

Cross-Generational Communication in Public Service Delivery: A Study of the Pidie District Government, Indonesia

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Submitted:
June 25, 2025

Accepted:
December 11, 2025

Published:
December 12, 2025

Abstract: Intergenerational interaction is an increasingly important factor shaping the functioning and adaptability of public organizations. In bureaucratic environments, these interactions become more complex due to differences in values, authority orientations, work styles, and technological familiarity across generations. While prior research has largely focused on generational dynamics in private-sector organizations, limited empirical evidence explains how these dynamics operate within public bureaucracies in Aceh Province, where hierarchical norms and administrative cultures differ significantly. This study examines how intergenerational interaction is constructed within the Pidie District Government and how it influences organizational effectiveness and public service delivery. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, participant observations, and analysis of internal regulations across several government agencies. The findings reveal three dominant patterns: technological competency gaps that disrupt task coordination, varying interpretations of bureaucratic hierarchy that affect communication flow, and contrasting work-style orientations that shape teamwork and conflict emergence. These patterns often lead to recurring misunderstandings and reduced workflow efficiency. However, adaptive leadership, structured knowledge-sharing routines, and informal mentoring between generations were found to effectively minimize barriers. The study contributes to public administration literature by highlighting how generational identities intersect with bureaucratic norms. Practically, the results emphasize the need for targeted digital literacy initiatives, clearer internal communication guidelines, and institutionalized cross-generational mentoring to enhance organizational cohesion and improve service delivery.

Keywords: Cross-generational Communication, Generational Dynamics, Public bureaucracies

Abstrak: Interaksi antargenerasi menjadi faktor penting yang memengaruhi keberfungsian dan kemampuan adaptasi organisasi publik. Dalam lingkungan birokrasi, interaksi ini kerap menghadapi kompleksitas akibat perbedaan nilai, orientasi kewenangan, gaya kerja, serta tingkat literasi teknologi di antara generasi yang bekerja

berdampingan. Sementara penelitian sebelumnya banyak berfokus pada dinamika generasi di sektor privat, bukti empiris mengenai bagaimana dinamika tersebut berlangsung dalam birokrasi publik di Provinsi Aceh masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana interaksi antargenerasi terbentuk di lingkungan Pemerintah Kabupaten Pidie serta dampaknya terhadap efektivitas organisasi dan kualitas pelayanan publik. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen internal pada beberapa perangkat daerah. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama interaksi antargenerasi: kesenjangan kompetensi teknologi yang menghambat koordinasi tugas, perbedaan pemaknaan terhadap hierarki birokrasi yang mempengaruhi alur komunikasi, serta kontras gaya kerja yang berdampak pada kolaborasi dan potensi konflik. Pola ini memunculkan miskomunikasi yang berulang dan menurunkan efisiensi kerja. Namun, praktik kepemimpinan adaptif, rutinitas berbagi pengetahuan, dan mentoring informal antargenerasi terbukti mampu meminimalkan hambatan tersebut. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya program literasi digital, pedoman komunikasi internal yang lebih jelas, serta skema mentoring antargenerasi untuk memperkuat kohesi organisasi dan meningkatkan pelayanan publik.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Lintas Generasi, Dinamika Generasi, birokrasi publik.

Introduction

Communication in an organization is an important aspect that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization's running. In public bureaucracy, communication has a more complicated role considering the diversity of ages and generational backgrounds. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is increasingly felt with the presence of generations that have different characteristics and communication patterns, such as Generation Baby Boomer, X, Y (Millennial), and Z. Each generation brings unique values, hopes, and ways of communicating, which often become a challenge in managing public bureaucracy, including Pidie Regency Government (Regional Government of Pidie Regency), Aceh. The importance of cross-generational communication becomes even more apparent when talking about government bureaucracy, which is known for its rigid and formal administrative system. With the differences in communication methods between the older and younger generations, gaps often arise that can affect performance and working relationships within government institutions (Wardani et al., 2024). The younger generation tends to be more open mind to the use of technology and a more at ease to communication, while the older generation tends to maintain formal communication norms.

Pidie District Government, this is a relevant issue considering Pidie's position as a region with a unique history and culture, as well as the existence of a special autonomy policy that poses challenges in governance. The concept of communication in the Pidie District Government bureaucracy does not only consider administrative aspects, but also cultural and social aspects that are tied to local values. The diversity of generations in Pidie District Government, which involves actors with different life

experiences and ways of thinking, requires an adaptive and inclusive communication approach in order to create harmonious cooperation among generations.

It is hoped that through this understanding, it can provide insight into communication strategies for existing gaps, mutual respect, and minimizing misunderstandings among generations, can facilitate cross-generational communication and create collaboration among generations to achieve organizational goals (Jannah et al., 2024). Cross-generational communication in public bureaucracy, especially in Pidie Regency Government, therefore needs to be examined not only descriptively but also analytically through relevant theories. Interpersonal communication helps explain how messages are interpreted differently across generations, while diffusion of innovation clarifies why younger generations tend to adopt technological communication tools more rapidly than older ones.

Communication strategy is an important thing in the communication process (Hermansyah, 2022). The communication strategy is carried out to ensure that the message is conveyed according to the initial purpose of being sent, but also to overcome the challenges of cross-generational communication or cultural in organizational context. Various studies have shown that effective cross-generational communication has the potential to improve collaboration, innovation, and performance in government organizations. Research on cross-generational communication in the public sector revealed that understanding generational differences in terms of communication styles can reduce tension and increase work efficiency (Jannah et al., 2024). Likewise, (Husamah, 2024; Radiana, 2025) showed that the use of modern communication technology can bridge the gap among the younger and older generations in government bureaucracy. Communication in an organization refers to the process of exchanging information, ideas, or messages among members of an organization that aims to support the achievement of organizational goals.

Devito (1997) defines organizational communication as the sending and receiving of formal and informal messages within an organization. This communication includes various channels, oral, written, formal, and informal, that occur within the organization to convey information that is relevant to the running of the organization. In public bureaucracy, communication plays an important role because it is a link among various elements in the organization, among superiors and subordinates, among colleagues, and between work units in the organization (Iskandar, 2021). However, in the context of government bureaucracy, communication is not just an exchange of information. It must also pay attention to aspects of clarity, accuracy, and conformity with the norms and values that develop within the organization (Wardani et al., 2024). In Pidie District Government, effective communication, especially interpersonal communication (Budiyatna et al., 2013), is carried out within the organization, face to face or through the media, and can change behavior based on understanding among two side. This is the key to overcoming administrative challenges and strengthening relationships between employees who have different backgrounds of experience, age, and position.

If an organization can maintain good communication stability, then effective interpersonal (Budiyatna et al., 2013) communication will improve close relationships at every level of the organization, which is a way for organizations to improve employee welfare and will also have an impact on harmony among employees and the organization which can create commitment to the organization. In the concept of interpersonal communication, the contact that occurs is two-way and reciprocal. When this communication can be established well, it is expected to increase harmony within the organization which can trigger increased employee work motivation (Saputra et al., 2021). The cross-generational communication dynamics in public bureaucracy, especially in Pidie Regency Government. One of them is interpersonal communication which emphasizes the importance of relationships between individuals in conveying messages (Rakhmat, 1999). This explains how effective communication can be achieved by understanding the characteristics of individuals from various levels of generations involved. In this context, understanding the values, expectations, and communication preferences is very important to create mutually supportive communication among employees. In the other side, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory can also be applied in seeing how new communication technologies can be accepted and used by various levels of generations in bureaucracy. According to Rogers in Mailin (2022), the process of adopting communication technology in an organization requires an understanding of individual characteristics, which in this case, are influenced by the age and experience of the generation.

Cross-generational communication in government bureaucracy, including Pidie District Government, is a comprehensive issue that is important to discuss. Differences in communication styles across generations require an innovative approach to these differences. A communication strategy is needed that may bridge the gap among generations and create a harmonious, productive, and efficient neighbourhood work.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2018; Creswell, 2014) to analyze the phenomenon of cross-generational communication in the government bureaucracy that is full of social meaning, especially Pidie Regency Government (Musfikar, 2018; Mustafa et al., 2016). This approach was chosen to understand directly how communication challenges and opportunities appear in daily bureaucratic practices. By engaging with real work situations, the researcher was able to observe how employees from different generations interact, exchange information, and respond to communication issues that arise in the bureaucratic structure.

Participatory observation was carried out by joining several routine activities within the Pidie District Government, such as weekly coordination meetings, administrative service processes, and informal interactions in the office environment. Through these observations, the researcher identified concrete communication behaviors, such as how messages were delivered, how employees responded to instructions, and how digital media were used in neighbourhood work. The focus was

on capturing differences among generations in real time, including moments of misunderstanding, adaptation, or collaboration during daily tasks.

Interviews were conducted openly and unstructured (Mulyana et al., 2008) with employees from each generational group. The interviews explored the challenges they face in communicating with colleagues from different generations, how they adjust the way they communicate across generations, and how they utilize technology in the communication process. Employees were asked to describe specific experiences, such as difficulties understanding digital instructions, variations in interpreting hierarchical messages, or differences in preferred communication channels. These concrete stories provided contextual insights into how cross-generational communication is practiced, negotiated, and improved in the bureaucratic environment.

Results and Discussion

Cross-Generational Communication Dynamics in Public Bureaucracy

Cross-generational communication refers to the interaction among individuals from different generations who have ways of thinking, values, and lifestyles that are not always aligned. These differences create communication dynamics in workplace, especially in public bureaucratic organizations. Generally, generations in the workplace are divided into several categories based on their life stages and social development, namely Baby Boomers, X Generation, Y Generation (Millennials), and Z Generation. Baby Boomer generation (born 1946–1964) tends to have traditional values that prioritize discipline, value face-to-face communication and formality in conveying messages (Williams et al., 2012), respect authority, and maintain formal and hierarchy-based communication patterns. Generation X (born 1965–1980), although more flexible than Baby Boomers and more accustomed to technology, still holds to the values of discipline, hard work, and stability, but is more open to the use of technology in communication.

Generation Y (Millennials, born 1981–1996), as young employees who are familiar with digital technology, are more communicative, and tend to want a more inclusive and flexible work environment. Known for their adaptive nature towards technology, this generation is more open, interactive, and values collaboration in communication, and tends to be more relaxed in their approach. Meanwhile, Generation Z (born after 1997) represents newer employees in the bureaucracy who prefer fast and digital-based communication, and want a more open and less formal work atmosphere. This generation lives amid the development of digital technology and social media (Khizanatul, 2024), growing up with different habits and media consumption patterns than previous generations. They are more accustomed to communication technology-based, fast, and direct communication, and are flexible in norms and structures. These generational differences create challenges in communication, especially in public bureaucracies that tend to be rigid and formal. While younger generations tend to want more open and quick communication, older

generations value formality and procedural accuracy in every communication they make.

Public bureaucracy, including Pidie Regency Government, often faces challenges in building effective cross-generational communication. Several studies have shown that differences in cross-generational communication patterns are often a source of tension and misunderstanding (Kartini et al., 2024). In a bureaucracy where organizational structures are often rigid and formal, differences in communication preferences can affect performance and collaboration among employees. Baby Boomers and Generation X tend to value face-to-face communication and focus on organizational hierarchy, while Generation Y and Z prefer to use technology such as instant messaging applications, email, or other digital platforms. These differences, if not managed properly, can lead to misunderstandings, decreased motivation, and decreased work productivity. Therefore, managers and leaders in public bureaucracy, including the Pidie Regency Government, must have a communication strategy that can unite various communication styles among generations.

One of the aspects of life most affected by technological developments is the cultural aspect of society which is gradually shifting (Setiawan, 2017). The advancement of digital technology continues to develop, causing changes in human lifestyle patterns due to technological advances so that they become more pragmatic. Pidie Regency Government, with its long and complex bureaucratic structure, faces many challenges in cross-generational communication. One of the main challenges is how to integrate the use of technology in communication (Medina, 2020) without ignoring local cultural values and norms that remain relevant in the context of local government. Aceh, as a region with special autonomy, has strong cultural characteristics that influence the way employees communicate and interact in the workplace.

According to Oktaviana (2024), bureaucracy in special autonomous regions such as Aceh requires a flexible and inclusive approach to communication. Cross-generational communication must accommodate the use of technology for the younger generation (Jannah et al., 2024), while providing appropriate communication channels for the older generation (Syarifah, 2025). One proposed solution is the implementation of a communication technology-based model supported by cross-generational communication skills training for all employees. On the other hand, diversity also brings opportunities to enrich the decision-making process and innovation in bureaucracy. Collaboration between the senior generation and the younger generation can create synergy that combines experience with creative ideas (Radiana, 2025) and promotes collaboration. Therefore, it is important for the Pidie Regency Government to utilize this diversity as social capital that enriches organizational dynamics, not as an obstacle.

The findings show that the Pidie Regency Government, as a public institution with employees from diverse age groups, experiences a dynamic pattern of cross-generational communication. Differences in values, work habits, and preferences for communication technologies significantly shape how employees interact in the bureaucratic environment. The presence of Baby Boomers and Generation X alongside Millennials and Generation Z creates distinct communication patterns that influence daily workflow and decision-making.

Two dominant communication patterns were identified. First, older generations tend to maintain formal, hierarchical, and procedure-oriented communication. They prefer structured channels such as face-to-face meetings, written memos, and official reports. Second, younger generations prefer flexible and technology-based communication channels such as instant messaging, email, and digital collaboration platforms. These differences often lead to misunderstandings, delays in information flow, and inconsistent interpretations of urgency or formality in messages.

Field observations also revealed that the adoption of digital platforms is uneven across generations. Younger employees adapt more quickly to digital applications, while older employees still struggle with some technological demands. This discrepancy creates gaps in teamwork that depends heavily on digital coordination. Several employees expressed confusion when receiving important information through informal digital platforms, while others felt constrained by bureaucratic procedures that rely on manual documentation.

Despite these challenges, the findings highlight the potential for generational synergy. The experience and institutional knowledge of senior employees, combined with the technological adaptability and collaborative spirit of the younger generation, can strengthen organizational performance. Both generations expressed willingness to learn from each other when supportive communication structures are present. Local cultural values in Aceh, which emphasize respect and collectivism, also contribute positively to maintaining interpersonal harmony within the bureaucracy.

Bridging Traditional and Modern Communication Styles in Government Bureaucracy

The results reflect broader issues in the literature regarding how generational differences influence communication in public organizations. The persistence of formal communication preferences among older employees stems from long-standing bureaucratic values such as hierarchy, discipline, and clarity. These values align with traditional Acehnese norms that emphasize respect for authority. However, the expectations of younger generations favor openness, transparency, and collaboration, which challenge the rigidity of conventional bureaucratic practices.

The tension between traditional and modern communication styles is particularly evident in technology-mediated interactions. While younger generations perceive digital platforms as efficient and responsive, older generations view them as lacking clarity and undermining established procedures. This mismatch leads to message distortions, delayed responses, and uncertainty over the status of information

received via informal channels. These findings support recent studies that highlight the need for coherent communication strategies in multi-generational workplaces.

Several strategies are necessary to address these challenges. Cross-generational communication training can improve digital literacy for older employees and enhance younger employees' understanding of bureaucratic norms. Building a collaborative culture that values diverse communication styles is equally important. Leaders play a crucial role in mediating generational expectations by creating inclusive spaces for discussion, combining formal and informal communication channels, and promoting mutual learning. Integrating digital communication gradually into formal procedures can help bridge technological gaps without disrupting organizational order.

Aceh's cultural context provides an important foundation for harmonizing cross-generational communication. Values of togetherness, respect, and family-like relationships support the creation of a balanced communication environment that maintains tradition while embracing modernization. Effective management of these cultural and generational differences will determine the degree to which Pidie Regency Government can enhance its bureaucratic performance and adapt to ongoing digital transformation.

Conclusion

Cross-generational communication in the Pidie District Government bureaucracy shows that significant challenges remain in achieving effective collaboration, largely due to differences in communication methods between older and younger generations. These differences shape the flow of information, interaction patterns, and overall organizational performance. A deeper understanding of generational characteristics, along with interventions such as cross-generational communication training, the gradual integration of digital communication technologies, and the development of a collaborative organizational culture, provides strategic opportunities to improve communication dynamics, efficiency, and innovation within government settings.

The generational diversity present in the Pidie District Government has the potential to strengthen cooperation and enhance organizational performance, ultimately contributing to improved public service delivery. For this reason, it is crucial for the Pidie District Government to continue fostering an inclusive, adaptive, and technology-oriented communication culture while respecting local cultural values that guide interpersonal relationships within the bureaucracy. Through innovative and adaptive approaches, internal communication can become more dynamic and responsive to changing administrative and technological demands, allowing generational diversity to serve not as a barrier but as a strategic asset that enriches organizational dynamics.

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