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## Implications of Principals' Transformational Leadership on the Work Motivation of Generation Z Teachers at SDN 2 Senawar

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of principals' transformational leadership in improving the work motivation of Generation Z teachers at SDN 2 Senawar. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal and twelve Generation Z teachers, supported by observation and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the principal applies transformational leadership through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These practices contribute positively to enhancing teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, sense of belonging, and performance. The use of technology, open communication, and constructive feedback are key factors in strengthening intrinsic motivation. The study concludes that adaptive and collaborative transformational leadership is effective in addressing the characteristics and needs of Generation Z teachers in elementary schools.

## 1. Introduction

The changing characteristics of human resources in education are a consequence of technological developments and increasingly complex social dynamics. The entry of Generation Z teachers into the school workplace brings new challenges and opportunities for educational organizations. Generation Z is known to be adaptable to digital technology, open to change, communicative, and has a high need for collaboration, recognition, and participation in decision-making (Stillman & Stillman, 2018). These characteristics demand a more flexible and adaptive leadership approach than traditional hierarchical leadership styles.

In the context of elementary education, principals play a strategic role in managing the diverse characteristics of teachers across generations. Overly bureaucratic and control-oriented leadership tends to be less effective in responding to the needs of Generation Z teachers, who value autonomy, trust, and two-way communication. Hardiman et al. (2025) emphasized that school principals play a strategic role not only as administrators, but also as learning leaders who shape school culture, teacher professionalism, and learning quality through participatory and adaptive leadership practices. Therefore, transformational leadership is considered relevant because it emphasizes role modeling, inspiration, empowerment, intellectual stimulation, and attention to the individual development of organizational members (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Various studies have shown that a principal's transformational leadership positively influences teacher motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasized that transformational leadership can create a work environment that supports teacher innovation and professional development. Kamalia et al. (2022) emphasized that principal leadership significantly influences teacher motivation, work discipline, and performance, especially when implementing leadership practices that limit empowerment, supervision, and professional support. From a work motivation perspective, Generation Z teachers' needs for appreciation, recognition, and development opportunities align with Maslow's theory of needs, which places self-actualization at the pinnacle of individual needs (Maslow, 1954) and Herzberg's two-factor theory, which emphasizes the role of motivating factors such as recognition, responsibility, and self-development in enhancing job satisfaction and performance (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Theoretically, this study utilizes Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership theory as the primary grand theory. Four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration formed the basis for developing interview questions to explore principals' leadership practices. To understand and analyze the work motivation of Generation Z teachers, this study is supported by Maslow's theory of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory, which serve as conceptual frameworks for interpreting need fulfillment, job satisfaction, and motivator and hygiene factors. Meanwhile, the characteristics of Generation Z teachers are understood using Strauss and Howe's generational theory, which emphasizes the importance of the generational context in shaping individual attitudes, values, and work behaviors within an organization.

However, empirical studies specifically linking principals' transformational leadership to Generation Z teacher work motivation, particularly at the elementary school level, are still relatively limited. Most educational leadership research remains general in nature and has not explicitly integrated the dimensions of transformational leadership, work motivation theory, and generational perspectives into a single analytical framework. Yet, differences in generational characteristics have the potential to influence leadership effectiveness, work climate, and teacher performance in schools. Based on these conditions, this study aims to explore the

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implementation of principals' transformational leadership in improving Generation Z teacher work motivation and to identify the principal's strategies for managing cross-generational leadership challenges at SDN 2 Senawar.

The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions through the integration of transformational leadership theory, work motivation theory, and generational theory, as well as practical contributions for school principals in designing leadership strategies that are adaptive, participatory, and relevant to the dynamics of contemporary education. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of transformational leadership, work motivation theory, and generational perspectives in the context of Generation Z teachers at the elementary school level, an area rarely comprehensively examined in previous research.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to deeply understand the implications of the principal's transformational leadership in improving the work motivation of Generation Z teachers by uncovering the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of informants within the school environment. This research was conducted at SDN 2 Senawar, considering that the school has Generation Z teachers and is led by a principal who implements a transformational leadership style. The study was conducted in December 2025. Research informants were determined using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The principal was the primary informant, while supporting informants consisted of 12 Generation Z teachers.

Data collection was conducted through several techniques: structured interviews with the principal and Generation Z teachers, observations of the principal's interactions with teachers and the work situation within the school environment, and documentation studies in the form of school program documents, task distribution, and teacher development documents. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques. This study used Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership theory as the main theory. Four dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) were used as the basis for developing interview questions. To measure the work motivation of Generation Z teachers, this study was supported by Maslow's theory of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory. The characteristics of Generation Z were understood using Strauss and Howe's generational theory.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### ***Results***

#### ***Implementation of Transformational Leadership***

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### **a. Idealized Influence**

The findings show that the principal's credibility and role modeling play a crucial role in building teachers' trust and motivation. The principal stated that he exemplifies leadership through consistency between words and actions, honest and open communication, and fair and transparent enforcement of rules. He also expressed appreciation for good performance and the courage to take responsibility for every decision. Most teachers confirmed this perception, assessing the principal's leadership as professional, participatory, democratic, and adaptive. G1 stated that *"the principal is able to direct tasks clearly, establish effective communication, and provide ongoing support"*. G4 added that the principal is *"firm yet humane, able to organize teachers' tasks well and support professional development."* G11 provided a unique perspective on the principal's objectivity as a conflict mediator who is *"neutral and impartial, redirecting students' interests to the school's vision and mission."* However, G5 expressed a different view, stating that the leadership style *"still uses outdated methods, not up to date with current leadership styles."*

### **b. Inspirational Motivation**

The findings indicate that the principal builds a shared vision through open and participatory communication, involving teachers in program planning, decision-making, and developing learning innovations. He also facilitates a space for expression, particularly in the use of technology. Appreciation and trust were the dominant motivating factors cited by majority of teachers. G2 stated, *"the principal gives me full trust to carry out teaching in the classroom, so I carry it out with enthusiasm and responsibility."* G4 emphasized that *"appreciation for teacher performance, both verbal and written, and trust in carrying out my duties make me feel valued and motivated."* Open communication and caring were also important themes. G6 stated that *"the principal's openness to suggestions and willingness to listen to challenges makes teachers feel valued and involved."* Modeling discipline and integrity was also cited as a source of motivation (G6, G11).

### **c. Intellectual Stimulation**

The findings highlight that the principal provides space for innovation through open discussion forums, involves teachers in program development, and gives them the trust to try creative ideas in learning with support, mentoring, and appreciation. All participants confirmed that there is ample room for innovation. *"The principal is very open to new ideas and allows me to try them"* (G2). Support for implementation is concrete, not just verbal. *"When we proposed the project-based learning method, the principal fully supported it, provided facilities, and encouraged other teachers to try it"* (G7). Autonomy in developing creative teaching modules was also granted. *"Teachers are given autonomy to develop creative teaching modules tailored to student characteristics, with the principal acting as a mentor and providing constructive feedback"* (G10). Examples of concrete innovations include project-based learning (G1, G4, G6, G7, G8), the use of technology and digital media (G8, G9, G10), and creative learning methods (G1, G4, G6).

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#### **d. Individualized Consideration**

The findings reveal that the principal provides personalized attention through open communication, individual mentoring, and constructive feedback tailored to each teacher's needs, so they feel valued, supported, and develop professionally. Open communication and active listening were mentioned by majority of teachers. *"The principal is willing to take the time to listen to the challenges teachers face, both related to teaching and administration"* (G1, G4). Personal guidance is also provided collaboratively. *"The principal actively listens to challenges in the classroom and helps find solutions collaboratively"* (G2). Empathy for teachers' personal circumstances was also demonstrated. *"The principal pays attention to teachers' personal circumstances and needs, providing flexibility in certain situations without compromising professionalism"* (G6). Informal appreciation through daily interactions such as asking about teachers' news, classroom conditions, or challenges faced also demonstrates personal attention (G9). A constructive supervisory approach was highlighted by G11, *"Classroom observations are conducted not to find fault, but to provide constructive feedback"*.

#### **Work Motivation of Generation Z Teachers**

##### **a. Fulfillment of Needs (Maslow)**

School principals identified that Generation Z teachers require four key elements: trust, appreciation, space for innovation, and clear guidance to increase work motivation. Regarding primary motivation, the majority of teachers cited student development as a primary intrinsic motivator. *"The most motivating factor is seeing students' development and success, both academically and in character"* (G1, G4, G6, G8). G11 added, *"There's a special inner satisfaction in seeing students who previously struggled understand"*. A supportive, positive work environment was also a crucial factor. *"Support from the principal and fellow teachers, good communication, harmonious cooperation, and appreciation for performance make me feel valued and motivated"* (G1, G4). G10 emphasized *"support and trust from leadership, as well as a conducive and mutually supportive work environment"*. Opportunities for growth and innovation were also mentioned. *"Appreciation from the principal, support from fellow teachers, opportunities to participate in training, and opportunities to develop creative learning methods"* (G9).

##### **b. Herzberg's Motivating Factors**

The principal uses recognition and reward strategies, including open praise (verbal and written), positive feedback, training opportunities, involvement in innovation projects, and strategic role assignments to motivate and improve the performance of Generation Z teachers. Recognition and appreciation for performance are key motivating factors. All teachers feel valued and acknowledged by the principal. *"The principal expresses appreciation through words of thanks, trust, and support for learning activities, as well as constructive feedback"* (G1, G4). Recognition takes various forms, including verbal appreciation in meetings (G1, G4, G8), trust in strategic responsibilities (G6, G10), and support for professional development (G7, G9). *"Recognition is no longer just a formality, but is manifested through concrete actions such as the freedom to design learning projects based on student interests"* (G9). G11 highlighted the principal's responsiveness: *"The principal*

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*always responds positively to the innovative ideas I propose and provides full support in the form of facilities and permission for personal development".* Job satisfaction and organizational commitment were also high. *"Firm but open leadership, good communication, and respect for teachers make me feel comfortable and feel a sense of belonging to the school"* (G1, G4, G6). G10 added that *"open and democratic leadership creates a harmonious atmosphere, and support and trust foster a sense of belonging, thus increasing work enthusiasm."*

### **Characteristics and Needs of Generation Z Teachers**

#### **a. Dominant Characteristics**

School principals stated that Generation Z teachers are characterized by being adaptable to technology, open to change, creative, and communicative, and require greater collaboration and recognition than previous generations. Generation Z teachers exhibited characteristics of being adaptable to technology, open to change, creative, and requiring collaboration and recognition. The majority of teachers (11 out of 12 teachers) expected leadership to be open, communicative, and supportive. *"Generation Z teachers value leaders who listen to ideas, provide space for innovation, and are open to the use of technology"* (G1, G4). Key leadership expectations included transparent two-way communication (G1, G6, G8), opportunities for innovation (all teachers), recognition for performance and constructive feedback (G8, G10), and support for professional development (G1, G4, G6, G9). G2 emphasized the need for *"adaptive, supportive, and modern leaders who value technological expertise and care about mental health"*. G11 added the need for *"technology-adaptive leaders who support innovation and minimize the burden of manual administration."*

#### **b. The Role of Technology, Communication, and Feedback**

The principal explained that the use of technology as a means of communication, performance monitoring, and learning, along with providing prompt, clear, and constructive feedback, significantly improves the performance of Generation Z teachers. All teachers stated that technology, communication, and feedback from the principal significantly influence work motivation. *"The use of technology helps make work more effective and efficient, open communication allows teachers to understand the direction of their work well, and constructive feedback fosters a spirit of development"* (G1, G4). Technology is utilized for fast and efficient coordination. *"The principal utilizes WhatsApp groups or other digital media to convey information quickly and clearly"* (G6). Open communication creates a sense of security. *"Effective interpersonal communication creates a sense of security and togetherness"* (G7). Specific and constructive feedback is highly appreciated. *"Specific feedback after class supervision motivates me to continue improving because I know my strengths and weaknesses"* (G11).

#### **c. Effective Leadership Styles**

The principal emphasized that the leadership style implemented is open, collaborative, and communicative, providing space for active participation for Generation Z teachers, although they still face challenges in aligning expectations, maintaining consistent discipline, and managing differences in perspectives

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between generations. The majority of teachers (11 out of 12 teachers) stated that democratic, participatory, and transformational leadership styles are most effective. *"Leadership that is open, adaptable to technological developments, provides clear direction, and includes constructive feedback, making Generation Z teachers feel valued and motivated to perform at their best"* (G1, G4). G2 emphasized the importance of *"leaders who are able to humanize them and support flexible career growth"*. G11 explained a preference for *"mentor-collaborative leadership, where the leader acts as a mentor who guides, is inclusive, adaptable to technology, and values work efficiency"*. G8 added that *"transparent, technology-savvy, and empathetic leadership are key to securing loyalty and spurring creativity in Generation Z teachers"*.

### ***The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Generation Z Teacher Motivation***

#### **a. Professional Development Programs**

The principal explained that the implemented programs include ongoing training, mentoring, and the involvement of Generation Z teachers in innovation and school development projects tailored to each teacher's individual potential. The most beneficial programs, according to teachers, were training and ongoing professional development. All teachers cited training, workshops, and learning community activities as key programs. *"Providing opportunities to participate in training, workshops, seminars, and KKG/MGMP helps broaden my knowledge and improve my pedagogical competency"* (G1, G4, G6, G8). Support for innovation is also crucial. *"Policies that encourage teachers to innovate in their teaching methods help me explore my potential"* (G7). G2 highlighted *"granting autonomy to innovate in the classroom and full support for participation in the Teacher Mover Program"*. G12 provided a unique perspective on *"a learning community where teachers share stories and provide feedback on classroom issues"*.

#### **b. Adapting Leadership Style**

The principals conveyed that challenges in managing Generation Z teachers are addressed through a communicative and collaborative approach, setting clear work targets, providing targeted mentoring, and utilizing technology to maintain work effectiveness and a results-oriented approach. The majority of teachers stated that the principal adapts his leadership style to the characteristics of Generation Z through an open, communicative, and flexible approach. *"The principal provides space for expressing ideas, utilizes technology in communication, and provides prompt and constructive feedback"* (G1, G4). G2 provided a concrete example: *"The principal gives me full trust to manage the school's social media and implement digital learning"*. G6 added that *"the principal creates a collaborative and professional yet relaxed work environment"*. However, G5 offered a different perspective: *"I've never been led by a principal whose leadership style meets the needs of Generation Z teachers"*. G11 highlighted the communication aspect: *"The principal establishes a more fluid and relaxed communication style, positioning himself not only as a superior but also as a discussion partner, which perfectly suits the needs of Gen Z, who are more comfortable with two-way dialogue"*.

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### **c. Impact on Motivation, Satisfaction, and Performance**

The principal emphasized that transformational leadership has a positive impact on increasing the motivation, sense of belonging, and performance of Generation Z teachers because they feel valued, involved in decision-making, and encouraged to continuously develop and innovate. All teachers stated that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. *"The principal is able to provide a clear vision, moral support, and trust to develop innovation, which increases motivation and a sense of belonging to the school"* (G1, G4). Examples of concrete impacts include improving the quality of learning. *"Through coaching supervision, the principal helps teachers improve the quality of learning, which has a direct impact on improved performance"* (G1, G4). G7 added that transformational leadership *"shifts teachers' perspective from simply 'working to earn a living' to 'carrying out the educational mission,' which fosters intrinsic motivation"*. G2 stated that *"the principal doesn't just give orders, but acts as an inspiring role model"*. G11 emphasized that *"leadership that provides space for innovation makes me feel valued as a professional, which encourages me to have a high commitment to maintaining the quality of teaching"*.

## **Discussion**

### ***Transformational Leadership as a Motivational Catalyst for Generation Z Teachers***

The findings indicate that transformational leadership is consistently implemented and perceived positively by teachers. This is reflected in the principal's practices across the four main dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The alignment between the principal's leadership practices and teachers' experiences suggests that transformational leadership is not only conceptual but also practically applied in the school context. A high level of consistency between the perceptions of the principal and teachers indicates that leadership practices are not merely normative but are actually experienced by Generation Z teachers. This finding supports the research of Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), which stated that the principal's transformational leadership significantly influences teacher motivation, commitment, and performance quality. In the context of Generation Z, this influence becomes even more relevant because the characteristics of this generation demand authentic, open, and participatory leadership.

### ***Idealized Influence and Leadership Credibility***

The findings show that the principal's credibility and role modeling play a crucial role in building teachers' trust and motivation. The principal's exemplary behavior through consistency between words and actions, integrity, and fairness in decision-making strengthens trust and legitimacy in leadership. The majority of teachers perceive principals as professional, democratic, and humanistic figures, which aligns with the concept of moral modeling in transformational leadership (Stillman & Stillman, 2018). This belief is an important foundation for Generation Z, who, according to Stillman (2018), tend to be critical of symbolic authority and value

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authentic and responsible leaders. However, the emergence of a minority view from the G5 that leadership is still "using old methods" indicates an expectation gap that needs to be addressed. This confirms that although transformational leadership has been generally effective, adapting to the individual preferences of Generation Z remains an ongoing challenge.

### ***Intellectual Stimulation as a Dominant Dimension in the Context of Generation Z***

The findings highlight that intellectual stimulation emerges as a dominant dimension in supporting innovation and creativity among Generation Z teachers. The intellectual stimulation dimension demonstrates a perfect context, making it a key strength of principal leadership. Principals not only create space for innovation but also provide concrete support in the form of facilities, mentoring, and legitimacy for learning experiments. This finding aligns with Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) theory of knowledge creation, where effective organizations encourage the conversion of individual knowledge into collective knowledge through dialogue, reflection, and shared practice. The findings of Basuki et al. (2025) also indicate that principals who actively encourage innovation and provide ongoing professional support play a crucial role in enhancing teacher professionalism and improving school quality. Generation Z teachers, as digital natives, respond very positively to work environments that enable the exploration of ideas, project-based learning, and the use of technology (Prensky, 2001). Furthermore, these practices also reflect Generation Z's characteristics of being oriented toward meaning, innovation, and social change (Stillman & Stillman, 2018). Thus, transformational leadership that encourages creativity and autonomy has been shown to align with the psychological and professional needs of Generation Z teachers.

### ***Integrating Work Motivation: Maslow and Herzberg's Perspective***

The findings reveal that teachers' motivation is largely driven by intrinsic factors, particularly related to self-actualization and meaningful work. Self-Actualization as a Primary Motivator. Research shows that student development and success are the primary intrinsic motivators for most teachers. This finding indicates that Generation Z teachers have reached the self-actualization level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where work meaning and social contribution are primary sources of satisfaction. This reinforces Wahyudi (2018) view that Generation Z prioritizes meaning and impact over purely material rewards. In this context, transformational leadership serves as an enabler that connects the school's vision with teachers' personal values.

**Appreciation and Trust as Motivating Factors.** All teachers identified appreciation and recognition as key motivators, confirming Herzberg's two-factor theory. However, this study expands on Herzberg's theory by showing that for Generation Z, meaningful appreciation must be manifested in the following forms: real trust to assume a strategic role, autonomy in making learning decisions, and specific and real-time feedback. These findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory

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(Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and connectedness as prerequisites for intrinsic motivation.

### ***Technology, Communication, and Feedback as a Medium of Leadership***

The findings emphasize that technology, communication, and feedback function as key instruments in strengthening leadership effectiveness and teacher motivation. This research confirms that technology serves as a medium for leadership, not an end in itself. Utilizing digital platforms for rapid communication, coordination, and feedback creates work efficiency and reduces manual administrative burdens, in line with Generation Z's preferences for speed and clarity. Principals who are able to integrate technology with empathetic interpersonal communication demonstrate a form of adaptive leadership relevant to the digital age. Research findings by Nikmah et al. (2025) also show that the use of digital systems and technology-based communication strategies by school principals increases managerial effectiveness, teacher performance, and professional development. Rapid, specific, and constructive feedback has been shown to increase teachers' motivation and reflective awareness of the quality of their performance.

### ***Transformational-Adaptive Leadership: A Conceptual Model***

Based on the overall findings, this study formulates a transformational-adaptive leadership model for Generation Z teachers, which integrates:

- a. Bass and Avolio dimensions
- b. Maslow and Herzberg's motivational theories
- c. Generation Z characteristics

This model emphasizes that effective leadership for Generation Z must be:

- a. Mentoring collaborative, not hierarchical
- b. Empowering, through trust and autonomy
- c. Digital-aware, utilizing technology for efficiency
- d. Human-centered, through empathy and personal recognition

This model aligns with the concept of empowering leadership (Ahearne et al., 2005), where empowerment increases self-efficacy, commitment, and performance. Yenita and Andriani (2025) stated that principals who strengthen professional learning communities and integrate contextual values into their leadership practices are more effective in encouraging teacher commitment, collaboration, and continuous school improvement. In the context of Generation Z, empowerment must be delivered quickly, collaboratively, and meaningfully to sustainably optimize the potential of this generation.

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that principals' transformational leadership significantly enhances the work motivation, job satisfaction, and performance of Generation Z teachers. The effective implementation of leadership is reflected in adaptive practices, including the use of technology, open communication,

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continuous professional development, and constructive feedback. These approaches align with the characteristics and expectations of Generation Z teachers, who value collaboration, recognition, and autonomy. Although challenges remain in aligning generational differences and maintaining consistent discipline, these can be addressed through a flexible and communicative leadership approach. Overall, transformational leadership proves to be relevant and effective in supporting teacher motivation and improving educational quality in elementary schools.

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