

FROM AUTHORITY TO AUTHENTICITY: PARADIGM SHIFT IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TOWARDS AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN THE GEN Z ERA

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ABSTRACT

Based on the results of the research entitled "From Authority to Authenticity: Paradigm Shifts in School Leadership Towards Authentic Leadership in the Gen Z Era", it can be concluded that there has been a profound transformation in school leadership practices from authoritative patterns to authentic leadership that is more humanistic, reflective, and adaptive to the characteristics of the digital generation. Effective leadership in the Gen Z era is no longer determined by formal positions, but by the ability of school principals to build relational relationships based on trust, empathy, and moral consistency. The authenticity of the principal has proven to be a major factor that increases the engagement of young teachers through honesty, openness, and participation in decision-making. In addition, the transformation of leadership communication to a humanized digital format strengthens emotional closeness and increases the loyalty of school residents. The use of digital media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube makes interactions more warm, responsive, and inclusive. Thus, authentic leadership in the Gen Z era plays an important role in creating a school culture that is collaborative, adaptive, and oriented towards human values, thus becoming a relevant and sustainable leadership model for the modern world of education.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Generation Z, Relational Authority, Humanist Digital Communication.

A. Introduction

The current paradigm of school leadership is undergoing a significant shift from authoritative to more authentic relational patterns (Kamaludin, 2023). This is due to the characteristics of Generation Z who grew up in a digital and social environment that is very open to dialogue, participation, and equality. They are no longer easily subservient to leaders who rely

only on formal positions, but rather value the authenticity of attitude, empathy, and personal integrity. Based on interviews with teachers and students in several schools, it is known that principals who are able to build emotional closeness, communicate openly, and show empathy are more respected than those who only demand obedience without explanation (Rambe & Wijaya, 2025). This social fact shows that leadership authority in the modern era no longer comes from power structures, but from the ability of leaders to build human and authentic relationships, thus fostering trust and involvement among all school citizens

In the context of leadership in the Gen Z era, authenticity has emerged as a major source of trust in the school community (Laka et al., 2024). This generation lives in the midst of information openness and a social media culture that makes them critical of the incongruity between a leader's words and actions. Students and teachers have more respect for principals who are honest, transparent, and brave in admitting mistakes, compared to leaders who always try to appear right. Based on the results of observations, school principals who display emotional honesty and consistency of values are able to foster loyalty and collective work spirit among teachers and students. Meanwhile, rigid and formal leadership styles tend to cause social distancing and resistance. This fact confirms that authenticity is not just a moral value, but also a social foundation that determines the success of leadership in creating a school climate full of trust and collaboration (Suhardi, 2025).

The digital era brings a major challenge to the traditional form of authority of school principals. With the presence of social media, teachers and students now have the space to express their opinions, even criticize school policies openly (Rizqiyah et al., 2025). This condition makes the leader's authority no longer absolute, but continues to be negotiated

through the digital space. Some of the interview results show that school principals who are unable to adapt to the dynamics of digital communication lose credibility in the eyes of students and teachers, because they are considered irrelevant to the reality of the times. Instead (Jumahir et al., 2025). This fact shows that authentic leadership in the digital era requires technological literacy and adaptive communication skills, so that the leader's authority is still recognized not because of formal positions, but because of his authentic presence and openness in the digital public space.

Generation Z brings a big change to students' expectations of the principal figure (Akbar et al., 2024). They no longer judge leaders by assertiveness alone, but by the ability to build emotional closeness, listen to aspirations, and be a real role model. The digital culture they live fosters the view that ideal leadership is participatory and horizontal, not hierarchical. Based on the interview findings, students were more respectful of the principal who was present in their midst, interacted casually, and shared inspiring personal experiences (Sweet, 2024). This attitude fosters a sense of acceptance and appreciation, which ultimately increases motivation to learn. On the other hand, school principals who keep their distance and only govern are often perceived as not understanding the reality of students. This social fact shows that authentic leadership is becoming a real necessity in modern schools to bridge generational gaps and build more human relationships between leaders and learners.

Authentic leadership has proven to have a great influence on the formation of an inclusive, open, and adaptive school culture (Jayadi et al., 2025). Leaders who prioritize honesty, transparency, and participation create an environment where all school residents feel valued and involved in decision-making. Based on the results of field studies,

authentically led schools show a higher level of collaboration, both between teachers and students, and are able to foster innovation in learning. Principals who are open to new ideas also strengthen a sense of belonging in the educational community (Bhoki et al., 2025). In contrast, authoritative leadership tends to create a culture of fear and passivity. This fact concludes that the paradigm shift in leadership towards authenticity not only changes individual behavior, but also transforms the school's value system and culture to be more adaptive to educational challenges in the global and digital era.

Here are some related studies that suggest that the shift from traditional authoritarian leadership to authentic leadership is driven by Gen Z's unique values and expectations in the educational environment (FRONT, n.d.). Authentic leadership is considered crucial in responding to educational reform, with leaders able to influence followers through positive psychological abilities. Gen Z leaders prioritize inclusivity, sustainability, and emotional intelligence, which fundamentally challenges traditional leadership models. Gen Z educators excel at encouraging open communication, developing connections, and supporting work-life balance (Gaus et al., 2025). Authentic leadership has a greater impact on Gen Z's psychological capital and work engagement compared to other leadership styles.

The novelty of this research lies in an effort to examine in depth the paradigm shift of school leadership from authority to authenticity in the context of generation Z, which has different values, expectations, and psychological dynamics than previous generations (Wulandari, 2017). Unlike previous research that only highlighted the role of authentic leadership in general organizations or the world of work, this study specifically focuses on the educational environment, where school principals must adapt to the character of Gen Z that demands inclusivity,

transparency, emotional balance, and open communication. Another novelty is the disclosure of the psychological and social dimensions of authentic leadership that not only affect the work involvement of teachers and students, but also builds trust and social cohesion in the school community. Thus, this research presents a new contribution in understanding how the values of authenticity, empathy, and reflectivity can be the foundation of relevant educational leadership in the era of digital generation-based educational reform(Alrosid, 2023).

The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to understand the transformation of the school leadership paradigm in the midst of the social and generational changes brought about by the presence of Generation Z. This generation grew up in a digital environment that demands transparency, empathy, and authenticity from leading figures, so that traditional authoritarian leadership models have become less relevant in the context of modern education(Prabowo et al., 2024). The principal is no longer enough to lead with formal power, but must be able to build authentic relationships that foster trust, motivation, and emotional engagement of teachers and students. This research is important because there have not been many studies that comprehensively explore the shift in authority towards authenticity in the context of schools, especially in Indonesia(Sugiarto et al., 2025). Thus, the results of the research are expected to provide a theoretical and practical basis for the development of an adaptive, humanist, and effective educational leadership model in responding to the challenges of education reform in the digital and multigenerational era. The purpose of this study is to analyze the paradigm shift in school leadership from an authoritarian model to authentic leadership in response to the characteristics, values, and expectations of Generation Z in the context of modern education.

B. Research Methodology

The selection of MTs Al Amiriyah Belokagung Banyuwangi as the location of the research is based on the characteristics of this institution which reflects the dynamics of the transition of educational leadership in the modern era. This madrasah is known as one of the Islamic educational institutions that is trying to balance the traditional values of pesantren with the demands of modernity and the character of Generation Z who are more open, critical, and dialogue-oriented. The madrasah principals and teachers at MTs Al Amiriyah show a variety of leadership styles that are interesting to research, ranging from authoritative approaches that are still strong to authentic leadership practices that are beginning to be applied in school management. In addition, the presence of Gen Z students who are digitally and socially active provides an ideal context to explore how leadership paradigm changes occur in real life in daily interactions. Thus, this madrasah becomes a relevant representation for the study of the shift of authority towards authenticity in the leadership of Islamic education.

A qualitative approach with a case study type was chosen in this study because it was able to explore in depth the phenomenon of a paradigm shift in school leadership from authority to authenticity in a complex and dynamic social context. This approach allows researchers to understand the meaning, experiences, and interpretations that principals, teachers, and students have of authentic leadership practices in the Gen Z era. In addition, this approach provides the flexibility to collect data through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, resulting in a holistic picture of leadership dynamics. Thus, the use of qualitative case studies is considered the most appropriate to understand the process, context, and meaning of school leadership change in an authentic and in-depth manner.

The use of primary and secondary data sources in this study is

intended to gain a comprehensive understanding of the paradigm shift in school leadership from authority to authenticity in the Gen Z era. Informan Kunci, namely the head of the madrasah as a policy maker and main leader, and Supporting Informants such as teachers, staff, and students who have experienced firsthand leadership practices in the school environment. Meanwhile, secondary data was used to strengthen field findings through document analysis, school policy archives, activity reports, and literature related to authentic leadership theory and Gen Z characteristics. The combination of these two data sources allowed researchers to establish a triangulation of valid and contextual information, so that the results of the study not only describe the empirical reality at MTs Al Amiriyah, but also have a strong theoretical basis in explaining the changes Educational Leadership Paradigm in the Modern Era. The following are informants consisting of madrasah heads, teachers, staff and 20 students.

Table of Information

Yes	Report	Gender		Code /quantity
		Man	Woman	
1	Head of Madrasah			Km/1
2	teacher			Gm/9
3	staff			St/2
4	student			Sm/8

The use of in-depth interview techniques, participant observation, and documentation studies in this study was chosen because the three complement each other in exploring the phenomenon of a paradigm shift in school leadership from authority to authenticity in the Gen Z era in a complete and contextual manner. In-depth interviews were used to obtain personal views and subjective experiences from madrasah principals, teachers, and students regarding authentic leadership practices in the daily

life of the school. Participant observations were carried out so that the researcher could see firsthand the dynamics of interactions, communication styles, and relationship patterns between leaders and school residents in a real context, not just based on verbal perceptions. Meanwhile, the documentation study is used to complement the data through the analysis of official documents such as the school's vision and mission, activity reports, and internal policies that reflect the leadership orientation. By combining these three techniques, the research is expected to produce a deep, accurate, and thorough understanding of leadership transformation in the modern educational environment.

The use of the Miles and Huberman interactive data analysis model was chosen in this study because it was able to provide a systematic and in-depth analysis framework for the phenomenon of the shift in school leadership from authority to authenticity in the Gen Z era. Through data reduction, researchers can filter important information from interviews, observations, and documentation to focus on findings that are relevant to the research objectives. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate understanding patterns and relationships between phenomena. The last stage, drawing conclusions is carried out reflexively based on verified empirical evidence. This interactive approach is considered the most appropriate because it is able to capture social dynamics, values, and the meaning of leadership authenticity in a contextual and in-depth manner according to the characteristics of qualitative research.

Triangulation of sources, methods, and observers was used in this study to ensure the validity and credibility of data related to the shift in the paradigm of school leadership from authority to authenticity in the Gen Z era. The triangulation method was carried out through a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation studies. Meanwhile,

observer triangulation involves more than one researcher or party in the process of observation and interpretation of data. These three forms of triangulation are used so that the research results are more objective, consistent, and reflect the social reality as a whole.

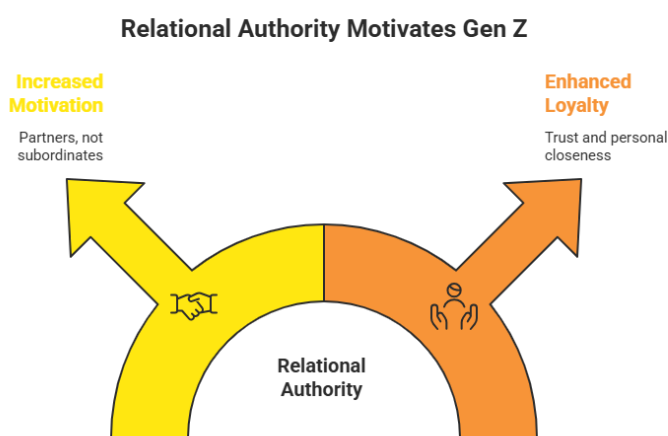
C. Results And Discussion

The Shift from Formal Authority to Relational Authority

The shift in formal authority to relational authority indicates a profound paradigm shift in school leadership practices in the Gen Z era (Nasution, 2019). The younger generation who grew up in a digital culture appreciates leaders who are authentic, open, and communicative more than figures who only rely on the power of office. They view that leaders who are able to build emotional connections, listen to aspirations, and show empathy have a stronger influence than leaders who are rigid and hierarchical. Based on the results of interviews and observations, young teachers and students feel more motivated and loyal when the principal treats them as partners, not subordinates. Leadership practices such as reflective discussion, collaboration, and informal communication are clear evidence that trust and personal closeness are now replacing structural dominance. Thus, the power of modern leadership in schools is born from human relationships that are mutual respect and based on trust, not just from formal positions (Duryat, 2021).

"I used to think that as a school principal I should always look firm and keep a distance from teachers and students. But now I see better results when I open up the dialogue room and listen to their opinions. Close relationships turn out to make teachers more open and their responsibilities increase."

From the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of leadership in the Gen Z era no longer depends on assertiveness or social distance between leaders and subordinates, but on the ability to build warm and open relationships. Principals who dare to change their leadership style from authoritarian to dialogical are able to foster trust, openness, and shared responsibility (Sudiyana, Apriyani, 2023). This relational approach has been proven to increase teacher motivation and performance in a more sustainable manner.



The picture illustrates how relational authority is key in motivating Generation Z in the educational environment. Relational authority or authority based on personal relationships has been proven to be able to increase individual motivation and loyalty. On the left side, increased motivation appears when leaders treat teachers and students as peers, not subordinates. While on the right side, higher loyalty is formed through trust and personal closeness between leaders and members. This illustration confirms that leadership based on human relationships is more effective in building commitment and work spirit in the modern era.

Authenticity of School Principals as a Key Factor in Young Teacher Engagement

Principal's Authenticity as a Key Factor engagement Young teachers show a change in values in leadership relationships in schools(Khoirroni et al., 2023). Young teachers who live in the digital age value leaders who are honest, open, and consistent between speech and actions more than leaders who rely only on the formalities of their positions. Principals who dare to show their human side, accept criticism, and involve teachers in decision-making can create a strong sense of trust and emotional attachment. Based on the interview results, young teachers feel more excited and responsible when the principal treats them as peers, not subordinates. Warm and open communication patterns make them feel valued and have an important role in school development. Thus, the authenticity of the principal has proven to be a social force that builds motivation, loyalty, and commitment of young teachers to educational institutions.

Yes	Description	Result
1	Value changes in leadership relationships in schools	Young teachers value leaders who are honest, open, and consistent in their words and actions.
2	Leadership approaches that are relevant to the character of young teachers in the digital age	Young teachers feel more involved and trust in school principals who do not rely only on formal positions.
3	The principal shows a human side and sincerity in interacting	Able to create a strong sense of trust and emotional attachment among young teachers.
4	Principals accept criticism and involve young teachers in decision-making	Young teachers feel excited, appreciated, and more responsible for the school's tasks and development.
5	Warm, open, and equal communication patterns between principals and teachers	Fostering loyalty, motivation, and commitment of young teachers to the vision and progress of educational institutions.

The table illustrates that the authenticity of school principals has a strategic role in improving engagement young teachers through humanist and collaborative leadership practices. Principals who display honesty, openness, and consistency are considered to be able to build trust and emotional attachment among young teachers. Through warm communication and teacher involvement in the decision-making process, a more participatory and meaningful work atmosphere is created. As a result, young teachers show high motivation, loyalty, and commitment to school development, indicating that authentic leadership is the key to the success of educational organizations in the modern era(Mardizal et al., 2023).

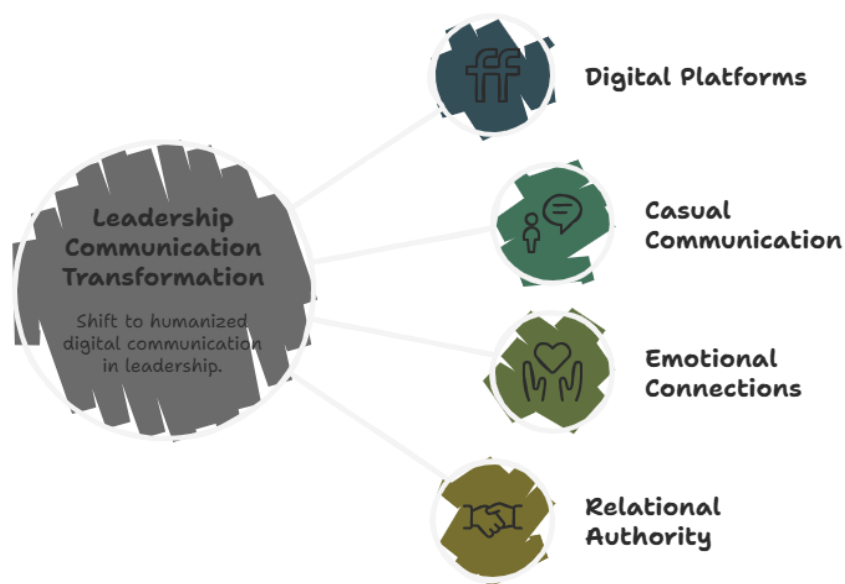
Transforming Leadership Communication to a Humanized Digital Format

The transformation of leadership communication to a humanized digital format shows a major shift in the way principals build relationships with teachers and students in the Gen Z era(Mardizal et al., 2023). The digital generation demands fast, open, and personalized communication patterns, so a formal, one-way approach is no longer effective. School principals now use various platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and the school's YouTube channel to convey messages, give appreciation, and maintain emotional closeness with school residents. Based on the results of the interviews, teachers and students feel more appreciated when communication is done in a relaxed, responsive, and empathetic manner. This not only accelerates the flow of information, but also creates more human relationships in the digital space(Ritonga, 2019). Thus, the transformation of digital communication that is oriented towards human values becomes a new force in strengthening the trust, participation, and effectiveness of school leadership in the modern era.

"We feel happy when the principal often provides motivation through WhatsApp groups. He not only discusses work, but also gives congratulations or encouragement in the morning. That simple thing makes us feel cared for and appreciated."

From the results of the interview, it can be seen that school principals use digital media such as WhatsApp groups as an effective and personal means of communication. School principals not only use the platform to convey job information, but also to provide motivation, congratulations, and messages of encouragement every morning. This simple act fosters a sense of appreciation and attention among teachers, creates an emotional closeness that strengthens working relationships and increases the spirit of volunteerism in the school environment.

Navigating Leadership in the Digital Age



The image depicts the transformation of leadership communication in the digital era that focuses on a humanist approach. This change is

characterized by a shift from hierarchical communication patterns to more open, personal, and empathetic communication. Education leaders are now leveraging digital platforms such as social media and messaging apps to build casual but meaningful interactions. Through more emotional and relational digital communication, the leader not only becomes an authoritative figure, but also comes across as a partner who understands the needs and feelings of subordinates (Ihwan, 2025) Sss. This transformation strengthens trust and emotional attachment within the organizational environment.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research entitled "From Authority to Authenticity: Paradigm Shifts in School Leadership Towards Authentic Leadership in the Gen Z Era", it can be concluded that there has been a profound transformation in school leadership practices from authoritative patterns to authentic leadership that is more humanistic, reflective, and adaptive to the characteristics of the digital generation. Effective leadership in the Gen Z era is no longer determined by formal positions, but by the ability of school principals to build relational relationships based on trust, empathy, and moral consistency. The authenticity of the principal has proven to be a major factor that increases the engagement of young teachers through honesty, openness, and participation in decision-making. In addition, the transformation of leadership communication to a humanized digital format strengthens emotional closeness and increases the loyalty of school residents. The use of digital media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube makes interactions more warm, responsive, and inclusive. Thus, authentic leadership in the Gen Z era plays an important role in creating a school

culture that is collaborative, adaptive, and oriented towards human values, thus becoming a relevant and sustainable leadership model for the modern world of education.

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