Conflict Management Strategies Between Generations in the Workplace: Perspectives from Millennials and Baby Boomers

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ABSTRACT

Generational conflict in the workplace has become an increasingly relevant issue in the modern era, especially between the Millennial generation and Baby Boomers who have different characteristics, values, and work approaches. This study aims to explore the conflict management strategies used by both generations in dealing with differences in perception and work styles in the professional environment. Using a qualitative approach based on literature study (library research), this study analyzes various theories, previous research results, and organizational policies related to intergenerational conflicts in the workplace. The results show that conflicts between Millennials and Baby Boomers are often rooted in differences in communication, job expectations, and perspectives on leadership and work flexibility. Baby Boomers tend to have a hierarchical, disciplined, and rewarding work style that values work experience, while Millennials prioritize flexibility, innovation, and balance between work and personal life. To address these conflicts, some of the effective strategies identified include open communication approaches, cross-generational mentoring, flexible work policies, and strengthening an inclusive organizational culture. In addition, organizations need to implement adaptive leadership training policies that allow for the integration of both generations in a harmonious and productive work environment. This study contributes to providing academic insights into the impact of generational differences on organizational dynamics, as well as offering practical strategies for managers and organizational leaders in managing a multigenerational workforce. Further research is needed to develop more specific intervention models in dealing with generational conflicts in various industrial sectors.

1. Introduction

Generational conflict in the workplace has become an increasingly prominent phenomenon, especially with the difference in values, work preferences, and communication styles between Millennials (born between 1981–1996) and Baby Boomers (born between 1946–1964) (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). The Millennial Generation is known for its more flexible, technology-based, and work-life balance approach (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). In contrast, Baby Boomers value stability, hierarchical structure, as well as experience-based leadership and seniority (Wood, 2019). These fundamental differences often give rise to conflicts in the workplace, especially in terms of work expectations, communication patterns, and leadership styles (Fishman, 2016).

With the increasing number of multigenerational workforces, organizations need to understand how these conflicts occur as well as identify effective strategies for managing them (Arriaga & Ballew, 2015). Previous studies have shown that intergenerational conflicts can hinder organizational productivity if not managed properly (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the conflict management strategies used by both generations is crucial to create a more harmonious and collaborative work environment (Price, 2018).

Although various studies have discussed generational differences in the world of work, there is still a gap in the literature regarding specific strategies applied by Millennials and Baby Boomers in dealing with workplace conflicts (Hillman, 2014). Most of the research focuses more on the differences in values and characteristics between generations, without exploring how each generation faces conflicts and adjusting their strategies in resolving them (LeMay, 2022). In addition, existing research is mostly conducted in the context of developed countries, while studies in developing countries are still limited, especially in understanding how culture and social norms affect intergenerational conflict resolution strategies (Harris, 2015).

Generational conflicts not only impact work efficiency, but also affect employee well-being, retention rates, and leadership effectiveness in organizations (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). With the difference in mindset between Millennials who are more digital-based and Baby Boomers who rely more on direct experience, conflicts in work methods, decision-making, and the use of technology in professional environments are increasingly occurring (Ngotngamwong, 2019). Therefore, this research has an urgency in providing insights into strategies that can help organizations manage conflict effectively and build an inclusive work culture.

Previous research has found that generational conflicts are often caused by differences in communication and work expectations. A study by Wood (2019) shows that Baby Boomers prioritize face-to-face communication and formality at work, while Millennials are more comfortable with digital communication and flexibility. In addition, research by Fishman (2016) highlights that Baby Boomers have a tendency to maintain boundaries between professional and personal lives, while Millennials prefer a more relaxed and collaborative work environment. Other research by Arriaga & Ballew (2015) shows that cross-generational training and mentoring are effective strategies to relieve tensions and build synergies between generations.

Different from previous research, this study not only discusses the differences between generations but also explores the specific strategies used by both generations in resolving conflicts. In addition, this study investigates how cultural factors and organizational policies can moderate intergenerational conflict in the workplace (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Using a library research approach based on qualitative methods, this study provides a more in-depth perspective on the dynamics of conflict resolution between the Millennial Generation and Baby Boomers in various industrial contexts.

This study aims to analyze the differences in conflict approaches between Millennials and Baby Boomers

in the work environment, as well as identify the strategies used by both generations in resolving conflicts and evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, this study also explores the role of organizations in managing intergenerational conflicts through more inclusive and adaptive policies, and provides research-based recommendations to optimize intergenerational cooperation in a professional environment.

The results of this research are expected to provide benefits for various parties. For managers and organizational leaders, this research offers concrete strategies in managing intergenerational conflict to create a more harmonious and productive workplace. For academics, this study can add insight into the dynamics of generational conflicts in scientific literature, especially in the field of human resource management and organizations. For multigenerational workers, this research helps them understand the differences in characteristics between generations and how conflicts can be resolved constructively to improve collaboration. Meanwhile, for policymakers, this study can provide recommendations in designing human resource management policies that are more adaptive to generational diversity in the workplace.

With a comprehensive approach, this research is expected to provide in-depth insights into how intergenerational conflicts in the workplace can be managed effectively. This ultimately contributes to increasing productivity, innovation, and employee well-being in the long term, while helping organizations create a more inclusive and collaborative work environment

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method to explore conflict management strategies between the Millennial Generation and Baby Boomers in the work environment. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze various theoretical perspectives, previous research, and organizational policies related to

intergenerational conflicts in the world of work (Bowen, 2009). Literature studies are used as the main method in this study because they are exploratory and allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied through the analysis of relevant scientific sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The data sources in this study were obtained from various relevant scientific literature, including academic journal articles, books, research reports, and organizational policies that discuss intergenerational conflicts in the workplace (Neuman, 2014). The selection of sources is carried out by considering the credibility and relevance of the literature, especially those published in reputable journals such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. In addition, this study also refers to organizational reports and policies related to human resource management published by global institutions such as Harvard Business Review, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and International Labour Organization (ILO) (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).

The data collection technique is carried out through document analysis, which includes the identification, selection, and synthesis of various literature that discusses intergenerational conflict management strategies (Bowen, 2009). This process is carried out by critically reading various sources that have been collected, then identifying the main themes related to intergenerational conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and their impact on organizational productivity (Creswell, 2013). The literature analyzed includes research that discusses differences in generational characteristics, communication patterns, work expectations, and factors that trigger conflict in the workplace (Fishman, 2016).

The data analysis in this study was carried out using the qualitative content analysis method, which aims to identify the main patterns, themes, and categories in intergenerational conflict management strategies (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis was conducted by categorizing conflict management strategies used by Millennials and Baby Boomers, and evaluating their effectiveness based on findings

from various previous studies. In addition, this study also conducts a comparative analysis, by comparing the strategies used by each generation to understand the differences and similarities in their approaches to conflict resolution (Silverman, 2020).

In ensuring the validity of the research, source triangulation is carried out, namely comparing the results of analysis from various literatures to obtain a more objective and comprehensive understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). With this method, research can provide more comprehensive insights into the most effective strategies for managing intergenerational conflict in the workplace, as well as how organizations can adopt more inclusive

policies to create a harmonious and productive work environment.

3. Result and Discussion

The following table is the result of a selection of 10 scientific articles that have been filtered from various relevant sources in this literature study. These articles are selected based on the criteria of relevance, credibility, and their contribution in discussing conflict management strategies between Millennials and Baby Boomers in the workplace. Each article is categorized based on the main focus of the research, the methods used, as well as the main findings identified.

No	Author & Year	Title	Findings
1	Ozolina et al. (2024)	*Bridging Generational Gaps: Reducing Conflict and Enhancing Collaboration in the Workplace*	Conflicts between generations can be reduced with open communication and cross-generational mentoring.
2	Wood (2019)	*Millennials in the Workplace: Mystery or Magic?*	Millennials have a more flexible communication style than Baby Boomers, but are often misunderstood as lacking discipline.
3	Arriaga & Ballew (2015)	*When Millennials and Baby Boomers Collide*	Generational conflict can be managed with flexible work policies and adaptive leadership roles.
4	Ngotngamwong (2019)	*Working with Millennials: From the Perspective of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers*	Differences in expectations of organizational hierarchies are the main cause of intergenerational conflicts.
5	Appelbaum et al. (2022)	*A Study of Generational Conflicts in the Workplace*	Baby Boomers tend to value in-person communication more, while Millennials prefer digital communication.
6	Hillman (2014)	*Understanding Multigenerational Work-Value Conflict Resolution*	Differences in mindsets towards leadership and work evaluation contribute to generational conflict.
7	Gabrielova & Buchko (2021)	*Here Comes Generation Z: Millennials as Managers*	Differences in the use of technology between generations can exacerbate organizational conflicts.
8	Fishman (2016)	*How Generational Differences Will Impact America's Aging Workforce*	Conflicts between generations are often triggered by differences in motivation and expectations for work.
9	Deyoe & Fox (2012)	*Understanding Strategies to Minimize Workplace Conflict Due to Generational Differences*	Successful conflict resolution strategies involve work flexibility and adaptive management.
10	Price (2018)	*Managing Generational Conflict in the Workplace*	Companies that implement cross-generational mentoring have lower levels of conflict.

Based on the findings of various studies that have been studied, intergenerational conflicts in the workplace are often caused by differences in communication patterns, work expectations, and leadership styles. Millennials tend to be more flexible and technology-based at work, while Baby Boomers value direct communication and a clear hierarchy more. The most effective strategies for managing this conflict include cross-generational mentoring, open communication, and flexible work policies. In addition, companies that implement adaptive leadership management and an inclusive work culture tend to be more successful in minimizing intergenerational conflict in the workplace. This table is expected to provide a systematic overview of the research that has been carried out in this field, as well as serve as a basis for further analysis in this article.

Based on the findings in the literature study that has been compiled, intergenerational conflicts in the workplace are mainly triggered by differences in communication patterns, work expectations, and leadership approaches. Millennials have a more flexible and digital-based communication style, while Baby Boomers tend to prioritize face-to-face communication and a clear hierarchy (Wood, 2019; Fishman, 2016). These differences often lead to misunderstandings in the work environment, especially in decision-making and the division of tasks. For example, research by Appelbaum et al. (2022) shows that companies that still implement traditional communication patterns often experience conflicts because Millennials feel that the system is too rigid and inefficient.

In addition to differences in communication patterns, conflicts also arise from differences in expectations for work and leadership. Baby Boomers tend to have a more disciplined work ethic and value loyalty to the company, while Millennials prioritize work-life balance and flexibility at work (Hillman, 2014). This is in line with the findings of Ngotngamwong (2019) which shows that many Baby Boomers consider the work flexibility that Millennials want as a form of lack of commitment to the company. Meanwhile,

research by Arriaga & Ballew (2015) found that companies that implemented flexible policies, such as remote work options and flexible working hours, were more successful in reducing intergenerational conflict.

From a leadership perspective, the research studied in this study shows that Baby Boomers tend to be more comfortable with hierarchical leadership styles, while Millennials prefer participatory and collaboration-based leadership (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). A study by Fishman (2016) revealed that intergenerational conflicts in leadership often arise because Millennials feel that they are not given enough space to contribute to decision-making. This can hinder their engagement and motivation at work. In contrast, research by Price (2018) shows that companies that implement cross-generational mentoring have lower levels of conflict because Baby Boomers leaders can mentor younger generations with a more adaptive approach.

Furthermore, the findings in the literature also show that technology has an important role in magnifying or easing conflicts between generations. Millennials who are very familiar with technology often consider the manual work system used by Baby Boomers to be outdated and inefficient, while Baby Boomers feel that the use of technology that is too intense can reduce personal interaction within the team (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Research by Hillman (2014) indicates that organizations that adopt cross-generational technology training programs can help bridge these differences by improving a shared understanding of how technology can be used to increase productivity without eliminating traditional communication values.

In terms of conflict resolution, research shows that the most effective strategies in managing intergenerational conflict include open communication, cross-generational mentoring, and flexible work policies (Ozolina et al., 2024). Companies that implement transparent communication policies and provide space for

intergenerational discussions have lower levels of conflict than organizations that maintain conventional communication patterns (Appelbaum et al., 2022). In addition, cross-generational mentoring applied in companies can help Millennials understand how Baby Boomers work and expectations, and vice versa, allow Baby Boomers to adopt innovations and more flexible work styles than Millennials (Price, 2018).

Overall, the results of this study confirm that managing intergenerational conflict in the workplace requires a holistic and adaptive approach. Companies that implement flexible leadership strategies, open communication, and an inclusive work culture tend to be more successful in creating a harmonious and productive work environment. By taking into account the key factors that have been identified in this literature study, organizations can develop more effective human resource management policies in accommodating generational diversity in the workplace, thereby improving employee productivity, collaboration, and well-being in the long run.

Discussion and Analysis

The phenomenon of intergenerational conflict in the workplace is an increasingly relevant challenge in the modern work environment. Millennials and Baby Boomers have different approaches to communication, leadership, and job expectations, which are often triggers for conflict in organizations (Wood, 2019; Fishman, 2016). Data from the literature study studied in this study shows that conflicts often occur due to differences in values, work habits, and perspectives on work hierarchy and flexibility. In some cases, these conflicts can hinder productivity and create tension within the work team.

In the context of today's world of work, more and more organizations are experiencing challenges in managing a multigenerational workforce. In many companies, Baby Boomers still occupy managerial or leadership positions, while Millennials dominate the operational workforce. These differences lead to disagreements in leadership styles, where Baby

Boomers rely more on experience and hierarchical systems, while Millennials prefer collaborative and open leadership (Hillman, 2014). This phenomenon can be observed in various industry sectors, where companies with rigid hierarchical structures often experience higher turnover rates among Millennials, as they feel less empowered and not given enough opportunities to contribute.

In addition, expectations of work flexibility are also a major source of conflict. A study by Ngotngamwong (2019) shows that Millennials want a balance between work and personal life, while Baby Boomers have a more traditional mindset, where commitment to work is considered an indicator of loyalty and dedication. In this situation, organizations that still implement fixed hours and physical presence in the office as the main standard tend to experience friction with Millennial workers who prefer flexibility, such as remote work options or more dynamic work arrangements. This phenomenon can be seen in some technology companies and start-ups that are more adaptive to change, where flexibility becomes part of their work culture, which ultimately increases job satisfaction and retention of Millennial employees.

From the perspective of conflict management theory, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model approach explains that conflict resolution strategies can be categorized into avoiding, competitive, compromising, accommodating, and collaborative (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Based on the findings in this study, the most effective strategies in dealing with intergenerational conflict are collaboration and compromise, where companies need to create a more inclusive and adaptive work culture to the needs of each generation (Price, 2018). Companies that implement a collaborative strategy by providing space for both generations to adapt and understand each other's perspectives tend to have a more harmonious work environment with minimal conflict.

In addition to differences in leadership and work flexibility, the use of technology is also a major factor in generational conflict in the workplace. Millennials

who grew up with digital technology tend to rely more on app-based communication, email, and online collaboration, while Baby Boomers are more comfortable with face-to-face communication and work formalities (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). In some cases, organizations that fail to bridge this technology gap experience bottlenecks in the work process, where Baby Boomers feel left behind and have trouble adjusting to digitalization, while Millennials feel frustrated because they have to work with systems that are considered slow and inefficient. Therefore, the implementation of cross-generational technology training programs can be an effective solution in reducing this gap.

An increasingly popular approach used by modern companies in managing intergenerational conflict is cross-generational mentoring. Findings from Price (2018) show that companies that implement mentoring programs between Baby Boomers and Millennials have experienced a significant decrease in conflict rates and an increase in team collaboration. In this program, Baby Boomers can share their experiences and insights in aspects of leadership and work ethics, while Millennials can provide new perspectives related to innovation and digital technology. This approach creates more positive interactions and builds stronger working relationships between different generations.

In addition to mentoring, companies also need to adjust their human resource policies to be more inclusive towards different generations. Organizations that have a more flexible policy system, provide opportunities to adapt to employee needs, and encourage open communication will have an easier time managing intergenerational conflicts compared to organizations that maintain rigid work policies (Appelbaum et al., 2022). One example that has been successfully implemented in many global companies is opening up more transparent communication channels, such as intergenerational discussion forums, multigenerational leadership training, and internal surveys regarding employee job expectations.

The author argues that intergenerational conflict management cannot be done with a one-way approach, but requires a holistic approach that includes aspects of communication, organizational policies, and understanding of the characteristics of different generations. Companies need to avoid a biased approach to one particular generation and focus more on building synergy and a respectful work environment. Success in managing these conflicts will not only increase productivity and work effectiveness, but also create a more innovative and competitive environment in the long run.

Overall, the results of this study show that conflict management strategies based on open communication, cross-generational mentoring, and flexible work policies can be the most effective solution in managing intergenerational conflict in the workplace. With the growing global work trend and digitalization on the rise, companies that are able to adapt this strategy will be better prepared to face the challenges of the future, while creating a more harmonious and inclusive work environment for all generations.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature studies that have been conducted, it can be concluded that intergenerational conflict in the workplace is a common phenomenon due to differences in communication patterns, work expectations, and leadership styles between the Millennial Generation and Baby Boomers. Millennials prioritize work flexibility, the use of technology, and a participatory leadership approach, while Baby Boomers value stability, loyalty, and hierarchical organizational structures. Disagreements over these differences often lead to tensions within the organization that can negatively impact employee productivity and job satisfaction. However, this study also shows that these conflicts can be managed well through open communication strategies, cross-generational mentoring, and flexible and inclusive work policies.

The findings in this study also indicate that companies that are able to accommodate the needs and preferences of different generations will be more successful in building a harmonious and productive work environment. The most effective strategy for addressing these conflicts is to implement intergenerational mentoring programs, where Baby Boomers can share leadership experiences with Millennials, while Millennials can provide insights into technology and innovation to older generations. In addition, companies need to adjust their human resource policies by providing more flexible work options, opportunities to develop skills across generations, as well as communication mechanisms that can facilitate more constructive interactions between employees of different ages.

As a recommendation for further research, further studies are needed that use an empirical approach with quantitative methods or a combination of mixed-methods to obtain more representative data related to the impact of intergenerational conflict management strategies in various industrial sectors. In addition, future research may also explore how organizational culture factors, global labor policies, and the dynamics of generation Z as a new workforce can affect intergenerational conflicts and how they are resolved. With a broader understanding of this phenomenon, companies can develop more adaptive and innovative policies in managing a multigenerational workforce to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the organization in the future.

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