

THE RELEVANCE OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP FOR GENERATION Z IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mengubah karakteristik Generasi Z serta memunculkan tantangan baru bagi organisasi dalam menerapkan kepemimpinan yang mampu memenuhi ekspektasi generasi tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis karakteristik Generasi Z di era digital, mengidentifikasi tantangan kepemimpinan yang dihadapi organisasi, serta mengkaji relevansi nilai-nilai kepemimpinan Islami dalam menghadapi tantangan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode library research. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Generasi Z memiliki karakteristik adaptif terhadap teknologi, mengharapkan fleksibilitas kerja, komunikasi yang terbuka, serta kesempatan untuk berkembang. Karakteristik tersebut menuntut pemimpin mampu membangun komunikasi yang efektif, menciptakan hubungan kerja yang dilandasi kepercayaan, dan beradaptasi terhadap perubahan yang cepat. Nilai-nilai kepemimpinan Islami, yaitu *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, dan *fathanah*, relevan dalam menjawab tantangan kepemimpinan di era digital karena mampu memperkuat integritas, tanggung jawab, komunikasi, serta kemampuan pengambilan keputusan. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dengan memperluas kajian kepemimpinan Islami ke dalam konteks Generasi Z dan era digital, serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi organisasi dan pemimpin untuk mengembangkan pendekatan kepemimpinan yang lebih adaptif dengan tetap berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islam.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Islami, Generasi Z, Era Digital

Abstract

*The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the characteristics of Generation Z and created new challenges for organizations in developing leadership approaches that meet the expectations of this generation. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era, identify the leadership challenges faced by organizations, and examine the relevance of Islamic leadership values in addressing these challenges. This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research method. The findings indicate that Generation Z is highly adaptive to technology, values workplace flexibility and open communication, and seeks opportunities for personal development. These characteristics require leaders to establish effective communication, foster trust-based relationships, and adapt to rapid changes. The Islamic leadership values of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* are relevant to addressing leadership challenges in the digital era by strengthening integrity, responsibility, communication, and decision-making. The findings contribute theoretically by extending the discussion of Islamic leadership to the context of Generation Z and the digital era, while also providing practical implications for organizations and leaders in developing more adaptive leadership approaches grounded in Islamic values.*

Keywords: Islamic Leadership, Generation Z, Digital Era.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology over the past few decades has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the workplace. These changes accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many organizations adopted work-from-home (WFH) policies as a way to adapt to the evolving situation (Achmad et al., 2023). This transformation has changed how organizations operate. It has also reshaped communication patterns, coordination processes, and employees' expectations of a more flexible, technology-driven work environment (Achmad et al., 2023; Sitompul et al., 2025; Sulistyowati et al., 2025). Consequently, organizations are required not only to adapt to technological advancements but also to adjust their leadership approaches in order to maintain effective working relationships in this changing environment.

Along with this transformation, Generation Z has become an increasingly dominant segment of the workforce across various sectors. Having grown up alongside the internet and digital technology, this generation is widely recognized as digital natives and possesses characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations (Shafitri & Rialdy, 2024). In Indonesia, Generation Z represents the largest generational group. The 2020 Population Census recorded 74.93 million Generation Z individuals, accounting for 27.94% of the country's total population. Born between 1997 and 2012, this generation represents an increasingly important demographic group for Indonesia's current and future workforce (BPS, 2021). Generation Z tends to value workplace flexibility, open communication, timely feedback, opportunities for personal growth, and a healthy work-life balance (Aslikhah et al., 2025). They also prefer collaborative work environments, technology oriented organizations, and workplaces that encourage employee participation in decision-making processes (Rambe et al., 2024).

These changing workforce characteristics have created new challenges for organizational leaders. Leadership in the digital era requires the ability to foster effective communication, facilitate virtual collaboration, and create an environment that supports innovation. The rapid advancement of digital technology, together with the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI), has further challenged organizations in managing their human resources. Therefore, leadership approaches are expected not only to adapt to technological developments but also to uphold ethical and human values throughout the leadership process.

An approach considered relevant in this context is Islamic leadership. Islamic leadership is grounded in the values of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, viewing leadership as a trust (*amanah*) that must be carried out with responsibility and accountability (Sukatin et al., 2022). This understanding is reinforced by the Qur'an and Hadith. Surah An-Nisa (4:58) commands believers to fulfill trusts and uphold justice in judgment, while Surah Al-Ahzab (33:21) presents the Prophet Muhammad as an exemplary model of conduct. The Prophet's statement that "every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for his flock," narrated in both Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, further emphasizes that leadership is a responsibility and accountability rather than merely a position of authority. These principles are reflected in the four core values associated with the Prophet's leadership: *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah*, which represent honesty, trustworthiness, effective communication, and wisdom (Khairunnisa & Ahmadi, 2025). Together, these values provide a moral foundation for building fair, transparent, and responsible relationships between leaders and organizational members.

Previous studies on Islamic leadership have examined various aspects of the topic. Efrina (2022) found that Islamic leadership positively influences employee performance in Islamic multifinance companies. Harjoni et al. (2023) reported that an Islamic work

environment strengthens the relationship between Islamic leadership and employee performance. Meanwhile, Setianingsih & Hendratmi (2025) showed that the implementation of Islamic leadership, particularly charismatic leadership, contributes to improving work-life balance and the performance of Generation Z employees. On the other hand, studies on Generation Z have primarily focused on workforce characteristics, work preferences, and human resource management challenges in the digital era (Aslikhah et al., 2025; Sitompul et al., 2025). Likewise, leadership studies have generally been conducted from the perspectives of transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, digital leadership, and other contemporary leadership approaches.

Nevertheless, these studies have largely examined Islamic leadership, Generation Z characteristics, and digital era leadership challenges separately. Research on Islamic leadership has mainly focused on its influence on employee performance, job satisfaction, and related organizational outcomes. Meanwhile, studies on Generation Z have predominantly emphasized the characteristics and work preferences of this generation. In addition, research on leadership in the digital era has largely adopted western leadership perspectives. This indicates a limited number of studies that integrate Generation Z characteristics, leadership challenges in the digital era, and Islamic leadership values into a comprehensive discussion.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era, identify the leadership challenges arising from these characteristics, and examine the relevance of Islamic leadership values in addressing leadership challenges in the digital era through a literature review. Unlike previous studies, this research brings these three aspects together in a single analytical framework. It therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relevance of Islamic leadership for Generation Z in the digital era. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic leadership studies, particularly in the field of human resource management in the digital era, and provide a conceptual reference for future research.

2. Literature Review

Islamic Leadership

Islamic leadership is a leadership concept grounded in the values of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, in which leadership is regarded as a trust (amanah) that must be carried out responsibly before both Allah SWT and society. Unlike leadership approaches that primarily focus on achieving organizational goals, Islamic leadership places moral, spiritual, and public welfare (maslahah) values at the center of decision-making and leader-follower interactions. Accordingly, the effectiveness of a leader is assessed not only by organizational performance but also by the ability to uphold justice, honesty, responsibility, and concern for the well-being of organizational members (Sukatin et al., 2022).

The concept of Islamic leadership is largely derived from the exemplary leadership of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). His leadership is reflected in four fundamental values: siddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), tabligh (effective communication), and fathanah (wisdom and intelligence) (Khairunnisa & Ahmadi, 2025). These values serve not only as moral principles but also as a leadership framework for fostering fair, transparent, and mutually beneficial working relationships. Siddiq emphasizes integrity and consistency between words and actions, thereby strengthening trust within the organization. Amanah reflects a leader's responsibility and commitment to fulfilling duties while safeguarding the rights of organizational members. Tabligh highlights the importance of open, clear, and effective communication in conveying

organizational vision, policies, and information. Meanwhile, fathanah represents a leader's intelligence, wisdom, and ability to make sound decisions based on careful judgment.

These four values are grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah: *siddiq* and *amanah* are reinforced by Surah An-Nisa (4:58), which commands that trusts be rendered to those entitled to them; *tabligh* reflects the command in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:67) to convey the message clearly and without concealment; and *fathanah* is affirmed in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:269), which describes wisdom (*hikmah*) as a gift granted by Allah to whom He wills. The Hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, in which the Prophet stated that every leader is a shepherd accountable for those under his care, further underscores leadership as a form of moral responsibility rather than privilege.

Unlike many western leadership approaches that tend to emphasize efficiency and productivity, Islamic leadership is rooted in accountability to Allah SWT as its ultimate foundation. Consequently, leadership is not solely directed toward achieving organizational objectives but also toward promoting ethical values and employee well-being. Empirical evidence supports this perspective. Sujarwanto & Sutianingsih (2024) found that Islamic leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance, with work motivation and job satisfaction acting as mediating variables. These findings indicate that Islamic leadership values are not merely normative principles but have measurable impacts on organizational outcomes.

Previous research also suggests that Islamic leadership may be relevant to younger employees. Setianingsih & Hendratmi (2025) showed that Islamic leadership contributes to improving work-life balance and the performance of Generation Z employees. However, studies specifically examining the relationship between Islamic leadership and Generation Z remain limited, as existing research has largely focused on employee performance, job satisfaction, motivation, organizational commitment, and work-life balance. Therefore, further discussion is needed to explain how Islamic leadership can respond to the characteristics and expectations of Generation Z in the digital era.

Generation Z

Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Unlike previous generations that experienced the transition from the analog to the digital era, Generation Z is the first generation to grow up surrounded by the internet, social media, and various digital technologies (Venice et al., 2025). This has positioned Generation Z as digital natives, a generation that not only uses technology as a tool but has also integrated it into almost every aspect of daily life, including learning, communication, and work. Early exposure to digital technology has shaped Generation Z into a generation that is highly adaptable to technological advancements, accustomed to accessing information quickly, and reliant on technology as an integral part of everyday activities and the workplace (Prihantira & Dharmawan, 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

As digital natives, Generation Z also holds different expectations regarding work and the workplace. Previous studies indicate that this generation no longer considers compensation as the sole factor in choosing a job. Instead, they place greater importance on work-life balance, flexible working arrangements, career development opportunities, and the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. In addition, they expect organizations to provide a work environment that supports continuous learning and professional development. These preferences suggest that Generation Z tends to value organizations that not only pursue organizational goals but also prioritize employee well-being and individual growth as essential elements of organizational success (Nugrohojati & Linando, 2025; Hidayatullah et al., 2025).

Generation Z also tends to expect direct and transparent communication from leaders. Having grown up in a highly connected digital environment, they are accustomed to rapid access to information and immediate interaction. Consequently, delayed communication, rigid hierarchical structures, and limited opportunities for participation may create challenges for leaders in managing this generation. From the perspective of Islamic leadership, these characteristics are particularly relevant. Generation Z's preference for open communication can be associated with *tabligh*, while their need for trust and transparency relates to *siddiq* and *amanah*. Their expectations for participation, fair treatment, development, and guidance can also be linked to the principles of justice, *shura*, and *fathanah*. Thus, Islamic leadership may provide a value-based framework for responding to the expectations of Generation Z.

Leadership in the Digital Era

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way organizations operate, communicate, and manage human resources. These changes have also reshaped leadership practices, shifting from traditional face-to-face interactions to leadership that relies on digital technologies as the primary means of coordination, communication, and decision-making. In this context, leadership is no longer viewed solely as the process of influencing individuals to achieve organizational goals but also as the ability to build effective working relationships in an increasingly digitalized environment (Banks et al., 2022). Accordingly, digital leadership is defined as a leader's ability to integrate digital technologies into managerial processes, enabling organizations to adapt to rapid and dynamic environmental changes (Mahfuuzhoh et al., 2025).

This transformation requires leaders to possess broader competencies than those demanded by conventional leadership. In addition to managerial capabilities, leaders need digital literacy, a sound understanding of emerging technologies, and the ability to utilize digital platforms to facilitate organizational communication, coordination, and collaboration (Mahfuuzhoh et al., 2025; Hura, 2026). Musaigwa & Kalitanyi (2024) further argue that digital leaders should possess a clear digital vision, empower team members, demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning, and effectively manage diverse teams in a rapidly changing business environment. These competencies enable leaders to align organizational strategies with technological developments while guiding digital transformation more effectively.

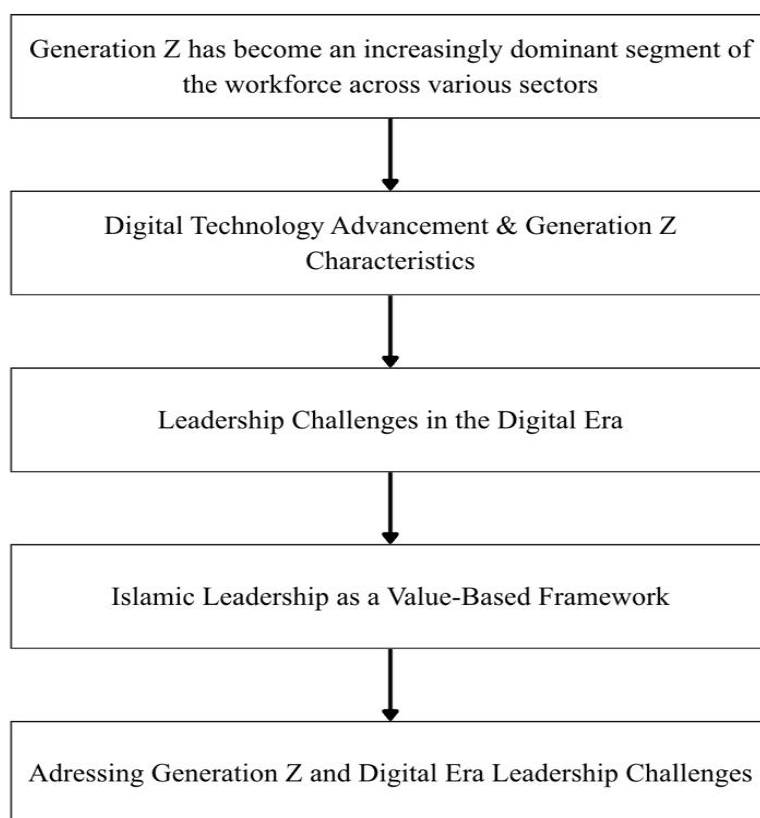
However, technological competence alone may not be sufficient to address leadership challenges in the digital era. Digital workplaces may create communication barriers, reduce direct interaction, and raise ethical concerns related to technology and artificial intelligence. Leaders must therefore balance technological competence with interpersonal skills, ethical judgment, trust, and concern for employee well-being. This challenge is particularly relevant when managing Generation Z, whose expectations include flexibility, participation, rapid feedback, and meaningful work.

Conceptual Framework

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way organizations operate, communicate, and manage their human resources. At the same time, the increasing presence of Generation Z in the workforce has introduced new expectations regarding flexibility, open communication, rapid feedback, participation, career development, meaningful work, and work-life balance. These characteristics create specific challenges for organizational leaders, particularly in managing communication, maintaining engagement, building trust, facilitating virtual collaboration, and balancing technological efficiency with employee well-being.

The digital era further intensifies these challenges through the increasing use of digital platforms, remote and hybrid work arrangements, and artificial intelligence. Leaders are therefore expected to possess digital competence while maintaining effective interpersonal relationships and ethical decision-making. In this context, contemporary leadership approaches provide important competencies but may not always address the moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership comprehensively.

Islamic leadership is proposed as a value-based framework that may help address these challenges. The values of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* provide relevant principles for responding to the characteristics of Generation Z and the demands of the digital era. *Siddiq* supports honesty and transparency in communication and decision-making. *Amanah* emphasizes responsibility, accountability, and trust. *Tabligh* encourages clear, open, and effective communication, including in virtual work environments. *Fathanah* supports wise, adaptive, and informed decision-making when responding to technological developments and complex organizational challenges.



Source : Authors (2026)

3. Research Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach through a library research (literature review) design. This design was chosen because the research objective is conceptual in nature: to synthesize existing scholarly discussions on Generation (Turnbull et al., 2023). Z characteristics, digital-era leadership challenges, and Islamic leadership values into a single analytical framework, rather than to test causal relationships empirically (Choirin et al., 2026). The review follows a narrative-synthesis model informed by systematic

search procedures. This means that although the literature search was conducted in a structured and traceable manner, the analysis itself relies on thematic interpretation rather than statistical meta-analysis. This approach is considered appropriate given the conceptual and cross-disciplinary nature of the topic, which bridges Islamic leadership studies, generational workforce studies, and digital leadership theory.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using several academic databases and indexing platforms, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and ResearchGate. This search was supplemented by backward citation tracing, in which the reference lists of key articles were examined to identify additional relevant sources not captured through database keyword searches (Snyder., 2019). The search covered publications from approximately 2020 to 2026, prioritizing recent studies in order to reflect current discussions on digital transformation and Generation Z in the workplace. Classical religious references, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and foundational works on Islamic leadership, were included without temporal restriction given their normative rather than empirical character.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they met the following conditions: published in peer-reviewed journals, indexed proceedings, or established institutional reports such as BPS census data; directly addressed at least one of the three core themes of this study, namely Generation Z characteristics, leadership in the digital era, or Islamic leadership values; written in English or Indonesian; and accessible in full text. Sources were excluded if they were non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces, duplicated findings already represented by more comprehensive studies, focused on generational cohorts other than Generation Z without comparative relevance, or could not be retrieved in full text for verification. Through this screening process, an initial pool of records was narrowed down to the sources cited in this study, comprising journal articles, conference proceedings, one institutional census report, and primary religious texts.

Analysis and Synthesis Procedure

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis procedure conducted in three stages. First, selected sources were organized according to three thematic domains corresponding to the study's research questions: the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era, the leadership challenges arising from these characteristics, and the substantive content of Islamic leadership values, namely *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah*. Second, within each domain, recurring concepts and findings across sources were identified, compared, and grouped into sub-themes. Third, the three domains were cross-analyzed to examine conceptual points of convergence between Islamic leadership principles and contemporary leadership approaches, including transformational, servant, authentic, and digital leadership. The results of this cross-analysis are presented in the comparative synthesis table in Section 4. This iterative process of categorization, comparison, and integration allowed the study to move from a descriptive literature summary toward an interpretive conceptual framework.

4. Result and Discussion

Characteristics of Generation Z in the Digital Era

Generation Z has become the dominant generation in today's workforce. Unlike previous generations that experienced a gradual adaptation to technological advancements, Generation Z was born and raised in an environment where the internet, social media, and digital devices had already become an integral part of everyday life.

This environment has shaped their experiences, values, and perspectives as they enter the workplace (Lazar et al., 2023; Zahra et al., 2025). Zahira & Nasution (2025) further explain that, from an early age, Generation Z has been accustomed to using the internet, social media, and digital devices, enabling them to adapt to technological changes more quickly than previous generations. Therefore, the characteristics of Generation Z are influenced not only by age but also by the digital environment that shapes the way they learn, work, communicate, and interact with others.

The characteristic most frequently discussed in the literature is Generation Z's ability to utilize digital technology. Lazar et al. (2023) describe Generation Z as being highly technologically aware, having grown up amid continuous digital transformation. This environment enables them to adapt to technological innovations more easily and embrace change more readily than earlier generations. These findings are supported by Soliha et al. (2025), who state that Generation Z is technologically adaptive, creative, and accustomed to using digital technology in various work-related activities. Similarly, Zahira & Nasution (2025) found that Generation Z adopts new technologies more rapidly and prefers information that is delivered quickly, interactively, and through easily accessible digital platforms. These findings indicate that technology is not merely a supporting tool for Generation Z but has become an essential part of how they access information and accomplish their work.

In addition to their strong digital capabilities, Generation Z brings new expectations to the workplace. They value workplace flexibility, work-life balance, and jobs that align with their personal values and beliefs (Lazar et al., 2023; Setianingsih & Hendratmi, 2025; Nugrohojati & Linando, 2025). For this generation, work is no longer viewed solely as a source of income but also as a means of self-actualization and personal development (Soliha et al., 2025). Putri (2024) likewise found that Generation Z places greater importance on job satisfaction, career development opportunities, and work-life balance than on financial compensation alone. These findings suggest a shift in work orientation, where the quality of the work environment and opportunities for personal growth are considered just as important as financial rewards.

Another characteristic consistently highlighted in previous studies is Generation Z's preference for open, fast, and two-way communication (Lazar et al., 2023; Nugrohojati & Linando, 2025; Zahira & Nasution, 2025). Having grown up in a highly digital environment, they expect information to be communicated clearly and transparently, accompanied by continuous feedback. Lazar et al. (2023) note that Generation Z prefers collaborative work environments with open communication rather than highly hierarchical organizational structures. Similarly, Zahira & Nasution (2025) argue that extensive exposure to digital media has shaped their habit of accessing information instantly, leading them to expect prompt and interactive responses in workplace communication. These preferences indicate that effective communication is a key factor in maintaining Generation Z's engagement, requiring organizations to adopt communication practices that are more responsive to the characteristics of this generation.

Although numerous studies suggest that Generation Z possesses characteristics that support adaptation to the digital era, these characteristics alone do not guarantee success in meeting workplace demands. Nabilla et al. (2025) explain that high levels of digital literacy do not necessarily translate into adequate work readiness, as such capabilities must be complemented by psychological capital, including self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope, to enable individuals to cope with the dynamic nature of the workplace. Soliha et al. (2025) further argue that Generation Z has high expectations regarding workplace flexibility, personal development, and work-life balance.

Consequently, organizations that fail to meet these expectations may experience lower levels of employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition, Putri (2024) found that Generation Z is more likely to seek alternative employment when their workplace no longer provides opportunities for growth or fails to align with their personal values. These findings suggest that organizations should not focus solely on leveraging Generation Z's digital competencies but must also address their psychological needs and workplace expectations to fully develop their potential.

The literature suggests that the characteristics of Generation Z represent a combination of strong digital competence, adaptability to change, and shifting work-related values. Their ability to utilize technology prepares them to navigate digital transformation, while their preference for workplace flexibility, open communication, and meaningful work reflects changing expectations regarding the relationship between employees and organizations (Lazar et al., 2023; Soliha et al., 2025; Nugrohojati & Linando, 2025). At the same time, previous studies emphasize that these characteristics should be complemented by the development of non-technical competencies, such as communication skills, resilience, and professionalism, to enable Generation Z to adapt effectively to increasingly complex work environments (Nabilla et al., 2025; Putri, 2024). Therefore, Generation Z not only reshapes the composition of today's workforce but also encourages organizations to rethink how communication, leadership, and human resource management should be implemented in the digital era.

Leadership Challenges in Managing Generation Z in the Digital Era

Changes in workforce characteristics in the digital era have reshaped the challenges faced by organizational leaders. Leaders are expected to understand and align with the characteristics, expectations, and working styles of Generation Z, which differ considerably from those of previous generations (Lazar et al., 2023; Venice et al., 2025). As a generation that has grown up with digital technology, Generation Z expects communication to be fast, open, and participatory. They value leaders who communicate transparently, encourage employees to express their opinions, and foster two-way communication rather than relying on hierarchical and closed communication patterns (Reformasianto & Faizah, 2024; Venice et al., 2025; Rumayanto et al., 2025). These changes indicate that effective communication has become one of the primary leadership challenges in managing Generation Z.

Another challenge is the growing demand for workplace flexibility. Advances in digital technology, together with changes in work practices following the COVID-19 pandemic, have encouraged many organizations to adopt hybrid and remote working arrangements (Achmad et al., 2023; Suyanti et al., 2025). This requires leaders to manage teams working across different locations and schedules while maintaining effective coordination and organizational performance (Fytaloka & Pratiwi, 2025). Consequently, effective leadership is no longer determined solely by direct supervision but also by the ability to build trust, encourage collaboration, and sustain employee engagement through the effective use of digital technology (Amirah et al., 2025). Therefore, workplace flexibility presents a leadership challenge that must be balanced with maintaining productivity and organizational commitment.

Although digitalization has improved the efficiency of communication, coordination, and decision-making, excessive reliance on technology may reduce interpersonal connections among employees if it is not complemented by effective face-to-face communication. For this reason, leadership in the digital era requires more than digital literacy; it also demands emotional intelligence, empathy, and the ability to build trust-based relationships so that employees continue to feel valued and engaged within the

organization (Amirah et al., 2025; Rumayanto et al., 2025; Damiasih, 2026). These findings suggest that successful digital transformation depends not only on technological competence but also on leaders' ability to balance technological advancement with the human dimension of leadership.

The changing characteristics of Generation Z have also encouraged organizations to move away from rigid leadership approaches toward more adaptive and collaborative styles. Generation Z values leaders who provide continuous feedback, involve employees in decision-making, and create a work environment that encourages innovation (Reformasianto & Faizah, 2024; Venice et al., 2025). Likewise, Amirah et al. (2025) emphasize that leaders should cultivate a learning culture, encourage active participation, and provide opportunities for personal development in order to sustain Generation Z's motivation and engagement. This suggests that leadership is no longer limited to directing employees but also involves empowering them to grow alongside the organization.

Previous studies indicate that leadership challenges in managing Generation Z extend beyond technological change and are closely related to shifting expectations regarding communication, workplace relationships, and organizational management. Leaders are expected to foster transparent communication, manage flexible work arrangements, leverage digital technology effectively, and maintain empathy and collaboration in their relationships with employees. These challenges highlight the need for leadership approaches that are not only adaptive to digital transformation but also grounded in values that strengthen trust, accountability, and meaningful human relationships within organizations.

The Relevance of Islamic Leadership Values in Addressing Leadership Challenges for Generation Z

The findings presented in the previous section indicate that leaders face numerous challenges in managing Generation Z. These challenges have encouraged the development of various leadership approaches that are considered more responsive to the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era. Consequently, a growing body of research has explored different leadership styles to address these challenges. Among the most widely discussed are transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and digital leadership, all of which emphasize the importance of communication, employee empowerment, collaboration, and adaptability to change (Iskandar et al., 2025; Mitchell, 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

Mitchell (2025) argues that effective leadership for Generation Z should not rely on a single leadership style but rather integrate authentic, servant, and transformational leadership while being supported by digital competencies. Similarly, Iskandar et al. (2025) found that transformational, participative, and digital leadership are more effective in enhancing the motivation, engagement, and innovativeness of Generation Z than traditional leadership approaches. Putri et al. (2025) also demonstrate that servant leadership strengthens the relationship between leaders and employees. Although these approaches have been developed primarily within contemporary leadership theories, the values they promote, such as integrity, communication, accountability, and employee empowerment are closely aligned with the principles of Islamic leadership.

These leadership approaches suggest that effective leaders for Generation Z are those who promote open communication, empower employees, foster collaborative working relationships, and adapt to technological change. This indicates that leadership effectiveness in the digital era depends not only on managerial competence but also on the personal values and character demonstrated by leaders. Leaders are therefore expected to establish trust-based relationships characterized by fairness and accountability in order

to sustain Generation Z's engagement and organizational commitment. In this regard, studies on Islamic leadership consistently show that ethical, spiritual, and moral values contribute to building a positive organizational culture, strengthening work motivation, and enhancing organizational commitment (Abdelwahed et al., 2025; Zaim et al., 2024).

Islamic leadership is therefore relevant not only in faith-based organizations but also in modern organizations experiencing rapid digital transformation. Rather than focusing solely on organizational performance, Islamic leadership emphasizes the leader's role in cultivating value-based organizational culture, motivating employees, and supporting both their professional and spiritual development (Abdelwahed et al., 2025). Likewise, Zaim et al. (2024) found that values such as justice, wisdom, religiosity, and kindness positively contribute to organizational commitment and employee performance.

These findings suggest that the principles of Islamic leadership are closely aligned with the leadership characteristics expected by Generation Z. This generation values leaders who are honest, transparent, encourage participation, appreciate employees' contributions, and build relationships based on trust. Within the Islamic perspective, these characteristics are reflected in leadership that upholds amanah (trustworthiness), justice, shura (consultation), and exemplary conduct. The relevance of Islamic leadership in addressing leadership challenges for Generation Z can therefore be understood through the four core characteristics of Prophet Muhammad: siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah.

The first value, siddiq, represents honesty, integrity, and consistency between words and actions. Within organizations, this value forms the foundation for building trust through transparency, objectivity, and accountability in decision-making. Its relevance has become increasingly important for Generation Z, who expect leaders to be authentic, communicative, and transparent. Given their broad access to information, Generation Z tends to evaluate leaders based on the consistency of their actions, making integrity an essential element of leadership credibility.

Integrity and honesty are fundamental characteristics of effective leadership because they foster trust, openness, and consistency in workplace relationships. These qualities also correspond to Generation Z's expectations of leaders who are transparent, authentic, and capable of encouraging participative communication (Mitchell, 2025; Iskandar et al., 2025). From the perspective of Islamic leadership, siddiq extends beyond truthfulness in speech to include consistency in fulfilling responsibilities and making fair decisions. The application of this value contributes to strengthening organizational culture, reinforcing organizational values, enhancing work motivation and employee commitment, and increasing trust in leadership (Budiharto & Himam, 2006; Abdelwahed et al., 2025; Zaim et al., 2024).

The second value, amanah, reflects responsibility, commitment, and the ability to uphold trust when carrying out duties and making decisions. Within organizations, amanah is demonstrated not only by fulfilling responsibilities but also by leaders' willingness to be accountable for their decisions and to treat employees fairly. This value has become increasingly relevant in the digital era, where flexible working arrangements require leaders to rely more on trust than on direct supervision.

The importance of trust-based leadership is also consistent with the expectations of Generation Z, who seek greater autonomy while continuing to receive guidance and support from their leaders. Leaders are therefore expected to demonstrate accountability, place trust in their employees, and take responsibility for organizational decisions in order to foster productive and respectful working relationships. These characteristics closely reflect the Islamic concept of amanah, which positions trust and responsibility at the heart

of leadership (Mitchell, 2025; Iskandar et al., 2025). The implementation of amanah has also been shown to strengthen leader employee relationships, enhance organizational commitment, and create a more harmonious and productive work environment (Fitrianty et al., 2024; Zaim et al., 2024). Thus, amanah provides an important foundation for leading Generation Z by fostering the trust required for collaboration and employee engagement in the digital era.

The third value, tabligh, refers to a leader's ability to communicate information, organizational vision, and policies clearly, openly, and effectively. This value is particularly relevant when leading Generation Z, who expect leaders to communicate openly, encourage employees to express their opinions, and promote two-way communication rather than hierarchical interaction (Reformasianto & Faizah, 2024; Mitchell, 2025).

Open communication not only facilitates the exchange of information but also strengthens trust, enhances employee engagement, and encourages collaboration within organizations. Previous studies indicate that leadership effectiveness in the digital era depends heavily on leaders' ability to develop participative and adaptive communication while maintaining meaningful human relationships despite the extensive use of digital technologies (Amirah et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic leadership, this characteristic is reflected in tabligh, which emphasizes communicating truth, fostering shared understanding, and conveying organizational goals wisely in order to establish open and harmonious working relationships.

The final value, fathanah, refers to intelligence, wisdom, and the ability to analyze problems and make sound decisions. Effective leadership also requires strategic thinking and decision-making that considers the interests of both the organization and its employees. These qualities correspond to the expectations of Generation Z, who seek leaders capable of providing solutions, encouraging innovation, and creating a work environment that supports learning and continuous development. Previous studies demonstrate that adaptive, participative leadership combined with the wise use of technology contributes to higher levels of motivation, creativity, and employee engagement among Generation Z (Iskandar et al., 2025; Amirah et al., 2025; Mitchell, 2025). These findings indicate that leadership intelligence involves not only technical expertise but also the ability to understand environmental changes and manage human resources effectively.

Within the Islamic leadership perspective, fathanah represents intelligence guided by wisdom, moral judgment, and responsibility in decision-making. This value enables leaders to utilize technological advancements effectively without compromising ethical principles, justice, and organizational well-being (maslahah) (Khairunnisa & Ahmadi, 2025). Leadership grounded in wisdom and ethical values has also been shown to strengthen organizational culture, improve employee motivation, and enhance organizational performance (Abdelwahed et al., 2025; Zaim et al., 2024).

The literature does not suggest that the four Islamic leadership values are equally salient for Generation Z. Their relative importance appears to depend on the specific challenges associated with the digital workplace. Among the four values, siddiq and amanah can be considered foundational because digital and hybrid work environments require high levels of transparency, credibility, trust, and accountability despite reduced direct supervision. Tabligh is particularly important in addressing Generation Z's preference for rapid, open, and two-way communication, while fathanah becomes increasingly relevant to the technological and adaptive demands of contemporary organizations because leaders must combine digital competence with sound judgment and

ethical decision-making. Thus, rather than functioning as four separate and equally weighted characteristics, the values can be understood as complementary dimensions of leadership, with *siddiq* and *amanah* establishing the ethical and relational foundation, *tabligh* facilitating communication and participation, and *fathanah* supporting adaptability and strategic decision-making. This distinction is important because it indicates that the relevance of Islamic leadership to Generation Z lies not simply in the presence of religious values, but in the way these values respond to specific generational and digital workplace needs.

A comparison with contemporary leadership theories further clarifies this contribution. Transformational leadership shares similarities with Islamic leadership through its emphasis on vision, motivation, empowerment, and employee development, while servant leadership corresponds closely with the Islamic emphasis on responsibility, care, and service to others. Authentic leadership also overlaps with *siddiq* through its emphasis on honesty, consistency, and authenticity, whereas digital leadership similarly reflects *fathanah* through its emphasis on technological adaptability and innovation. However, Islamic leadership provides a broader normative foundation by integrating these relational, adaptive, and performance-oriented dimensions within an explicitly ethical framework. In particular, the combination of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* links leader credibility, trust, communication, and competence to moral responsibility rather than treating them primarily as instruments of employee performance or organizational effectiveness. This suggests that Islamic leadership should not be viewed merely as an alternative to contemporary leadership theories, but as a value-integrative framework that can complement them in addressing the complex expectations of Generation Z in digital workplaces.

Table 1. Comparative Synthesis of Islamic and Contemporary Leadership Approaches for Generation Z

Leadership value	Core emphasis	Relevance to Generation Z	Similarity with Islamic leadership	Distinctive contribution of Islamic leadership
Siddiq	Honesty, integrity, consistency, and transparency	Responds to Generation Z's preference for authentic and transparent leaders	Closely related to authentic leadership	Extends authenticity into a moral responsibility grounded in ethical conduct
Amanah	Trust, responsibility, accountability, and fairness	Supports autonomy and trust in flexible and hybrid work environments	Similar to servant and authentic leadership	Connects employee autonomy with moral accountability and stewardship
Tabligh	Open, clear, participative, and responsible communication	Addresses Generation Z's preference for rapid feedback and two-way communication	Similar to transformational and participative leadership	Frames communication as an ethical responsibility rather than only a managerial strategy
Fathanah	Intelligence, wisdom, adaptability, and sound decision-making	Supports innovation, learning, technological adaptation, and problem-solving	Similar to digital and transformational leadership	Integrates technological competence with ethical judgment and organizational well-being

Transformational leadership	Vision, inspiration, empowerment, and change	Encourages engagement, innovation, and personal development	Overlaps with fathanah and employee empowerment	Islamic leadership adds an explicit moral and accountability dimension
Servant leadership	Service, empathy, care, and employee development	Fits Generation Z's expectation of supportive and people-oriented leaders	Strongly overlaps with amanah	Islamic leadership connects service with trust, responsibility, and moral obligation
Authentic leadership	Authenticity, transparency, self-awareness, and ethical conduct	Aligns with Generation Z's preference for credible and transparent leaders	Strongly overlaps with siddiq	Islamic leadership places authenticity within a broader religious-ethical framework
Digital leadership	Digital competence, innovation, technological adaptation, and flexibility	Directly responds to Generation Z's digital orientation	Strongly overlaps with fathanah	Islamic leadership combines digital adaptability with ethical decision-making and responsibility

Source : Authors (2026)

Taken together, the literature indicates that the relevance of Islamic leadership for Generation Z lies not in treating siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah as equally weighted or isolated traits, but in understanding how they collectively address distinct challenges of the digital workplace. Siddiq and amanah provide the ethical foundation for credibility, trust, and accountability; tabligh responds to the need for transparent and participative communication; and fathanah supports technological adaptability, innovation, and sound decision-making. Compared with transformational, servant, authentic, and digital leadership, Islamic leadership shares several important characteristics but distinguishes itself by integrating these characteristics within a coherent moral framework. The literature therefore suggests that Islamic leadership can complement contemporary leadership approaches by connecting digital competence and employee-centered practices with ethical responsibility, trust, and moral accountability. For Generation Z, this integrated orientation is particularly relevant because their expectations extend beyond technological efficiency toward authenticity, meaningful relationships, participation, personal development, and value congruence. Islamic leadership consequently offers a potentially comprehensive framework for understanding leadership effectiveness in digitally mediated workplaces, although further empirical research is needed to determine which values have the strongest influence on Generation Z's engagement, commitment, and performance across different organizational contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Generation Z possesses distinctive characteristics shaped by continuous exposure to digital technology. Their adaptability to technological change, preference for workplace flexibility, expectations of open and participatory communication, and desire for personal development and meaningful work create specific leadership challenges in the digital era. These challenges indicate that effective leadership requires not only technological competence but also trust, accountability,

communication, adaptability, and the ability to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships. Within this context, Islamic leadership provides a coherent conceptual foundation through the integration of siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah. Siddiq supports trust through honesty and integrity, amanah reinforces responsibility and accountability, tabligh facilitates transparent and participatory communication, while fathanah strengthens strategic thinking, adaptability, and sound decision-making. These values are complementary and collectively provide a leadership framework that corresponds to the expectations and workplace characteristics of Generation Z.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic leadership discourse by positioning Islamic leadership values as a relevant conceptual framework for understanding leadership in digitally transformed workplaces. The findings extend the discussion beyond the normative dimension of Islamic leadership by demonstrating its potential relevance to contemporary generational and organizational challenges. Practically, organizations can translate these values into leadership practices by promoting transparent communication, accountable decision-making, flexible yet responsible work arrangements, employee participation, and opportunities for continuous development. Such practices may support stronger engagement and more meaningful work experiences among Generation Z employees.

This study is limited by its library research approach. The findings are conceptual and dependent on the availability, scope, quality, and interpretation of existing literature. Consequently, the study cannot establish causal relationships, measure the magnitude of the influence of each Islamic leadership value, or determine whether Generation Z employees consistently perceive these values as relevant in actual organizational settings. Future research should therefore employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches to empirically examine the relationship between siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah. Strengthen the conclusion through a clear conceptual synthesis, distinguish between theoretical and practical implications, provide specific directions for future research, and elaborate on the limitations of the literature-based approach. and specific outcomes among Generation Z, including work engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, innovative behavior, and employee performance. Future studies may also examine mediating or moderating factors, compare Generation Z with other generations, and investigate different organizational and cultural contexts to further validate and develop the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

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