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## Intergenerational Interpersonal Conflict in the Workplace at TK Aisyiyah 22 Surabaya

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### ABSTRACT

Currently, the work environment is increasingly colored by the existence of various generations with different values, communication styles, perceptions, and work ethics. This research aims to analyze the forms of interpersonal conflict that arise as a result of the generational difference between Baby Boomers (Senior Generation) and Generation Z at Aisyiyah 22 Kindergarten Surabaya, as well as identifying the causative factors and strategies used to resolve existing conflicts. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving two purposively selected informants one from the Baby Boomers group and one from Generation Z with data collection through in-depth interviews and analysis using an interactive model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Research results show that intergenerational conflicts are mainly sourced from differences in communication styles, work ethic, and approaches to technology. Baby Boomers tend to like structured, formal, and process-oriented work patterns, while Generation Z prioritizes efficiency, flexibility, and task completion and quick results. This difference is manifested in the form of miscommunication, misunderstanding in the execution of tasks, and temporary interpersonal tension. However, conflicts that arise can generally be resolved on the same day through direct communication, mutual openness, and mediation by the principal if necessary. This study concludes that intergenerational conflicts can be managed constructively through an attitude of mutual understanding, inclusive leadership, and an organizational culture that embraces generational diversity.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Conflict, Intergenerational, Baby Boomers, Generation Z, Conflict Management.

### ABSTRAK

Saat ini lingkungan kerja semakin diwarnai dengan keberadaan beragam generasi dengan nilai, gaya komunikasi, persepsi, dan etos kerja yang berbeda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk-bentuk konflik interpersonal yang muncul sebagai akibat dari perbedaan generasi antara Baby Boomers (Generasi Senior) dan Generasi Z di TK Aisyiyah 22 Surabaya, sekaligus mengidentifikasi faktor penyebab dan strategi yang digunakan untuk menyelesaikan konflik yang ada. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, melibatkan dua informan yang dipilih secara purposif satu dari kelompok Baby Boomers dan satu dari Generasi Z dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan analisis menggunakan model interaktif yang mencakup reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa

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*konflik antargenerasi terutama bersumber dari perbedaan gaya komunikasi, etos kerja, dan pendekatan terhadap teknologi. Baby Boomers cenderung menyukai pola kerja yang terstruktur, formal, dan berorientasi pada proses, sedangkan Generasi Z lebih mengutamakan efisiensi, fleksibilitas, dan penyelesaian tugas serta hasil yang cepat. Perbedaan ini termanifestasi dalam bentuk miskomunikasi, kesalahpahaman dalam pelaksanaan tugas, dan ketegangan interpersonal yang bersifat sementara. Meskipun demikian, konflik yang muncul umumnya dapat diselesaikan pada hari yang sama melalui komunikasi langsung, keterbukaan bersama, dan mediasi oleh kepala sekolah apabila diperlukan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa konflik antargenerasi dapat dikelola secara konstruktif melalui sikap saling mengerti, kepemimpinan yang inklusif, dan budaya organisasi yang merangkul keberagaman generasi.*

**Kata Kunci:** Konflik Interpersonal, Antargenerasi, Baby Boomers, Generasi Z, Manajemen Konflik.

## INTRODUCTION

The workplace is a gathering place for individuals with diverse characters, habits and mindsets. One of the differences that often creates dynamics in the workplace is the generational divide. Currently, Baby Boomers and Generation Z are two generational groups that frequently hold differing views on work. Baby Boomers are generally known to be more disciplined, loyal to their jobs, respectful of rules, and accustomed to working in a structured manner. On the other hand, Generation Z adapts more easily to technological developments, prefers flexibility, open communication, and a more practical and efficient way of working. These differing characteristics often trigger conflicts among colleagues due to differences in values, communication styles, and work patterns within the organisation (Hidayat & Ramdani, 2025; Wardani et al., 2024).

In a school environment, good working relationships between teachers and staff are essential to support the learning process and educational services. However, when individuals from different generations work together, misunderstandings often arise regarding communication, task allocation, and decision-making. Baby Boomers sometimes view Generation Z as an impatient, overly laid-back generation that fails to respect established rules. Conversely, Generation Z often perceives older generations as too rigid, resistant to change, and out of touch with technological advancements. These differing perspectives can create tension that impacts the effectiveness of teamwork (Putra et al., 2024; Syafri, 2024).

Intergenerational conflict in the workplace should not be underestimated as it can affect productivity and the quality of working relationships among employees. Ineffective communication can hinder task completion, reduce work motivation, and create an uncomfortable working atmosphere. Previous research has shown that intergenerational conflict is generally influenced by differences in communication styles, working methods, adaptability to technology, and expectations regarding the work environment. If not managed properly, such

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conflicts can hinder collaboration and reduce organisational performance (Wardana et al., 2025; Ekayanti et al., 2025).

Based on these issues, this study was conducted to analyse inter-colleague conflicts arising from generational differences between Baby Boomers and Generation Z at Aisyiyah 22 Kindergarten in Surabaya. This study aims to identify the factors causing conflict, its impact on work effectiveness, and the measures that can be taken to foster more harmonious working relationships across generations. It is hoped that this research will identify appropriate solutions to ensure that intergenerational cooperation runs more smoothly and creates a more productive working environment (Pradhana et al., 2024; Hidayat & Ramdani, 2025).

This research uses three main theoretical perspectives. First, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to explain how generational identity affects the perception and value of interaction between groups. Second, the Rahim Conflict Management Model (1983) as a framework for analyzing the conflict management style used by each generation. Third, the perspective of the difference in values between generations (Twenge et al., 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002) which is used to explain how the difference in value systems from each generation contributes to the formation of conflict. The collaboration of these three perspectives is expected to provide a more comprehensive and clear understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal conflict between generations in the work environment.

Interpersonal conflict refers to the conflict that occurs between two or more individuals due to differences in goals, values, or views in a social context (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Thomas (1992) also said that conflict begins when one party perceives that the other party has negatively influenced something that is their concern.

In an organizational environment, interpersonal conflict is not always destructive. At a moderate level, conflict can be a catalyst for change and innovation that can develop organizations and individuals involved if managed well (Wall & Callister, 1995). Jehn (1995) distinguishes conflict into two main types: task conflict (task conflict) which is related to differences of opinion about work, and conflict of differences in expectations and how to understand work can trigger conflicts between co-workers.

At the felt conflict stage, tension begins to be felt emotionally by both parties. Adilah said that she had experienced tension and guilt when she was reprimanded due to a mistake in arranging the table at a bazaar event, which she thought happened because the senior's instructions were not clear. Mrs. Mei also admitted that there was a feeling of annoyance when Generation Z did not move without being ruled first. However, both parties agree that the conflict is not allowed to drag on and is generally resolved on the same day.

Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained that individuals tend to classify themselves into social groups and take identity from the membership of that group. In a generational context, generational identity functions as a wall of social identity that is significant in nature. This classification process can

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intensify conflicts between generations, especially when there is a threat to the identity of the group.

Structural Conflict Theory, Dahrendorf (1959) sees conflict as part of the consequence of the structure of authority that applies in the organization. This theory is relevant to explain how the dynamics that occur between the Senior Generation who generally occupy managerial positions and Generation Z who are in the entry-level position. This difference in authority position creates a structural gap that can trigger conflict.

Rahim's Conflict Management Model Rahim (1983) developed a two-dimensional model that considers between self-care and care for others. Based on these two dimensions, it is found that there are five styles of conflict management: integration, obedience, domination, avoidance, and compromise. This model is quite relevant to analyze the differences in conflict management styles between the Senior Generation and Generation Z which are influenced by the different values and socialization between the two generations.

Definition and Classification of Generation, Mannheim (1952) defines that generation is a group of individuals who are born in a certain period of time and experience similar sociohistorical events, thus forming relatively similar values and behaviors. The commonly used generation classifications in research are: Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y or Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012).

Characteristics of Senior, GenerationThe Senior Generation in this study refers to Baby Boomers and Generation X who generally occupy positions that are already quite senior in the organization. Baby Boomers are known to have a strong work ethic, high loyalty to the organization, and tend to define themselves through work (Smola & Sutton, 2002). While generation X tends to be more independent, adaptive, and skeptical towards authority. In general, The Senior Generation has a relatively strong hierarchical orientation, values experience and seniority, and is more formal in professional communication.

Characteristics of Generation Z, Generation Z (born 1997–2012) is the first generation that grew up together with everything that was digitized. Their formative experience was marked by the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and significant technological developments. Twenge (2017) identifies the main characteristics of Generation Z in the workplace: thirst for technology, value transparency and open communication, purpose-driven, desire a flexible work system, and expect instant and continuous feedback. Unlike the previous generation, Generation Z shows lower loyalty to one organization and is more willing to change jobs to get working conditions and environments that match their values (Deloitte, 2023).

Difference in Work Value, The Difference in The Work Values Twenge and Campbell (2008) show that there is a significant shift in value between generations. The Senior Generation tends to prioritize the values of work security, loyalty, and appreciation based on seniority, while Generation Z emphasizes intrinsic values

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such as meaningful work, self-development, and work-life balance. Differences in work ethic – where the Senior Generation always associates

Differences in Communication Styles, Gursoy et al. (2008) showed that each generation has its own unique communication preferences. The Senior Generation prefers formal communication through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and official letters, and values established communication protocols. Generation Z who grew up with social media and instant messaging began to get used to fast, short, and multi-directional communication. This difference often causes a misunderstanding, where the Senior Generation views Generation Z's communication style as unprofessional, while Generation Z perceives the Senior Generation's style as slow, rigid, and inefficient.

Difference in Technology Orientation, Prensky (2001) introduced the concept of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" to describe the basic difference between those who grew up with digital technology and those who adopted it later. Generation Z as digital natives tend to question manual procedures that are considered ineffective and inefficient and will advocate for the adoption of the latest technology. This attitude often causes bias and a less one-way reaction from the Senior Generation who may feel more comfortable with the existing system.

Different Career Expectations, The Senior Generation is generally oriented towards a linear career with progress based on dedication and seniority. On the other hand, generation z wants faster career advancement, access to development opportunities, and work flexibility. Deloitte's research (2023) shows that Generation Z is willing to leave their jobs if they do not get the growth opportunities that they consider adequate. This difference in expectations is becoming clearer after the COVID-19 pandemic which normalizes the hybrid work model.

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) identified five conflict management approaches: competition, collaboration, compromise, accommodation, and avoidance. In the context of conflict between generations, the collaboration approach is seen as having a high effectiveness value because it allows both parties to explore solutions that accommodate and represent the values of each generation.

Organizations have a crucial role in providing a conducive environment for the creation of cross-generational collaboration. Some strategies that have proven effective include: cross-generational mentoring programs (reverse mentoring), cross-generational team formation, generational awareness training, and inclusive policies that consider the needs of all generations (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Inclusive leadership and open communication also play a role in reducing the intensity of conflict between generations (Gratton et al., 2007).

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using the case study method to conduct an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of workplace conflict caused by generational differences between Baby Boomers and Generation Z in the workplace. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a deep understanding of the subjective experiences, perceptions, and dynamics of social

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interactions that occur among individuals in the workplace. In this study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis process. This study was conducted at Aisyiyah 22 Kindergarten in Surabaya, a location described as a workplace with intergenerational interactions. The study involved two main informants, one from the Baby Boomers and one from Generation Z. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including experience working in an intergenerational environment and a history of involvement in workplace interactions that could potentially lead to conflict. The data collection method employed an in-depth interview approach. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide as the primary instrument, which allowed researchers to remain focused on their research objectives while still maintaining flexibility in gathering further information. The focus on the interviews included intergenerational work experiences, the types of conflicts that arose, the factors causing the conflicts, and the conflict resolution efforts undertaken. To ensure the completeness and accuracy of data during the collection process, the research instruments used included an interview guide and a recording device as an aid. The data analysis technique in this study employed an interactive analysis model encompassing the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Additionally, this study employs comparative analysis to compare intergenerational perspectives in understanding the conflicts that occur. The reduced data is presented in a thematic descriptive format to identify patterns emerging from each informant, before being interpreted to derive research conclusions. To compare the information provided by each informant, this study employs source triangulation to ensure data validity. Consequently, the study's findings are expected to demonstrate sufficient credibility and validity in presenting the phenomenon of intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Overview of Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace*

In an organization, every individual works with colleagues who have different personalities and ways of thinking. These differences require everyone to understand one another and adapt so that cooperation can function effectively to achieve shared goals. Relationships among coworkers in the workplace extend beyond merely completing tasks; they also involve communication, coordination, and a spirit of mutual support. However, daily interactions also have the potential to spark interpersonal conflicts due to differing perspectives or communication styles. Pondy (1976) explains that conflict is a dynamic process occurring between two or more parties, which unfolds a series of stages from the potential for conflict to the resulting consequences.

Conflicts within organizations also frequently arise due to generational differences in the workplace, particularly between older generations and Generation Z. Older generations tend to be accustomed to structured and formal work patterns, whereas Generation Z adapts more quickly to technology and possesses a more flexible communication style (Mannheim, 1952). These differences

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often lead to miscommunication and friction in the workplace when working on joint tasks. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of each generation is essential to maintaining harmonious working relationships and minimizing conflict.

### *Interview Findings*

#### a) Intergenerational Differences in Communication Styles

Based on the interview findings, the most common source of conflict between older employees and Generation Z stems from differences in communication styles within the workplace. Generation Z interviewees noted that older employees often provide brief instructions and focus solely on the core tasks, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings during execution. This is reflected in a statement from a Gen Z interviewee: "When seniors give instructions, they only explain the gist." On the other hand, senior interviewees argued that Gen Z should be able to understand the intent of instructions without needing overly detailed explanations, as expressed in the quote: "Gen Z shouldn't need things explained in too much detail."

This difference in perspective demonstrates that each generation has distinct communication patterns. Senior employees tend to be accustomed to brief communication, assuming colleagues already understand the intended message. Meanwhile, Generation Z prefers clear, detailed, and structured instructions to ensure tasks are executed accurately. It is these differing expectations in communication that subsequently trigger miscommunication and interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. This situation aligns with the view that differences in perception and communication patterns across generations can be a source of conflict between individuals within an organization (Mannheim, 1952).

#### b) Differences in Work Ethic and Work Styles Across Generations

Based on interview results, differences in work ethic and work styles between older generations and Generation Z are also a major cause of workplace conflict. Generation Z tends to want to finish work quickly so that tasks are completed promptly and they have more time to rest. Meanwhile, older generations are more comfortable working at a steady pace and enjoy the work process until the end of the workday. Older generations are also more structured in their work, such as writing activity schedules, developing learning plans, and completing tasks according to the established plans. This contrasts with Generation Z, who are more flexible and adhere to the principle that the most important thing is that the work gets done. Generation Z respondents also noted that older generations work more slowly and are less attuned to technological advancements and modern work methods.

Conversely, senior sources argue that Generation Z still lacks initiative when it comes to collaboration and often needs to be given instructions before starting work. According to the older generation, this situation sometimes causes frustration because the younger generation is seen as less proactive about tasks that should be completed without always needing to be told what to do. These differences in work styles demonstrate that each generation has distinct mindsets and work habits. The

older generation focuses more on process and order, while Generation Z prioritizes speed and efficiency in completing tasks (Twenge et al., 2010)

### *Forms of Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace*

Conflicts between older generations and Generation Z typically take the form of miscommunication, misunderstandings regarding work tasks, and tension arising from working together. Pruitt (2006) explains that conflicts stem from the interests of certain individuals that do not align with those of others.

Differences in communication styles and the interpretation of instructions often lead to misunderstandings among coworkers. Additionally, conflict can create feelings of hesitation and discomfort, particularly among Generation Z toward older generations, due to concerns about making mistakes or being perceived as impolite. These conditions sometimes cause work to be slightly delayed and workplace relationships to become strained for a short time.

Nevertheless, the conflicts that arise do not last long because both generations strive not to prioritize their own egos. Both older generations and Generation Z continue to respect one another, remain open to criticism and suggestions, and strive to resolve issues through direct communication. Conflicts are generally resolved on the same day to prevent them from piling up and affecting future work relationships. This demonstrates that intergenerational conflicts in the workplace can still be managed through effective communication and a spirit of mutual understanding among colleagues.

### *Resolving Intergenerational Conflict*

Although conflicts between older generations and Generation Z often arise due to generational differences, both sides have their own ways of resolving them. Older generations believe that issues should be resolved immediately so they do not pile up and affect working relationships, while Generation Z tends to dwell on conflicts and often overthink them once a problem arises.

Honest and transparent communication plays a crucial role in reducing misunderstandings, building trust, and creating a conducive work environment to address emerging changes and challenges (Fatihaturahmi & Giatman, 2023). Therefore, both generations are accustomed to sharing their experiences and feelings during work, including offering direct criticism and suggestions.

Conflict resolution is typically conducted through direct communication with the parties involved, discussed in small forums or meetings, or facilitated by the school principal as a liaison and mediator. An approach involving a third party is often necessary, especially when conflicts have persisted for a long time and cannot be resolved by the parties involved. Research indicates that third-party intervention can enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution, particularly in complex situations (Susanto, 2024). Accordingly, if the conflict cannot be resolved directly, the principal acts as a mediator by providing guidance and feedback to both parties to serve as a basis for joint evaluation.

Ultimately, both older generations and Generation Z strive to understand and respect one another and adapt to each other's personalities and work styles so that working relationships remain positive.

### *Analysis Based on Theory*

#### a) Analysis Based on the Theory of Interpersonal Conflict (Pondy, 1967)

Pondy (1967) explains that conflict within an organization is a dynamic process that unfolds through a series of stages, ranging from latent conflict, to perceived conflict, to emotionally felt conflict. Based on the interview findings, this pattern is clearly evident in the working relationship between older generations and Generation Z.

At the latent conflict stage, the potential for conflict is present from the start due to generational differences in background, which shape distinct perspectives, communication styles, and work ethics. A Generation Z interviewee (Adilah) revealed that from the very beginning of her employment, she had felt a sense of hesitation and anxiety about making mistakes in front of the older generation. Meanwhile, a senior interviewee (Ms. Mei) stated that Generation Z is perceived as lacking initiative and being too reliant on instructions before taking action. This situation indicates that latent tension has already formed even before the conflict explicitly surfaces.

At the perceived conflict stage, both parties begin to realize that there are differences that could potentially lead to friction. These differences encompass three main aspects. First, differences in communication styles Gen Z feels that instructions from seniors are too brief and lack detail, while seniors believe that Gen Z should already be able to understand the intent of the instructions without needing lengthy explanations. Second, differences in work ethic Gen Z tends to want to complete tasks quickly and efficiently, whereas older generations prefer to enjoy the process and work in a structured manner. Third, differences in technology utilization Generation Z feels more competent in using tools like Canva and digital devices, while seniors still require guidance in these areas. These conditions indicate that differing expectations and approaches to understanding work can lead to conflicts among coworkers.

At the "felt conflict" stage, tension begins to be emotionally felt by both parties. Adilah mentioned experiencing tension and guilt when reprimanded for a mistake in setting up tables at a bazaar event, which she attributed to unclear instructions from her senior. Bu Mei also acknowledged feeling annoyed when Generation Z members didn't act without being told to do so first. Nevertheless, both parties agreed that conflicts shouldn't be allowed to drag on and are generally resolved on the same day.

#### b) Analysis Based on the Theory of Generational Differences (Mannheim, 1952; Twenge et al., 2010)

Mannheim (1952) argued that individuals who grow up during the same historical period will develop similar worldviews, values, and habits as a collective response to their social environment. Based on the interview results, the differences

between the older generation and Generation Z reflect fundamental differences in value formation.

Members of the older generation, such as Ms. Mei, grew up in a work environment that prioritized hierarchy, order, and on-the-job experience. This is reflected in her structured, planned, and process-oriented work style. Conversely, Generation Z members like Adilah grew up alongside digital technology, making them more adaptable, results-oriented, and accustomed to equal and informal communication. It is these value differences, according to Mannheim (1952), that form the root of intergenerational friction not merely a matter of individual personality.

This is supported by the findings of Twenge et al. (2010), who state that younger generations tend to prioritize extrinsic values such as speed, efficiency, and free time over previous generations, who placed greater value on the centrality of work and dedication to the process. In the context of this study, Generation Z's tendency to finish work quickly and leave early, along with seniors' assessment that Generation Z lacks a sense of responsibility, are clear manifestations of the intergenerational value differences identified by Twenge et al. (2010).

c) Analysis Based on the Thomas-Kilmann Theory (1976)

Thomas and Kilmann (1976) identified five conflict resolution styles based on two dimensions: assertiveness (the extent to which a person seeks to satisfy their own interests) and cooperativeness (the extent to which a person seeks to satisfy the interests of the other party). The five styles are competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

Based on the interview results, the two informants exhibited different yet complementary styles. Adilah, as a representative of Generation Z, tended to adopt an avoiding style in the early stages by keeping herself busy and avoiding negative remarks to prevent the situation from worsening. However, when a conflict needs to be resolved, Adilah chooses to communicate directly and openly with senior staff to seek a mutual resolution. This approach aligns with the avoiding and accommodating styles in the Thomas-Kilmann theory. Bu Mei, as a representative of the older generation, exhibits a tendency toward the compromising style seeking a middle ground through direct communication and ensuring conflicts do not persist for more than three days to prevent them from escalating.

Both parties also involve the school principal as a mediator when conflicts cannot be resolved directly, which, within the Thomas-Kilmann framework, reflects a "collaborating" approach a style characterized by the highest levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness and focused on solutions that benefit all parties. Thus, conflict resolution between older generations and Generation Z in this workplace does not rely on a single style, but is adaptive and situational, depending on the intensity of the conflict at hand.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, interpersonal conflicts between Generation Z and Baby Boomers in the workplace at Aisyiyah 22 Kindergarten in Surabaya are

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influenced by differences in their communication styles, work ethics, and approaches to work. Baby Boomers tend to follow structured and formal work patterns, while Generation Z is more flexible, tech-savvy, and focused on work efficiency. These differences lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings in task execution, and tension in work relationships. However, the conflicts that arise do not escalate into ongoing conflicts because both parties strive to resolve issues through direct communication, openness, and mutual respect. The research indicates that intergenerational understanding and adaptation in the workplace can help manage intergenerational conflicts constructively. The study highlights the importance of fostering an inclusive work culture through effective communication, intergenerational collaboration, and the leadership's role as a mediator in conflict resolution. Additionally, organizations need to create a work environment that embraces the differences among generations so that workplace relationships can be more harmonious and productive. Future research is recommended to involve more informants and cover a broader range of organizations so that it can provide a better picture of the dynamics of intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

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