

Leadership Development in Generation Z within Student Organizations

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Abstract



The emergence of Generation Z, known as digital natives with a high level of adaptability to technology, flexibility, and active participation, presents both challenges and opportunities in leadership development within student organizations. This study aims to explore leadership approaches that align with the characteristics of Generation Z through a literature review method based on relevant scholarly journals. A qualitative descriptive approach using secondary data was employed to identify trends, gaps, and insights into effective leadership models in the context of student organizations. The literature review findings reveal that transformational and situational leadership styles are the most effective for Generation Z, as they emphasize inspiration, collaboration, empathy, and shared decision-making. Student organizations serve as strategic platforms for leadership practice through direct training in communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving. However, most previous studies have focused on corporate settings and have not thoroughly examined the dynamics of student organizations. Therefore, this literature study addresses an important gap by highlighting the need for a participatory, adaptive, and technology-based leadership model that is relevant to Generation Z. The study concludes that higher education institutions and student organizations must formulate contextual leadership strategies that support interpersonal communication and foster a positive organizational culture to maximize the leadership potential of Generation Z in facing future challenges.

Keywords: Generation Z, Student Organization, Leadership Development, Transformational Leadership, Situational Leadership

Introduction

In today's era, Generation Z is one of the largest population groups in Indonesia. This generation includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012, and most of them are now entering their productive years. As digital natives, they grew up in an environment closely intertwined with technology and information. Their curiosity to explore new things makes them dynamic individuals, particularly in the context of higher education, where many of them are actively engaged as students (Veda et al., 2025). In this context, the development of leadership skills is an important aspect that needs to be addressed to support their active roles within the campus environment and broader society.

However, becoming an effective leader among Generation Z is not an easy task. Leadership today can no longer rely on conventional approaches. Generation Z demands leaders who can adapt to the times, are open to diversity, and possess high levels of empathy and collaboration (Nugroho, 2024). Transformational leadership style is considered most relevant for Generation Z, as it fosters inspiration, trust, and respect in leadership

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relationships. This poses a challenge for student organization leaders to adjust their approaches to the unique characteristics of this generation.

The phenomenon of student involvement in campus organizations highlights the important role of organizations as leadership training grounds. Organizational activities can train students in various projects, ultimately developing skills such as communication, time management, teamwork, and leadership (Aquina Tiara Dewi et al., 2023). Campus organizations are not only a place for socialization but also an effective arena for self-actualization to prepare students for the challenges of the working world. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to encourage student participation in organizations to support the development of their leadership potential (Ningsih et al., 2024).



In terms of characteristics, Generation Z differs significantly from previous generations. They are highly proficient in digital technology, prefer faster processes, and are more independent in decision-making. They also grew up in a globally connected world and are more open to social and environmental issues (Prabowo et al., 2024). This generation is known for being vocal and wanting to be involved in decision-making processes, including within organizations. A Deloitte survey shows that 77% of Generation Z want leaders who listen to their voices and can inspire and instill confidence (Bantam et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the emergence of Generation Z in the workplace and organizations also presents new challenges, particularly in terms of communication and leadership. Companies and organizations must be able to build effective relationships with this generation, which is accustomed to living in a virtual world (Hardian & Eric Hermawan, 2022). The leadership model applied must also be adaptive to the situation. Situational leadership approaches are highly relevant for aligning strategies with evolving conditions and needs within organizations (Hartika et al., 2023).

According to Alexis Abramson, each generation has distinct behavioral tendencies and values, depending on the period in which they were born. Generation Z, as part of the digital age, brings new characteristics to the world of work and organizations. Thus, leadership approaches cannot be generalized across generations (Agustriyana et al., 2024). This requires a deep understanding of character differences so that the leadership applied can be effective and useful in influencing team members or organizations.

Generation Z is known as an innovative generation that tends to seek informal career paths, such as starting their own businesses. However, their work skills are still developing as they are just entering the professional world. Factors such as inspirational leadership and a positive organizational culture greatly influence their performance and creativity in the workplace (Sinaga & Terbuka, 2025). Therefore, a holistic development approach is needed to maximize their potential.

Research on the characteristics of Generation Z workers is important because they now make up around 40% of the labor market (Pratama & Elistia, 2020). Understanding leadership patterns, organizational culture, and job satisfaction is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of human resource management across various sectors (Restiani & Puspitawati, 2024). High work engagement is influenced by strong transformational leadership, making it a key focus in leadership development among Generation Z (Putri & Setyaningrum, 2023).

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Although various studies have examined leadership styles, there is still a research gap regarding how an ideal leadership style can be specifically designed for Generation Z in the context of student organizations. Previous studies have largely focused on professional and corporate sectors, while the dynamics of student organizations have not been explored in depth. Therefore, this study aims to identify and formulate the most appropriate leadership approach for Generation Z in the context of student organizations (Rusliana & Pribadi, 2024). Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of a relevant, participatory, and transformative leadership model for future generations (Chandra Sari et al., 2024).

Method



This study uses a literature review method by collecting data from various scientific journals accessed through the official websites of journal publishers. The research process involves searching, recording, and managing information from literature relevant to the topic under discussion. Since it does not involve primary data collection such as surveys or experiments, the focus of this study lies in the analysis and interpretation of previously published findings. This approach allows researchers to gain in-depth insights based on existing theoretical and empirical studies without having to collect data directly. By utilizing literature studies, this research can also identify trends, patterns, and gaps in the topic being studied based on a synthesis of various reliable sources. Researchers critically evaluate existing literature to build arguments or find new perspectives on the issues being studied. This method is considered efficient because it utilizes verified secondary data, thereby strengthening the theoretical basis of the research. In addition, this approach also helps avoid duplication of research by understanding the latest developments from previous studies.

Results and Discussion

The resultsThe results of the literature review indicate that leadership development among Generation Z in the context of student organizations requires a different approach compared to previous generations. Generation Z is known as the digital native generation, characterized by high technological adaptability and a strong tendency toward meaning-seeking and self-actualization. These characteristics make them more responsive to participatory and experience-oriented learning methods, including active participation in campus organizations.

In several studies conducted by researchers such as Veda and colleagues, as well as Aquina Tiara Dewi and her team, it is explained that Generation Z students' participation in campus organizations is not merely an additional activity but a strategic platform for developing communication skills, teamwork, time management, and leadership directly. This underscores that student organizations have significant potential as social laboratories where students learn to lead and be led in real-world dynamics.

The most effective leadership style for Generation Z in the context of student organizations is transformational and situational leadership. This is because Generation Z tends to seek flexibility, collaboration, and active involvement in decision-making processes.

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According to Nugroho and Bantam, transformational leadership has proven effective in creating an inspiring environment, building trust, and valuing the contributions of each member. This leadership model also encourages innovation and strengthens a sense of ownership toward the organization. Conversely, authoritarian or hierarchical leadership approaches are no longer relevant as they are seen as limiting members' expression and creativity.

Literature also highlights significant challenges in managing Generation Z members within organizations, particularly in terms of interpersonal communication, team collaboration, and productive use of technology. Studies by Bantam and Prabowo emphasize that Generation Z is more open, expressive, and has high expectations of their leaders. They want leaders who can understand their perspectives, provide equal dialogue, and show empathy. Therefore, leaders in student organizations need to build a more flexible, communicative, and interpersonal relationship-oriented approach.

Strengthening a positive organizational culture is also an important element in creating an environment that supports the development of leadership in this generation. Several studies emphasize the importance of soft skills training, such as active listening, conflict resolution, and values-based leadership, to help students hone their leadership capacities. This aligns with the views of Ruslana and Pribadi, who stress that institutional interventions should be directed toward creating a healthy and inclusive organizational climate to support individual and collective growth.

However, the findings from this literature review also indicate that there is still a limited amount of research specifically examining the most appropriate leadership model for Generation Z in the context of student organizations. Most existing studies focus more on professional and corporate organizational contexts. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution by highlighting the need for a leadership model that is adaptive to the student context, with an emphasis on the use of technology, participatory leadership, and a transformational approach.

Considering these findings, it can be concluded that the development of a leadership model that is responsive to the characteristics of Generation Z is of great importance. A model that can accommodate flexibility, collaboration, and the use of technology will be more relevant and effective in fostering student leadership potential in the current era. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a foundation for higher education institutions and student organizations in formulating contextual, sustainable, and contemporary leadership development strategies.

Conclusion

Developing leadership among Generation Z in student organizations requires a different approach from previous generations. This generation has unique characteristics as digital natives who are highly adaptable to technology, value flexibility and participation, and seek meaning in every activity they undertake. Student organizations provide a strategic space for them to hone their leadership skills through hands-on practice in collaborative activities. Therefore, transformational and situational leadership styles are considered most effective in accommodating the dynamics of Generation Z, as they emphasize inspiration, collaboration,

and empathy in the leadership process. However, literature reviews also indicate that there are limitations in research specifically addressing the appropriate leadership model for Generation Z within student organizations. This research contributes by offering a more focused perspective on the higher education context and underscoring the importance of strengthening positive organizational culture and soft skills training. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for higher education institutions and student organizations in formulating relevant, adaptive, and sustainable leadership development strategies to maximize the potential of Generation Z.

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