

MULTIGENERATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: CONFLICT, COLLABORATION, AND ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of multigenerational organizations is becoming increasingly prominent as the workforce undergoes demographic changes that encompass the Baby Boomer, X, Y (Millennial), and Z generations. Differences in generational characteristics create challenges in social interactions and organizational performance. This research aims to research the dynamics of conflict, patterns of collaboration, and effective leadership in multigenerational organizations through a qualitative literature review. The analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis method of journals and books published up to 2021. The results of the research show that conflicts often arise due to differences in work values, communication styles, and perceptions of authority. When facilitated by adaptive leadership, however, conflicts can be turned into opportunities for collective learning. Cross-generational collaboration has been proven to strengthen organization innovation through the exchange of knowledge and experience. Organizational policy factors, such as work flexibility, mentoring programs, and diversity-based rewards, also determine the success of multigenerational management. This research emphasizes the importance of inclusive leadership, policies that support positive interactions, and managing generational differences as a strategic asset. These findings contribute to the development of human resource management theory and provide a practical foundation for organization to strengthen sustainability in the era of multigenerational work.

Keywords: multigenerational management, work conflict, cross-generational collaboration, adaptive leadership, organization, generational diversity, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The demographic transformation of the global workforce in the 21st century presents new challenges for organizations. Companies now have four to five generations working together, from Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), to Generation Z who are just entering the workforce. This age diversity brings significant variations in values, expectations and work styles. The multigenerational phenomenon affects the dynamics of working relationships and demands more adaptive management patterns (Benson & Brown, 2011).

Differences in characteristics between generations often arise in terms of work orientation, communication patterns, and technology preferences. Older generations tend to emphasize loyalty and stability, while younger generations prioritize flexibility, meaning in work, and work-life balance. These contrasts have the potential to trigger differences in views on work practices, problem-solving methods, and even ideal leadership styles (Ng & Parry, 2016).

The development of digital technology has accelerated the gap between generations in terms of skill mastery, besides. Younger generations adapt more quickly to new technologies, while older generations sometimes need longer-term adjustment. These differences in adaptation have implications for team dynamics and organization effectiveness (Bennett et al., 2012). This highlights the need for management strategies that can constructively manage generational diversity.

Organizations that fail to understand the multigenerational phenomenon risk experiencing low employee engagement, increased interpersonal conflict, and decreased productivity. Conversely, companies that are able to manage this diversity can leverage intergenerational collaboration as a source of innovation and competitive advantage (Schullery, 2013). The issue of multigenerational management cannot be ignored in contemporary human resource management practices.

One of the problems that often arises in a multigenerational environment is the high potential for conflict due to differences in work values. Research shows that generational orientations toward loyalty, communication styles, and expectations of superiors often cause tension within organizations (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). This conflict can disrupt team performance if not managed properly.

Another problem is the difficulty of creating a leadership system that can bridge the needs of different generations. Traditional leadership styles that emphasize hierarchy do not always match the expectations of younger generations who are more egalitarian. Leadership that is too flexible, on the other hand, may be considered indecisive by older generations (Carter & Walker, 2018). This mismatch indicates the need for an adaptive leadership model that can balance the diverse needs of different generations.

In addition, intergenerational collaboration still faces obstacles. Although the potential for innovation from diversity is enormous, practices in the field show that there is a gap in teamwork. Factors such as differences in learning styles, ways of sharing knowledge, and technological skills often pose significant barriers (Kuron et al., 2015). This reinforces the view that multigenerational management is a serious challenge in modern management.

Studies on multigenerational management are important because this phenomenon is not a temporary trend, but a reality that will continue to grow as the workforce ages. Generational dynamics within organizations affect work patterns, productivity, and corporate sustainability. By understanding issues of conflict, collaboration, and leadership, managers can design more effective interventions to create harmony in the workplace.

Understanding multigenerational management also contributes to the development of leadership and human resource management theory. Studies on generational diversity can enrich the literature on work motivation, organizational justice, and cross-age collaboration practices. This research is therefore relevant both practically and academically.

This research aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities in multigenerational management with a focus on issues of conflict, collaboration, and leadership. This research is expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of intergenerational dynamics, while also offering practical implications for organizations in designing adaptive human resource management policies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. This approach was chosen because the issue of multigenerational management is best analyzed through conceptual and empirical studies that have been published in various scientific journals and academic books. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative studies enable researchers to comprehensively understand social phenomena through the interpretation of meanings contained in texts. The literature study in this research includes related articles, focusing on the themes of intergenerational conflict, collaboration patterns, and leadership in multigenerational organizations.

The analysis process was carried out using the thematic synthesis method. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic synthesis helps researchers identify patterns, group themes, and connect various findings from diverse literature. This technique is appropriate for the research objectives because it allows for the exploration of issues of conflict, collaboration, and leadership from various theoretical and practical perspectives. The synthesis was carried out in stages: first, the collection of relevant literature; second, the coding process; third, the formation of themes; and finally, the integration of the results into a multigenerational management analysis framework.

The validity of the research results is reinforced by the principle of source triangulation. Denzin (2012) emphasizes that triangulation in qualitative research can increase reliability through the use of various references to support conclusions. This research combines primary sources, such as international scientific journals, with secondary sources, such as academic books on management and work sociology. Using this method, the research results are expected to provide a consistent, valid, and relevant analytical picture of contemporary organizational dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multigenerational management in organizations is both a challenge and an opportunity that is increasingly relevant in the era of globalization of the workforce. The existence of several generations with different characteristics presents complexity in organizational dynamics. According to Lyons and Kuron (2014), differences in work values between generations can cause tension if the organization does not have adaptive management mechanisms. The older generation often prioritizes loyalty and hierarchy, while the younger generation emphasizes flexibility and the search for meaning in work (Ng & Parry, 2016). These tensions can lead to conflict in working relationships, especially in decision-making and the distribution of responsibilities. Other research shows that generational diversity can also be a source of innovation if differences are managed with an inclusive leadership approach (Bennett et al., 2012). Multigenerational management is therefore not merely a matter of obstacles, but rather an opportunity that needs to be optimized.

Multigenerational conflicts are often triggered by differences in communication styles. Baby Boomers are more accustomed to formal, face-to-face communication, while Generations Y and Z tend to utilize digital media and concise communication styles. These differences can lead to miscommunication and even misunderstandings in work coordination (Mencel & Lester,

2014). From a sociological perspective, communication is an important means of forming social relationships within an organization. When communication styles are not aligned, the legitimacy of authority and the effectiveness of collaboration can be disrupted. Research by Putri and Hidayat (2020) shows that organizations that successfully mediate communication styles between generations by providing hybrid communication media tend to have more harmonious work teams. This confirms that conflict is not only an individual problem, but a structural phenomenon that requires systemic intervention.

In addition to communication, differences in work orientation are a dominant factor in triggering multigenerational conflict. Baby Boomers often value loyalty to the organization as the main measure of professionalism, while Millennials place greater emphasis on work-life balance and opportunities for self-development (Twenge, 2010). These differences in orientation have implications for expectations regarding reward systems and leadership. Older generations tend to value career certainty, while younger generations demand flexibility and opportunities for innovation (Kuron et al., 2015). If organizations fail to balance these differing orientations, the risk of turnover increases, especially among younger employees. The success of multigenerational management is therefore determined by the extent to which organizations are able to design policies that are responsive to the expectations of diverse generations.

Although conflicts often arise, the potential for intergenerational collaboration within organizations is actually enormous. According to research by Benson and Brown (2011), generational diversity can enrich perspectives in problem solving. The younger generation tends to offer fresh and innovative ideas, while the older generation brings experience and wisdom to decision making. This collaboration can create synergy when facilitated by the right working mechanisms. Research conducted by Schullery (2013) shows that organizations that encourage cross-generational work through joint team projects are able to increase employee engagement and strengthen organizational identity. This shows that successful collaboration does not happen automatically, but requires proactive managerial design in connecting the strengths of each generation.

Leadership is a crucial factor in determining whether multigenerational conflict will weaken or strengthen an organization. Traditional leadership models that are too hierarchical are often seen as rigid by younger generations, while leadership that is too permissive can be seen as indecisive by older generations. Research by Carter and Walker (2018) emphasizes the need for adaptive leadership that is able to balance the needs of different generations. Effective leaders in a multigenerational environment are those who possess high emotional intelligence, are able to communicate across styles, and are sensitive to differences in work values. Transformational leadership style has proven to be relevant in this situation because it can inspire, provide meaning, and encourage innovation (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Adaptive leadership can therefore be the key to minimizing conflict and maximizing collaboration between generations.

In addition to leadership factors, organizational policies also determine the success of multigenerational management. Companies that provide work flexibility, cross-age learning opportunities, and diverse reward mechanisms have proven to be more capable of maintaining employee engagement. Research by Meister and Willyerd (2010) shows that reverse mentoring

programs, in which younger generations mentor older generations in digital technology, can strengthen mutual respect and reduce stereotypes. Such policies not only improve skills but also foster solidarity between generations. Organizations should therefore not rely solely on the role of leaders but must also establish internal policies oriented towards managing generational diversity.

The implications of multigenerational conflict can also be seen in terms of productivity. Research by Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) states that despite differences in values, different generations do not actually show significant differences in terms of objective performance. This indicates that generational stereotypes are often exaggerated. When conflicts remain unresolved, however, this potential for productivity cannot be maximized. Conversely, when cross-generational collaboration is successfully facilitated, the synergy of knowledge, experience, and innovation can increase team effectiveness (Joshi et al., 2010). In other words, generational conflict is not a problem of individual performance, but rather one of social interaction dynamics within the organization.

From an organizational sociology perspective, multigenerationality reflects broader social dynamics within society. According to Mannheim (1952), each generation is shaped by its unique historical experiences, resulting in different collective identities. This identity is carried into organizations and influences patterns of interaction among members. Differences in perceptions of authority, technology, and cooperation can be understood as the result of social constructs inherent in each generation. Multigenerational management cannot be viewed merely as a managerial issue, but must be understood as a continuous process of social negotiation. This perspective helps leaders to view conflict not as a failure, but as a natural part of social dynamics that can be directed towards shared learning.

In the realm of collaboration, literature shows that the success of multigenerational teams is largely determined by the quality of social interactions. Research by Van der Heijden et al. (2010) found that knowledge exchange between younger and older generations enhances organizational innovation. Younger generations bring new ideas, while older generations provide practical experience in implementation. For this knowledge transfer to be effective, however, organizations must create a psychologically safe environment. Without a sense of security, younger generations may be reluctant to share ideas for fear of being perceived as inexperienced, while older generations may feel threatened by change. Cross-generational collaboration must therefore be facilitated by mechanisms that emphasize mutual respect, equality, and openness.

Based on the overall discussion, multigenerational management can be understood as a complex process that involves potential conflicts as well as opportunities for collaboration. Success in managing generational differences is highly dependent on adaptive leadership, inclusive organizational policies, and the willingness of members to learn from each other. Intergenerational conflict should not be viewed solely as an obstacle, but rather as an opportunity to strengthen more dynamic social interactions. Cross-generational collaboration, when managed properly, can lead to innovation and strengthen organizational sustainability. Leadership in multigenerational organizations must therefore focus on building trust, creating an equitable work environment, and facilitating intergenerational dialogue to achieve common goals.

CONCLUSION

Multigenerational management in organizations is both an unavoidable challenge and opportunity. Differences in values, work preferences, and perceptions of authority between generations of employees can lead to conflict, but at the same time provide space for productive collaboration. Adaptive leadership, inclusive organizational policies, and open communication mechanisms are key factors that determine whether generational diversity can be turned into an organizational asset or become an obstacle.

This research confirms that organizations need to develop a leadership approach that emphasizes cross-generational empathy, facilitates open dialogue, and provides a fair platform for collaboration. Companies that are able to manage generational diversity constructively have the potential to strengthen innovation, increase employee loyalty, and ensure sustainable competitiveness. Multigenerational management is not merely a managerial challenge, but an important strategy in creating an inclusive and highly resilient work environment.

Further research is recommended to explore the most effective specific leadership models in multigenerational organizations in different sectors, such as the creative industry, manufacturing, or the public sector. Empirical research is also needed to assess the actual implementation of cross-generational collaboration policies, including their impact on innovation, productivity, and employee well-being. With further research, organizations can have more practical guidelines for managing generational diversity.

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