

THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP IN BUILDING RESILIENCE: A CASE STUDY ON GEN-Z EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine in depth the role of transformational leadership in strengthening the resilience of Generation Z employees, born between 1997 and 2012, in facing challenges in an increasingly dynamic and uncertain work environment. Through in-depth interviews with 10 Generation Z employees purposively selected from various private companies, this study explores how various leadership behaviors contribute to strengthening six dimensions of resilience, including emotional control, impulse control, optimism, problem-solving ability, empathy, and self-confidence. The research findings indicate that the implementation of the four main pillars of transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on the development of employee resilience. The pillar of ideal influence, reflected in leaders' exemplary emotional management during conflicts, inspires professional behavior in 80% of respondents. The intellectual stimulation pillar, through the creation of discussion spaces that encourage critical thinking, strengthens analytical skills and impulse control in 70% of respondents. Meanwhile, individualized consideration, manifested in assigning tasks according to competencies and providing personal guidance, enhances self-confidence in 80% of participants. Lastly, inspirational motivation, through recognition and the communication of a clear vision, builds optimism amid work pressure among 50% of respondents. The synergy between these pillars creates a work ecosystem that supports individual empowerment, enabling Generation Z employees to view challenges as opportunities for growth. These findings recommend that leaders adopt an adaptive communication approach and build a trust-based work culture to enhance employee well-being and productivity.

Keywords: Leadership, Resilience, Gen-Z

Introduction

Today's world of work continues to experience dynamic and challenging changes. Employees are important human resources for companies that must be able to adapt and survive in the face of various types of pressure. Based on data (Badan Pusat Statistik., 2023), Generation Z, which was born between 1997 and 2012, dominates with a total of around 74.93 million people, or 27.94% of the population, starting to dominate the job market around the world. Generation-Z grew up amidst the rapid development of technology, the internet, and social media that have become part of their daily lives (Arum et al., 2023). As a result, Generation Z is highly capable of utilizing technology to improve their productivity and efficiency in the workplace. For Gen Z, it is important to be able to work well while living a personal life without interfering with each other. Therefore, this generation is very interested in flexible work and working hours (Nurqamar et al., 2022).

According to Budiati in (Setiani, n.d.), Generation Z is known as a creative generation, especially in the use of technology and has a high concern for social and environmental issues. However, behind their adaptability, Gen Z is also vulnerable to psychological pressures due to dynamic work dynamics, such as burnout, uncertainty, and high productivity demands. The article (SWA.co.id, 2024) highlights that Gen Z wants leaders who not only provide direction, but are also able to serve as role models in managing change, opening spaces for collaboration, and encouraging personal growth. According to a report (Delloite, 2023), 75% of Gen Z stated that inspirational leadership is a key factor in choosing a workplace. However McKinsey (2022), revealed that 40% of Gen Z employees feel that they lack support from leaders to deal with psychological stress at work. This phenomenon shows the need for transformation of leadership styles that are aligned with the needs of this generation, especially in building resilience or employee resilience as a foundation to rise from the hand and thrive in the midst

of change from challenges to achieve their full potential in the world of work.

Resilience or the ability to rise from adversity, is one of the key factors that determine the success of a person and organization. Resilience is an important factor in maintaining the balance between productivity and well-being of Gen Z employees. A study conducted by the American Psychological Association (2018) found that resilience is influenced by how individuals perceive challenges, the availability of social support, and effective coping strategies. Organizational leaders have an important role in creating an environment that supports this resilience, such as through open communication and recognition of employee contributions. Thus, the role of leadership is needed in this regard.

The definition of transformational leadership proposed by Bass in (Setiawan & Muhiht, n.d.) transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that emphasizes the leader's ability to become a role model of integrity (idealized influence), convey an inspirational vision (inspirational motivation), encourage innovation through intellectual stimulation (intellectual stimulation), and provide personal attention to employee development needs (individualized consideration). This approach was chosen due to its relevance to the character of Generation Z-a demographic group born 1997-2012 (Badan Pusat Statistik., 2023) characterized by high digital competence, flexible work values, collaboration preferences, and sensitivity to psychological support. Meanwhile, resilience is a positive adaptation ability to help individuals overcome difficulties, losses, or adversities in life, and be able to bounce back, develop, and be able to face new challenges, which are manifested in six key dimensions including emotional control, impulse control, optimism, root cause analysis, empathy, and self-efficacy (Mir'atannisa et al., 2019; Azizah & Abadi, 2020)

Leadership plays an important role in shaping employee resilience. Supportive, empowering, and motivating leadership styles can help employees develop a sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and the ability to overcome adversity whereas authoritarian or less supportive leadership styles can hinder the development of employee resilience (Mataro, 2021). Previous research has shown that there is a significant relationship between Empowering Leadership, Work Motivation and Resilience. However, the article (SWA.co.id, 2024) states that leaders need to adopt a coaching and empathic approach, but there is no empirical evidence that directly explores Gen Z's experience. In addition, there are still few studies that specifically focus on the role of leadership in shaping the resilience of Gen Z employees. Thus, there is a gap in this research. Therefore, this research brings novelty by conducting a qualitative study to deeply understand how leadership affects the resilience of Gen Z employees in the workplace.

This study is expected to provide valuable insights for HR leaders and practitioners in developing effective strategies to improve the resilience of Gen Z employees, thereby creating a healthier, more productive and sustainable work environment. Practically, this study provides concrete recommendations for leaders to adopt a two-way communication style, provide trust-based autonomy, and utilize digital platforms in building resilience. Academically, this study enriches the literature on generation Z leadership and serves as a reference for the development of adaptive leadership models in the disruptive era.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach of phenomenological type to understand non-quantitative symptoms, especially the perceptions and experiences of subjects related to leadership towards resilience. The qualitative method was chosen to observe behavior directly in natural conditions and obtain valid information presented in a narrative, focusing on an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of a particular group (Rahadi, 2020). The phenomenological approach allows exploration of the subjective meaning of the phenomenon under study (Rahadi, 2020). The main research location is Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan, where data collection through interviews was conducted offline to enable direct face-to-face interaction with informants. In addition, to reach participants who could not be physically present or for reasons of practicality, interviews were also conducted online through the Zoom video conferencing application.

The main data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, both in person and online (via Zoom) to reach participants who were unable to attend in person. The interviews began with identity questions, followed by core questions and follow-up questions, with a duration of 22-57 minutes per session. The research subjects consisted of 10 Generation Z employees who were selected purposively and had at least 2 years of work experience in private companies to ensure a mature understanding of organizational culture and work dynamics.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the researcher transcribed all interview recordings (offline and online) into text form, and in the second stage, the researcher thematically analyzed by reading the transcripts in-depth to identify patterns, meanings, and similar perceptions among informants. The findings were then grouped into systematic themes, enabling the development of a comprehensive understanding of the leadership and resilience phenomena based on the direct

perspectives of Gen-Z employees.

Result and Discussions

This study aims to explore the role of leadership in shaping the resilience of Generation Z employees in the workplace, using a phenomenological approach. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 10 Gen Z employees working in private companies. The criteria for determining Generation Z were based on the birth period between 1997 and 2012, with a minimum requirement of two years of work experience in the private sector. The characteristics of each informant in this study are presented below:

Table 1 Characteristics of Research Informants

No	Initials	Type of Company	Working Time (Years)	Gender
1	BKP	Private	2	Male
2	CDPS	Private	3	Female
3	JP	Private	3	Male
4	JTL	Private	2	Female
5	JS	Private	3	Male
6	OSS	Private	4	Male
7	PP	Private	3	Male
8	RSN	Private	3	Female
9	SN	Private	2	Female
10	YVN	Private	3	Female

Source: Data processed by researchers



Figure 1
Documentation with informants



Figure 2
Documentation with informants

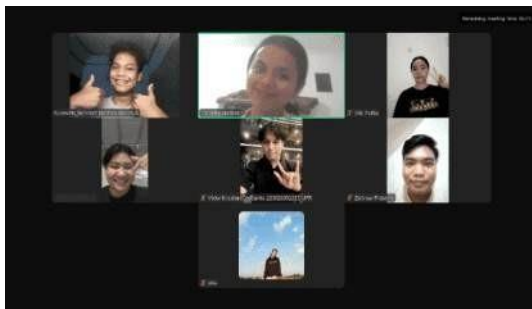


Figure 3
Documentation with informants



Figure 4
Documentation with informants



Figure 5
Documentation with informants

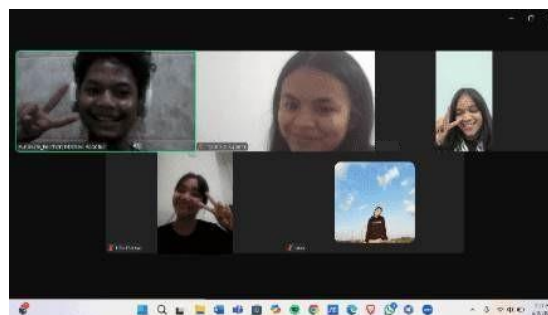


Figure 6
Documentation with informants

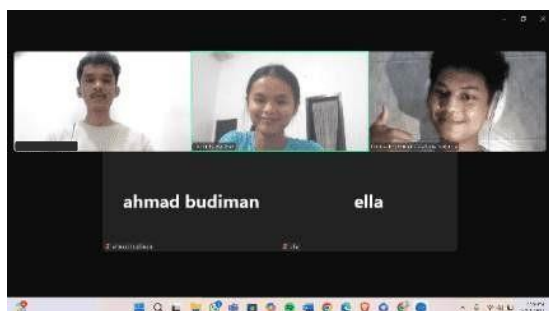


Figure 7
Documentation with informants



Figure 8
Documentation with informants

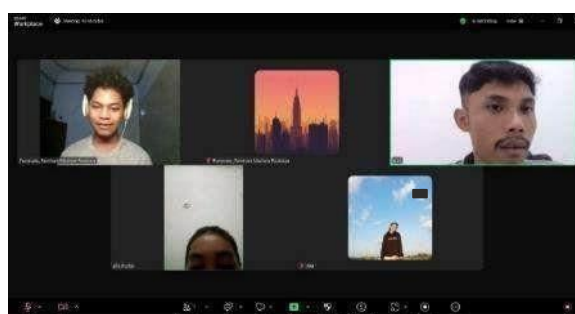


Figure 9
Documentation with informants

After conducting interviews with various informants, audio and video recordings of each interview session were transcribed into text. The transcript data was then analyzed and categorized into several themes relevant to the research focus. Based on the results of this analysis, the following table summarizes the main findings obtained from interviews with informants:

Table 2 Research Findings About Resilience

Category	Main Finding	Data Source
Emotion Control	The ability of employees to manage and control emotions is essential to prevent negative impacts on employee relations and organizational operations, while maintaining professionalism, making rational decisions, resolving conflicts effectively, and creating a collaborative and educative work environment in team management.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, dan RSN.

Impulse Control	Impulse control is reflected in an individual's ability to manage ego and emotions objectively, be cautious in making decisions, make a habit of discussion before acting, and maintain focus on goals and responsibilities despite facing pressure, conflict, or boring routines, with the support of work structures and daily targets as effective self-control tools.	BKP
Optimistic	Employee optimism is influenced by internal factors, such as intrinsic motivation and passion for work, as well as external factors, namely support from superiors in the form of direct motivation, appreciation, trust, verbal affirmation, and opportunities for self-development. The combination of these two factors shapes employees' confidence in facing work challenges, while also increasing their mental resilience and productivity.	JP, JTL, JS, OSS, dan RSN.
Analyzing Problem Causes	The process of analyzing the causes of problems is carried out through various approaches, such as self-introspection, comparing actual results with initial expectations, direct observation in the field, chronological tracing of events, discussions with various related parties, verification of data and field evidence, and utilization of planning documents as an objective reference source.	CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP dan RSN.
Ability to empathize	The ability to empathize is very important in the work environment to understand the conditions of colleagues humanely, create a comfortable atmosphere, and strengthen interpersonal relationships, but must be accompanied by limits so as not to cause dependence, with the right empathetic approach in the form of assistance and providing knowledge, not taking over problem solving.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, RSN, SN dan YVN.
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy can be managed through realistic approaches, such as trying to give your best, feeling the support of the work environment, following instructions clearly, trying before acting further, and utilizing supervisor feedback to learn and develop, all of which contribute to increased confidence when tasks are in line with competence, while enthusiasm, responsibility, and resilience in the face of difficult situations are also indirect indicators of strong self-efficacy in task performance.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, dan RSN.

Source: Data processed by researchers

Based on the results of data analysis, this study shows that transformational leadership plays an important role in shaping Gen Z employee resilience through four main pillars. The Idealized Influence pillar is reflected in the figure of a leader who is a role model in emotional control and empathy, thus encouraging employees to imitate a professional attitude when facing conflict. The Intellectual Stimulation pillar is realized through providing autonomy and collaborative discussion space, which helps Gen Z control emotional impulses and analyze problems systematically. Meanwhile, the Individualized Consideration pillar through mentoring and support for self-development strengthens self-efficacy, especially when employees carry out tasks that are in accordance with their competence.

Furthermore, the Inspirational Motivation aspect of leadership (through appreciation, trust, and clear vision) plays an important role in building optimism in Gen Z employees, which is a key element in maintaining mental resilience amid the dynamics of the world of work. The synergy of these four pillars of transformational leadership forms an empowering work environment, where leaders not only serve as role models in emotional management, but also as facilitators who encourage independence, collaboration, and adaptive learning. As a result, although Gen Z is known as a digital generation prone to stress, they are able to turn pressure into growth opportunities (resilience), in line with the need for inclusive work environments and empathic leadership, as reflected in the findings of McKinsey (2022) dan Deloitte (2023).

Table 3 Research Findings About leadership

Category	Main Finding	Data Source
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Decision-Making Ability	In the decision-making process, leaders consistently involve subordinates, especially on decisions that have a direct impact on the team or work, by using various methods such as informal discussions, special forums, and collaborative planning sessions; this team involvement contributes to increased transparency, objectivity, and alignment of organizational goals.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, SN, dan YVN
Motivating Ability	A leader's ability to motivate employees (through concrete actions such as empowerment, recognition, technical support, and tailoring to individual needs) is a key factor in improving performance, morale, and emotional resilience and this is becoming increasingly important for generation Z who highly value recognition and clarity of purpose	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP
Ability to Control Subordinates	Effective leaders are able to create an open work atmosphere through the right communication media, adjust tasks to individual abilities, and solve problems directly or through deliberation. The leader's ability to control subordinates depends on clear communication, understanding the character and condition of subordinates, and a flexible approach in giving directions and handling conflicts.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, RSN, SN, YVN
Responsibility	Leader responsibility is critical and includes commitment to decisions made and active presence in crucial moments; leaders must be able to divide tasks fairly, provide needed resources, and maintain an emotional connection with employees through understanding and humane reprimands. In addition, leaders must solve problems with the team, model accountability, and provide appreciation for team members' performance.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, RSN, SN, YVN
Emotional Control	Emotional control by leaders and employees, through open communication, introspection, and the creation of a collaborative work culture, is critical to maintaining team stability, preventing conflict, increasing productivity, and preventing turnover, as uncontrolled emotions can undermine the work environment and decision-making.	BKP, CDPS, JP, JTL, JS, OSS, PP, RSN, SN dan YVN

Source: Data Processed by Researchers

Based on the results of data analysis, this study found that transformational leadership thoroughly shapes the resilience of Gen Z employees through the integration of its four main pillars. The Idealized Influence pillar appears from the figure of a leader who is a role model in emotional control, such as maintaining a professional attitude when facing conflict, which then inspires employees to emulate similar behavior. The Intellectual Stimulation pillar is realized through the provision of collaborative discussion spaces that encourage Gen Z to develop the ability to systematically analyze problem roots (problem analysis) and improve impulse control. Meanwhile, Individualized Consideration through mentoring and support in self-development also strengthens balanced empathy and self-efficacy, especially when employees carry out tasks that are in accordance with their capacity and competence.

Furthermore, the Inspirational Motivation pillar of a leader, which is shown through appreciation, trust, and the delivery of a clear vision, plays an important role in building a sense of optimism in Gen Z employees amid the challenges of a dynamic world of work. The synergy of these four pillars of transformational leadership creates a supportive and empowering work environment, where leaders not only serve as role models in emotional management, but also as facilitators who encourage independence, adaptive learning, and transformation of challenges into self-development opportunities. As a result, Gen Z employees are able to significantly develop psychological resilience, in line with McKinsey's (2022) findings that emphasize the importance of supervisor support and an inclusive work culture for this generation.

Conclusion

Based on an in-depth analysis of the experiences of 10 Gen Z employees, this study concludes that transformational leadership patterns significantly shape resilience at work. Eight informants identified that leaders who consistently serve as role models in emotional control encourage them to emulate professional behavior in the face of conflict. Collaborative discussion spaces facilitated by leaders, noted by seven informants, enabled Gen Z employees to systematically analyze root causes of problems while controlling impulses. Trust-based mentoring, such as constructive feedback and matching tasks

to competencies (reported by eight informants), contributed directly to strengthening self-efficacy. Meanwhile, five informants emphasized that appreciation and clear vision from leaders were the main triggers for growing optimism in the face of work pressure.

From this pattern of empirical findings, it is concluded that Gen Z's resilience is formed through transformational leadership manifested in four concrete actions, namely emotion regulation modeling (Idealized Influence), facilitation of collaboration space (Intellectual Stimulation), assistance in self-development (Individualized Consideration), and appreciation and delivery of inspirational vision (Inspirational Motivation). The findings confirm that an empowering work environment is a prerequisite for Gen Z, a critical yet stress-prone digital generation, to be able to convert challenges into growth opportunities.

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