

## GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS AT THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC SECTOR WORKPLACE FROM THE MILLENNIAL'S PERSPECTIVE

**Irhamahayati, Hubeis M., Hermawan A., Djohar S.\***

**Abstract:** Conflicts in the workplace can occur due to differences among generations. In the context of public sector, it might be aggravated by bureaucracy system and the formal relation. This study explores the existence of conflicts caused by the differences between the young and the older generations. Data was gathered by using survey, FGDs and interviews. Participants are employees of The NADFC working at various locations, selected purposively. Completed data from 250 paper-based questionnaires was processed by SPSS Statistics using descriptive analysis and cross-tabulation. Result indicates that conflicts occur mainly due to the differences on technological mastery; orientation to change; and formal communication. Study also confirms the relations of the high intergenerational conflict to the job performance.

**Key words:** generational conflict; public sector; intergenerational workplace; millennial; performance

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### Introduction

In this information and communication technology (ICT) era, Millennials become the most reliable resources to help organization facing the increasingly complex strategic challenges because their mastery of technology is better than the older generations. Millennial is the most techno-savvy generation (Dries and Pepermans, 2008), has higher ICT literacy (Imran, 2010), and is "the first generation to enter the workplace with a better grasp of key business tool than more senior workers" (Rendell, 2011). There are three generations at today's Indonesian public sector workplace: Baby Boomers, Generation-X, and Millennial. Conflict can occur due to generational differences that management needs to be aware. Millennials complain more about the tensions since they are youngest and mostly at the lower positions. In the public sector, this pressure more often happens because seniority culture is still quite strong. Rowe (2009) stated that conflicts due to generational differences could occur in the workplace as well as conflicts that occur due to other differences such as multi-issue, multi-context, cross-gender, multi-cultural and so on. According to Jones III et al., (2017) Millennial brings new values to the workplace, and some of these values have the potential to cause intergenerational

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\* **Irhamahayati**, MTI; Prof. **Musa Hubeis**; Dr. **Aji Hermawan**; **Setiadi Djohar**, DBA; School of Business, Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia

✉ Corresponding author: irhamaku@yahoo.com

✉ hubeis.musa@yahoo.com; Ajjiher@gmail.com; sdjohar@gmail.com

conflict. This conflict can result in an unpleasant work environment; create fatigue (Carver and Candela in Jones III et al., 2017); increase tension; decrease satisfaction (Kupperschmidt, 2000); create confusion, hatred, anger and even turnover (Quinn, 2010).

In Indonesia, researches and academic discussions about Millennials still limited. In determining the character of Indonesian Millennials, Luntungan et al., (2014) suggested to adopt the character indicators of USA Millennials with an emphasis on exposure to ICTs. His study revealed that characters of Indonesian Millennials are: result oriented; frontal, directive and open communication; and being influenced by social environment in work decisions. How generations differ and why we need to be aware on it is discussed in the initial section of this article. Then, how the older generation perceived Millennial and how Millennial perceived themselves were explored in the next section, based on the empirical evidence. Differences between Millennial and the Old Generations that cause conflicts, and its relation to the performance were being the next conversation. Finally, the conclusion was made up and some breakthrough was offered. All the discussion is framed in the context of government organization.

### **Generation Cohorts and the Differences Among Them**

Referring to Mannheim (1952) idea, that sociologically a group of generations can be considered as a group consisting of individuals who have similarities in age range and experiences, following important historical events in the same period of time and location, Strauss and Howe (1991) observed American society and divided generations based on the span of birth and influential historical events. Some other researchers also divided generations and labelled them with the same or the different name (Anantatmula and Shrivastav, 2012). Each generation has a span about 20 years. Although it is not a clear cut off, it is useful for analysis purpose. Different countries, with different influential historical events, may have the different limit, for example Millennial in North Africa (1990-2000), in the USA (1984-2001), in Europe/ UK (1985-2001), and in Japan (1986-2001) (Codrington and Grant-Marshall in Van Der Walt et al., 2016). In Indonesia, since Millennials are associated with the exposure of ICT, the birth-year of Millennial is considered later than Western countries due to the delay in ICT development and globalization. The issue of generational differences continues to be a debate. Those who disagree with the issue assume that it creates a "box / partition" that separates people and raises stereotyping. Kriegel (2017) argues that giving the same label to millions of people born in a period of 20 years is not fair. On the other hand, empirical evidence on it continues to emerge. Woodward et al., (2015) through a systematic literature review revealed that out of 50 studies related to generation differences, 17 studies (34%) found that there were clear differences among generations, 31 studies (62%) indicated that there were differences and similarities; and only 2 studies (4%) found that there was no evidence of differences.

How generations differ can be explained by the birth-year cohort theory and age-related life stage theory (Hillman, 2014; Sessa et al., 2007; Smola and Sutton, 2002). The birth-year cohort theory explains that the unique work-values and beliefs of each generation are formed during the process of socialization that results a collective memory and shared perceptions, such as beliefs about how a workplace should function or what people expect from the workplace (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). While, the age-related life stage theory explains that people change along with their life cycles (Giancola, 2006).

Generational differences in the workplace are associated with different characters of each generation that reflect "world-view, values, and attitudes commonly shared by descriptive of cohorts" (Kupperschmidt, 2000). For examples, the characters of each generations are as follows:

- Baby Boomers are the fighters and hard workers, are known as team player, and are committed and loyal to the organization. Baby Boomers are also idealistic (Dries and Pepermans, 2008), optimistic and driven (Glass, 2007), and dedicate their lives to work. Regarding technology exposure, they are born before personal computers were in every home, it makes them a little behind in mastering ICT.
- Generation-Xers are independent, adaptable, effective and broad-minded. They are also famous for pragmatism and entrepreneurship (Dries and Pepermans, 2008). They care about the work-life balance more than Baby Boomers do. Regarding technology exposure, they are typewriter users, but also pioneers of ICT development. This makes them more familiar with technology (Sanner-Stiehr and Vandermause, 2017).
- Millennials are more selfish, impatient, frequently changing their job, and quickly expecting promotion. Massive and intense exposure to ICT make them inseparable from smartphone/tablet (Barclays, 2013), and having a better ICT literacy (Imran, 2010), like online communication, are socialist and techno-savvy (Dries and Pepermans, 2008). They also believe in a collective effort and are optimistic about the future; they like teamwork and show a strong desire to get things done with high enthusiasm (Gursoy et al., 2008). They also like fun workplaces and really care about work-life balance.

### **Generational Conflict**

Generational conflict in the workplace was associated to differences in work-values between generations (Kelly et al., 2016; Miriam et al., 2015; Hillman, 2014; Cugin, 2012; Van der Walt et al., 2016), so we also can called it intergenerational work-values conflict. Other researchers associated it with the aspect of communication (Milligan, 2016); existence of individualism and collectivism (Karp and Sirias, 2001), or differences in perception and expectation (Zopiatis et al., 2012; Tay, 2011; Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010).

The conflict can be either high- or low-level form, depends on the distance of gaps or polarization among the parties involved. The greater the difference is, the higher the conflict occurs. Tay (2011) described that conflict follows the magnitude of gap

between perception (P) and expectation (E) towards others (P-E). Each employee brings different expectations and hopes, and wants at least a balanced result (P = E). If perception is smaller than expectation (P<E) then the employees become less happy or unhappy. Gursoy et al., (2008) gave some examples of the differences of perception between each generation to others: Baby Boomers perceived Generation-X and Millennial as employees who do not have work ethics and considered them as "slackers"; Baby Boomers believed that even though younger employees had many things to learn, they perceived them as a generation that pursues recognition and promotion; Baby Boomers also considered that managers from Generation-X did not have managerial experience, did not appreciate Baby Boomers' life experiences, had lack of people skills, and relied too much on technology; while, Generation-X perceived Millennial as "slackers" and did not understand business processes of hospitality, but admitted them as a fast learner.

### Effect of Conflict on Employee Performance

Conflicts has negative correlation with performance, and the correlations would be stronger in the highly complex than the less complex tasks (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Relationship with co-workers, such as a quality of support and enthusiasm; trusting in fellow team members; and close relationships; determine the team's performance. Therefore, conflicts among co-workers or superiors/ subordinates are not conducive to achieve a good performance. All information about generational differences, conflicts, and performance, is important inputs for HR managers to seek effective strategies to build more harmonious multi-generational workplace.

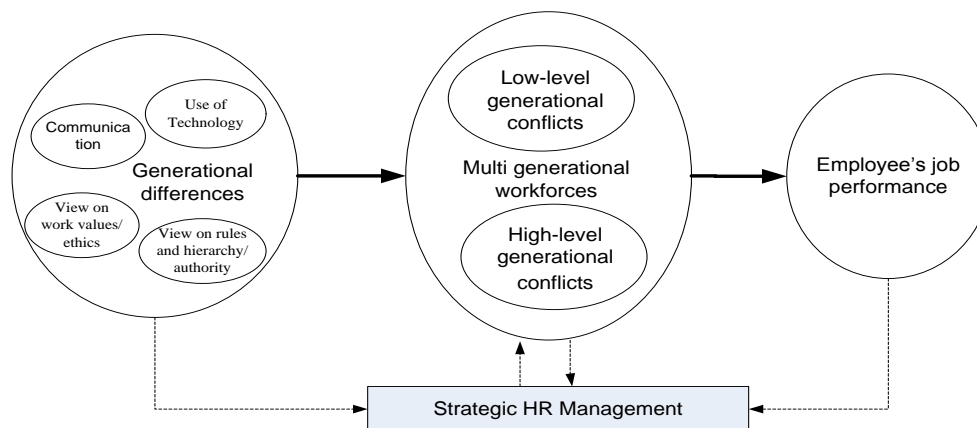


Figure 1. Framework

### Research Methodology

This study grouping employees into two groups; Millennial (born 1982-2000) and the Old Generations (born before 1982). Informants from those two groups were interviewed, two separated focus group discussions (FGD) were held, and a paper-

based survey was conducted to gather Millennial’s perspective information. FGDs and face-to-face interview discussed the topic on the perception on the Millennial, and the occurrence of conflicts among generations caused by the generational differences. Based on literature studies, field observations, interviews, and discussions, themes of differences was identified. Then, from those emerged themes, a questionnaire was compiled. Respondents, 250 Millennials of The National Agency for Drug and Food Control (NADFC) working in various locations in Indonesia, were chosen purposively. They were asked to give approval about statements according to conflicts using Likert scale 1-5. From the completed questionnaire data was processed and analyzed by using qualitative and quantitative methods.

**Result and Discussion**

Perception on Millennial. Discussed questions on what is the perception of the two group on Millennial are “How do you perceive Millennial?” “Does Millennial and the Old Generations have different characters/ work values / attitudes?” “Do these differences lead to conflict?” and “Do these conflicts impact on the employee’s performance?” Study interviewed 9 employees from all generations, various departments and various position; as well as discussed with two separate groups: 9 employees from the Millennials and 7 employees from the Old Generations. We found that there are some similar perception for several things and different perception for several others. The Old Generation highlighted the “negative” issues, such as “Millennial are poor in manners/ethics”, and “they have less sense of responsibility”; whereas Millennial focus more on their “positive-strength”, such as “they have idealism and demand to know their purpose and contribution in the work”, and “they prefer open communication”. Yet, the two groups agreed on that Millennial are more on mastering technology, and on that they have their own communication style.

**Table 1. Perception on Millennial**

From the old generations	From the Millennials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor manners / ethics</li> <li>- Have better knowledge and skills, especially related to technology</li> <li>- More open in communication and daring to convey input / ideas</li> <li>- Less sense of responsibility and easier to give up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have idealism and demand to know the purpose and contribution in the work</li> <li>- Demanding equality and appreciation</li> <li>- Prefers more open and informal communication</li> <li>- Like challenges and changes</li> <li>- Have better knowledge and mastery of technology</li> </ul>

Most of the Old Generations are unaware of issue about Millennial and considers it as a usual matter and not need to be specifically discussed. Hanifah argued that grouping employees only reinforces the existence of differences and leads to the

opposite feelings to each other. This is in line with (Sanner-Stiehr and Vandermouse, 2017; Kriegel, 2017).

*I do not understand who made the term [Millennial].... I think it [issues on Millennial] does not exist, everyone is same, depends on their personality and on how we manage them. (Hanifah, manager, Generation-X)*

However, Maria, argued that it is important to recognize the existence of Millennial. She suggested that organization need to pay attention on Millennial because their characters that are differ from the Old Generations caused conflicts at workplace.

*I once asked to give input, I said that they [Millennial] were more open, more understanding of the internet or information technology. If we don't participate in [understanding their character] then we will conflict with them. [I do not think it is a problem] if we follow them. Soon, we will retire, [we] must know ourselves. (Maria, supervisor, Generation-X)*

Validity and reliability of questionnaire. Questionnaires were passed through validity and reliability testing. The measurements result of the Cronbach Alpha value at 0.841, and significant bivariate correlation at the level of 0.01.

Descriptive analysis of generational conflict. From 250 respondents, there were 248 questionnaires that could be processed. Most of respondents are women (74%), as staff position (90%), undergraduate education (84%), having 5-10 years of average working period (51%); and working in the head office (60 %). Using the average value, an illustration of generational conflict as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. The average score of generational conflicts**

Theme of Diff.	Conflict due to generational differences	Score	Mark
Communication :			
Communication preferences	The <i>Old Generations</i> tend to like face-to-face communication; whereas Millennials prefer communication using <i>gadget</i>	3.27	Moderate
Formality	The <i>Old Generations</i> are more formal; whereas Millennials prefer informal communication	<b>3.47</b>	<b>High</b>
Attention to the other person	The <i>Old Generations</i> consider it is important to pay attention to the other person; whereas Millennials are more selfish	3.05	Moderate
View on work values/ethics :			
Working hard	The <i>Old Generations</i> consider Millennials as "slackers" and lack of hard work	2.21	Low
Relying on technology	The <i>Old Generations</i> consider Millennials do not have enough experiences in people management and rely too much on technology	2.46	Low
Commitment	The <i>Old Generations</i> consider Millennials to lack of commitment because Millennials don't like <i>overwork</i> ; whereas they are willing to work overtime as long as the work is done	2.52	Low

Orientation to Change	The <i>Old Generations</i> are more reluctant toward change; whereas Millennials are more enthusiastic	3.52	High
Optimism	The <i>Old Generations</i> are more cynical/pessimistic; whereas Millennials are more optimistic	3.34	Moderate
View on rules and hierarchy/ authority :			
View on authority/ hierarchy	The <i>Old Generations</i> respect authority/ hierarchy more; whereas Millennials consider it mediocrity	3.33	Moderate
Attitude towards rules	The <i>Old Generations</i> respect rules more; whereas Millennials often break and oppose the rules	2.49	Low
Use of Technology :			
Knowledge	Millennials have more <i>up-to-date</i> knowledge	2.93	Moderate
Mastery of technology	The <i>Old Generations</i> are not familiar with the latest technology/ method/ tool; whereas Millennials master it more	3.64	High
Openness and information sharing	The <i>Old Generations</i> are more closed in information sharing; whereas Millennials prefer openness	3.28	Moderate

As illustrated in Table 2, generational differences associated to generational conflicts in the workplace has high score for technology mastery, orientation to change, and formality in communication. The last is in line with Milligan (2016).

In terms of formality in the government institutions, the Old Generations are used to and more familiar with; whereas, Millennial took time to be adaptive. Even though it is also part of the bureaucratic culture, formality is less comply with Millennial's characters, so that the conflicts caused by it remains high. On the other hands, conflict regarding view on rules and hierarchy which is moderated by the bureaucratic culture, becomes more less since it is commonly acceptable as a consequences of being a civil servant. Meanwhile, the high score on orientation to change give us a sign of unresponsiveness which is an indicator of insufficient New Public Management practices.

Effects of generational conflicts on Millennials' performance. Data on performance is based on respondent's self-assessment that covers those aspects of quality, quantity, cost and time. Both data on conflicts and performance were divided into three levels: high, moderate, and low. Using cross-tabulation, the result can be seen in Table 2 below.

**Table 3. Relationship between conflict and performance**

		Level of Performance		
		High	Moderate	
Level of Conflict	Low	Expected Count	5.8	3.2
		% within Level of Conflict	100.00%	0.00%
		Adjusted Residual	2.2	-2.2
		p_value	0.0278	0.0278
	Moderate	Expected Count	112.3	60.7
		% within Level of Conflict	68.80%	31.20%
		Adjusted Residual	1.9	-1.9
		p_value	0.0574	0.0574
	High	Expected Count	42.8	23.2
		% within Level of Conflict	50.00%	50.00%
		Adjusted Residual	-3	3
		p_value	0.0027*	0.0027*
*) indicates statistical significance at the adjusted alpha level of 0.01				

Table 3 shows that no one has low level of performance; conflict at high level is significantly related to performance; and conflict at moderate and low levels are not significantly related to performance. Perhaps, the culture of tolerance in Indonesian people allows “room” for acceptance of lower level conflict, thereby reducing the tension and its influence on performance. If we consider conflict as a cause of stress or arousal, we need to be aware of the high level conflict since following Yerkes and Dobson Law, when levels of arousal become too high, performance decreases.

### Discussion

Although Millennial bring new characters to the workplace, it does not mean they are the only cause of conflicts. The conflict can be triggered by any party. The Old Generation’s lack of understanding about Millennial and the worries that acknowledge their existence will lead to stereotyping, even it does not make the situation become better. Otherwise, apprehending generational diversity can help to build mutual understanding and appreciation (Lafta, 2016). It is not to affirm the strength of one generation to the others, but to protect Millennial becoming a victim if the conflicts are not bridged, because in the Eastern culture the younger employees “are required” to yield to the older. The consequence is organization can lose them (they resign or survive without optimal performance).

The managerial implication of this research is that organization needs to manage employees with an intergenerational perspective (Čič, 2017), which treats them according to their characters, and makes them feel comfortable, engaged and valued. Some ways to overcome conflicts are through generational diversity training, two-way mentoring, and creating a less formal atmosphere and open communication.



Training on diversity can improve awareness of respect for differences, helps to bring expectation and perception closer, and reduces disappointment. In two-way mentoring, the Old Generations can share their experiences and wisdoms, and Millennials can share their technological skills (Sujansky, 2009). Creating a cross-generation teamwork is also a good way to encourage all members, raise dependability to others, and fill in the gaps. It is also necessary to give a special understanding of bureaucratic system at the first time Millennials come, to reduce tensions due to the formal and highly regulated work environment.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that it is needed to pay attention on the issues on generational conflicts. The top three differences that cause conflicts are technological mastery; orientation to change; and formal communication. The nature of government institution might contribute to the last two. This study also proves that high-level conflict significantly affects the performance. This valuable information is expected to be used by HR management to take appropriate steps making a better and more comfortable workplaces for all employees. Thus, the organization could retain Millennials and keep them in their high performance.

It is strongly recommended to take some real actions to control the issues regarding to the high level of conflicts to stop them turning into obstacles in achieving performances; and at the same time prevent the issues regarding to the moderate level of conflicts such as “Optimism” and “Openness and information sharing” from going to be escalated. On the other hand, it is suggested to take advantages from the issues regarding to the low-level conflicts such as “Working hard” and “Attitude towards rules” by utilizing them as a driving force for a fair competition among employees to get productivity increased (Yerkes and Dobson Law).

This research limitation is grouping Baby Boomers and Generation-X into one proxy group. Although it was easier in identifying just two groups, theoretically the two older generations have their own different characters. Therefore, further studies to see the conflict from the perspective of the two will provide a more comprehensive understanding. Also, to see whether decision makers in government agencies have had sufficient awareness and what steps they have taken to anticipate generational conflicts are also suggested for the future research.

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#### KONFLIKTY POKOLENIOWE W INDONEZYJSKIM ŚRODOWISKU PRACY SEKTORA PUBLICZNEGO Z PERSPEKTYWY MILLENNIALNEJ

**Streszczenie:** Konflikty w miejscu pracy mogą wystąpić z powodu różnic między pokoleniami. W kontekście sektora publicznego może to być pogarszane przez system biurokracji i formalne relacje. Badanie to analizuje istnienie konfliktów spowodowanych różnicami między młodymi i starszymi pokoleniami. Dane zebrano za pomocą ankiety, FGD i wywiadów. Uczestnicy są pracownikami NADFC pracującymi w różnych lokalizacjach, wybranych celowo. Zebrane dane z 250 papierowych kwestionariuszy zostały przetworzone przez SPSS Statistics za pomocą analizy opisowej i tabeli krzyżowej. Wynik wskazuje, że konflikty występują głównie z powodu różnic w zakresie opanowania technologii; orientacja na zmianę; i formalnej komunikacji. Badanie potwierdza również relacje wysokiego konfliktu międzypokoleniowego z wynikami pracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** konflikt pokoleń; sektor publiczny; międzypokoleniowe miejsce pracy; tysiącletni; wyniki.

#### 千禧年视角下的印度尼西亚公共部门工作场所的生成冲突

**摘要:** 由于世代之间的差异, 工作场所可能会发生冲突。在公共部门的背景下, 官僚制度和正式关系可能会加剧这种情况。本研究探讨了由年轻一代和老一代之间的差异引起的冲突的存在。通过调查, FGD和访谈收集数据。参与者是NADFC的员, 他们在不同地点工作, 有目的地选择。来自250份纸质问卷的完整数据由SPSSStatistics使用描述性分析和交叉制表处理。结果表明, 冲突的发生主要是由于技术掌握的差异; 改变方向; 和正式的沟通。研究还证实了高代际冲突与工作绩效的关系。

**关键词:** 代际冲突; 公共部门; 代际工作场所; 千禧年; 性能。