

Gen Z, which one: Transformational or Servant Leadership?

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Abstract: Leaders direct and motivate their teams to accomplish the organization's goals. Among the 66 leadership styles indicated transformational leadership is the most emphasized, which has been growing rapidly since the 1990s, especially in studies that investigate how these studies promote better performance in organizations. However, the different situation requires a different type of leadership. However, the different situation requires a different type of leadership. Generation Z just recently entered the workforce, and with their different characteristics, the organization needs to deal with them differently. There were significant discrepancies among the different generations on preferred leadership styles. This study aims to see what the effective leadership style for Generation Z is. A qualitative study with structured questionnaires involving 401 participants was conducted. Collected data were analyzed by NVivo. The study showed that the effective leadership style for Gen Z is the combination of Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership. It is transformational leadership minus challenge and stewardship.

Key-words: Gen Z, leadership, transformational, servant

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1. Introduction

Leaders directs and motivates their team to accomplish the organization goals. Leadership play important role in the successful of firms. Leaders are necessary for success. (Dwidienawati, Arief, et al., 2020) stated Leadership is considered as one of the most important factors influencing the success of innovation. Leadership also play crucial rules during crisis (Dwidienawati, Tjahjana, et al., 2021).

Literature stated several types, such as authoritarian, charismatic, situational, visionary, contingency, behavioral, transactional among others (Northouse, 2016). Among the 66 leadership styles indicated (Girardi & Rubim Sarate, 2021), transformational leadership is the most emphasized,

which have been growing rapidly since the 1990s, especially in studies that investigate how these studies promote better performance in organizations (Girardi & Rubim Sarate, 2021). However, difference situation requires different type of leadership. However, difference situation requires different type of leadership.

Recently workforce is occupied by three generations. The newest comer is Generation Z (Gen Z). Gen Z are people who were born between 1993-2005 (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018). They have distinctive characteristics compared to Gen Y or Millennial. They communicate mostly through digital communication. Unlike Gen Y who are optimistic and fearless, Gen Z are self-reliant yet less optimistic and weary. They need attention, yet do not

like micromanage. They are also more risk-averse than earlier generation. They have lower expectation, cautious and less entitled (Tulgan, 2013). They are easily bored, therefore, they expect to have different job role and flexibility (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018). They want instant success. They communicate digitally most of the time, but they like face-to-face interaction.

Generation Z just recently enter workforce, with their different set of characteristics, organization needs to deal with them differently. Most of millennial managers had to develop an effective leadership style which is suitable for their younger counterpart. There were significant discrepancies among the different generations on preferred leadership styles (Bertsch et al., 2022).

The most studied leadership style is transformation leadership. However, Rosing (2011) in (Dwidienawati, Arief, et al., 2020) stated that the effectiveness of transformational leadership had a broad range of variation. Therefore, it might not effective for every situation. (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021) stated that Generation Z preferred transformational leadership style. They like leaders who communicate positively, offer growth opportunity, have high emotional intelligence, engage personally, and fair. However, (Al Amiri et al., 2019) stated that it is not only transformational leadership, but also servant leadership being preferred by Gen Z.

What is the effective leadership style for Generation Z? The topic of leadership and Gen Z is still under explored. The search result in Scopus database in mid of February 2022 only hit 55 documents. (Burton et al., 2019) confirmed a low presence of literature related to generational differences and teams. (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022) even stated that the current literature on Gen Z is still a wide margin for growth. This study aimed to identify the preferred leadership style for Indonesian Gen Z. This study would answer:

1. What are characteristics of your Ideal Leader
2. What are characteristics of Leader that can motivate you
3. What are characteristics of Leader that can make you work better
4. What is the effective leadership style for Indonesian Gen Z.

This qualitative study would map the Gen Z preference to three leadership style which were transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. This study contributes to leadership literature, most specifically leadership for Gen Z.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Generation Cohort

Generation cohort is a concept that explains how a group of individuals becomes homogeneous not only because they were born at the same time period, but more importantly sharing similar experiences of some of the main external events during late adolescence and early adulthood (Ting et al., 2018) Generation cohort (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021) are group of people who bound by similar experiences and events such as war, politics, technology, employment, and globalization. (Maloni et al., 2019) stated that generation cohort is denoted as an identifiable group of people who have the same birth year, experience similar life events and grow up in an environment comparable to the same resources, opportunities, and challenges. *“Generations represent distinct and separate groups of people with a common set of beliefs, experiences, and values about the way the world works”* (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2014). *“Generation is defined by both its years of birth and a particular set of shared social and economic conditions during their formative years”*.

Two key factors contribute to the definition of the “generation” (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018). The first one is a common lifetime period in historical times. The second one is that they share common events and experiences that shape their “distinct consciousness”. These two aspects contribute to common generational characteristics which make people belonging to a generation similar in their traits, thinking, values, and beliefs. A generation is defined as “a series of birthdays of a group of people”. A different definition for a generation is “the generational cohorts or groups, who belong to the same age group, experience, or will experience accordingly the similar life experience in the years they may shape their lives”.

Currently there are at least 4 adults generations. The first is the *Baby Boomers* Generation (1946 – 1963), the second is Generation X (1963 – 1981), the third is Generation Y or often known as the *Millennial* (1981 – 1996) and the last one is Generation Z (1996 – 2012) (Gabriellova &

Buchko, 2021). Each generation has distinct characteristics which are influenced by how they raised and the (Dwidienawati, Tjahjana, et al., 2020) environment they lived in. For example, Baby Boomer, they were borne and lived after WWII. This generation grew up in an era of reform and believe they can change the world. Therefore, they are known to have a carefree style. Baby Boomers are confident, independent, and self-reliant. They questioned established authority systems and challenged the status quo (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018).

2.1.2. Generation Z

Gen Z are people who were born between 1996 to 2012 (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018). Gen Z are a digital enthusiast because this generation was raised exclusively with the influence of technology and they are used to interacting in the digital world. Even when they have problems, such as finding advise, Gen Z tend to turn to technology. Growing up in virtual technology with unlimited sources of information, influence their way of thinking and attitudes (Goh & Lee, 2018). (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018)

Gen Z are known to be able to *multitask* using technology while engaging with other activities. Previous study said that Gen Z are *digitally-native* (Lestari, 2019). They use digital technology seamlessly. They use technology for all their activities such as socializing, spending free time, communicating, and working. Gen Z are the first generation to have access to wide-scale digital communication technology in the form of mobile phones, Wi-Fi, and interaction computer games. Gen Z could never imagine a world without the internet, even according to research a Gen Z spends an average of 6.5 hours every day in front of an electronic screen. They could even write and receive 109.5 texts per day (Dwidienawati & Gandasari, 2018) (Lestari, 2019).

The advancement of existing technology has enable Gen Z to easily do a lot of things. Technology also enable them access to all information easily. Therefore, Gen Z are more pragmatic and analytical in making decisions compared to previous generations. Report stated that 65% of Gen Z claimed that they are well updated to what is happening around their environment. This Gen Z is said to be more comfortable absorbing online knowledge than at traditional learning institutions (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Because they were born during an economic recession then Gen Z are characterized by flexibility and independence, these individuals are more open to diversity than previous generations, learn to accept

differences related to religion, social class, race or ethnicity (Kapil & Roy, 2014). Compared to previous generations, Gen Z are more successful in avoiding barriers associated with cultural differences in professional settings (Kapil & Roy, 2014). According to (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021) Gen Z are good listeners, creative, always oriented towards learning, accustomed to giving input, but has poor writing skills. They realize the importance of direct communication and its shortcomings in the field (O'Boyle et al., 2017) to (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021).

They are a pragmatic generation that is, a generation that is narrow-minded, practical and likes something instant. Gen Z want everything that is done to be achieved immediately. Gen Z has a sense of uncertainty and risk averse. Although they are gaining broad digital insights, Gen Z still needs support to be able to think critically and get the opportunity to improve their perseverance at work (Baum, 2020). Research conducted by Ernst & Young, in 2016 shows that Gen Z prefer to be treated with respect by their superiors, behave ethically, a fair system of compensation as well as promotion, wise decision making (Cherry, 2019). (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021) added that the Gen Z like to get regular feedback from his superiors. All these characteristics obtained by Gen Z can influence their behavior in the workplace (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021).

2.2. Leadership

Leadership is defined as the process of interactive influence that arises at the moment a person accepts others as their leaders in achieving the same goal (Silva et al., 2016). Leadership is also defined as the process of motivating a group of people to work together to achieve good things (Vroom & Jaago, 2007). It is also defined as someone who can inspire others and has critical thinking and is able to manage existing resources to achieve goals in the organization (Ward, 2020). Therefore, it can be concluded that leadership is the nature of a person in critical thinking, managing resources and influencing others who are in the organization to achieve organizational goals (Dwidienawati & Ratnasari, 2021).

Leadership play important role in the successful of firms. Leaders are necessary for success. Leaders have the ability to manage resources in an organization and make changes to the organization. Leaders determine decisions that can influence his members in the management to perform their tasks more effectively in the organization.

(Dwidienawati, Arief, et al., 2020) stated Leadership is considered as one of the most important factors influencing the success of innovation. Leadership also plays crucial rules during crisis (Dwidienawati, Tjahjana, et al., 2021).

Literature has raised different type of leadership style. However, the most studied leadership style is transformation leadership. (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021) stated that Generation Z preferred transformational leadership style. They like leaders who communicate positively, offer growth opportunity, have high emotional intelligence, engage personally, and fair. However, (Al Amiri et al., 2019) stated that it is not only transformational leadership, but also servant leadership being preferred by Gen Z.

2.2.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the opposite of transactional leadership. If the leadership of transactional is based on *reward and punishment*, then transformational leadership is a style of leadership that tries to make a change (Bass, 1990:338). Refer to the concept from (Bass, 1998), (Girardi & Rubim Sarate, 2021), (Tung, 2016), , and (Chen et al., 2014) state about the 4 I's of transformational leadership. There are four characteristics inherent in the behavior of transformational leaders.

The first "I" addresses Idealized Influence. Transformational leaders serve as role model and source of pride to the team. They provide vision and sense of mission. They exert trust and respect from their subordinate. The second "I" is Inspirational Motivation. Transformational leaders can provide spirit and motivation. they can express the importance of innovation in a way that enhances subordinates' intrinsic motivation to achieve this, resulting in them making more effort to perform well and thus enhance the prospects of success. Inspirational motivation is a way of transformational leaders to express their high expectation. The third "I" of transformational leadership is Intellectual Stimulation. Transformational leaders encourage and challenge their followers to improve their performance and transform way from their comfort zone. Leaders encourage followers to challenge existing assumptions, to reframe problems, and to

approach old situations in new ways. The forth "I" is Individualized consideration relates to coaching and mentoring behavior of transformational leaders. Through coaching and mentoring, transformational leaders put consideration to individual needs and help them to become more efficient and capable in performing their work. With this, followers can learn more from their leaders so that they can increase their contribution to organization (Northouse, 2016).

Transformational leadership is a leader who works with the team with fostering team identity, creating vision through inspiration and executing the change or the organization, and building team commitment. The transformational leadership style is charismatic, delegating, inspires, communicating, encourage innovation (Cismas et al., 2016). Transformational leaders have four distinct factors; charisma (idealized influence), inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, known as the four I's of transformational leader (Datche & Mukulu, 2015). Based on the previous studies, many characteristics are aligned with transformational leadership characteristics which influence the effectiveness of leaders during a crisis. The characters are such as building team confidence and trust, creating hope and sharing the big picture, building team relationships, and strengthening teamwork.

(Belias et al., 2015) reveal that transformational leadership has a high impact on job satisfaction during financial crises in Greek. Transformational leadership inspires and is able to make employees think positively and makes them have less defensive attitude and behaviour, which will lead to better employee turnover and customer satisfaction (Belias et al., 2015). (Kelly, 2005) argues that the most effective leadership style in a time of crisis is the transformational leadership style because this type of leadership is quick to respond to change.

2.2.2. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was introduced by Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990) in his seminal work "The Servant as Leader," first published in 1970 (van Dierendonck, 2011). He stated that: "*The Servant-Leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . The*

best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (1977: 7)

Patterson (2003) in (Waddell, 2006) states that the theory of servant leadership as an extension of transformational leadership theory. She refers a servant leader as “those leaders who lead an organization by focusing on their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral”. With the changes and challenges now, the demand for more ethical, people-centered management, leadership inspired by the ideas from servant leadership theory may very well be what organizations need now. What is the main differentiation of servant leadership compared to other leadership style? If other leadership styles put focus on the well-being of the organization, a servant leader more concern with serving the follower. They are putting their follower first. A servant leadership directs its focus first on the ability of the individuals to succeed and then subsequently on the success of the mission (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Servant leadership is a holistic leadership style that involves its followers in various dimensions such as relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual). Servant leadership sees itself as a servant of organizations that seek to grow the resources, finances and others that have been entrusted to them (van Dierendonck, 2011). Thus, they do not neglect performance even though they focus on the personal development of their followers. In contrast to a leadership approach that is only performance-oriented and often sacrifices others for profit. (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002) referred that *servant*

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study was designed as a qualitative study. Structured questionnaires were used as the instruments for an online survey, which was conducted in October – November 2022. Disclosure about the nature of the study, informed consent, and the participants’ willingness to join the survey were also included at the beginning of the questionnaires. Questionnaires without informed consent from

leadership can be organized by creating opportunities within the organization to help its followers grow.

(van Dierendonck, 2011) explained the 6 main characteristics of *servant leadership*, the first is *empowering and developing people*. It aims to give a sense of strength to the individual employee's personality. As well as in encouraging independent decision making, information sharing and coaching. The servant-leader's belief in the intrinsic value of each individual is a central issue as is the recognition and realization of each person's abilities and what the person can still learn.

Second, *humility*. It refers to the ability to put one's own achievements and talents in the right perspective. *Servant-leaders* realize that they can benefit from the expertise of others. Humility shows the degree to which a leader puts the interests of others first, facilitates performance, and gives important support to his followers. In addition humility also speaks of decency.

Third, *authenticity*. It explains how a leader expresses himself consistently with inner thoughts or feelings. This is included in integrity which means a leader reflects an honest and highly committed nature.

Fourth, *interpersonal acceptance*. It is an ability to understand the feelings of others and the ability to forgive. This includes empathy and seeing things from the perspective of others. Its forms include acts of affection, warmth, and forgiveness even when being confronted. It aims to place trust in others and make people feel welcome.

Fifth, *providing direction*. The servant-leader's attitude in providing direction is to make the work dynamic and adaptable. Which can also mean creating new approaches to old problems, with a strong reliance on values and beliefs. As well as the last one is *stewardship*. It is a willingness to take responsibility for a larger institution and serve rather than attach importance to self-interest. *Servant-leaders* must act as role models. By setting the right example, leaders can lead others to achieve common goals. Stewardship includes social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork (van Dierendonck, 2011).

participants were omitted from the analysis. Open Questions regarding the participants opinion on the characteristic of leaders that they respect and make them work effectively were asked including the reasons. Additional demographic information, such as participants’ position, gender, and location, was also requested for descriptive analysis

3.2. Participant

Target participants were Generation Z who were born between 1995 to 2005. The target sample was to get

are included in the characteristics of Inspirational Motivation in Transformational Leadership and Humility in Servant Leadership are also mentioned as characteristics of ideal leaders.

4.2.3. Motivated Leadership Characteristic



Figure 2. Characteristics of Leader that can make you motivated

Based on WordCloud images of the 300 most popular words used with the Word Frequency Query feature of "Reasons for Leadership Characteristics that Can Motivate Work Based on Questionnaire Respondents" based on imported questionnaire respondent data, said motivate, knowledge, goals, opinion which are included in the characteristics of Inspirational Motivation in Transformational Leadership and Empowering and Development in Servant Leadership are the dominant words that emerge. Other words such as direct, communication, honest, and loyal which are included in the characteristics of Idealize Influence in Transformational Leadership and Providing Direction in Servant Leadership are also mentioned as characteristics of ideal leaders.

4.3. Transformational Leadership

Of the 4 characteristics of Transformational Leadership, the one that gets the highest number mentioned by Gen Z is Idealized Influence with 1,956 words. The words that are widely mentioned by Gen Z for this characteristic are friendly, assertive, smiling, firm and honest. The next characteristic is Individual Consideration of 1,294 words. The most mentioned words are flattered, praised, promotion, salary and holidays. Then, the next characteristic is

Inspirational Motivation as many as 433 words. The most mentioned words are responsible, diligent, and giving motivation. And the last one is the characteristic of Intellectual Stimulation of 211 words. The most mentioned words are giving knowledge, Brave, ideas from subordinates, and dare to take risk.

4.4. Servant Leadership

From the characteristics of Servant Leadership, the one who gets the highest number mentioned by Gen Z is Humility with 544 words. The words that Gen Z mentions a lot for these characteristics are promotion, praised, provide support. The next characteristic that is widely mentioned is Stewardship with a total of 516 words. The most mentioned words are responsible, wise, willing to listen to suggestions or ideas from subordinates. The next characteristic that is widely mentioned is Authenticity of 485 words. The words that are widely mentioned by Gen Z for this characteristic are friendly, honest, disciplined. The next characteristic is Interpersonal Acceptance of 295 words. The words that Gen Z mentions a lot for this characteristic are empathetic, protect employees, fair. The next characteristic is Providing Direction with 198 words. The most mentioned words are giving direction, communicative, decision-making nature. And the last one is Empowering and Development as many as 138 words. The words mentioned by Gen Z for this characteristic are giving knowledge, good listener, able to develop.

4.5. What is the effective leadership style?

The purpose of this study was to know what leadership styles was effective for Gen Z. The data obtained was processed using NVivo software by creating nodes in each leadership style according to what you want to research, namely *Transformational Leadership* and *Servant Leadership*. Based on the results of data processing that has been carried out, the following results were obtained: *Transformational Leadership* has a total of 3,894 nodes and *Servant Leadership* has a total of 2,176 nodes. It showed that Gen Z tends to choose *Transformational Leadership*, then followed by *Servant Leadership*.

The nodes of *Idealized Influence* were 1,956 words and *Authenticity* as many as 485 words which shows that Gen Z tend to prefer leaders who are charismatic, honest, highly committed, able to show confidence, take a stand and the ability to attract followers, have a personally admirable side with followers. Gen Z need leaders who can communicate and build positive relationships between followers

and leaders so that the leader can be a friend to his followers.

In addition, the 544 *Humility* nodes indicate that Gen Z also likes leaders who pay attention to interests of others, facilitate performance, and can provide support or whatever their employees need, this includes giving awards both financially and non-financially. Then there were 433 words of *inspirational motivation* which showed that Gen Z to need leaders who can inspire followers so that they can provide enthusiasm for their followers and leaders who have a clear vision and mission for the organization.

Individual Consideration has 1,294 nodes. It means Gen Z need leaders who can provide direction in the process of completing their tasks, as well as needs leaders who can listen to the needs of followers. Gen Z also need recognition and appreciation, and someone who is a good mentor. There are 295 words of *Interpersonal Acceptance* which means that Gen Z likes leaders who are fair, impartial to anyone and always look at a problem from various points of view. Therefore, if a leader has criteria like this, it will cause trust for employees in the leader. Then there are 516 stewardship characteristics which means Gen Z tends to like teamwork because it is more effective and efficient. And on the one hand they like a leader who is loyal, responsible, and can be a good example for his team members.

5. Discussion

Based on the analysis, first Gen Z preferred leader who can be a good role model. Gen Z needs leaders they can look up, admire, trust, and rely on. Second, they need leaders who pay attention to their interest, support them, reward and appreciate them. Third they preferred leaders who can teach, mentor, direct, guide, help and take care of them. The fourth, they need leaders who can inspire and motivate them. It seemed that Gen Z preferred the combined leadership style of Transformational Leadership and Servant. It is interesting to know that only few words found on challenges. It seemed Gen Z does not really kin to be given the challenges. Gen Z also seemed to need stewardship.

If compared to Gen Z characteristics, the findings confirms that the combination of leadership style, transformational and servant leadership are the most suitable for Gen Z. Gen Z are well informed, embracing diversity, concerned on environment (Dwidienawati, Abdinagoro, et al., 2021) ethical, and fair (Dwidienawati et al., 2022). They hold ideal value. Therefore, they need leader who practice value. Leader who can be their role model.

However, at the same time, Gen Z seeks attention, appreciation, fair treatment, and regular feedback. They love promotion and instant achievement. Those characteristic which are triggered the need to have leader who pay attention to their interest.

Gen Z are known to have less confidence compared to Gen Y. They feel weary and uncertain. They like being taking care of. They request guidance. If they make mistake, they want to be forgiven and given another chance. They do not like to take risk and challenges. Leader with strong stewardship will be suitable with generation with this characteristic.

6. Conclusion

Gen Z need ideal leaders with Idealized Influenced (Transformational Leadership) or Humility (Servant leadership) who has characteristic such as honest, discipline, integrity, respect. Gen Z need leader with Idealized Influence (Transformational Leadership) or Interpersonal Acceptance (Servant leadership) to motivate them. Leaders with Inspirational Motivation (Transformational Leadership) and Empowering and Development (Servant Leadership) are leaders who can make them work better.

The most effective leadership style for Gen Z is the combination of Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership. It is transformational leadership minus challenge and plus stewardship.

Limitation of the study and further study recommendation

This study did not see the relationship between leadership style and work effectiveness. Therefore, further quantitative study is recommended to confirm the relationship. This study also only used questionnaire, therefore the deep understanding why Gen Z mentioned certain characteristic cannot be explored. Further study with deep interview can be recommended to understand further on leadership style in Gen Z.

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