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## COMPARISON OF GENERATION Z LEADERSHIP STYLES IN MAKASSAR AND SURABAYA: A CONTEXTUAL STUDY IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION



**Pingkan Ardha Rheswari<sup>1</sup>**  
Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia  
[pingkan.ardhana.rheswari-2022@feb.unair.ac.id](mailto:pingkan.ardhana.rheswari-2022@feb.unair.ac.id)

**Habiburrochman<sup>2</sup>**  
Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia  
[habib@feb.unair.ac.id](mailto:habib@feb.unair.ac.id)

**Akhmad Akram Hirman<sup>3</sup>**  
Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Pelita Buana, Makassar, Indonesia  
[akramhirman16@gmail.com](mailto:akramhirman16@gmail.com)

**Wiwik Supratiwi<sup>4</sup>**  
Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia  
[wiwik\\_s@feb.unair.ac.id](mailto:wiwik_s@feb.unair.ac.id)

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### Abstract

This study explores the leadership styles of Generation Z professionals in the accounting and finance sector in two major Indonesian cities, Makassar and Surabaya. Using a qualitative approach with thematic analysis, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten informants, including accounting staff, tax consultants, and auditors. The findings reveal that Generation Z leaders in both contexts demonstrate democratic, participatory, and situational leadership styles characterized by openness, collaborative decision-making, and the integration of digital technology into workplace practices. Despite cultural differences between Makassar and Surabaya, consistent leadership patterns emerged, particularly in valuing fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in financial reporting and team management. The study contributes to the growing literature on intergenerational leadership by offering insights into how Generation Z's digital orientation and collaborative values shape organizational practices. Practically, the results highlight the importance of organizations to foster inclusive work environments, leverage technology, and encourage active participation from younger professionals. The research also identifies limitations related to sample scope and cultural depth, suggesting opportunities for broader, cross-sectoral, and cross-cultural studies in the future.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Leadership Style, Accounting Profession, Democratic Leadership, Indonesia



## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors in organizational life is leadership (Faturahman, 2018). The success or failure of an organization greatly depends on the role of the leader (Hardian & Hermawan, 2022). The role of leaders has a significant influence on the leadership style employed in companies, aiming to create a productive work environment, encourage collaboration among teams, and optimize the achievement of goals. Leadership style refers to a person's ability to lead, influence, encourage, and motivate others or subordinates, enabling them to carry out tasks effectively and achieve the desired results (Hasnawati, 2021).

The development of the times has brought significant changes in leadership styles, with inclusive and collaborative styles becoming increasingly valued. Leaders who can listen, motivate, and encourage team member participation, while also being prepared to adapt to change, are often considered effective leaders (Syafitri, 2021). One of the main factors influencing this change is the shift from the boomer generation to Generation Z in the present day.

Generation Z, born between 1995 and the early 2010s, has led to a shift in leadership styles from an authoritarian model to a more democratic and participatory one (Dewi, 2023). Additionally, differences in organizational culture between regions in Indonesia contribute to variations in leadership styles and decision-making practices. For example, Makassar and Surabaya have different social and cultural characteristics that can influence the way teams work and leaders make decisions.

The leadership style characteristics of Generation Z, especially in Makassar, tend to emphasize openness, honest communication, and collaboration (Tenlima et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Generation Z in Surabaya is known for its adaptive, flexible, and socially impact-oriented leadership style (Leuwol, 2023). This phenomenon shows that modern organizational structures present new dynamics in leadership practices. Generation Z not only prioritizes efficiency and technology but also demands transparency, fairness, and collective involvement in the decision-making process. In various major cities such as Makassar and Surabaya, cultural differences also shape variations in the implementation of these leadership styles.

Based on previous research, Generation Z's leadership style tends to be integrated with technology, flexible, performance-oriented, but less able to maintain boundaries, less resilient, and vocal (Tenlima et al., 2023). Meanwhile, according to Hirman (2024), their leadership style primarily employs a democratic and situational approach. Generation Z also emphasizes equal rights, affirmation, open communication, involvement, and always prioritizes innovation, technology, and creativity in building organizational and team sustainability (Agustriyana & Faritzal, 2024). Therefore, this new research examines the leadership style of Generation Z in Indonesia in greater depth, specifically comparing the two major cities of Makassar and Surabaya. The purpose of this study is to identify the differences and similarities in Generation Z leadership styles, despite their two different cultural perspectives, in terms of communication methods, values, and decision-making approaches applied in each region, as well as to understand the perspectives and leadership styles of Generation Z in teams or organizations within companies.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Leadership Styles**

Leadership is broadly understood as the process of influencing and guiding the activities of individuals or groups toward the achievement of organizational goals (Jacob & Jacques, 2008; Trang, 2013). It is not only the ability to direct but also to inspire, motivate, and encourage voluntary cooperation (Hasnawati, 2021). Scholars have proposed various classifications of leadership, including authoritarian, democratic, bureaucratic, participative, delegative (*laissez-faire*), transactional, transformational, and servant leadership (Hasnawati, 2021). Each style reflects different approaches to decision-making, authority distribution, and the leader-subordinate relationship. For instance, authoritarian leaders centralize power and decision-making, while democratic and participative leaders encourage collaboration and subordinate involvement. Transformational and servant leadership styles, meanwhile, emphasize inspiration, moral integrity, and long-term development of followers.

### **Generation Z**

Generation Z, often defined as individuals born between 1995/1998 and the early 2010s, represents the first cohort of true digital natives (Andriyanty, 2024; Wibowo & Ayuningtyas, 2024). They have grown up with pervasive technology, making them highly proficient in digital communication and adaptive to technological change. Beyond their digital fluency, Generation Z is also characterized by social consciousness, inclusivity, and a preference for open dialogue (Hirman, 2024). They value independence, flexibility, and experiential learning while displaying entrepreneurial and collaborative tendencies (Arum et al., 2023).

### **Leadership Styles of Generation Z**

Emerging research suggests that Generation Z leaders are inclined toward participatory and democratic approaches that prioritize fairness, transparency, and innovation (Dewi et al., 2023; Tenlima & Hardiman, 2023). They are also described as situational leaders who adapt their style depending on organizational needs (Hirman, 2024). Importantly, this generation integrates technology into leadership practices, using digital platforms to enhance communication, decision-making, and team collaboration (Agustriyana & Faritzal, 2024). Regional and cultural contexts, however, continue to influence the manifestation of these traits. For example, urban centers such as Makassar and Surabaya differ in cultural norms and organizational practices, potentially shaping how Gen Z leaders behave in professional settings (Leuwol et al., 2023).

### **Synthesis**

From the literature, it is evident that Generation Z brings distinct values and practices into leadership, particularly in leveraging technology, promoting inclusivity, and emphasizing fairness in decision-making. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these tendencies manifest across different cultural and professional contexts within Indonesia. This study addresses that gap by comparing the leadership styles of Generation Z in Makassar and Surabaya, focusing on the accounting and finance professions.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research design with a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is well-suited to exploring lived experiences and uncovering patterns in leadership practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten informants, comprising accounting staff, tax consultants, and auditors from companies in Makassar and Surabaya. Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed profiles of the informants.

### Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility in exploring informants' perspectives while maintaining a consistent focus on the research questions (Asfi, 2017). Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each and were conducted both online (via Zoom) and face-to-face in informal settings such as cafés to create a more comfortable environment for participants. Questions focused on leadership behaviors in financial reporting, decision-making, conflict management, and fairness. Ethical considerations were observed by anonymizing names and ensuring that participants gave informed consent.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) seven-step process:

1. Familiarization – Reading transcripts multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding.
2. Coding – Identifying key statements and labeling them with codes (e.g., team participation, use of technology, fairness in decisions, Collaboration in conflict).
3. Theme Development – Grouping related codes into broader themes such as participatory leadership, conflict resolution, and technology integration.
4. Reviewing Themes – Ensuring themes accurately reflected the dataset and research objectives.
5. Defining and Naming Themes – Refining themes to provide clear conceptual meaning.
6. Narrative Construction – Developing thematic descriptions supported by direct quotations from informants.
7. Reporting – Presenting findings in a structured narrative to highlight both commonalities and differences between Makassar and Surabaya.

This rigorous process ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by systematically linking raw data with emerging themes.

The researchers collected detailed data from various sources, including interviews. The data obtained were collected from various sources, including company employees, tax consultants, and public accountants. This study also included an analysis of the types of jobs in the accounting field as listed in Table 1

**Table 1.**  
**Data on Informants Working in Companies Located in Makassar**

No	Name	Position	Main Duties
1	Zainal	Accounting Staff	Manage and prepare financial reports

2	Rindu	Accounting Staff	Recording all company transactions and preparing financial reports
3	Taufiq	Tax Consultant	Providing tax consultation, preparing tax planning, and preparing tax returns
4	Sinta	Auditor	Reviewing financial reports clients
5	Indah	Accounting Staff	Preparing financial statements

Source: Processed Data, 2025

**Table 2.**  
**Data on Informants Working in Companies Located in Surabaya**

No	Name	Position	Main Duties
	Eva	Accounting Staff	Recording all company transactions and preparing financial reports
2	Linda	Tax Consultant	Providing tax consultation, preparing tax returns
3	Nana	Auditor	Preparing audit reports and evaluating Financial Performance
4	Pingkan	Accounting Staff	Preparing Financial Reports
5	Tika	Tax Consultant	Providing tax consultation, preparing tax planning,

Source: Processed Data, 2025

The method used in this study was semi-structured interviews, in which the interviewer asked a series of questions to the respondents to achieve the research objectives (Asfi, 2017). Semi-structured interviews aim to explore information in depth while still providing flexibility for both researchers and respondents. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, with questions related to office work aimed at assessing factors such as pressure, opportunities, rationalization, and religiosity to prevent fraud in financial reporting within the workplace. The interview process was conducted via Zoom (online) and also included face-to-face interviews at a cafe near the company, which aimed to make the sources feel more comfortable and at ease.

The names listed in this report have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the sources for the benefit of both parties. The interview process was carried out to obtain accurate information from reliable sources. The qualitative approach allowed researchers to

explore individual views and experiences related to the research and topics discussed in this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Team Involvement in Financial Reporting**

Interviews revealed that Generation Z professionals in both Makassar and Surabaya highly value team participation in preparing financial reports. In Makassar, informants emphasized the use of collaborative software and transparency, treating technology as a learning tool for all team members. Surabaya participants, in contrast, highlighted structured discussions—both formal and informal—that encouraged active input but with attention to efficiency and accuracy. These findings demonstrate that while both groups value inclusivity, Surabaya leaders tend to be more results-oriented, integrating technology not only for collaboration but also for performance optimization.

This aligns with the results of interviews conducted with several sources working in Makassar.

"In the decision-making process, I invite all team members to participate by asking general questions. If there are opinions, I ask other members to provide different perspectives. When preparing reports, I involve the team by using special software connected to a computer, so that we can directly access the accounting application to enter transactions and learn together" (N1/Z, Data 1). "Each member is given tasks according to their abilities and workload" (N3/T, Data 9).

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Makassar, tends to involve teams in decision-making, particularly in the preparation of financial reports, by utilizing advanced technology to keep up with the latest developments. These results are also reinforced by interviews with several sources working in Surabaya:

"I invite the team to be involved from the start by providing a space for discussion and gathering ideas, actively involving them but still considering other opinions before a final decision is made, especially in terms of technology-based accounting reporting that allows us to speed up the process and improve the accuracy of the data presented." (N3/N, Data 7).

"I created an open discussion space, both formal and informal, to convey the issues faced and ask for input from the team. I gave them opportunities without coercion and helped them feel involved with questions so that they felt they had contributed but still felt safe and unpressured" (N4/P, Data 10)

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Surabaya, tends to value open discussion and active participation in decision-making. They want to be allowed to express their opinions without pressure. At work, especially in technology-based accounting and reporting, they prioritize efficiency and accuracy through the use of technology.

Based on the findings in this study, Generation Z tends to value open discussion, active participation, and the opportunity to express their opinions without pressure. Additionally, they utilize technology to enhance efficiency and accuracy, particularly in financial reporting. Although this study analyzed not only one major city, but two major cities with different local cultures, these findings remain relevant in line with Hirman's (2024) research, which states that Generation Z's leadership style is democratic and transactional, where leadership emphasizes participation, collaboration, and employee involvement in

decision-making, as well as rewarding employees when they successfully carry out agreed-upon tasks.

### **Conflict Management in Teams**

Conflict resolution practices among Generation Z showed strong similarities across both cities. Makassar informants reported beginning with root-cause analysis and encouraging open communication, often involving mediators to ensure fairness. Surabaya respondents demonstrated a more facilitative approach, focusing on mediating diverse viewpoints, identifying compromises, and balancing risks and benefits for the collective good. These approaches align with democratic and situational leadership traits, suggesting that Gen Z prioritizes dialogue, empathy, and consensus in resolving workplace disputes.

"First of all, I focus on finding the root cause of the problem before taking the next step. This needs to be communicated openly so that team members feel comfortable discussing the issues that arise. Conflicts are resolved together with the involvement of a mediator, such as a top manager" (N2/R, Data 7).

"If there are differences of opinion within the team, I will ask them to explain the reasons behind their opinions. After listening, I will look for similarities, even if they are small, and then give my opinion on solutions that can overcome these differences" (N5/S, Data 11).

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Makassar, tends to handle conflicts within the team by starting with finding the root cause of the problem and encouraging open communication. If there are differences of opinion, the next step is to ask each member for their reasons, find common ground, and provide solutions to unite their opinions. These results are also reinforced by interviews with several sources working in Surabaya:

In this case, the most I can do as a mediator is to listen to each party's opinion, find the best solution, and convey the common ground between the differences of opinion, as well as appreciate individual thoughts by explaining in detail the risks and benefits of the opinions taken for the common good" (N2/L, Data 5). "Discussing views among members to find a suitable middle ground in terms of decision making" (N5/T, Data 14).

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Surabaya, tends to use a collaborative and communicative approach in handling team conflicts. This approach focuses on listening to the views of all parties, finding a suitable compromise, and providing solutions that consider mutual interests in order to achieve mutually beneficial decisions and effectively mediate differences of opinion.

Based on the findings of this study, Generation Z employs a collaborative and communicative approach to managing team conflicts, beginning with identifying the root of the problem, listening to the views of all parties, and seeking mutually beneficial solutions to effectively reconcile differing opinions. Although this study analyzes two major cities with different local cultures, the findings remain relevant. This aligns with Hirman's (2024) research, which suggests that a democratic and situational approach characterizes Generation Z's leadership style in handling team conflicts. This leadership style emphasizes participation, collaboration, and the involvement of subordinates in decision-making, as well as adaptation to different needs and conditions in each situation.

### **Fairness and Common Interests**

Fairness emerged as a central value in decision-making for participants in both contexts. Makassar informants underscored the importance of avoiding biased decisions and ensuring outcomes reflected the collective agreement. In Surabaya, leaders applied more structured methods—using objective criteria, data-driven analysis, and transparent communication—to secure fairness and trust. Despite slight differences in approach, both groups shared a strong commitment to equity and inclusivity, reflecting Gen Z's broader emphasis on justice and social responsibility in organizational contexts.

This aligns with the results of interviews conducted in Makassar.

"Justice and common interests are always prioritized in decision-making. If a decision is considered burdensome to one party, then it should be discussed again so that common goals can be achieved" (N4/I, Data 14).

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Makassar, tends to prioritize the principle of fairness in decision-making related to justice and shared interests, where decisions are not biased but based on mutual agreement to achieve common goals. These results are also reinforced by interviews with several sources working in Surabaya.

"I ensure that decisions are fair and take into account the interests of all parties by involving them in the decision-making process, establishing objective criteria, and analyzing the impact. Decisions are communicated transparently to build trust, and after implementation, I monitor the impact and seek feedback to ensure the fairness and effectiveness of the decision" (N1/E, Data 3)

"Before making a decision, I always consider its impact on all parties involved, strive to be objective, and avoid bias. By involving the team in the process and basing decisions on data and logic, I ensure that the results are fair and beneficial to all parties" (N4/P, Data 12).

Based on the interview results, Generation Z, especially in Surabaya, tends to prioritize fairness and shared interests when making objective decisions that involve all parties. These decisions are communicated transparently to foster trust and ensure fairness and effectiveness for all parties involved.

Based on the findings of this study, Generation Z prioritizes the principle of fairness in decision-making related to justice and shared interests by involving all parties concerned, ensuring that decisions are objective and based on mutual agreement, and communicated transparently. Although this study analyzed two large cities with different local cultures, the findings remain relevant. This aligns with Hirman's (2024) research, which suggests that Generation Z's leadership style, in terms of fairness and common interests, is characterized by a democratic and participatory approach. This leadership style emphasizes participation, collaboration, and the involvement of subordinates in decision-making. Furthermore, in a participatory leadership style, ideas can flow from below (members) because control over problem-solving and decision-making is held alternately.

### **Integration of Technology in Leadership**

Technology played a critical role in shaping leadership styles in both cities. In Makassar, technology was framed as a tool for transparency and collective learning, while in Surabaya, it was leveraged for efficiency, speed, and accuracy in financial reporting. These distinctions suggest that while Makassar leaders see technology as an enabler of inclusivity, Surabaya leaders use it more strategically for productivity and innovation.

### **Comparative Synthesis**

The comparative summary (see Table 3) illustrates the nuanced similarities and differences between Makassar and Surabaya. Both groups demonstrate democratic and participatory leadership traits, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, fairness, and open communication. However, Surabaya leaders appear more transactional and pragmatic, focusing on efficiency and innovation, while Makassar leaders highlight consensus-building and collective fairness. These variations can be linked to contextual cultural influences: Makassar’s emphasis on community values contrasts with Surabaya’s more adaptive, performance-oriented urban environment.

**Table 3.**  
**Leadership Traits of Generation Z in Makassar and Surabaya**  
**(Accounting & Finance Professions)**

Dimension	Makassar (Findings)	Surabaya (Findings)
Team Involvement	Involves team in financial reporting; uses software collaboratively; values transparency	Encourages open discussions (formal & informal); seeks consensus; emphasizes efficiency and accuracy
Conflict Management	Identifies root causes first; open communication; seeks common ground with mediator if needed	Collaborative resolution; mediates opinions; listens to all sides; finds compromises for mutual benefit
Fairness & Decision-Making	Prioritizes fairness and collective goals; avoids biased decisions; seeks agreement	Ensures fairness through objective criteria and data-driven analysis; communicates decisions transparently
Use of Technology	Applies technology in financial reporting and teamwork; sees it as a learning tool	Leverages technology for speed and accuracy; integrates it into decision-making processes
Leadership Style	Democratic and participatory, with situational flexibility; emphasis on collaboration	Democratic, participatory, and transactional; emphasis on efficiency, inclusivity, and innovation
Cultural Influence	Influenced by values of openness and collective decision-making; context-sensitive	Influenced by adaptive, pragmatic, and innovation-oriented practices, socially impactful

Source: research summary (2025)

“As summarized in Table 3, both Makassar and Surabaya informants demonstrated democratic and participatory leadership styles. However, Surabaya leaders emphasized efficiency and innovation more strongly, while Makassar leaders highlighted fairness and consensus-building.

**Discussion in Relation to Previous Studies**

The findings are consistent with Hirman (2024) and Dewi et al. (2023), who argue that Generation Z exhibits democratic and situational leadership characteristics. This study extends prior research by showing how these traits manifest differently across regional and cultural contexts in Indonesia. The results also support Agustriyana and Faritzal (2024),

emphasizing the integration of digital technology in Gen Z leadership, while adding the insight that technology can serve different functions depending on local practices—collaboration in Makassar and efficiency in Surabaya.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the leadership styles of Generation Z in Makassar and Surabaya within the accounting and finance professions, revealing a consistent preference for democratic, participatory, and situational approaches. Regardless of local cultural differences, Generation Z leaders prioritize collaboration, fairness, transparency, and the effective use of technology in decision-making and financial reporting. These findings underscore the adaptability of younger professionals in balancing organizational goals with team inclusivity and social impact.

Theoretically, this research extends leadership literature by demonstrating how cultural context interacts with generational values to shape leadership practices in emerging economies. It also enriches cross-cultural studies by showing that, while regional variations exist, the core principles of Generation Z leadership remain consistent across different urban settings. Practically, the results provide valuable guidance for managers, HR professionals, and policymakers seeking to integrate Gen Z into leadership roles. Encouraging digital adoption, promoting open dialogue, and ensuring fairness in decision-making can strengthen organizational performance and employee engagement.

Nonetheless, the study is limited to a small sample within the accounting and finance sector and does not fully capture the influence of external institutional and cultural factors. Future research should expand to other industries, include larger and more diverse samples, and explore how regulatory environments and global digitalization trends further shape leadership dynamics among Generation Z.

### Limitations and Future Research

#### Limitations

Although this study offers valuable insights into Generation Z leadership styles in the accounting and finance sectors of Makassar and Surabaya, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample of ten informants restricts the generalizability of findings. While qualitative research emphasizes depth over breadth, a larger and more diverse sample could strengthen the robustness of the results. Second, the study focuses exclusively on the accounting and finance profession, which may not fully represent the leadership styles of Generation Z in other industries with different work cultures and organizational dynamics. Third, cultural factors were not systematically analyzed, even though they may significantly influence decision-making and leadership practices in each region. Finally, external factors such as regulatory environments, market pressures, and organizational structures were beyond the scope of this research but could shape leadership behaviors in important ways.

#### Future Research

Future studies should expand the scope across multiple sectors—such as healthcare, education, and technology—to examine whether Generation Z's leadership patterns remain consistent or vary by industry. Comparative studies involving rural and urban contexts, or different regions of Indonesia, could also reveal how local culture shapes leadership practices more explicitly. Moreover, integrating quantitative methods, such as surveys or mixed-methods designs, would allow broader generalization while maintaining the depth of qualitative insights. Another promising avenue is exploring how external drivers, such as government regulations, globalization, and digital transformation, further

influence the leadership dynamics of Generation Z. Longitudinal research could also capture how these leadership styles evolve as Gen Z professionals advance into senior management roles.

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