

## Social Adaptation of Generation Z in Multicultural Workplaces: Evidence from the TIDAYU Context of West Kalimantan

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Generation Z has become a dominant workforce cohort whose expectations for openness, flexibility, and meaningful work often intersect with the multicultural and multigenerational dynamics of local workplaces. This study aims to examine how Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan socially adapt within organizational environments shaped by the interethnic TIDAYU (Dayak–Malay–Chinese) context. Using an exploratory qualitative design, the research involved 18 participants aged 18–28 from the service, retail, education, and MSME sectors in Pontianak, Singkawang, and Ketapang. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, generating 138 codes, 24 subcategories, and three final themes. The findings reveal three dominant adaptation patterns: communication adjustment, learning from senior workers, and seeking clarity and meaning in work. Organizational factors—particularly open leadership and flexible work structures significantly facilitate adaptation, while authoritarian leadership and rigid structures hinder it. Peer support emerged as the strongest community factor that accelerates Gen Z's social adjustment, supported by multicultural workplace values that foster acceptance and comfort. The study concludes that Gen Z's adaptation is an interactive, context-dependent process shaped by personal strategies, organizational culture, and the social dynamics of TIDAYU communities. These insights emphasize that successful adaptation occurs when organizational values align with generational needs and local cultural norms. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of adopting inclusive leadership, establishing flexible work systems, and strengthening cross-generational and cross-cultural engagement to enhance Gen Z integration and workplace harmony in multicultural regions.

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### Public Interest Statement

This study provides crucial insights into how Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan socially adapt to multicultural and multigenerational workplaces. By uncovering their dominant adaptation patterns, such as communication adjustment, learning from senior colleagues, and seeking meaningful work, this research highlights the organizational and community factors that either support or hinder their integration. The findings are valuable for organizations, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to build inclusive, culturally sensitive, and adaptive work environments capable of attracting, empowering, and retaining young talent in socially diverse regions such as West Kalimantan.



## Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z), defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2012, has emerged as a major force in today's workforce and is driving substantial changes in organizational practices through characteristics and expectations that differ markedly from those of previous generations. As digital natives, Gen Z employees have grown up in environments deeply integrated with technology and therefore expect digitalization to be embedded in virtually all work processes (Benítez et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2025). They also place a strong emphasis on flexibility in working hours and locations, viewing such arrangements as essential for maintaining a healthy balance between personal and professional lives (Nugroho et al., 2025; Thomas & Sharma, 2025; Osorio & Madero, 2024; Rotich et al., 2025; Aggarwal et al., 2020). In addition, Gen Z seeks meaningful work that aligns with their personal values, motivating them to prefer organizations that make genuine contributions to employees, communities, and society at large (De Castro Neves, 2025; Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021; Rotich et al., 2025).

In workplace interactions, Gen Z tends to prioritize open, fast, and transparent communication and shows a preference for flatter organizational structures with minimal hierarchies (Aswani & Otiende, 2025; Kostoeva, 2023; Janssen & Carradini, 2021). They respond positively to inclusive leadership styles that encourage feedback, dialogue, and active participation in decision-making processes (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Zahra et al., 2025; De Castro Neves, 2025; Kostoeva, 2023). Diversity and inclusivity are also central values for this generation; consequently, Gen Z employees expect organizations to provide safe, open, and respectful environments that acknowledge differences and promote equality (Pichler et al., 2021; Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). However, these high expectations may also pose challenges, particularly in the form of increased turnover when Gen Z employees feel undervalued or fail to find meaning in their work (Benítez et al., 2022; Neves, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025). Moreover, differences in communication styles, work values, and expectations across generations can trigger internal conflicts that disrupt collaboration and team effectiveness (Zahra et al., 2025; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Watkins & Omilion-Hodges, 2025; Mahmoud et al., 2020). These dynamics highlight the need for organizations to continuously adapt their leadership approaches, work policies, and communication systems to accommodate a workforce that is increasingly critical, flexible, and technology-oriented (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Kostoeva, 2023; Zahra et al., 2025).

Within this context, social adaptation and organizational culture play complementary and interdependent roles in shaping employees' work experiences and behaviors. Social adaptation enables individuals to adjust to organizational values, norms, and behavioral expectations, thereby strengthening communication, collaboration, and psychological comfort, particularly during periods of organizational change or crisis (Ratković & Kostić, 2014; Uzyumova, 2019; Ružicavišnji, 2024). Simultaneously, a positive and adaptive organizational culture fosters innovation, efficiency, continuous learning, and work behaviors aligned with organizational goals (Kuhuparuw, 2025; Albogami et al., 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2025; Khan, 2024). Such cultures require adaptive leadership to prevent rigidity that may hinder organizational change while simultaneously enhancing employee commitment, satisfaction, and performance (Brahm & Poblete, 2024; Sabuhari et al., 2020; Gardner et al., 2021; Dewi & Fitrio, 2022). Together, effective social adaptation and a supportive organizational culture form the foundation for organizations to navigate the complexities of contemporary diverse workplaces.

Importantly, social adaptation and cultural alignment do not occur in a social vacuum. Instead, they are embedded within broader socio-cultural and historical contexts that shape interpersonal relationships, power structures, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the workplace. This is particularly relevant in multicultural societies, where ethnic identities, historical tensions, and unequal socioeconomic relations may influence employees' interpretation of organizational norms, interaction with colleagues, and negotiation of belonging. For Generation Z, who strongly value inclusivity, openness, and social justice, such contextual factors can significantly shape their workplace adaptation, especially when organizational diversity ideals intersect with unresolved intergroup dynamics in the surrounding society.

West Kalimantan provides a particularly salient context for examining these issues in Indonesia. The region is characterized by long-standing interethnic interactions among Dayak, Malay, and Chinese communities, collectively referred to as TIDAYU, which have shaped local social identities while simultaneously remaining vulnerable to conflict and pseudo-multiculturalism, even in relatively tolerant cities such as Singkawang (Ruslan et al., 2025; Fannia et al., 2023; Atmaja et al., 2023; Prasojo, 2017). Socioeconomic relations further complicate this landscape, as the economic dominance of ethnic Chinese communities and the maintenance of status quo competition with other groups continue to influence interethnic interactions. In border areas, ethnic identity is strategically mobilized for cross-border labor migration, as observed among the Iban community (Atmaja et al., 2023; Fachrurrazi, 2019; Eilenberg & Wadley, 2009). Although various integration efforts have been pursued through multicultural education, local media, minority religious communities, and cultural acculturation via traditional arts and regional languages,

historical trauma and latent tensions persist within some segments of the population (Nakaya, 2018; Kurniawan & Miftah, 2021; Anggraini et al., 2025; Aditya et al., 2025). Contemporary challenges such as misinformation and digital propaganda further reinforce stereotypes and heighten the risk of social tension, underscoring the importance of tolerance, cross-ethnic collaboration, and social resilience (Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2022; Kurniawan & Miftah, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly attention to Gen Z characteristics, social adaptation, and organizational culture, a significant gap remains in understanding how Gen Z employees navigate social adaptation within workplaces simultaneously shaped by organizational values and complex socio-ethnic dynamics. Existing studies often portray Gen Z as a globally homogeneous cohort with relatively universal preferences, overlooking how generational identity interacts with local phenomena such as pseudo-multiculturalism, ethnic economic dominance, and collective memories of intergroup conflict. Furthermore, research on social adaptation and organizational culture is frequently treated as separate domains, leaving unanswered questions about how these dimensions operate together in multicultural workplace settings, particularly in the distinctive context of West Kalimantan.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores how Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan socially adapt within multigenerational and multiethnic workplaces shaped by organizational cultural values. This study seeks to identify the organizational factors, community dynamics, and everyday social practices that facilitate or hinder Gen Z's adaptation amid diverse workplace expectations. By foregrounding the subjective experiences of Gen Z employees while situating them within local sociocultural and organizational structures, this study provides a more contextualized understanding of workplace adaptation.

This study offers both academic and practical contributions to the literature. Academically, it extends the theories of social adaptation, organizational culture, and intergenerational workplace interaction by providing empirical insights from a multicultural Indonesian region that remains underrepresented in the literature. It also advances conceptual linkages between generational identity and local sociocultural dynamics in shaping workplace adaptation. Practically, the findings can inform organizational leaders, human resource practitioners, and policymakers in West Kalimantan in designing leadership practices, HR policies, and communication systems that are sensitive to both ethnic diversity and generational preferences, thereby fostering harmonious, inclusive, and effective workplaces capable of attracting and retaining Gen Z talent.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Generation Z and Generational Theory in the Workplace***

Generational theory posits that each cohort is shaped by the dominant social, economic, and technological conditions experienced during its formative years, resulting in distinct values, behaviors, and work expectations (Baša et al., 2023; Pichler et al., 2021). From this perspective, Generation Z (born 1995–2012) represents a cohort whose identity has been strongly influenced by rapid digitalization, constant connectivity, and accelerated information flows. As digital natives, Gen Z employees are highly familiar with technology and tend to expect digital integration, efficiency, and immediacy in organizational processes (Neves, 2025; Zahra et al., 2025). In workplace contexts, these formative experiences translate into preferences for flexibility, transparency, participative decision-making, and work that is perceived as meaningful and aligned with personal values (Thomas & Sharma, 2025; Rotich et al., 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025). Gen Z also shows a clear inclination toward flatter organizational structures and fast, interactive communication patterns that reduce hierarchical distances (Janssen & Carradini, 2021; Aswani & Otiende, 2025; Syarifah et al., 2025). These generational characteristics provide an important analytical foundation for understanding how Gen Z engages in social adaptation, particularly when entering workplaces dominated by older generations, established organizational norms, and culturally diverse environments (Romański & Łukasiński, 2025; Husein et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2025).

### ***Social Adaptation as a Core Process***

Social adaptation theory explains how individuals adjust to new environments through the internalization of social norms, values, and behavioral expectations (González, 2024; Hertz, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2019; Gavrillets et al., 2024). Rather than being a static outcome, adaptation is a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by individuals' interpretive capacities and responses to environmental demands (Grusec, 2011). Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory further conceptualizes adaptation as a cyclical process involving stress, adjustment, and growth, which is particularly relevant in culturally diverse settings (Kim, 2000, 2017). In the context of multigenerational and multiethnic workplaces, social adaptation is a critical mechanism through which Gen Z employees learn to navigate differences in work values, communication styles, power distance, and cultural expectations. For Gen Z, adaptation is not limited to adjusting to organizational systems but also involves negotiating intergenerational relations and interethnic interactions shaped by local socio-cultural histories (Janssen and Carradini, 2021). Thus, social adaptation is positioned in this study as a

central process that mediates between individual generational characteristics and broader organizational and social contexts.

### ***Organizational Culture as Context and Enabling Structure***

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape employee behavior and social interactions within the workplace. Prior research has consistently shown that flexible, innovative, and inclusive organizational cultures are more compatible with the expectations of younger employees, including Generation Z (Lambe, 2024; Katsaros, 2024; Husein et al., 2025). Cultures that emphasize open communication, respect for diversity, and opportunities for participation tend to facilitate faster and more effective social adaptation among Gen Z employees (Kimonyo, 2025; Katsaros, 2025). Conversely, rigid, hierarchical, and slow-changing organizational cultures often create tension and misalignment for Gen Z, who prefer egalitarian structures and adaptive modes of interaction (Neves, 2025). Leadership plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. Adaptive leadership functions as a cultural transmission mechanism, translating organizational values into daily practices while simultaneously accommodating the expectations and communication styles of the new generation (Brahm & Poblete, 2024; Sabuhari et al., 2020; Gardner et al., 2021; Dewi & Fitrio, 2022) (Febriana & Mujib, 2024). In this study, organizational culture is conceptualized not merely as background context but as an enabling or constraining condition that shapes the quality and trajectory of Gen Z’s social adaptation.

### ***Cultural Context and the Importance of Multilevel Perspectives***

Although research on Generation Z across global, Asian, and Indonesian contexts reveals broadly similar preferences, particularly regarding digitalization, flexibility, inclusivity, and meaningful work, these preferences do not manifest uniformly across settings. Global studies emphasize Gen Z’s demand for work–life balance and participative leadership, encouraging organizations to adopt more adaptive management practices (Hasanah& Waldan, 2023, Nugroho et al., 2025). However, Asian studies demonstrate that local cultural values, such as collectivism and power distance, continue to shape how Gen Z negotiates authority, collaboration, and organizational belonging (Farrell & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Research in China further shows that culturally embedded values, including face consciousness, influence Gen Z’s well-being and their long-term career intentions (Tang et al., 2020). In Indonesia, Gen Z’s workplace adaptation is shaped by a combination of psychological factors (e.g., emotional intelligence and career adaptability) and social support systems involving family, peers, and colleagues (Brilliantisyah et al., 2025). These findings underscore that generational characteristics alone are insufficient to explain adaptation outcomes. Instead, local socio-cultural structures play a decisive role. This is particularly evident in regions such as West Kalimantan, where workplace interactions are embedded within complex interethnic relations among Dayak, Malay, and Chinese (TIDAYU) communities. These dynamics simultaneously enrich and complicate Gen Z’s social adaptation, requiring organizations to actively facilitate cross-cultural engagement and mutual respect to sustain social harmony (Parani et al., 2025; Jailani et al., 2021)

### ***Synthesis and Conceptual Framework***

Drawing on the reviewed literature, this study integrates generational, social adaptation, and organizational culture theories into a unified conceptual framework. Generation Z’s characteristics are positioned as individual-level predispositions, social adaptation as the core adaptive process, organizational culture as the contextual and enabling structure, and local multiethnic dynamics as a situational moderator that shapes how adaptation unfolds in practice

Table 1. Conceptual Positioning of Key Theories and Variables

Theoretical Component	Conceptual Role in the Study	Key Focus
Generational Theory	Individual-level foundation	Gen Z values, expectations, communication styles
Social Adaptation Theory	Core process (mediator)	Adjustment, interaction, and relational integration
Organizational Culture	Contextual enabler/constraint	Values, norms, leadership, inclusivity
Local Multicultural Dynamics	Situational moderator	Interethnic relations, historical context, social sensitivity

Source: Author’s synthesis based on Generational Theory (Baša et al., 2023; Pichler et al., 2021), Social Adaptation Theory (Carriedo et al., 2024; Əhmədova, 2025; Scheklachyeva, 2019), Organizational Culture and Leadership literature (Lambe, 2024; Katsaros, 2024; Febriana & Mujib, 2024), and multicultural workplace studies in Indonesia (Parani et al., 2025; Jailani et al., 2021).

## Materials and Methods

This study employed an exploratory qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate for capturing participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes while remaining close to their everyday language and perspective. This approach was selected to explore how Generation Z employees socially adapt to organizational cultures situated in the multiethnic TIDAYU (Dayak–Malay–Chinese) context of West Kalimantan. A qualitative descriptive design allows for a comprehensive yet low-inference account of social adaptation processes, acknowledging their social, cultural, and organizational complexity without imposing rigid pre-existing theoretical categories. Analytically, this study adopts a reflexive thematic analysis approach, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2017, 2020, 2024), in which themes are understood as interpretive patterns actively constructed by the researcher through engagement with the data rather than as objective entities awaiting discovery. Accordingly, the analysis does not aim to establish inter-coder reliability or coding consensus as indicators of rigor in qualitative research. Instead, emphasis was placed on reflexivity, transparency of analytical decisions, and coherence between the data, conceptual framework, and research objectives.

The participants consisted of 18 Generation Z employees aged 18–28 years working in the service, retail, education, and micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sectors across Pontianak, Singkawang, and Ketapang. These locations were selected to reflect the sociocultural diversity of the TIDAYU region. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the participants had a minimum of three months of work experience, allowing them to reflect meaningfully on their social adaptation processes within their organizations. Recruitment continued until thematic sufficiency was achieved, as indicated by recurring patterns of meaning and the absence of substantively new insights in later interviews. Rather than treating saturation as a purely numerical threshold, this study conceptualizes it as an analytical judgment based on depth, variation, and coherence within the dataset.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45–60 min, conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participant availability. The interview guide was informed by the literature review and conceptual framework, particularly the concepts of social adaptation and organizational culture. Social adaptation was operationalized through questions exploring participants' experiences of adjustment, interaction, communication, learning workplace norms, and relationship building with colleagues and supervisors. Organizational culture was explored through prompts related to leadership styles, communication patterns, flexibility, inclusivity, work structures, and informal workplace norms. Participants were also encouraged to reflect on how local cultural and interethnic dynamics shaped their daily workplace interactions. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and were transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews to document contextual details, nonverbal expressions, and culturally specific interactional cues relevant to the TIDAYU context. These notes were used to enrich the interpretation and reflexive engagement with the data rather than as an independent data source for triangulation.

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2017, 2020, 2024): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) developing candidate themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing a final analytical report. The primary researcher coded the data through repeated and careful readings of the interview transcripts to identify patterns of meaning related to Generation Z's social adaptation and organizational cultural dynamics. Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained reflexive analytic notes to document key analytical decisions, changes in interpretation, and the researcher's positionality concerning the data. Discussions with the co-authors were conducted as interpretive dialogues to enhance analytical depth and conceptual clarity, rather than to establish coding agreement or inter-coder reliability. The analysis produced 138 initial codes, which were grouped into 24 subcategories and subsequently synthesized into three overarching themes that reflect the multidimensional nature of Generation Z's adaptation to multicultural work environments.

Trustworthiness was ensured by applying the established qualitative rigor criteria, specifically credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative analytic reflection, and peer debriefing, which focused on the coherence and plausibility of interpretations rather than verification. Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the participants' characteristics, workplace contexts, and the broader sociocultural setting of West Kalimantan. Dependability was addressed through the maintenance of a transparent audit trail, including interview guides, coding records, analytic notes and documentation of theme development. Confirmability was strengthened through ongoing reflexive practice, explicitly acknowledging the researcher's role in constructing themes, and grounding all interpretations in participants' accounts. Field notes were used to contextualize the interview data and deepen interpretation; however, this study does not claim formal data triangulation, as in-depth interviews were the primary source of empirical data.

All research procedures adhered to the ethical standards for social research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, participants received detailed information regarding the study’s aims, procedures, and their rights, and written informed consent was obtained from them. Participant identities were anonymized, and all personal data were handled with strict confidentiality measures. In accordance with the research ethics policy of LP2M IAIN Pontianak, this study was classified as minimal risk and ethically exempt, as it involved non-interventionist qualitative interviews with adult participants and did not collect sensitive, personal data. This classification aligns with the institutional guidelines governing social science research at IAIN Pontianak. Anonymized interview transcripts and field notes are available upon reasonable academic request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

## Results

Qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 18 Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan revealed three main themes in their social adaptation to local workplace culture. These findings were generated through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s procedures, resulting in 138 initial codes, 24 subcategories, and three themes. Descriptively, Generation Z demonstrates a strong adaptive capacity through a combination of personal strategies, social support, and organizational dynamics that shape the workplace environment.

### *Forms of Social Adaptation Among Generation Z*

This study identifies three interrelated forms of social adaptation among Generation Z employees: communication adjustment, learning from senior employees, and seeking meaning and role clarity at work. These forms emerged inductively through thematic analysis of interview transcripts and illustrated how Gen Z negotiates its social and professional positioning within multigenerational and multicultural workplace settings in West Kalimantan. To enhance analytical clarity, the presentation of the results integrates qualitative interpretation with descriptive quantitative patterns. Figure 1 and Table 2 illustrate the relative prominence of subthemes across participant narratives while maintaining the primacy of meaning, context, and theoretical interpretation in line with a qualitative descriptive and thematic analysis approach.

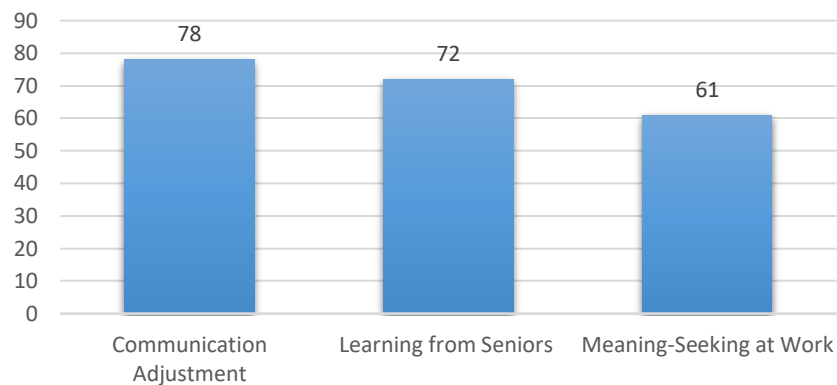


Figure 1. Percentage of Social Adaptation Subtheme Occurrences (n = 18)

Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of social adaptation subtheme occurrences across the dataset ( $n = 18$ ). These percentages indicate the proportion of participants whose interview narratives contained references to each subtheme rather than the frequency, intensity, or effectiveness of adaptation. As shown in Figure 1, communication adjustment appeared in 78% of participant narratives, followed by learning from senior employees at 72% and meaning-seeking at work at 61%. This distribution provides an overview of thematic salience and serves as an entry point for a deeper qualitative interpretation.

Table 2. Distribution and Interpretation of Social Adaptation

Social Adaptation Subtheme	Percentage of Occurrence (%)	Descriptive Quantitative Meaning	Qualitative Interpretation
Communication Adjustment	78%	Most frequently referenced subtheme	Communication functions as the primary and most visible entry point of social adaptation, enabling Gen Z to navigate hierarchical and generational differences in daily workplace interactions.

Social Adaptation Subtheme	Percentage of Occurrence (%)	Descriptive Quantitative Meaning	Qualitative Interpretation
Learning from Senior Employees	72%	Referenced by the majority of participants	Adaptation occurs relationally through observing and imitating senior employees' work rhythms and behavioral norms to gain acceptance and reduce social distance.
Meaning-Seeking at Work	61%	Present in more than half of narratives	Adaptation involves internal cognitive and motivational processes, where understanding task purpose and role clarity supports sustained engagement.

Note: Subthemes Among Generation Z (n = 18). The percentages represent the proportion of participants whose narratives included each subtheme. They were used descriptively to illustrate thematic salience and did not imply statistical dominance or causal relationships.

### ***Communication Adjustment as an Adaptive Entry Point***

Among the three subthemes, communication adjustment emerged as the most salient form of social adaptation in this study. Participants consistently described consciously modifying their preferred communication styles—typically fast, informal, and digitally mediated—into more direct, face-to-face, and polite modes when interacting with senior colleagues. This pattern aligns with social adaptation theory, which conceptualizes adaptation as a reflexive adjustment to dominant social norms, and organizational culture theory, where communication acts as a central mechanism of cultural integration. One participant explained this as follows:

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*“I learned to communicate more directly and in person so that I would be seen as polite and respectful.” (P3, translated from local Malay dialect)*

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Despite its high occurrence, communication adjustment was not portrayed as a smooth or purely compliant process. Several participants expressed tension between efficiency-oriented digital communication preferences and conventional workplace etiquette. This indicates that adaptation involves ongoing negotiation rather than full assimilation into existing norms.

### ***Learning from Senior Employees as Relational Adaptation***

The second most prominent subtheme, learning from senior employees (72%), highlights adaptation through the observation and imitation of senior workers' routines, work rhythms, and informal behavioral norms. This form of adaptation reflects organizational socialization theory, which emphasizes learning through modeling as the core mechanism of newcomer adjustment. Participants perceived alignment with senior employees' work patterns as a strategy to foster acceptance and minimize relational friction.

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*“I follow the seniors' work rhythm so that working together feels more comfortable.” (P7, translated from Indonesian)*

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However, adaptation through imitation is not entirely passive. Several participants reported internal tension when senior work styles conflicted with their personal preferences, revealing their adaptive ambivalence. This nuance reflects the complex cultural context of West Kalimantan, where hierarchical norms coexist with the more egalitarian values commonly associated with younger generations.

### ***Meaning-Seeking and Role Clarity as Cognitive–Motivational Adaptation***

Although meaning-seeking at work showed the lowest occurrence (61%), it represents a theoretically significant form of adaptation to stress. Participants emphasized the importance of understanding the purpose and value of tasks before fully engaging in their roles in the program. This finding extends the meaning of work theory and self-determination theory, suggesting that adaptation among Gen Z is not limited to behavioral conformity but also involves cognitive and motivational alignment. As one participant stated:

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*“When I understand the reason behind a task, I can adapt more quickly.” (P11, translated from Indonesian)*

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A comparatively lower occurrence does not indicate lesser importance. Instead, it suggests that meaning-seeking is less immediately observable than communicative or behavioral adjustments, particularly in hierarchical and multicultural workplace environments, where expectations are often implicit.

Taken together, the distribution of subtheme occurrences and qualitative narratives demonstrate that social adaptation among Generation Z is multidimensional, negotiated, and context-dependent. Communication adjustment tends to function as the most immediate and visible form of adaptation, followed by relational learning from senior employees, whereas meaning-seeking underpins long-term engagement and internal adjustment. Importantly, the inclusion of percentages and tables in this study serves a descriptive and illustrative function, rather than a statistical one. The analytical emphasis remains on interpretive depth, contextual nuance, and theoretical integration, consistent with qualitative descriptive and thematic analysis approaches. The quantitative summaries presented in Figure 1 and Table 2 enhance transparency and reader comprehension. They do not indicate statistical significance or generalizability but illustrate recurring patterns of meaning across participant narratives.

### ***Organizational Factors Influencing Adaptation***

The findings indicate that the organizational context plays a crucial role in shaping the social adaptation of Generation Z in the workplace. Two interrelated organizational factors emerged from the thematic analysis: leadership styles and work structures. These factors influence not only the pace of adaptation but also the quality of intergenerational interactions and the psychological comfort experienced by Gen Z employees. To enhance transparency and readability, Figure 2 and Table 3 provide a descriptive overview of the recurrence of organizational factors across participant narratives. Consistent with the qualitative descriptive approach, these representations illustrate thematic salience rather than statistical dominance.

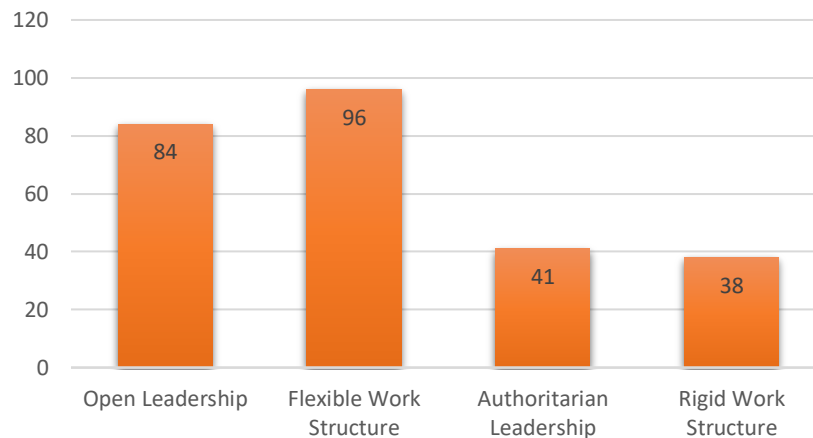


Figure 2. Frequency of Organizational Factors Mentioned in Interviews

Figure 2 shows the proportion of participants ( $n = 18$ ) whose interview narratives included references to specific organizational factors related to workplace adaptation. The term open leadership was mentioned by the largest proportion of participants (84%). Flexible work structures were mentioned by fewer participants, whereas authoritarian leadership and rigid work structures appeared in a smaller number of narratives. The percentages indicate the distribution of the participants' references to each organizational factor across the dataset.

### ***Open Leadership as a Facilitator of Adaptation***

Among the organizational factors, open leadership emerged as the most influential in facilitating social adaptation. Participants described leaders who were approachable, communicative, and receptive to feedback as creating a psychologically safe environment that accelerated adaptation and fostered a sense of value. This finding aligns with transformational and inclusive leadership theories that emphasize openness and dialogue as the foundations of trust and employee engagement. One participant stated:

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*“My supervisor is open, so I feel comfortable working here.” (P4, translated from local Malay dialect)*

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The high salience of open leadership (84%) suggests that leadership style functions as a structural enabler that shapes how other adaptation strategies, such as communication adjustment and learning from seniors, are enacted.

***Flexible Work Structure and Reduced Adaptation Barriers***

A flexible work structure, including hybrid schedules and adaptable task arrangements, was identified as an organizational factor that supports stable adaptation. Participants reported that flexibility reduced role pressure, allowed better work–life integration, and provided space to gradually adjust to organizational expectations, resonating with job design and person–environment fit theories, suggesting that structural flexibility enhances the alignment between individual preferences and organizational demands. As one participant explained:

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*“A flexible schedule helps me focus and adapt more quickly.” (P9, translated from Indonesian)*

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Although mentioned less frequently than leadership style, work structure plays a complementary role by shaping the conditions under which adaptation unfolds rather than directly dictating interpersonal dynamics.

***Authoritarian Leadership and Rigid Structures as Adaptation Constraints***

In contrast, authoritarian leadership and rigid work structures were associated with slower adaptation and limited communication skills. Participants described leaders who emphasized a strict hierarchy and minimal dialogue as creating distance between generations, discouraging Gen Z employees from expressing ideas or asking questions. This pattern reflects the tensions highlighted in power distance theory and organizational culture studies, particularly in hierarchical contexts. One participant noted:

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*“When the leader is too rigid, I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing.” (P12, translated from local Malay dialect)*

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Similarly, rigid work structures characterized by strict rules and inflexible schedules were perceived as making adaptation more burdensome:

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*“Rules that are too strict make adaptation feel heavy.” (P15, translated from Indonesian)*

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While these factors were less frequently mentioned, their impact was described as intense and inhibiting, underscoring that a lower occurrence does not equate to lesser significance.

Table 3. Organizational Factors Influencing Generation Z’s Social Adaptation (n = 18)

Organizational Factor	Descriptive Impact on Adaptation	Illustrative Participant Quote
Open Leadership	Facilitates rapid adaptation, enhances psychological safety and sense of being valued	“My supervisor is open, so I feel comfortable working here.” (P4)
Flexible Work Structure	Supports stable adaptation and reduces role pressure	“A flexible schedule helps me focus and adapt more quickly.” (P9)
Authoritarian Leadership	Slows adaptation and limits communication across generations	“When the leader is too rigid, I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing.” (P12)

Organizational Factor	Descriptive Impact on Adaptation	Illustrative Participant Quote
Rigid Work Structure	Creates difficulty in adjusting to work rhythms and expectations	“Rules that are too strict make adaptation feel heavy.” (P15)

Note: Factors are presented based on recurring patterns of meaning across the participant narratives

The findings show that participants described organizational factors as shaping their experiences of workplace adaptation. As summarized in Figure 2 and detailed in Table 3, open leadership and flexible work structures were more frequently mentioned in the participants’ narratives, whereas authoritarian leadership and rigid work structures appeared less often. These factors were presented to illustrate how participants referred to different organizational conditions in relation to their adaptation experiences. The percentages shown in Figure 2 indicate the proportion of participants who mentioned each factor and are included solely to describe the distribution of references across the dataset.

### *Role of the Workplace Community*

The findings indicate that the workplace community plays a critical role in facilitating Generation Z’s social adaptation. Beyond individual strategies and organizational structures, adaptation is strongly shaped by peer relationships, informal community activities, and the multicultural social context of the province. These dimensions collectively create a social environment that either supports or constrains adaptation processes. To enhance clarity, Figure 3 and Table 4 present a descriptive overview of the dimensions of workplace communities referenced in the participants’ narratives. In line with qualitative descriptive and thematic analysis approaches, these representations illustrate thematic salience rather than quantitative dominance or causal strength.

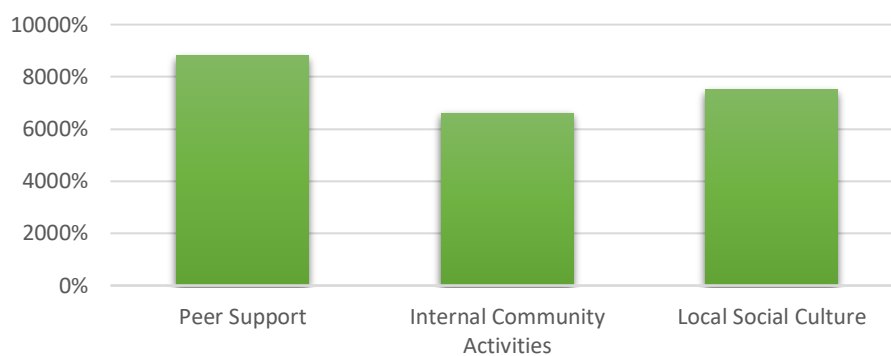


Figure 3. Workplace Community Dimensions Influencing Adaptation

Figure 3 illustrates the proportion of participants who referred to specific workplace community dimensions influencing their adaptation ( $n = 18$ ). Peer support emerged as the most salient factor, mentioned by 88% of the participants. This was followed by internal community activities and local social culture, both of which were described as contributing significantly to the smoothness of social adjustment. These percentages indicate the breadth of experiential references across participants and were used descriptively to support qualitative interpretation.

### *Peer Support as a Social Safety Mechanism*

Peer support emerged as the strongest facilitator of social adaptation among workplace community dimensions. Participants consistently described colleagues of similar age or status as providing a safe and non-hierarchical space to ask questions, seek clarification, and learn informal workplace norms.

This finding aligns with social support theory and communities of practice, which emphasize peer interaction as a key mechanism for informal learning and trust building. One participant explained this as follows:

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*“When I’m confused, I ask my peers first.” (P6, translated from local Malay dialect)*

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The high salience of peer support suggests that adaptation is often collectively negotiated, reducing the psychological pressure associated with formal hierarchies and senior–junior relationships.

### *Internal Community Activities and Informal Bonding*

Internal community activities, such as team gatherings, informal meetings and social events, were identified as important facilitators of adaptation. Participants reported that these activities helped break down formal boundaries, opened informal communication channels, and strengthened their interpersonal bonds. This finding resonates with organizational cohesion and informal socialization theories, which view non-task interactions as essential for building trust and mutual understanding in the workplace. As one participant noted:

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*“After gatherings, I feel closer to the team.” (P10, translated from Indonesian)*

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Although mentioned less frequently than peer support, internal activities function as social accelerators, creating conditions that reinforce peer support and communication adjustment.

### *Multicultural Local Social Culture as a Contextual Enabler*

The local social culture of West Kalimantan, characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, emerged as a contextual factor influencing this adaptation. Participants described multicultural norms, emphasizing that mutual respect and tolerance facilitate intergenerational acceptance and ease social integration. This finding is connected to multiculturalism and intercultural adaptation theories, suggesting that local cultural values shape workplace interactions beyond formal organizational policies. One participant explained this as follows:

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*“Here, everyone respects each other, so I quickly feel that I fit in.” (P14, translated from local Malay dialect)*

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However, participants also implied that such cultural facilitation operates implicitly and may not fully offset hierarchical or organizational constraints, reinforcing the view that adaptation is a negotiated process.

Table 4. Role of Workplace Community in Generation Z’s Social Adaptation (n = 18)

Workplace Community Aspect	Descriptive Impact on Adaptation	Illustrative Participant Quote
Peer Support	Accelerates learning, builds trust, and provides a safe non-hierarchical space for adaptation	“When I’m confused, I ask my peers first.” (P6)
Internal Community Activities	Strengthen social bonding and open informal communication channels	“After gatherings, I feel closer to the team.” (P10)
Local Social Culture	Facilitates intergenerational acceptance through multicultural values of respect	“Here, everyone respects each other, so I quickly feel that I fit in.” (P14)

Note: Data entries were derived from recurring patterns of meaning across participant narratives. They are intended to enhance interpretive clarity rather than rank factors quantitatively.

The findings indicate that participants frequently referred to workplace community aspects when describing their adaptation experiences in the study. As shown in Figure 3 and summarized in Table 4, peer support was the most frequently mentioned community dimension in the interview narratives, followed by internal community activities and multicultural local social norms. These aspects are presented to describe how participants referred to different forms of workplace communities in relation to their adaptation processes. The percentages shown in Figure 3 represent the proportion of participants who mentioned each community dimension and are included solely to describe the distribution of references across the dataset.

## **Discussion**

### *Managing Gen Z Social Adaptation in the TIDAYU Multicultural Workforce Context*

This study demonstrates that Generation Z employees’ social adaptation in West Kalimantan is shaped by how organizational systems manage communication practices, intergenerational learning, and construct meaningful work

roles within a multicultural workforce. Empirically, Gen Z employees adapt through communication adjustment, learning senior work norms, and seeking meaning in their job role. While these patterns are consistent with the global management literature emphasizing Gen Z's preference for openness, responsiveness, and flexibility (Nugroho et al., 2025), the findings show that such preferences do not operate automatically. Instead, they are mediated by organizational norms, leadership practices, and culturally embedded management expectations within the TIDAYU context.

From a management perspective, local norms of politeness (*kesopanan*), respect for seniority, and cultural emphasis on social harmony (*rukun*) function as informal organizational control mechanisms that shape how communication is enacted and evaluated in the workplace. These norms influence managerial expectations regarding appropriate communication channels, emotional expression, and interactional presence, particularly in hierarchical relationships. Gen Z employees respond to these expectations by strategically regulating their digital-native communication styles, reducing the use of instant messaging, emojis, or informal tones, and prioritizing face-to-face interactions during performance evaluation, task negotiation, and conflict resolution. This indicates that communication adjustment operates as a managed behavioral adaptation rather than a purely individual preference.

This process can be conceptualized as adaptive modulation within organizational communication systems, whereby Gen Z employees do not reject digital efficiency but recalibrate its use in response to perceived managerial expectations and the power relations. Adaptation was most effective when face-to-face interaction functioned as a managerial tool for building trust, clarifying roles, and enabling reciprocal understanding among employees. Conversely, adaptation became constrained when face-to-face requirements were experienced as excessive monitoring or when digital communication was normatively framed as disrespectful, regardless of intent. Under such conditions, Gen Z employees exhibit compliance-oriented behaviors, emotional withdrawal, or minimal engagement outcomes that signal ineffective management of communication norms rather than individual resistance.

Theoretically, these findings reposition the Social Adaptation Theory within the domain of management by showing that adaptation is not a linear psychological adjustment but a strategic response to organizational governance structures. Rather than progressing smoothly from stress to growth (Kim, 2000), Gen Z's adaptation unfolds through cycles of negotiation shaped by perceived authority, cultural risk, and managerial legitimacy. Therefore, adaptation represents a form of organizationally situated decision-making in which employees continuously assess how much conformity or initiative is permissible. For management practice, this underscores the need for organizations in multicultural regions to formalize communication standards that balance digital efficiency with culturally grounded expressions of respect, thereby reducing ambiguity and adaptation costs for foreign employees.

### ***Intergenerational Social Learning as a Managed Organizational Process***

Gen Z's adaptation was further shaped by intergenerational social learning processes embedded in everyday organizational routines. However, this learning was contingent on how seniority and authority were enacted by organizational actors. Gen Z employees selectively modeled the behaviors of senior colleagues who combined authority with openness, mentorship, and intercultural sensitivity. In management terms, this reflects the effectiveness of informal mentoring and role modeling mechanisms as tools of organizational socialization. In contrast, when seniority was expressed through rigid hierarchical control, ethnic exclusivity, or one-way instruction, social learning was reduced to a surface-level compliance. This indicates that authority without relational legitimacy limits knowledge transfer and adaptation effectiveness, which is a key concern in human resource management and leadership studies.

The multicultural TIDAYU workplace context intensifies this dynamic. Daily interactions among Dayak, Malay, and Chinese employees expose Gen Z workers to diverse communication styles and work norms, functioning as informal intercultural learning systems. Such diversity enhances intercultural competence when supported by inclusive managerial practices, aligning with research that views diversity as a productive organizational resource (Jailani et al., 2025; Jailani et al., 2021)

However, the findings also revealed the presence of defensive adaptation strategies such as silence, emotional distancing, and interactional caution. These behaviors emerge in response to latent ethnic sensitivities and collective memories of conflict, indicating that multiculturalism operates within implicit constraints. From a management perspective, this suggests that diversity alone does not generate effective learning. Without psychological safety and explicit organizational facilitation, employees prioritize conflict avoidance over engagement, resulting in underutilized capital. Theoretically, this refines the Social Adaptation Theory by integrating it with organizational behavior perspectives, positioning restraint as a rational adaptation strategy in contexts where organizational signals regarding safety and inclusion are ambiguous (Carriedo et al., 2024; Əhmədova, 2025; Scheklachyeva, 2019). For management,

this highlights the importance of structured interethnic collaboration, cross-generational mentoring programs, and facilitated dialogue as intentional HR interventions rather than relying on spontaneous social interactions.

### ***Organizational Dynamics: Leadership, Work Design, and Adaptation Outcomes***

Organizational culture, particularly leadership style and work structure, emerged as key factors shaping the quality of Gen Z adaptation. Leadership practices that encourage dialogue, feedback, and clarification reduce perceived power distance and enable Gen Z employees to engage more actively in learning and adjustment processes. In contrast, authoritarian leadership reinforces hierarchical and generational boundaries, leading to adaptation characterized by silence and compliance rather than meaningful engagement.

These findings deepen the Person-Environment Fit Theory by showing that fit is developed through everyday managerial practices (Caplan, 1987; Oh et al., 2014; Vianen, 2018). Alignment between Gen Z's expectations and organizational environments emerged through communication norms, leadership accessibility, and task structuring. Flexible work arrangements further function as signals of trust and recognition, supporting stress regulation and sustained motivation during the early career stages.

Meaning-seeking plays a central role in adaptation. When employees understand the purpose of their tasks and perceive their contributions as valuable, adaptation shifts from procedural compliance to deeper engagement. This supports Meaningful Work Theory, positioning meaning-making as an active driver of adaptation within organizational settings (Allan et al., 2018; Puchalska et al., 2019; Zammitti et al., 2025). From a management perspective, articulating task significance, enabling two-way feedback, and institutionalizing mentoring and informal interaction spaces are essential for fostering sustainable adaptation among Generation Z employees.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the social adaptation of Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan is shaped by the interaction between personal adaptive strategies, organizational dynamics, and workplace community support. Communication adjustment, learning from senior employees about workplace culture, and seeking meaning and role clarity are the primary forms of adaptation employed by Gen Z when entering multigenerational work environments. The findings further show that organizational conditions, particularly open leadership styles and flexible work structures, significantly accelerate the adaptation process by fostering psychological safety and reducing hierarchical barriers. Simultaneously, workplace community elements, including peer support, internal social activities, and local cultural values, strengthen Gen Z's sense of social attachment and facilitate smoother integration into the workplace. Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that social adaptation is not an individual or linear process but an interactive and negotiated one, shaped by the alignment between young workers' needs and organizational characteristics. Adaptation occurs when individuals and organizations engage in mutual adjustment through dialogue, social support, and inclusive norms and work practices. Within the multicultural context of West Kalimantan, the values of openness and mutual respect further enrich this adaptation process by enabling cross-generational and cross-cultural social integration. The findings highlight the importance of inclusive leadership, flexible organizational design, and peer-based support systems in creating adaptive and socially sustainable workplaces. As Generation Z becomes the dominant workforce cohort, these insights provide a valuable foundation for organizations, policymakers, and workplace communities to develop work ecosystems that are more responsive, inclusive, and productive in multicultural settings.

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