changes in Management Expectations	0.764	Employees (n = 107)	Acceptable
Quality of Work Life	0.755	Employees (n = 107)	Acceptable
Technology	0.741	Employees (n = 107)	Acceptable
Leadership and Management	0.711	Employees (n = 107)	Acceptable

Source: Author (2026)

3.5 Qualitative phase: sampling, coding, and reliability

The qualitative phase comprised 30 individual semi-structured interviews with managers (mean duration 1 hour 10 minutes) and 30 focus groups with employees (mean of approximately 13 participants per group, mean duration 1 hour 35 minutes). Managers who reported specific difficulties managing younger employees were prioritized for interviews, while focus groups were deliberately composed heterogeneously across Generation Y and Z to encourage open expression and reduce hierarchical bias. Interview guides and focus group protocols were built directly from the quantitative findings requiring clarification; for example, the statistical co-existence of high stability scores and universal openness to external opportunities was translated into direct follow-up questions asking what job stability meant to participants personally and under what conditions they would consider leaving their current employer.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method, combining deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework with inductive codes emerging from the data; Figure 4 summarizes the six phases as applied in this study.

All coding was conducted in MAXQDA, which supported hierarchical code organization, pattern identification, and the construction of comparative

matrices. Theoretical saturation was reached at the 25th manager interview, with the remaining five interviews serving to confirm rather than extend the coding scheme. Coding reliability rested on three complementary procedures rather than a single indicator. Member checking was carried out with eight strategically selected participants, four managers and four employees, who reviewed their transcripts and confirmed both the factual accuracy and the interpretive fidelity of the coding applied to their statements. Peer debriefing with two external researchers specializing in qualitative methods challenged the coding scheme, tested alternative interpretations, and helped identify potential interpretive bias; this debriefing functioned as the study's primary coding-verification mechanism. Finally, an audit trail documented every methodological decision from initial coding through final theme generation, supporting traceability and reproducibility of the analytic process.

Figure 4: The six phases of thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke

Phase 1 Familiarization with the Data	Phase 2 Generation of Initial Codes	Phase 3 Searching for Themes
• Repeated reading of the transcripts • Immersive and reflexive note-taking • Identification of preliminary patterns	• Deductive codes: derived from the theoretical framework (Big Five, motivation, etc.) • Inductive codes: emerging from the data (mobile stability, human recognition) • Systematic coding in MAXQDA	• Grouping codes into candidate themes • Creation of thematic maps • Hierarchical organization (themes/subthemes)
Phase 4 Reviewing Themes	Phase 5 Defining and Naming Themes	Phase 6 Producing the Analytical Report
• Verification of internal coherence (codes → themes) • Verification of external distinction (themes from one another) • Reorganization where necessary	• Writing clear definitions for each theme • Concise and evocative naming • Identification of representative excerpts	• Selection of the most illustrative excerpts • Connection between analysis and research question • Integration with quantitative data (triangulation)

Source: Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2026)

3.6 Integration and triangulation

The Integration was operationalized at three levels: methodological triangulation, comparing findings generated by quantitative and qualitative methods; source triangulation, comparing perspectives across managers and employees, Generation Y and Generation Z, and different sectors and company sizes; and temporal triangulation, comparing experiences across career stages. The central analytic tool for this integration was a set of triangulation ma-

trices constructed in MAXQDA. Each matrix was organized with quantitative indicators, mean scores and statistical test results, as rows and the corresponding qualitative codes and themes as columns. Reading across each row made it possible to classify the relationship between the two data sources at that intersection as convergent, when qualitative themes echoed the quantitative pattern; complementary, when qualitative themes added meaning to a quantitative pattern without contradicting it; or divergent, when qualitative themes appeared to contradict or complicate the quantitative pattern.

This row-by-row classification is what allowed the three behavioral paradoxes reported in Section 4 to be identified systematically rather than impressionistically: each paradox originated as a divergent cell in a triangulation matrix, which was then interpreted qualitatively to resolve the apparent contradiction. Tables 4 and 5, presented in Section 4, reproduce two such matrices in full. This sequential logic, quantitative results generating specific qualitative questions, which were then addressed through purposively selected participants and targeted interview and focus group content, with the resulting qualitative themes read back against the originating quantitative indicator through the triangulation matrices, constitutes the reproducible protocol this article documents. Its central methodological claim is that meta-inferences, conclusions that neither strand could support alone, depend on this explicit, row-by-row triangulation structure rather than on the general practice of collecting both types of data within a single study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in strict compliance with applicable ethical standards, in accordance with Malagasy Law No. 2014-038 on the protection of personal data. Four ethical principles guided the entire process: informed voluntary consent (obtained in writing before any participation, with a detailed explanation of the objectives and procedures), confidentiality and anonymity (systematic anonymization from the point of data collection, secure data storage, and restricted access to the researcher), nonmaleficence (non-stigmatizing wording, avoidance of intrusive questions, and special attention to participant well-being), and respect for autonomy (the right to withdraw at any time without justification or consequences, and the right to refuse to answer certain questions). Particular attention was paid to fairness in participant recruitment in order to avoid any discrimination based on gender, ethnic background, or socioeconomic status. These ethical considerations, far from being mere formalities, constitute an essential dimension of the quality and scientific legitimacy of the research.

4. Results

4.1 Convergence: cross-validation of findings

This first set of results addresses how triangulation strengthened the validity of the study's conclusions through convergence, independent corroboration of the same underlying pattern by both quantitative and qualitative data. The clearest example concerned the near-unanimous preference for collaborative and participative management among Generations Y and Z.

Quantitatively, 93.4% of employees expressed a strong preference for participative management ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.62$), with no statistically significant difference between Generation Y and Generation Z ($t = 1.23$, $p = 0.221$, Cohen's $d = 0.18$, a negligible effect size). This preference was reflected across specific survey items: managers actively encouraging employees to share their opinion on decisions ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.58$), substantial employee participation in decisions directly affecting daily work ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.64$), and managers genuinely taking employee suggestions into account ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.55$).

The qualitative data corroborated this pattern independently rather than simply restating it. The theme of participative management and active listening emerged spontaneously, without being prompted by the interview or focus group guide, in 27 of the 30 focus groups (90%). As one focus group put it, "What we really want is to be listened to like responsible adults, not just to receive orders to carry out without thinking" (FG-3); another added that a good manager today "is someone who systematically asks for our opinion before deciding, who sees us as partners and not subordinates" (FG-3). Managers acknowledged this same shift independently in their own interviews: "With today's young employees, we absolutely can no longer just give instructions and wait for execution. We have to explain the why, open discussion, and involve them in reflection" (M-14).

The convergence between the quantitative pattern, consistently high scores with no generational difference, and the qualitative pattern, a theme recurring across the large majority of focus groups and independently acknowledged by managers themselves, establishes the aspiration for collaborative and participative management as a robust and cross-cutting characteristic of both generational cohorts studied, rather than an artifact of either method taken alone.

This pattern of near-unanimous preference for participative management is broadly consistent with results reported elsewhere in single-method survey research on younger cohorts' workplace expectations, although independent qualitative corroboration of the kind obtained here, rather than

convergence inferred from quantitative results alone, is less commonly documented in that literature.

4.2 Complementarity: mutual enrichment of perspectives

The second set of results addresses how triangulation enriched understanding through complementarity, each method illuminating a distinct facet of the same phenomenon so that the combined picture exceeded what either method offered alone. The finding concerning job stability illustrates this complementary dynamic.

Quantitatively, 86.9% of employees assigned high or very high importance to job stability ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.84$), a score that, considered alone, would suggest a conservative, security-oriented orientation comparable to that often attributed to earlier generations.

The qualitative data added a distinction that was entirely invisible in the quantitative item, which asked only about job stability in generic terms. Participants distinguished explicitly between remaining with a single employer and maintaining a transferable, recognized skill set that secures employability more broadly, regardless of employer: "For me personally, stability does not mean staying in the same company for 20 or 30 years like our parents did. It means having solid, recognized, transferable skills that allow me to find work elsewhere easily if needed, if things get worse here" (FG-2). Several participants linked this distinction directly to the volatility of the local economic context: "In Madagascar, with all the economic precariousness, business closures, repeated crises, you absolutely cannot naively rely on a single company to secure your future. You have to develop your skills to have options and to be attractive in the labor market" (FG-6).

Read together, the quantitative result established the scale and generality of the phenomenon, a large majority of employees value stability, while the qualitative result established its specific content in this context, stability refers primarily to employability rather than to attachment to a single employer. Neither result alone would have supported this conclusion: the quantitative score without qualitative elaboration was open to a superficial reading as continuity with more traditional generational attitudes toward job security, while the qualitative distinction without the quantitative prevalence figure would have remained an intriguing but unquantified observation drawn from a small number of participants.

This reinterpretation of stability as employability rather than organizational tenure echoes a broader shift noted in research on contemporary career patterns, although that shift is more often inferred from qualitative or

conceptual work than demonstrated through the explicit quantitative-qualitative pairing presented here.

4.3 Revelatory divergence: three behavioral paradoxes

The third and most substantial set of results addresses how triangulation generated new theoretical insight through divergence, cases in which quantitative and qualitative findings appeared, at first reading, to contradict one another. Rather than indicating measurement error or a flaw in the study design, each apparent contradiction identified here pointed to a specific behavioral paradox that required qualitative explanation to resolve. Three such paradoxes were identified, each following the same underlying logic: a statistically robust quantitative contradiction, resolved by a qualitative account of the mechanism producing it.

4.3.1 The mobile stability paradox

Quantitatively, the same 86.9% of employees who placed high value on job stability ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.84$) also reported, without exception, being open to career opportunities outside their current company (100%, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.51$), and 78.5% reported being actively willing to change jobs frequently to advance their careers ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.87$). Taken at face value, these two patterns are difficult to reconcile: a stronger stated preference for stability would ordinarily be expected to coincide with lower, not higher, openness to mobility.

The qualitative data resolved this apparent contradiction by showing that participants had redefined the terms of organizational loyalty rather than holding an internally inconsistent pair of attitudes. As one participant explained, "I absolutely want to stay in my current company, but only if it continues to teach me, help me grow, and develop me. If I stop progressing professionally, if I no longer learn anything, of course I will look elsewhere for something better" (FG-3). Another rejected the premise that mobility signaled disloyalty: "We are not disloyal at all, as people often accuse us of being. In fact, we are very loyal AS LONG AS the company truly invests in us, respects us, and recognizes us. It is a give-and-take relationship, a fair and reciprocal one" (FG-4). Table 4 presents the full triangulation matrix for this paradox, crossing the quantitative indicators against the corresponding qualitative explanations.

Table 4: Triangulation matrix: The mobile stability paradox

Indicator	Quantitative data	Qualitative explanation
Stability valued	86.9% agree (M = 4.23, SD = 0.84)	Stability matters in Madagascar because the economic context is difficult (FG-6)
Openness to opportunities	100% open (M = 4.68, SD = 0.51)	If we stop progressing, we will naturally look elsewhere (FG-2)
Apparent paradox	Statistical contradiction	Reconceptualization of loyalty
Resolution	Conditional loyalty	Stability = sustainable employability, not the same employer I stay IF I learn, IF I am recognized (FG-7)

Source: Author (2026)

Three explicit conditions structured this conditional loyalty in participants' accounts: continuous and meaningful skill development; fair and authentic recognition of contributions; and a non-toxic, non-authoritarian work environment. Loyalty accordingly functioned not as an unconditional, fixed disposition but as a negotiable good exchanged for concrete investment in employability, a pattern the quantitative data alone registered only as an unexplained statistical contradiction.

This pattern of loyalty conditioned on employability rather than tenure diverges from earlier generational research that treated a stated preference for stability and an openness to mobility as mutually exclusive orientations, and instead aligns with more recent accounts describing the employment relationship as a negotiated, skills-based exchange.

4.3.2. The recognition misunderstanding

Quantitatively, 60% of managers reported favoring formal, structured recognition systems such as performance bonuses and merit-based promotions, and 73% believed their current recognition practices were adequate or excellent (M = 3.67, SD = 0.82). Employees, by contrast, reported markedly lower satisfaction with the recognition they actually received (M = 2.62, SD = 1.12), with 67% scoring below the midpoint of the scale. The resulting gap between managers' confidence and employees' satisfaction, 1.05 points on the five-point scale ($t = 6.23$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.98$), was both statistically significant and practically large.

The qualitative data clarified that this gap reflected a conceptual mismatch rather than a simple shortfall in the quantity of recognition provided. Managers described recognition primarily in terms of formal, measurable systems: "We introduced merit bonuses based on objective KPIs and transparent promotions based on performance. It is very concrete, measurable,

and fair" (M-08); another manager described public quarterly recognition of top performers as "transparent, motivating, and fair" (M-15). Employees, by contrast, explicitly and critically distinguished this transactional approach from the kind of recognition they valued most: "Year-end bonuses are nice financially, but that is really not what deeply motivates us or makes us want to stay. A simple sincere, personalized thank-you from our boss every day matters much more emotionally" (FG-3). As another participant put it, "We want to be recognized as whole persons, with our human qualities, not just as performance numbers or machines producing results" (FG-5). Table 5 presents the triangulation matrix for this paradox, crossing managers' and employees' quantitative results and qualitative statements.

Table 5: Triangulation matrix: The case of recognition

Source	Quantitative results	Qualitative findings
Managers	60% favor formal systems 73% believe practices are adequate	"We introduced bonuses, promotions... It is concrete" (M-08) "Results are rewarded fairly" (M-15)
Employees	Satisfaction: 2.62/567% dissatisfied	"Bonuses are fine, but a sincere thank-you matters more" (FG-3) "We want to be recognized as people, not numbers" (FG-5)
Convergence	Significant gap: $\Delta = 1.05$ ($p < 0.001$)	Conceptual gap: Managers $\rightarrow$ transactional recognition Employees $\rightarrow$ relational recognition

Source: Author (2026)

Managers and employees were, in effect, using the same word, recognition, to refer to two different constructs: a formal-transactional one for managers, and an informal-relational one for employees. This conceptual gap, rather than a simple deficit in the quantity of recognition provided, accounts for the coexistence of managers' confidence and employees' dissatisfaction observed in the quantitative data.

This divergence between formal and relational conceptions of workplace recognition is consistent with distinctions drawn elsewhere between transactional and relational approaches to recognition, although the present data demonstrate the practical organizational consequence of this conceptual gap, mutual misunderstanding between hierarchical levels, more directly than survey data alone typically can.

4.3.3. The illusory autonomy paradox

Quantitatively, 67% of managers reported granting substantial autonomy to their employees ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.76$), while employees reported perceiving markedly more limited autonomy ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.94$), with

71% expressing clear dissatisfaction with their actual level of autonomy. The resulting gap, 1.57 points ($t = 8.76$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.52$), was the largest of the three effect sizes identified in this study, indicating a fundamental disagreement between managers and employees rather than a difference of degree.

The qualitative data showed that managers and employees applied the same term, autonomy, to two distinct organizational realities. Managers described autonomy primarily as freedom in how work was executed: "I let my teams work however they want; I absolutely do not micromanage" (M-12); another explained that employees "can freely manage their time, choose their tools, and organize their tasks however they like. They are completely autonomous in execution" (M-22). Employees, by contrast, described genuine autonomy as participation in decisions about what work should be done and why: "We may be able to choose HOW to do our work in practice, but never WHAT exactly to do or WHY we are doing it. That is really not true professional autonomy" (FG-3); as another participant summarized, real autonomy meant "taking part in important decisions about the goals to be achieved and the strategic direction of our work, not just the technical details of execution" (FG-5).

This distinction between execution autonomy, which managers granted and believed employees experienced, and strategic autonomy, which employees expected and did not perceive themselves as having, accounts for the large and statistically robust gap between the two groups' reports without requiring either group's account to be treated as inaccurate or exaggerated.

This semantic divergence between execution-level and strategic-level autonomy has been noted in organizational research on delegation and empowerment, although it is more commonly discussed there as a conceptual distinction than demonstrated, as here, through a quantitatively measured perception gap paired with a qualitative account of why that gap exists.

4.4 Integrative synthesis

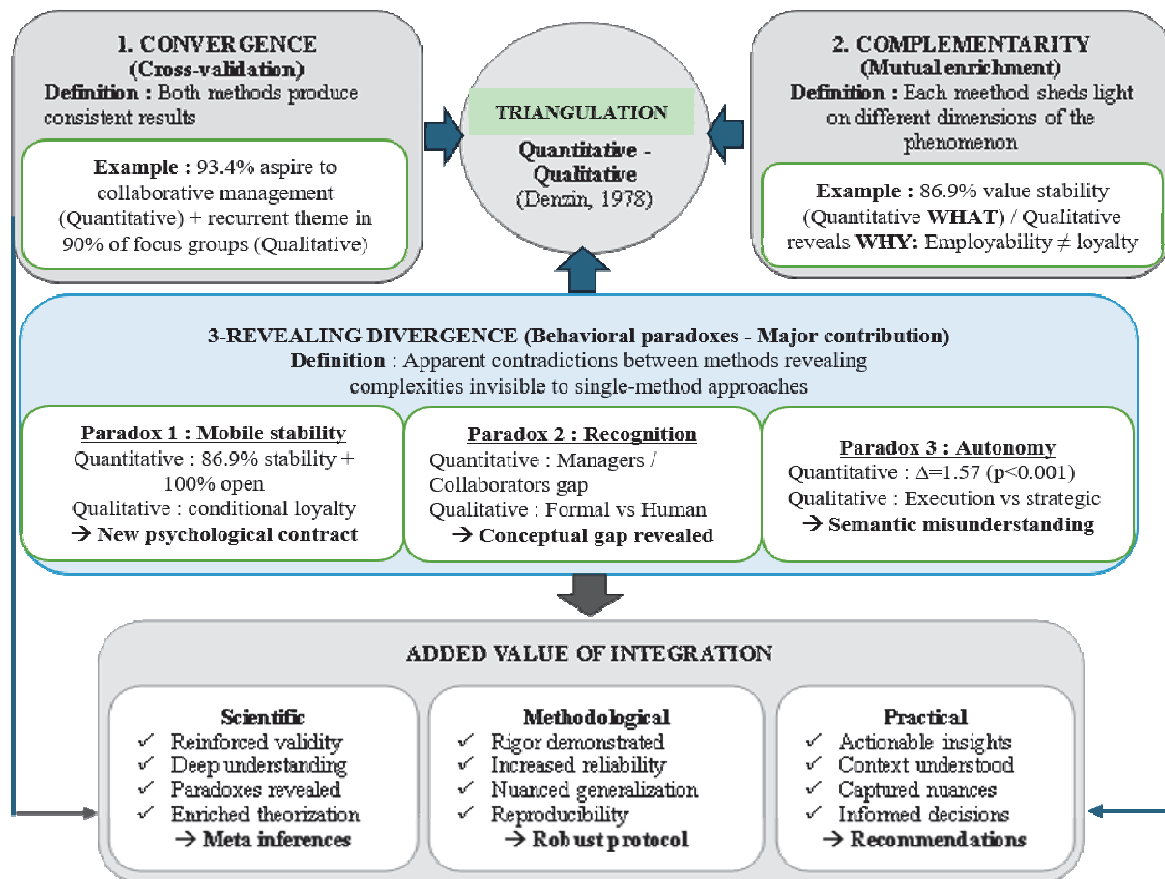
The pattern across all three forms of triangulation reported above addresses the overarching question of how methodological integration generates meta-inferences, conclusions that neither the quantitative nor the qualitative strand could have supported in isolation. Figure 5 presents the complete integrative model developed in this study, summarizing how convergence, complementarity, and divergence each generated a distinct category of contribution.

Convergence, illustrated by the participative-management finding in which 93.4% of quantitative respondents and 90% of focus groups independently pointed to the same pattern, strengthened the internal and external validity of that specific conclusion through methodological corroboration. Complementarity, illustrated by the stability finding in which the quantitative data established prevalence and the qualitative data established meaning, stability as employability rather than organizational tenure, produced a more complete and nuanced understanding than either method offered alone. Divergence, illustrated by the three behavioral paradoxes, produced the study's most substantial contributions: findings that a quantitative-only design would have registered as unexplained statistical anomalies, and that a qualitative-only design would have described richly but without any indication of how widespread or statistically robust the underlying pattern was.

Across all three paradoxes, the same underlying mechanism was at work: a single term, loyalty, recognition, or autonomy, carried different meanings for different organizational actors, and this semantic gap, rather than measurement error or respondent inconsistency, explained the statistical divergence observed in the quantitative data. Identifying this mechanism required both strands of data together: the quantitative results established that each gap was large, statistically robust, and not attributable to chance, while the qualitative results established what the gap actually consisted of and why it arose. Table 4 and Table 5 make this joint dependence explicit by presenting the quantitative and qualitative evidence for two of the three paradoxes side by side within a single matrix, rather than as separate quantitative and qualitative results reported one after the other.

Considered together, the three paradoxes indicate that divergence between quantitative and qualitative findings, in this study, was not distributed randomly across topics: it concentrated specifically on the terms employees and managers used to describe the employment relationship itself, loyalty, recognition, and autonomy, rather than on peripheral or purely descriptive items. Where the quantitative and qualitative strands addressed more peripheral or purely descriptive questions, such as the prevalence of a preference for participative management, they converged rather than diverged. This distribution of results across convergence, complementarity, and divergence is itself a finding: it suggests that triangulation is most likely to surface a genuine paradox, rather than simple corroboration or elaboration, at precisely the points where organizational actors rely on shared vocabulary to describe relationships whose underlying expectations are not, in fact, shared.

**Figure 5: Integrative model
of methodological triangulation contributions**



Source: Author (2026)

5. Discussion

The results reported above acquire their full significance only when read as products of integration rather than as separate quantitative and qualitative findings. Each paradox interpreted below is a meta-inference in the strict sense: a conclusion that neither strand could have supported alone, since the quantitative data established that a contradiction existed and was not attributable to chance, while the qualitative data explained what produced it. The discussion that follows accordingly treats the three theoretical clusters mobilized in Section 2, the psychological contract and employability, recognition and communication, and culture and hierarchy, not as independent literatures to be reviewed, but as interpretive resources that integration made necessary in the first place.

Two further results merit brief comment before turning to the paradoxes. The near-unanimous convergence on participative management, corrob-

orated independently by managers and employees, indicates that some generational expectations are stated with enough clarity and consistency that a single well-designed method would likely have detected them; triangulation here served a confirmatory rather than a discovery function. The stability-as-employability finding occupies an intermediate position: the quantitative data alone would have misread a high stability score as continuity with earlier generations' attachment to a single employer, an error the qualitative data corrected. Read together, these two results and the three paradoxes below span the full range of what triangulation can contribute, from simple corroboration to the resolution of genuine contradiction, and this range is itself part of the study's methodological contribution.

The mobile stability paradox nuances rather than confirms classical psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995): participants did not abandon the notion of a reciprocal exchange between employee and organization, but re-priced its currency, from tenure to continued investment in employability. This finding extends employability-based accounts of the employment relationship (Fugate *et al.*, 2004) and boundaryless-career models (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) by showing that, in a context of structural economic precariousness, employability functions less as an alternative to organizational attachment than as its precondition: employees remain loyal precisely because, and only as long as, the organization visibly builds their employability. This reframing diverges from earlier generational research that read a stated preference for stability as evidence of a return to traditional, tenure-based loyalty, and instead converges with more recent scholarship treating career mobility as a rational response to institutional volatility rather than a fixed generational trait.

The recognition misunderstanding confirms the formal-relational distinction identified in the recognition literature (Brun & Dugas, 2008), while enriching it by demonstrating its organizational cost: managers and employees were not disagreeing about how much recognition existed, but about what recognition was for. Read through leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the gap indicates that formal recognition systems cannot substitute for the relational quality of everyday supervisor-employee exchange; where that exchange is thin, even objectively generous formal systems are experienced as impersonal. This pattern converges with human resource research documenting the limits of transactional recognition, but diverges from managers' own assumption, expressed repeatedly in this study's interviews, that formalizing recognition procedures is sufficient to address generational expectations, a divergence made visible only because the qualitative data were read against, rather than merely alongside, the quantitative gap.

The illusory autonomy paradox is best explained by the coexistence, in the Malagasy organizational context, of hierarchical distance (Hofstede, 2001) with the strong relational obligation associated with *fihavanana* (Rasoamparany, 2015): managers who see themselves as approachable and consultative may not recognize that the same hierarchical distance leads employees to withhold the strategic-level input they privately expect to give. The finding nuances power-distance accounts of autonomy, which typically treat hierarchy as a single dimension, by showing that relational closeness and decision-making distance can coexist rather than move together. This divergence between managers' and employees' accounts converges with African management research describing a layering of imported bureaucratic structures over indigenous relational norms (Jackson, 2004), and suggests that autonomy, in such settings, should be assessed separately at the execution and strategic levels rather than as a single construct.

Beyond these substantive findings, the central contribution of this article is methodological. The explanatory sequential design demonstrated its value not merely by combining two methods but by using quantitative divergence as a deliberate trigger for qualitative inquiry, a discipline that produced three theoretically productive paradoxes rather than three unexplained anomalies. The row-by-row triangulation matrix documented in Section 3 operationalized this discipline in a way other researchers can reproduce, and nothing about its logic, comparing quantitative indicators against qualitative themes to classify convergence, complementarity, or divergence, is specific to Madagascar, to Generations Y and Z, or to organizational behavior; the protocol should transfer readily to other populations, sectors, and cultural settings facing comparably complex, multi-actor phenomena.

These methodological gains carry a practical corollary. Because the protocol traced each managerial misunderstanding to its precise conceptual source, mobility mistaken for disloyalty, formal systems mistaken for recognition, execution autonomy mistaken for strategic autonomy, it offers managers a more targeted diagnostic than either a survey or a set of interviews would supply alone. This diagnostic value follows directly from the methodological approach adopted here; it is offered as an illustration of what rigorous integration makes possible for practice, rather than as the study's principal claim.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to document a reproducible explanatory sequential mixed-methods protocol capable of transforming statistical contradictions into theoretically productive knowledge, specifically applied to Generation Y and Z management in Fianarantsoa. The research identified three behavioral paradoxes: conditional loyalty structured around employability, a conceptual gap between formal and relational recognition, and a semantic divergence between execution and strategic autonomy. These paradoxes underscore the inadequacy of single-method designs in capturing complex generational dynamics. Crucially, the findings demonstrate that quantitative-qualitative divergence serves as a robust discovery mechanism rather than a threat to validity.

The central contribution is fundamentally methodological. We provide a transferable, rigorously documented framework for explanatory sequential integration, featuring a row-by-row triangulation matrix alongside explicit validation, translation, and coding procedures. This protocol enables researchers to systematically convert methodological friction into actionable meta-inferences, independent of the specific population or sector investigated. Managerially, this approach equips organizations to accurately distinguish perceptual generational misunderstandings from those necessitating structural interventions.

Despite these contributions, several limitations persist. First, the purposive sample is restricted to a single mid-sized city, limiting the generalizability of the reported patterns. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes assessing the temporal evolution of these perceptions. Third, autonomy expectations likely vary by job type and education; thus, the identified autonomy paradox reflects a cohort-level tendency rather than a homogeneous expectation. Finally, the protocol's methodological richness is highly resource-intensive, requiring significant logistical capacity that may constrain its application in resource-limited settings.

Future research should replicate this protocol across diverse cultural and organizational environments to empirically test its transferability. Longitudinal designs are strongly recommended to examine whether conditional loyalty and contested autonomy persist as cohorts evolve. Additionally, comparative cross-country analyses and applications to other sectors experiencing hierarchical misunderstandings would further validate this framework. Ultimately, this study establishes that methodological divergence, when systematically triangulated through rigorous integration, yields profound insights for both management science and organizational practice.

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