

GENERATION GAP, KNOWLEDGE SHARING, AND SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP: EVIDENCE OF STRONG PARTIAL MEDIATION IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

The generation gap between senior teaching staff (Generation X) and junior teaching staff (Millennials and Generation Z) in three urban districts of Tasikmalaya City namely Bungursari, Indihiang, and Mugarsari are often viewed as a source of organisational barriers. This study offers a new perspective by examining whether generational diversity can, in fact, serve as a positive driver of organisational effectiveness. A quantitative approach using a survey method was employed to collect primary data from 30 primary school teachers via a structured questionnaire comprising 28 Likert-scale indicators. The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.1 software. The measurement model demonstrated strong validity and reliability. These findings shift the perspective on *the Generation Gap* from a barrier to a strategic asset in education, which is most effective in strengthening Sustainable Leadership when facilitated by structured knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

Keywords: Generation Gap, Knowledge Sharing, Sustainable Leadership, Work Values, Social Exchange Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability of an educational institution is determined by its ability to regenerate leadership in an adaptive manner, focusing not merely on short-term performance but on longterm sustainability and innovation (Hargreaves & Dean Fink, 2006). Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory proposed by Blau (1964), the relationship between individuals and organisations is built on the principle of reciprocity: organisations that provide appropriate rewards in the form of fair pay, a conducive working environment, and clear career progression will receive in return loyalty, commitment, and a sense of ownership from teaching staff. It is this foundation of balanced exchange that serves as a prerequisite for the creation of healthy, Sustainable Leadership (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2015).

In urban primary schools in the city of Tasikmalaya, the intergenerational encounter between the structurally dominant Generation X and younger teaching staff from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts creates tangible tension. This younger generation highly values *autonomy*, flexibility, and technological adaptation in their work values, which often clash with those of the older generation (Lestari & Perdhana, 2023). This disparity is commonly referred to as *the 'Generation Gap'*, is traditionally viewed as an obstacle to communication, collaboration, and the adoption of innovation within organisations. (Costanza et al., 2012)

Nevertheless, this study adopts a different theoretical perspective. Drawing on Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model, which conceptualises knowledge creation as a dynamic social process that converts *tacit* (intuitive) and *explicit* (systematic) knowledge through socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation, this study proposes that generational diversity

can actually act as a catalyst for intensifying knowledge exchange. The complementarity between the wealth of *tacit* pedagogical knowledge possessed by senior educators and the digital literacy strengths of junior educators creates conditions conducive to productive cross-generational knowledge flow. It is this flow that, in turn, strengthens the capacity for Sustainable Leadership.

The urgency of this study is reinforced by empirical findings showing that *Knowledge Sharing* makes a highly significant contribution to *Sustainable Leadership*, with an effect size (f^2) of 1.563, whilst *the generation gap* has been shown to be the primary driver of the intensity of Knowledge Sharing, with a path coefficient of 0.707. These findings suggest that generational diversity in schools has the potential to act as a driving force for broader knowledge exchange, which ultimately strengthens the foundations of Sustainable Leadership.

Previous studies have examined the impact of the generation gap on organisational behaviour (Brčić & Mihelič, 2015), the dynamics of Knowledge Sharing among a multi-age workforce (Bencsik, 2021; Andriani et al., 2022), and the determinants of Sustainable Leadership (Boeske, 2023; Jilani et al., 2020). However, three crucial research gaps remain: (1) the majority of studies are set in corporate organisations, meaning that educational institutions particularly primary schools in developing urban areas remain severely under-represented in the literature; (2) no research has yet tested the full mediation chain from the Generation Gap through Knowledge Sharing to Sustainable Leadership within a single integrated model in the Indonesian educational context; and (3) the conceptual framework positioning the Generation Gap as a catalyst for knowledge has not been empirically validated in the Indonesian educational context. This study is designed to address all three of these issues.

This study is structured around four research questions: (1) Does the Generation Gap have a direct, positive and significant effect on Sustainable Leadership in primary schools in the urban area of Tasikmalaya City? (2) Does the Generation Gap have a positive and significant effect on the intensity of Knowledge Sharing? (3) Does Knowledge Sharing have a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Leadership? (4) Does Knowledge Sharing mediate the relationship between the Generation Gap and Sustainable Leadership? In line with these questions, this study aims to: this study aims to: (1) test the direct effect of *the Generation Gap* on *the on Sustainable Leadership*; (2) examine the effect of *the Generation Gap* on *Knowledge Sharing*; (3) analyse the effect of *Knowledge Sharing* on *Sustainable Leadership*; and (4) analyse the mediating role of *Knowledge Sharing* in the relationship between *the Generation Gap* and *Sustainable Leadership* among primary school teachers in the urban area of Tasikmalaya City.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

The Generation Gap refers to collective divergences in values, behavioural norms, and workstyles that have formed socio-historically between cohorts based on different birth periods (Mannheim, 1928). In an organisational context, these divergences manifest themselves in differences in communication styles, the pace of technology adoption, and leadership preferences, as described by *Strauss-Howe's Generational Theory* (1991). Contrary to the traditional view that sees *the generation gap* as a source of conflict, modern strategic management literature recognises that this gap actually brings valuable *cognitive diversity*. Hernandez et al. (2019) demonstrate that Generation Z brings stronger values of sustainability, a stronger work ethic, and greater environmental awareness to the workplace. This situation creates positive pressure on senior leadership to adapt towards a more flexible and long-term oriented leadership style, in line with the principles of *Sustainable Leadership*.

H1: Generation Gap has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Leadership

The relationship between the generation gap and Knowledge Sharing is theoretically rooted in the principle of complementarity within Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). Bencsik (2021) distinguishes the tacit knowledge of the older generation which encompasses managerial intuition and organisational memory from the explicit knowledge of the younger generation in the form of

digital literacy. This asymmetry creates a functional symbiosis: each cohort perceives the other as a unique and irreplaceable source of knowledge, thereby motivating productive mutual exchange. The practice of reverse mentoring is a concrete manifestation of this dynamic: younger educators contribute through digital technology support, whilst senior educators pass on strategic insight and pedagogical wisdom. In an inclusive organisational climate, generational diversity transforms from a source of friction into a catalyst for richer and more meaningful Knowledge Sharing (Sammara et al., 2017; Brčić & Mihelič, 2015).

H2: Generation gap has a positive and significant effect on Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge Sharing is not merely a transfer of technical data; it is an organic social activity that integrates the tacit wisdom of senior educators with the adaptive innovations of the next generation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). When this two-way exchange takes place continuously across generational boundaries, organisations build a foundation of collective intelligence that is a prerequisite for Sustainable Leadership. Jilani et al. (2020) identified Knowledge Sharing as a key determinant of sustainable organisational performance, arguing that individuals' unique potential cannot become an organisational asset without effective sharing mechanisms. In an educational context, the active distribution of knowledge across generations mitigates the risk of brain drain during leadership transitions (Yunitasari et al., 2021) and ensures that leadership succession is underpinned by a strong accumulation of collective wisdom.

H3: Knowledge Sharing has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Leadership

The mediating role of Knowledge Sharing in the relationship between the generation gap and Sustainable Leadership can be explained through several complementary theoretical frameworks. Referring to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), interactions between individuals within an organisation are driven by the principle of reciprocity, whereby reciprocal knowledge exchange between generations can dissolve generational ego barriers and build norms of trust that form the foundation of Sustainable Leadership. In line with the Knowledge-Based View (Grant, 1996), Knowledge Sharing functions as a strategic integration mechanism that consolidates the tacit knowledge of the older generation and the explicit knowledge of the younger generation into the organisational collective intelligence required for Sustainable Leadership. Furthermore, within the framework of Organisational Learning Theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978), active Knowledge Sharing drives educational organisations to move from a defensive single-loop learning pattern towards transformative double-loop learning, so that generational differences no longer become a source of fragmentation but rather a source of knowledge diversity that enriches the organisation's adaptive capacity. Thus, Knowledge Sharing does not merely act as a passive intermediary, but as an active mechanism that systematically transforms the potential conflict of the generation gap into collective synergy, which ultimately substantially strengthens and expands the impact of the generation gap on Sustainable Leadership (Jilani et al., 2020; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Based on the theoretical arguments presented above, this study proposes that Knowledge Sharing functions as a critical mediating mechanism through which the generation gap influences Sustainable Leadership. When generational diversity is channelled through a structured knowledge exchange process, its transformative potential is fully realised, yielding not only direct effects on Sustainable Leadership but also substantially amplified indirect effects.

H4: Knowledge Sharing mediates the relationship between the Generation Gap and Sustainable Leadership

RESEARCH METHODS

His study employs an explanatory quantitative approach, using a survey as the primary instrument for collecting primary data. An explanatory design was chosen because the study aims to explain causal relationships and test mediating effects between Variables. The study population comprises all primary school teachers in three urban sub-districts of Tasikmalaya City, Bungursari, Indihang and Mugarsari totalling 100 individuals. By applying cluster random sampling based on

urban clusters, 10 respondents were selected from each sub-district, resulting in a total sample size of N = 30. The sample distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on Teacher Respondents in the Urban Areas of Tasikmalaya City

No	Teacher Respondent Data	
	Area Name	Sample Size
1	Indihiang	10
2	Bungursari	10
3	Mugarsari	10

Source: Processed data, 2026.

Table 2. Variables and Indicators

No	Variable	Definition	Indicator	Measurement Scale
1	Generational Gap Karl Mannheim (1928) - Generation Theory	Differences in values, communication styles, and work styles arising from the different birth periods of an organisation's members.	- X1 eliminated (outer loading = 0.68 < 0.70) - X2: Communication Style Barriers - X3: Technology Adaptation Gap - X4: Interaction Friction & Age Stereotypes	Likert Scale
2	Knowledge Sharing Peter Blau (1964) - Social Exchange Theory	The process of exchanging knowledge, experience, and skills between individuals to create added value for the organisation.	- 1: Knowledge Donation - Z2: Knowledge Collection - Z3: Experience Transfer - Z4: Exchange of Technical Information (Explicit)	Likert Scale
3	Sustainable Leadership Avery & Bergsteiner (2011)	A leadership style focused on balancing short term performance with the organisation's long term sustainability.	- Y1: Teacher Development - Y2: Long-Term Vision Perspective - Y3: Ethics Characteristics School Leaders - Y4: & of School Adaptability Innovation	Likert Scale

Source: Processed data, 2026

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 28 indicators covering three research Variables, each measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Table 2 presents the research Variables, theoretical framework and indicators. It should be noted that indicator X1 (Work Value Differences) was excluded because its outer loading of 0.68 fell below the minimum threshold of 0.70. All data were analysed using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4.1.1 (Ringle et al., 2022), selected for its ability to accurately estimate complex mediation models with latent Variables in small samples (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis was conducted in two stages: (1) assessment of the outer model and (2) assessment of the inner model

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The assessment of the measurement model confirmed the robustness of all constructs following the removal of X1 (Work Value Differences; outer loading = 0.68, below the threshold of 0.70). All 11 remaining indicators exhibited adequate to very good loading values (range: 0.829 0.976). Model quality is supported by AVE values exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50 for all constructs, namely Generation Gap (0.842), Knowledge Sharing (0.942), and Sustainable Leadership (0.971). CR and CA values above 0.70 confirm very strong internal consistency. Discriminant validity

is met based on the Fornell-Larcker criteria and all HTMT values < 0.90. Overall, this measurement model is deemed robust and suitable for structural equation modelling.

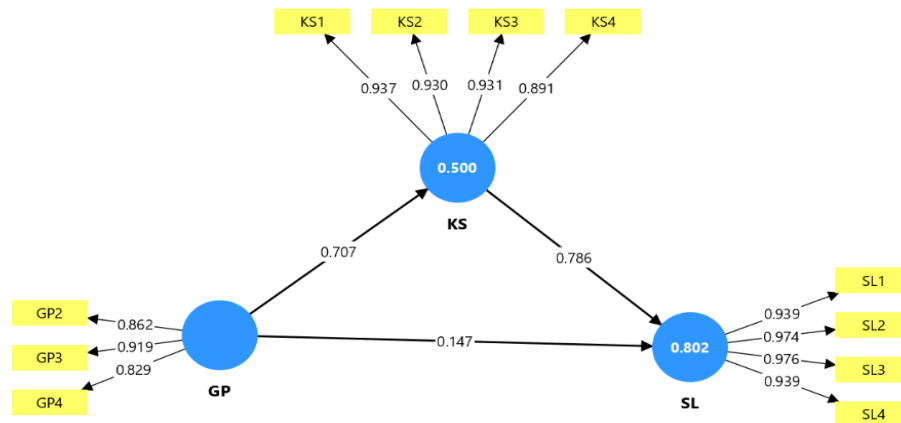


Figure 1. Outer Model Framework

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Table 3. Outer Loadings

Variabel	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Notes
Generation Gap	X2	0.862	0.842	Valid
	X3	0.919		Valid
	X4	0.829		Valid
Sustainable Leadership	Y1	0.939	0.971	Valid
	Y2	0.974		Valid
	Y3	0.976		Valid
	Y4	0.939		Valid
Knowledge Sharing	Z1	0.937	0.942	Valid
	Z2	0.930		Valid
	Z3	0.931		Valid
	Z4	0.891		Valid

Source: Test results using smartPLS 4

Testing Using the Inner Model

Table 4. Structural Model Results – Hypothesis Testing

H	Jalur	β	T-Stat.	P-Value	f^2	Decision	Tipe
H1	Gen Gap (X) → Sustainable Leadership (Y)	0,147	2,862	0,005	0,068	Supported	Direct
H2	Gen Gap (X) → Knowledge Sharing (Z)	0,707	—	< 0,001	—	Supported	Direct
H3	Knowledge Sharing (Z) → Sustainable Leadership (Y)	0,786	—	< 0,001	1,563	Supported	Direct
H4	Gen Gap (X) → via Z → Sustainable Leadership (Y)	0,556†	—	< 0,001	—	Strong Partial Mediation	Indirect

Source: Test results using smartPLS 4

Direct Effect of Generation Gap on Sustainable Leadership (H1)

The PLS-SEM results confirm that the Generation Gap has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on Sustainable Leadership, thus H1 is accepted. Although the coefficient is moderate, this statistical significance carries substantial weight in a context where the Generation Gap is traditionally viewed as a barrier; this finding suggests that generational diversity contributes meaningfully to Sustainable Leadership even without mediation by other Variables. In theory, this influence reflects the mechanism of heterogeneous resource exchange within the framework of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964): Generation X educators contribute social capital in the form of institutional experience and pedagogical wisdom, whilst Millennial and Generation Z educators bring intellectual capital in the form of digital innovation and sustainability awareness (Hernandez et al., 2019). This cross-generational exchange creates a balance of perspectives that strengthens leaders' capacity for sustainable decision-making. The coefficient values indicate that the Generation Gap functions as an enabling factor rather than a sole determinant of Sustainable Leadership. The true transformative impact of generational diversity is realised through the mediation of Knowledge Sharing.

Effect of Generation Gap on Knowledge Sharing (H2)

The Generation Gap demonstrates a very strong positive influence on Knowledge Sharing; consequently, H2 is accepted and represents the strongest direct pathway in the model. In the context of the in urban education, which is under intense pressure from digitalisation, senior Generation X educators and younger Millennial and Generation Z educators find themselves in a state of deep interdependence: senior teachers possess a wealth of tacit pedagogical knowledge, whilst younger teachers master digital literacy, a combination that generates productive intellectual exchange (Bencsik, 2021). Consistent with the knowledge management framework proposed by Andriani et al. (2022), the wider the generational span within a school, the more diversified the knowledge profiles and the more intensive the flow of Knowledge Sharing. The coefficients obtained provide strong empirical support for the notion that generational diversity is a key prerequisite for the creation of a dynamic organisational learning ecosystem in urban primary schools.

Effect of Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Leadership and Mediation Effects (H3 & H4)

Knowledge Sharing has the strongest influence on Sustainable Leadership; therefore, H3 is accepted. The effect size far exceeds the threshold for a large effect (Hair et al., 2021), confirming the very high practical relevance of Knowledge Sharing for sustainable educational leadership. With regard to mediation (H4), the indirect effect of the Generation Gap on Sustainable Leadership via Knowledge Sharing far exceeds the direct effect. The persistence of a significant direct path alongside the dominance of this indirect influence confirms strong partial mediation. This means: (a) the Generation Gap independently has a significant effect on Sustainable Leadership, but (b) this

effect is dramatically amplified when the Knowledge Sharing mechanism is actively at work. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, Knowledge Sharing functions as a mitigating mechanism; whilst generational differences may potentially pose the risk of communication gaps, the reciprocal exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge across generations dissolves the barriers of ego between generations (Blau, 1964). In line with Jilani et al. (2020), organisations where knowledge flows freely across generational boundaries develop the foundation of collective intelligence necessary for Sustainable Leadership—not because all educators come from the same generation, but because all educators have equal access to the organisation’s accumulated knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Knowledge Sharing is the strongest predictor of Sustainable Leadership in educational organisations in the urban area of Tasikmalaya. The generation gap does not have a direct effect; rather, through the mediation of Knowledge Sharing, the intergenerational divide becomes not a barrier but a collective asset that can be managed. Based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), the exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge between generations has been shown to build trust and collective intelligence, which form the foundation of Sustainable Leadership. Therefore, a holistic strategy is required that simultaneously facilitates generational diversity and fosters an inclusive culture of Knowledge Sharing. Practical implications that can be implemented by school heads and education policymakers: Firstly, the institutionalisation of reverse mentoring that is, establishing formal mentoring pairs between Generation X teachers and Millennial/Generation Z teachers designed to facilitate a two-way exchange of pedagogical wisdom and digital competencies. Second, create structured knowledge-sharing forums through regular intergenerational collaboration sessions (team teaching, co-design curriculum workshops) to provide an institutional framework for the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Thirdly, foster an inclusive organisational culture; school leaders must actively signal that all generational perspectives are valued, in order to reduce age stereotypes and enhance psychological safety in Knowledge Sharing.

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