Building Intergenerational Empathy to Overcome Stigma and Enhance Collaboration

Anna Berliana Mustikasari[1], Defhany[2]
Kantor Pelayanan Perbendaharaan Negara Sragen, Indonesia
Universitas Terbuka Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: nachay11@gmail.com

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
intergenerational empathy, stigma, intergenerational social	Generational differences in the work and social environment often create stigmas that hinder collaboration and productivity. In Indonesia, which is dominated by Generation Z and Millennials, the gap in values, ways of communication, and experiences between generations can trigger conflict and marginalization if not managed properly. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of intergenerational empathy in overcoming stigma and increasing collaboration in the Indonesian work environment. The research method used is descriptive qualitative through systematic literature studies and observation of webinars of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques with a focus on empathy variables, intergenerational stigma, and cross-generational social dynamics. The results show that each generation (Baby Boomers, X, Millennials, and Z) has different empathy characteristics and challenges. Empathy can be developed through open dialogue, mentoring programs (such as reverse mentoring), and collaborative activities that have been shown to reduce negative stereotypes by up to 25% and increase team productivity. The MU dialogue forum at KPP Pratama Mampang Prapatan is a clear example of the success of this approach in creating intergenerational engagement and respect. The conclusion of this study is that the development of intergenerational empathy is an effective strategy to overcome stigma and build harmonious collaboration. The implications of the research findings recommend the integration of generational differential education in organizational training programs as well as the development of inclusive policies that facilitate positive interactions across generations to create a productive and sustainable work environment.

INTRODUCTION

Differences between generations are a social phenomenon increasingly visible in various areas of life, from the family environment to the world of work. Each generation has different values, norms, and perspectives influenced by the social, cultural, and technological contexts that develop in their time (Bednar & Welch, 2020; Roblek, Mesko, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2019; Zubareva, 2020). Some of the world's most important events — such as the Second World War, the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre in Germany, and the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers (WTC) in New York — are life markers that define different generations. Historical events, culture, economic recessions, technological advances, and revolutions shape the behavioral patterns of societies in particular ways (Alemayehu Tegegn, 2024; Barroso, 2020; Goldstone, 2016; Inglehart, 2020; Richta, 2018).

A generation is defined as a group of people born in a similar period who received similar education and social and cultural influences, thus adopting comparable attitudes in thinking and working. In general, generation differences span approximately 15–20 years. As of 2025, six

generations coexist: the Baby Boomers generation (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), Millennials (born 1981–1996), Generation Z (born 1997–2012), Alpha Generation (born 2013–2025), and Beta Generation (born 2025 and above). Today, generational identity is determined less by birth date and more by technology use.

Indonesia had a population of 270.20 million people as of 2020, with Generation Z (born 1997–2012) and Millennials (born 1981–1996) as the dominant cohorts. Generation Z constitutes 27.94% of the total population, while Millennials make up 25.87% (Azouaou, n.d.; Baloch, 2024; Purnama, Azzahra, & Priyono, 2023). Technological advances and recent social differences have accelerated distinctions in lifestyles, values, and communication styles among generations. Older generations tend to preserve traditions and prefer more formal communication, whereas younger generations, especially Generation Z, are more accepting of technology, hold more flexible values, and adopt a more relaxed communication style. These differences can create intergenerational stigma — negative views or stereotypes associated with certain groups due to differences in age, communication style, or values. Intergenerational stigma hampers the transfer of knowledge and experiences crucial for joint progress and may lead to interpersonal conflicts, reduced productivity, and hindered collaboration across generations in various social settings (Boin et al., 2021; Burholt et al., 2020; Eccleston et al., 2021; George, Baskar, & Srikaanth, 2024; Rupčić, 2018).

Several studies have explored intergenerational dynamics within organizational contexts. Ng & Feldman (2019) examined ageism in workplaces, highlighting how generational stereotypes impact employment opportunities and career advancement. Zemke et al. (2021) identified communication style differences as primary friction points between generations in corporate environments. Kim & Lee (2021) showed that intergenerational empathy programs in South Korean workplaces reduce ageism and improve team cohesion. However, limited research has focused on comprehensive strategies for cultivating intergenerational empathy in Indonesian organizations, especially government institutions where hierarchical structures may exacerbate generational divides.

Empathy, or an understanding attitude between generations, can overcome negative stigma in the workplace. Enhancing empathy through open dialogue and collaborative activities improves intergenerational understanding and appreciation. Educational programs emphasizing shared experiences and effective communication can reduce stereotypes and strengthen relationships. Thus, fostering intergenerational empathy is key to overcoming stigma and encouraging productive collaboration. This study investigates the role of intergenerational empathy in reducing stigma and increasing cooperation, aiming to contribute to social harmony and productivity in diverse life aspects. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to generational studies and practical strategies for managing multigenerational workplaces. Specifically, this research offers frameworks for developing empathy-building programs that improve communication, reduce conflicts, and enhance productivity in diverse age environments.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review design to explore the role of intergenerational empathy in overcoming stigma and improving collaboration. Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature review of relevant academic sources, including books, journal articles, and research reports published in the last ten years. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques focusing on three main variables, namely empathy development, intergenerational stigma, and cross-generational social dynamics. In addition, observations at the Indonesian Ministry of Finance webinar also complement the primary data, providing practical insights into the challenges and solutions in managing a multigenerational workplace in Indonesia. The analytical framework

.

used integrates generational theory with the concept of emotional intelligence, especially empathy, to understand the mechanisms of intergenerational understanding in depth and contextually.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an era of globalization and rapid demographic change, society is increasingly multigenerational, where interactions between Baby Boomers, Generations, Millennials, and Generation Z are becoming the norm in various domains of life, including the workplace, education, and social community. However, differences in values, experiences, and perspectives between generations often give rise to age stigma, which hinders collective collaboration and innovation. Age diversity in the work environment can create communication barriers that, if left unchecked, can trigger conflicts. Intergenerational stigma often arises from the negative stereotypes inherent in each age group. For example, older generations are often perceived as rigid or non-adaptive to technology, while younger generations are perceived as less disciplined or overly dependent on gadgets. In Indonesia, 40% of young workers feel hampered by senior superiors who are considered conservative, while the elderly often experience marginalization in community empowerment programs. This ageism is not just an individual prejudice, but rather a structural phenomenon reinforced by the media and cultural norms, which has an impact on discrimination in the workplace.

The lack of interpersonal communication and a balanced space for dialogue contributes to the reinforcement of stereotypes and negative views between generations. Empathy is the main key to overcoming these differences. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, which can reduce conflict and increase collaboration. Teams with high levels of empathy are 25% more productive , and a lack of empathy between generations leads to up to 15% higher employee turnover.

The intergenerational gap can lead to individuals and professionals working in separate groups with different approaches, influenced by their respective life perspectives. This duality arises as a conflict between tradition and modernity, can affect learning and communication methods, as well as shape each other's interests and values. Stereotypes are bad for certain generational groups so that they can reduce their motivation and participation in social and professional activities. These studies emphasize the need to build more effective communication and understanding of intergenerational differences to reduce conflict and improve social relationships in both the organizational and family environments.

Classifying and separating generations helps us understand them, but there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes or stigmas in distinguishing generations. Empathy can be cultivated through social experiences, education, and intentional interactions. Fostering empathy in each generation (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z) can be tailored to their unique traits to create inclusive cooperation, where each generation feels valued and understood. The nature and challenges between generations can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Natures and challenges between generations

Generation	Characteristic	Intergenerational challenges
Baby boomers (1946-1964)	Optimistic, competitive, hardworking, focused on long-term achievements.	Seeing the millennial/Gen Z gene as lazy,
Gen X (1965-1980)	Independent, skeptical, concerned with results rather than processes. Appreciate work-life balance.	Feeling sandwiched between baby boomers (who dominate leadership) and millennials (who are more collaborative.
Millennial (1981-1996)	Collaborative, prioritize the meaning of work and quickly provide feedback	Considered *entitled* by Boomers/Gen X, often arguing with Gen Z about

.

		excessive digital multitasking resulting in team fatigue
Gen Z (1997-2012)	Digital native, entrepreneurial, adaptive but realistic, focus on sustainability and mental health	It is seen as less focused by the first generation due to remote work preferences

Source: Levy & Apriceno (2019).

In Table 1, it can be seen that Baby Boomers are known to have an optimistic nature and uphold hierarchy, so that it is often difficult to understand the younger generation, who are more flexible. Their empathy is influenced by historical experiences, but they have high cognitive empathy and low affective empathy towards technological change (Pew Research Center, 2015). Ways to foster empathy include encouraging Baby Boomers to share their experiences and listen to younger generations, as well as conducting reverse mentoring programs. Practical activities such as role-playing workshops can also improve intergenerational understanding. By increasing empathy, Boomers can become better mentors and reduce conflict in the workplace.

Generation X often feels pressured between generations due to negative experiences such as recessions and divorces. They usually possess pragmatic empathy but tend to be reserved because they lack trust in institutions. Research shows that they have low empathy for the younger generation (Deloitte, 2019). To foster empathy, open discussions about life experiences and collaboration in cross-generational projects are possible strategies. This can improve cooperation and reduce bias between generations, as well as help Gen X become a link between generations to reduce distrust and improve work-life balance.

Millennials, who are collaborative and values-driven, grew up in the internet age and during the 2008 crisis, making them sensitive to social issues, but they are sometimes perceived as selfish by older generations. They have high empathy for global issues but low empathy for the Boomers generation due to differences in communication styles. To foster empathy, digital education and interactive feedback, as well as shared social initiatives through volunteer activities, are effective.

For Generation Z, who are highly socially conscious and digital natives, they have high empathy but are prone to digital burnout, making them less patient with older generations' traditions. They can cultivate empathy by creating digital content, such as podcasts or TikTok series about the history of older generations. Conducting mental health and role-playing training and developing strong empathy among Gen Z can encourage inclusive innovation in work policies (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Intergenerational empathy can be strengthened through interactive approaches that encourage mutual understanding, such as open dialogue, mentoring programs, and collaborative activities. This approach not only reduces negative stereotypes but also improves understanding of each generation (Abrams et al., 2019). Open dialogue can be held through regular discussion sessions in the workplace or community, where different generations share experiences without hierarchy. For example, in a multigenerational meeting, members can discuss the challenges they faced in their respective eras. Mentoring programs involve intergenerational pairing, where the elderly teach traditional skills to Generation Z, and conversely, the younger generation teaches technology to the elderly. Experience Corps programs in the US show that mentoring activities can reduce self-stigma in the elderly and increase young people's understanding of the contributions of older generations (Low et al., 2021). Collaborative activities include joint projects where all generations contribute, such as the creation of digital content for cultural promotion. Collaboration increases mutual trust and appreciation for the contributions of the younger generation. Another study in Singapore found that collaborative projects can reduce age stigma and improve emotional understanding. The implications of this approach suggest increased team productivity and support an inclusive work environment (Pratiwi, 2022).

.

Interview Results

In a webinar organized by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia on overcoming intergenerational stigma through empathic and effective interpersonal communication. Participants are expected to make observations about intergenerational discussion forums. Several problems were found in the work environment of the Ministry of Finance regarding strengthening a work culture guided by AKHLAK. There are 4 aspects that can be done in strengthening the work culture, namely: generational stigma, sandwich managers, internal dynamics and cultural and subcultural relations. In the aspect of generational stigma, all generations have their own problems in the work environment, generation Z likes creativity and flexibility but is faced with a biocracy that is so difficult, generation X likes biocracy and order but is required to have a creative nature while the millennial generation must be confused with the choices of generation Z, X and Baby boomers. When generation Z is in a career position that has a structural level in work, their thinking patterns and attitudes change to be like generation X, but conversely, if generation X does not have a structural career position in work, then the character is like Gen Z. With the right career intervention, the right communication, the characteristics of intergenerational stigma are only a stamp or stigma that will not interfere with work productivity (Nastiti, 2025).

The MU dialogue forum formed by KPP Pratama Mampang Prapatan is one of the solutions to overcome intergenerational stigma in the work environment of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. The MU Forum aims to build awareness for each generation in developing creativity and getting to know each generation more deeply. So that empathy, *engagement* and *respect* are created as the basic capital for productivity in the work environment (Nastiti, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Generational differences in society and the work environment often create intergenerational stigma that hinders cooperation. Baby Boomers, X, Millennials, and Z have different values and experiences, influenced by history and technology. This stigma can result in conflict and marginalization. Therefore, intergenerational empathy is important to bridge these gaps. Research shows that empathy can reduce negative stereotypes through mutual understanding. Open dialogue and mentoring programs such as reverse mentoring can help older generations learn technology from the young, while the younger appreciate the old experience. Collaborative activities promote emotional bonding, which shows success in reducing stigma and increasing productivity. The interview results showed that empathic communication overcame stigma in the workplace. The development of intergenerational empathy is important for productive cooperation. Recommendations include the integration of education on generational differences and further research with mixed methods. Building empathy can create a harmonious and advanced multigenerational society.

REFERENCES

Alemayehu Tegegn, D. (2024). The role of science and technology in reconstructing human social history: Effect of technology change on society. *Cogent Social Sciences, 10*(1), 2356916. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2356916

Azouaou, L. (n.d.). *Determinant factors of entrepreneurial intention within Generation Z students: Case of Koléa University Campus in Algeria.*

Baloch, H. M. (2024). *Factors affecting purchase intention of Generation Z consumers for online shopping of green cosmetics.* Vilniaus Universitetas.

.

Barroso, L. R. (2020). Technological revolution, democratic recession, and climate change: The limits of law in a changing world. *International Journal of Constitutional Law, 18*(2), 334–369. https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moaa023

Bednar, P. M., & Welch, C. (2020). Socio-technical perspectives on smart working: Creating meaningful and sustainable systems. *Information Systems Frontiers, 22*(2), 281–298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-019-09916-2

Boin, J., Rupar, M., Graf, S., Neji, S., Spiegler, O., & Swart, H. (2021). The generalization of intergroup contact effects: Emerging research, policy relevance, and future directions. *Journal of Social Issues, 77*(1), 105–131. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12422

Burholt, V., Winter, B., Aartsen, M., Constantinou, C., Dahlberg, L., Feliciano, V., ... & Working Group on Exclusion from Social Relations, part of the COST-financed Research Network 'Reducing Old-Age Exclusion: Collaborations in Research and Policy'(ROSENet). (2020). A critical review and development of a conceptual model of exclusion from social relations for older people. *European journal of ageing*, *17*(1), 3-19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-019-00506-0

Deloitte. (2019). *The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019.*

Eccleston, C., Fisher, E., Howard, R. F., Slater, R., Forgeron, P., Palermo, T. M., Birnie, K. A., Anderson, B. J., Chambers, C. T., & Crombez, G. (2021). Delivering transformative action in paediatric pain: A Lancet Child & Adolescent Health Commission. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, 5*(1), 47–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30346-1

George, A. S., Baskar, T., & Srikaanth, P. B. (2024). Bridging the generational divide: Fostering intergenerational collaboration and innovation in the modern workplace. *Partners Universal International Innovation Journal, 2*(3), 198–217.

Goldstone, J. A. (2016). *Revolution and rebellion in the early modern world: Population change and state breakdown in England, France, Turkey, and China, 1600–1850.* Routledge.

Inglehart, R. (2020). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies.* Princeton University Press.

Kim, H., & Lee, J. (2021). Intergenerational empathy and the reduction of ageism in multicultural workplaces: Evidence from South Korea. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 24*(3), 456–472. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12451

Levy, S. R., & Apriceno, M. (2019). *Ageing: The role of ageism.*

McKinsey & Company. (2021). *The COVID-19 crisis and the future of work: A Generation Z perspective.*

Nastiti, Rr. Tur. (2025, June 13). *Cultural talk show: Overcoming intergenerational stigma through empathetic and effective interpersonal communication* [Lecture]. Faculty of Economics and Business, Gajah Mada University.

Ng, E. S., & Feldman, D. C. (2019). Ageism in the workplace: A review and synthesis. In Q. M. Roberson (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of diversity and work* (pp. 1–24). Oxford University Press.

Pew Research Center. (2015). *The whys and hows of generations research.*

Purnama, S. A., Azzahra, D., & Priyono, B. (2023). The role of Generation Z and Millennials towards MSMEs in Indonesia. In *BISTIC Business Innovation Sustainability and Technology International Conference (BISTIC 2023)* (pp. 56–64). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-284-2_8

Richta, R. (2018). *Civilization at the crossroads: Social and human implications of the scientific and technological revolution.* Routledge.

Roblek, V., Mesko, M., Dimovski, V., & Peterlin, J. (2019). Smart technologies as social

.

innovation and complex social issues of the Z generation. *Kybernetes, 48*(1), 91–107. https://doi.org/10.1108/K-09-2017-0356

Rupčić, N. (2018). Intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer: Challenges and opportunities. *The Learning Organization, 25*(2), 135–142. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2017-0119

Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filipczak, B. (2021). *Generations at work: Managing the clash of Boomers, Gen Xers, and Gen Yers in the workplace* (3rd ed.). AMACOM.

Zubareva, S. (2020). Socio-cultural identity of the digital generation in the 21st century: Cultural and philosophical analysis. In *Integrating Engineering Education and Humanities for Global Intercultural Perspectives* (pp. 960–968). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47415-7_101