

## **THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE LEADERSHIP IN ALIGNING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the role of emotional intelligence-based leadership in harmonizing generational differences in the workplace. The method used is a qualitative approach with descriptive research, through a literature study covering books and scientific journals. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to obtain an in-depth understanding of the contribution of emotional intelligence in cross-generational leadership. The results showed that emotional intelligence-based leadership had a significant effect on creating intergenerational harmony in the workplace. Leaders who are able to recognize, understand, and manage emotions have been proven to reduce the potential for conflict, increase employee engagement, and strengthen team cohesion. Emotional intelligence applied through the aspects of self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation is able to bridge differences in communication styles, values, and work orientations between the Baby Boomer, X, Y (millennial), and Z generations. A work environment managed with emotional health turns differences into a collective strength that drives productive collaboration, innovation, and organizational sustainability. Implementing this type of leadership confirms that generational diversity can be optimized into an organizational competitive advantage.

**Key words:** leadership; emotional intelligence; generation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Changing global workforce structures present new challenges for organizations. Today, different generations with different backgrounds, values, and perspectives are in one workspace. The baby boomer generation, X, Y (millennials), and generation Z, have unique characteristics that can be strengths and potential conflicts in daily interactions. Differences in communication styles, ways of working, and preferences for technology often create a distance that is difficult to bridge. This condition requires organizations to have leadership that is able to manage generational diversity so as not to cause friction that hinders performance (Anugrah et al., 2025).

The presence of various productive generations should provide opportunities for the creation of strong collaboration. But in reality, friction between generations often arises due to differences in perspectives on loyalty, work flexibility, and the use of digital technology. Older generations tend to uphold stability and procedures, while younger generations are more open to rapid change and innovation. These differences in work orientation can affect team harmony, reduce motivation, and even inhibit productivity (Ferdiana & Yuwono, 2023).

This kind of condition is a challenge for a leader. The success of an organization depends not only on business strategy or mastery of technology, but also on how leaders are able to manage the emotional relationships between team members. Leaders are required to have the ability to understand emotions, maintain interpersonal relationships, and create a harmonious work atmosphere. If this ability is not mastered, the potential for intergenerational conflict will be greater and have an impact on declining work effectiveness (Cahyono, 2022).

Emotional factors in leadership often go unnoticed, even though this aspect greatly affects the quality of interactions. Leaders who are able to understand the emotional needs of their subordinates can encourage the creation of mutual respect, attachment, and trust. When team members from different generations feel accepted and understood, they are more motivated to work together to achieve organizational goals. This shows that the aspect of managing emotions has a strategic role to bridge generational differences in the work environment.

The biggest challenge arises when organizations are unable to build bridges of intergenerational communication. For example, younger generations who feel undervalued because their ideas are rarely accepted, or older generations who feel their experience is not considered important by younger colleagues. This condition can give rise to a mutual underestimation attitude that leads to a low sense of togetherness. This situation shows the need to further research the role of leadership who has emotional intelligence in uniting various generations in order to create positive synergy within the organization.

This study aims to analyze the role of emotional intelligence-based leadership in harmonizing generational differences in the work environment. The main focus is to explore how leaders' ability to manage emotions can minimize conflict, improve team harmony, and encourage intergenerational collaboration so that organizations can achieve their goals optimally.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to understand social phenomena in depth based on the perspective that develops in society, rather than just measuring variables quantitatively. This type of descriptive research is used to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate picture of the role of emotional intelligence-based leadership in aligning generational differences. According to Sugiyono (2021), descriptive qualitative research aims to describe real conditions in depth so that researchers can capture the hidden meaning behind the facts.

Data collection techniques are carried out through literature studies sourced from books, scientific journals, and various literature relevant to the research theme. Literature studies are considered appropriate because the topic of emotional intelligence leadership and generational differences has been extensively researched theoretically and empirically. According to Sugiyono (2021), literature study is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading, recording, and processing research materials obtained from literature. Through this technique, researchers can obtain a strong theoretical foundation and enrich their understanding of the variables being studied.

The data analysis process in this study uses an interactive model from Miles & Huberman (2018) which includes three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification. Data reduction is the process of selecting, concentrating, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from various literature sources. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of a descriptive description so that the relationship between variables can be seen more clearly. The last stage is the drawing of verifiable conclusions, meaning that the initial conclusions can change if new, stronger evidence is found.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

The findings indicate that generational diversity significantly shapes employment relationships within organizations. Each generation demonstrates distinctive characteristics formed by different socio-economic and technological contexts. Baby Boomers tend to show strong organizational loyalty and place high value on stability and structured work systems. Generation X demonstrates independence, efficiency, and a strong preference for work-life balance. Millennials display adaptability to digital environments, openness to change, and a desire for meaningful and flexible work. Meanwhile, Gen Z exhibits high technological fluency, creativity, speed orientation, and a strong inclination toward innovation (Gultom, 2023).

Differences are clearly reflected in communication patterns. Baby Boomers and Generation X prefer formal, structured, and face-to-face communication methods, while Millennials and Gen Z rely more on digital platforms that enable fast and interactive exchanges. These contrasting preferences often influence collaboration effectiveness. The data further show that leadership style significantly affects how these differences are managed. Generations with more traditional orientations respond positively to directive and structured leadership, whereas younger generations demonstrate higher engagement when leaders apply collaborative, facilitative, and development-oriented approaches (Himawan, 2024).

Variations in work motivation and orientation were also identified. Baby Boomers emphasize dedication and long-term commitment, Generation X values efficiency and autonomy, Millennials seek meaningful and flexible roles, and Gen Z prioritizes innovation and rapid achievement. These differences create diverse work rhythms within teams. However, when integrated effectively, such diversity can enhance organizational performance by combining experience, efficiency, creativity, and innovation.

Technological adaptation presents another generational distinction. Younger employees show quicker mastery of digital tools, while older employees may require structured support to adapt. Organizations that provide training and collaborative learning opportunities are better able to reduce technological gaps and enhance efficiency (Islah, 2022). In addition, reward expectations differ: senior generations prioritize recognition of experience and position, whereas younger employees value growth opportunities, learning access, and constructive feedback.

The results also reveal that insufficient attention to emotional needs leads to reduced engagement and well-being. Employees, particularly from younger generations, experience higher emotional exhaustion when psychological expectations are unmet, which contributes to lower dedication and productivity (Laras & Saidi, 2023). The phenomenon of "quiet quitting" emerges as an indicator of disengagement caused by emotional strain and lack of psychological fulfillment (Lucero & Ocampo, Jr., 2019). Misinterpretation of emotional expectations

between generations further increases the risk of miscommunication, interpersonal tension, and declining job satisfaction (Ismanto & Hurriyati, 2025).

Moreover, unmanaged emotional burdens contribute to stress and burnout, especially among Gen Z employees facing high social and professional expectations. Without adequate coping strategies and psychological support systems, resilience weakens and performance declines (Mohlis, 2025). Emotional labor that is not well regulated intensifies fatigue and internal conflict, highlighting the importance of stress management and communication training initiatives (Mulya, 2024).

The findings further demonstrate that emotional intelligence-based leadership plays a significant role in mitigating these challenges. Leaders who exhibit self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and strong social skills create a more inclusive and psychologically safe environment. Such leadership enhances trust, strengthens collaboration, reduces conflict, and increases cross-generational cohesion (Novryansyah et al., 2021; Pandaleke & Ardi, 2025; Pinandito & Savira, 2022). Organizations led by emotionally intelligent leaders also show lower burnout risk, stronger loyalty, and improved long-term sustainability (Rimadhani, 2024).

Overall, emotional intelligence-based leadership positively influences multigenerational collaboration and productivity. By aligning motivational strategies with generational characteristics and facilitating open communication, leaders can transform diversity into collective strength. This leadership approach contributes not only to improved quantitative performance indicators but also to the development of an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable organizational culture (Supriyanto, 2023; Tampubolon, 2024; Veda & Rahayu, 2023; Yuliantari & Widayati, 2020).

## **DISCUSSION**

The results confirm that generational diversity is both a challenge and a strategic asset in modern organizations. Consistent with (Gultom, 2023), differences in formative experiences shape distinct values and workplace behaviors, influencing communication, motivation, and collaboration patterns. When unmanaged, these differences may create interpersonal distance and reduce team effectiveness. However, when organizations adopt inclusive structures, generational diversity enhances innovation and adaptability.

The variation in communication preferences supports prior findings that digital transformation intensifies generational gaps. Younger generations' reliance on technology contrasts with older generations' structured communication style. As noted by (Islah, 2022), organizations that invest in technological training and cross-generational knowledge sharing are more successful in bridging these divides. This suggests that digital inclusion strategies are not merely technical adjustments but essential components of organizational harmony.

Leadership adaptability emerges as a central factor in shaping cross-generational engagement. The findings align with (Himawan, 2024), emphasizing that leadership effectiveness depends on understanding generational expectations. Leaders who combine directive clarity with participative engagement create balanced environments that satisfy both traditional and modern orientations. Emotional intelligence strengthens this adaptability by enabling leaders to regulate responses, demonstrate empathy, and build meaningful connections (Novryansyah et al., 2021).

The discussion also highlights the critical role of emotional well-being in sustaining performance. Emotional exhaustion and "quiet quitting," as described by (Laras & Saidi, 2023) and (Lucero & Ocampo, Jr., 2019), indicate that productivity is closely linked to psychological fulfillment. Generational misinterpretation of emotional needs may escalate dissatisfaction and stress (Ismanto & Hurriyati, 2025). Therefore, organizational strategies must extend beyond structural management to include psychosocial interventions.

Furthermore, the increased vulnerability of younger generations to stress and burnout reinforces the importance of mental wellness programs and coping skill development (Mohlis, 2025; Mulya, 2024). Emotional intelligence-based leadership provides a comprehensive framework for addressing these challenges. By fostering trust, promoting inclusive motivation, and strengthening interpersonal relationships, leaders can reduce conflict and enhance collaboration (Pinandito & Savira, 2022; Rimadhani, 2024).

In conclusion, the integration of emotional intelligence within leadership practices is essential for optimizing multigenerational team performance. Generational diversity, when supported by adaptive leadership, inclusive communication systems, and psychological well-being initiatives, becomes a driver of innovation, resilience, and sustainable organizational competitiveness (Supriyanto, 2023; Tampubolon, 2024; Veda & Rahayu, 2023; Yuliantari & Widayati, 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, emotional intelligence-based leadership plays an important role in aligning generational differences in the work environment. Leaders who are able to recognize, understand, and manage emotions not only create more open and effective communication but also strengthen a sense of intergenerational togetherness.

The results of the study confirm that the success of collaboration is not only determined by organizational strategy but also by the ability of leaders to maintain emotional balance, manage conflicts, and provide motivation that suits the needs of each generation. The integration of each generation's strengths through an adaptive leadership style creates a more harmonious, productive, and innovative work environment so that organizations can maintain their competitive advantage in the midst of global changes.

The advice that can be given is for organizations to focus on developing the emotional intelligence of leaders and team members through training, mentoring, and periodic evaluation programs that emphasize communication skills, empathy, and self-regulation. In addition, companies need to provide cross-generational collaboration spaces that provide opportunities for employees to share experiences, ideas, and skills according to the characteristics of each age group. This approach not only reduces the potential for conflict but also strengthens team cohesion and increases employee engagement in achieving common goals. Consistent efforts to foster an inclusive work culture based on emotional intelligence will help organizations meet the challenges of generational differences while creating a strong foundation for long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

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