

Master's thesis

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Generations in the Workplace: An Exploration of Work Values, and Leadership Needs and Desires of Younger Employees

Master's thesis in Management of Technology
Supervisor: Daniel Casoinic
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Foreword

This Master's thesis represents the final work of our collaborative efforts during our studies at NTNU Handelshøyskolen. Throughout this journey, we have explored the complex interplay between younger generation employees and their leaders from the older generation, with a particular focus on work values and leader characteristics and behaviors.

Our interest in this topic emerged from learning about the evolving workplace and the unique challenges and opportunities presented by generational differences. Understanding the needs and desires of employees from younger cohorts and how they align with the perceptions and actions of their older cohort leaders is crucial for creating a collaborative and efficient work environment. Our journey through this thesis has been a teamwork between two friends, and this partnership has made the experience both enjoyable and memorable. Working together has allowed us to leverage each other's strengths, tackle challenges more effectively, and maintain our motivation even during the most demanding phases of the project.


We extend our deepest gratitude to our supervisor, Daniel Casoinic, whose expertise and insightful feedback have been invaluable in shaping our research. His encouragement and mentorship has not only guided us academically but has also inspired us personally. Moreover, we would like to thank the participants from the three organizations that participated in our research. Their willingness to share their experiences and insights through interviews provided us with indispensable data and perspectives that are central to our thesis. We are deeply grateful for their time, openness and cooperation. Finally, we are grateful to our families and friends for their unwavering encouragement and patience.

This preface is just a small token of our appreciation for all the support we have received. We are excited to present our research and hope that it serves as a valuable resource for both practitioners and scholars in the organizational research on generations and leadership studies. The contents and opinions given in this thesis are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Trondheim, 23.mai 2024



Maren Aksdal Åsvang



Maren Morken Christensen

Abstract

This Master's thesis explores the perspectives of employees from younger generations (Generation Y and Z) in terms of their workplace and leadership needs and desires, and the views of their leaders from older generations (Generation X) on these aspects. The focus of the study is centered on two research questions that address the work values and leadership preferences of the employees from younger generations and how these are perceived by their leaders from the older generation. This work involves a multi-case study encompassing three organizations within both technical and non-technical sectors.

Our findings indicate that employees from younger generations value learning and development opportunities, considering them a prerequisite for staying with their current employer. Additionally, employees from Generations Y and Z thrive in a social environment that facilitates work-life balance and collaboration. They also consider involvement in decision-making processes and autonomy in their work to be crucial for their job satisfaction. Continuous feedback from their leaders and recognition of their work are significant motivators for them. According to the younger generations, a leader should encourage and be involved in employees' learning and development, focus on building relationships with employees, appear genuine, and take responsibility in decision-making processes.

Our study also reveals that leaders from the older cohort have a very good understanding of what their employees from younger cohorts need and desire from the workplace in terms of work values. Despite the younger generations' need for development and collaboration, their leaders have observed a tendency for them to be competitive and have noted that they are prone to burnout. Although some generational differences have been identified, leaders seem to overestimate the prominence of these differences. When it comes to leadership preferences, younger cohort employees considered it more important for a leader to be a good mentor, a good listener, and an encourager, while the ability to be persuasive was seen as less important. These priorities were not found among the responses from their leaders.

In light of these results, our work suggests that leaders from the older generation are well aware of what employees from the younger generations expect from them and the workplace. However, it is recommended that they attach greater importance to these aspects in order to improve job satisfaction, motivation, and, consequently, the likelihood of these employees choosing to remain with the organization that employs them.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven utforsker perspektivene til ansatte fra yngre generasjoner (Generasjon Y og Z) med hensyn til deres behov og ønsker på arbeidsplassen og til en leder, samt synspunktene til deres eldre generasjons ledere (Generasjon X) angående disse aspektene. Studien er sentrert rundt to forskningsspørsmål som omhandler arbeidsverdier og lederpreferanser hos ansatte fra yngre generasjoner, og hvordan disse oppfattes av deres ledere fra den eldre generasjonen. Dette arbeidet innebærer en multi-case-studie som omfatter tre organisasjoner innen teknisk og ikke-teknisk sektor.

Funnene våre indikerer at ansatte fra yngre generasjoner verdsetter lærings- og utviklingsmuligheter, og anser dette som en forutsetning for å bli værende hos sin nåværende arbeidsgiver. Videre trives ansatte fra Generasjon Y og Z i et sosialt miljø hvor det legges til rette for work-life balance (balanse mellom arbeid og fritid) og samarbeid, samt anser de involvering i beslutningsprosesser og autonomi i arbeidet som essensielt for deres jobbtilfredshet. Kontinuerlige tilbakemeldinger fra deres ledere og anerkjennelse av deres arbeid er betydelige motivatorer for dem. Ifølge de yngre generasjonene burde en leder oppmuntre og være involvert i de ansattes læring og utvikling, fokusere på å bygge relasjoner til de ansatte og fremstå genuin, samt ta ansvar i beslutningsprosesser.

Vår studie avdekker også at ledere har en svært god forståelse av hva deres ansatte fra yngre generasjoner trenger og ønsker på arbeidsplassen når det gjelder arbeidsverdier. Til tross for de yngre generasjonenes behov for utvikling og samarbeid, har deres ledere observert en tendens til konkurransementalitet og bemerket at de er utsatt for å bli utbrent. Det ble avdekket generasjonsforskjeller, men lederne ser ut til å overvurdere hvor fremtredende disse forskjellene faktisk er. Når det gjelder lederpreferanser, vurderte ansatte fra yngre generasjoner det som viktigere at en leder er en god mentor, en god lytter og en oppmuntret, mens evnen til å være overtalende ble sett på som mindre viktig. Disse prioriteringene ble ikke funnet igjen hos svarene fra deres ledere.

I lys av disse resultatene foreslår vår studie at ledere fra den eldre generasjonen er svært klar over hva yngre ansatte forventer av dem og arbeidsplassen. Det anbefales imidlertid at de legger større vekt på disse aspektene for å forbedre jobbtilfredshet, motivasjon og dermed sannsynligheten for at disse ansatte velger å forbli i organisasjonen de er ansatt i.

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Glossary

Actual Generational Differences - The empirically derived generational differences in the study of Lester et al. (2012).

Baby Boomers - Refers to the generation of individuals born between 1946 and 1964.

(Generational) Cohort - Synonymously refers to generation.

Employee Motivation - Serves as a driving force for employees to act. Motivated people have incentives to perform optimally and are likely to feel satisfaction and happiness about their workplace.

Found Generational Differences - The empirically derived generational differences in our thesis.

Generation X - Refers to the generation of individuals born between 1965 and 1980.

Generation Y - Refers to the generation of individuals born between 1981 and 1994.

Generation Z - Refers to the generation of individuals born between 1995 and 2010.

Job Satisfaction - A pleasurable emotional state derived from appraisal of one's work as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's work values, and serves as a function of the relationship between what one desires to gain from work and what one assumes it offers or encompasses.

Need for Achievement - Refers to individuals who are drawn to work environments where they are entrusted with personal responsibility for achieving attainable and challenging goals, with the addition of feedback evaluating their performance.

Need for Affiliation - Refers to individuals who are drawn to work settings that involve developing or sustaining friendly relationships with others.

Need for Power - Refers to individuals who are drawn to work environments where they can exercise influence over actions or thoughts of a group to achieve organizational goals or group objectives.

Perceived Generational Differences - Differences as a result of the perceptions, or beliefs, that the generations hold of each other. Used in our thesis after the study of Lester et al. (2012).

Work Values - Serves as fundamental principles or beliefs that individuals hold, influencing decisions, attitudes and goals, and function as positive reinforcers of job satisfaction.

Abbreviations

EIL - Encouraging and Invested Leader

RF - Recognition and Feedback

LCB - Leader Characteristics and Behaviors

LDO - Learning and Development Opportunities

nACH - Need for Achievement, from McClelland Theory of Needs

nAFF - Need for Affiliation, from McClelland Theory of Needs

nPOW - Need for Power, from McClelland Theory of Needs

OC - Older Cohort, refers to Older Generation

OG - Older Generation, individuals from 1965 to -80, meaning Generation X

POL - People-Oriented Leader

RSL - Responsible and Sincere Leader

SCE - Social and Collaborative Environment

WAI - Work Autonomy and Involvement

WLB - Work-Life Balance

YC - Younger Cohorts, refers to Younger Generations

YG - Younger Generations, individuals from 1981 to 2010, meaning Generations Y and Z.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Society is in a constant state of change, marked by the dynamic interplay of economic, political, and social forces. As highlighted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) in a comprehensive scientific report published in 2020, these multi-faceted changes have contributed to profound transformations in the realm of employment over several decades, such as rising trends of educational attainment, female and immigrant workforce participation and retirement ages (NASEM, 2020; Nygård, 2021; KLP, 2024; Fedoryshyn & Falch-Monsen, 2024). Popular press and organizational literature highlights that this increase in workforce diversity brings a host of benefits such as heightened competitive advantage, problem-solving, creativity, and openness to change (Saxena, 2014). However, it can also pose challenges for leaders in terms of the management of a heterogeneous workforce in their organizations. Particularly in regard to the aforementioned societal changes, as they require effective leaders capable of federating and coordinating their employees to face the challenges effectively. To this end, leaders need to have the right set of knowledge, skills and abilities to motivate their workers who belong to different cohorts.

One particular area that has gained a constantly growing attention over the recent decades, is the leadership of a multigenerational workforce (Asting & Swanberg, 2020; Kaifi et al., 2012; Lackey, 2019). A “generation” or “generational cohort” refers to a group of individuals born within the same timeframe and raised amidst similar events (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). The rationale behind this is that each generation possesses their own characteristics as a result of shared experiences and opportunities (Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994). Today's workforce entails four generations; *Baby Boomers*, *Generation X*, *Generation Y* and *Generation Z*. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) have extensive tenure in the workforce and are nearing retirement. This generation, born after World War II, exhibits discipline in their work and are said to "live to work." The succeeding generation, Generation X (1965-1980), was born during the unstable times of the Cold War and are characterized by being self-reliant (Chlarence et al., 2022). They too are experienced in the workforce and hold many leadership positions in today's organizations (DFØ, 2019). Generation Y (1981-1994) has grown up with technology and the internet, comprising an increasingly large portion of the workforce. They are characterized by

a desire for work-life balance. The youngest generation, relatively new to the workforce, is Generation Z (1995-2010). This generation has grown up with social media and smartphones readily available, with both friends and information just a keystroke away (Jones, 2019).

Given the focus of organizational research on generations in the workplace, the exploration of generational differences has become equally relevant. Some studies have identified differences in generational work values (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Schullery, 2013; Smola & Sutton, 2002), while others have observed differences in preferences concerning leader characteristics and behaviors (Asting & Swanberg, 2020; Sessa et al., 2007). For instance, research suggests that employees from Generations Y and Z necessitate more frequent feedback (Bennet et al., 2012; Racołta-Paina & Irini, 2021), whereas employees from Generation X express a pronounced preference for autonomy in the professional sphere, and dislike micromanagement (Lester et al., 2012). Contrarily, other researchers have found generational differences characterized as “insignificant” or “almost negligible”, further presenting conflicting evidence in relation to extant research (Wong et al., 2008).

Despite research evidence available, the popular press presents articles delineating the differences among various generations. This proliferation has engendered stereotypes, both positive and negative in nature (Costanza et al., 2012). Generation Z, for instance, is stereotyped as lazy and lacking in critical thinking skills (Shatto & Erwin, 2016), whilst Generation Y is stereotyped as being self-absorbed, rule-followers and remarkably preoccupied with achievement (Castro, 2023; Leirfall, 2020). Generation X is stereotyped lacking in respect for authority (Costanza et al., 2012). The stereotyping of generations from popular press, coupled with the ambiguity and conflicting results within the research, makes it difficult to discern veracity from fallacy. Consequently, this issue has prompted further inquiry wherein researchers have examined actual differences and compared them with perceived differences (Lester et al., 2012) to ascertain if people perceive greater generational differences than those that truly exist.

To date, there are limited empirical studies conducted on generational differences within Norwegian organizations available to date, with much of the literature originating from the United States. A vast majority of Norwegian contemporary leaders can be considered as belonging to Baby Boomers and Generation X (DFØ, 2019), while Generation Y and especially Generation Z constitute the newer entrants to the workforce. However, as Baby

Boomers approach retirement or have already retired, Generation X will be depicted as the older generation in this study. Therefore, to establish the existence of generational differences between younger generations (Y and Z) and the older generation (X), and further examine the potential dynamics of generational differences in Norwegian organizations, additional research is required. The necessity for further inquiry is accentuated by two phenomena observed in Norway, resembling trends observed in the US. Firstly, there exists a distinctive upward trajectory among younger generation employees towards job transitions (Børresen, 2019). Secondly, leaders from older generations have articulated challenges associated with effectively leading and motivating younger cohorts (Karlsen, 2023).

Given the vast range of perspectives, thoughts, and research findings on generational differences in the workplace, the present study aims to further investigate the theme of "generational differences" in a Norwegian organizational context. Furthermore, this study aims to explore the work values of younger generations (Y and Z), as well as their older generation leaders' (X) understanding of them. In addition, to examine perceived generational differences, this research will empirically explore the perceptions of these leaders in relation to their younger employees' needs and desires for a particular type of leader, then compare these with the younger employees' own views. Furthermore, this thesis will examine the (existence of) generational differences between the older and younger cohorts' concerning leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs). By considering these aspects, this research will ideally contribute to increased awareness of the needs and desires of younger generations regarding the workplace and leadership. With expanded insight of the needs and desires of younger generations, coupled with augmented awareness regarding generational differences, leaders from the older generation may be better equipped to motivate and fulfill their needs, thereby increasing their job satisfaction and retaining them in the workplace. Based on the arguments and elements presented above, the problem statement in this thesis is focused on generations in the workplace, with particular emphasis on Generation X (leaders) and Generations Y and Z (employees), in a Norwegian organizational context:

Exploring how Norwegian organizational leaders from older generations (Generation X) perceive and respond to the needs and desires of younger employees (Generations Y and Z) at work, in order to improve their motivation and retention within their organizations.

1.2 Case Context

The research of this thesis has been conducted within two sectors (technical and non-technical), recruiting from three organizations, making this a multi-case study. Two of the organizations are innovative and mature, operating within the energy sector and based in Scandinavia. Hence, these organizations will be referred to as *technical organizations* and named *Org A* and *Org B*. Differing from the technical focus of these two organizations, the third entity, a public institution, operates predominantly within a non-technical domain, centered around human interactions. Thus, it will be referred to as a *non-technical organization* and named *Org C*. As only one organization from the non-technical sector was included, participants from *Org C* were recruited from two departments to avoid a one-sided perspective. Similarly, participants from *Org A* and *Org B* were recruited from three departments to promote a diverse sample. Characterized by hierarchical structures, all three organizations feature individuals at various career stages, from newcomers to those nearing retirement. This multigenerational makeup renders them highly relevant to our study. While exceptions exist, leader roles are primarily occupied by older generations, with a significant representation of employees from Generation Y, with a continuous rise in the number of individuals from Generation Z. Hence, it is pertinent to explore generational differences between leaders and employees, with our findings potentially enhancing older generation leaders' comprehension of their younger generation employees.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the work values of younger generations (Y and Z) as well as their older generation leaders' (X) understanding of them. Furthermore, the aim is to gain insight into the preferred leader of the younger generations, whilst also uncovering perceived and existing generational differences in terms of leader needs and desires between the leaders (Generation X) and employees (Generations Y and Z). The aim of this study is to contribute to the empirical literature on the needs and desires of the younger generations, along with generational differences in organizations with primary data from Norwegian organizations, as most studies available included samples from an Anglo-Saxon cultural and national context (e.g., United States). Hence, three objectives have been created for clarity and guidance through the thesis' research process. The objectives pursued in this thesis are as follows:

- 1) To conduct a critical review of literature on generations and generational differences in the workplace.
- 2) To explore first-hand how Norwegian leaders from the older cohort understand the needs, desires, and work values of younger cohorts in the workplace, in a Norwegian organizational context.
- 3) To develop evidence-based recommendations that could help leaders' awareness of what factors contribute to motivate and retain younger cohorts in the workplace.

1.4 Research Questions (RQ's) and Scope of the Study

To achieve the research aim and objectives stated above, two research questions have been formulated. These are meant to provide insights into different variables aiming to further assess the needs and desires of younger generations in the workplace in terms of work values and leader preferences, and the perceptions of these by their older generation leaders.

RQ1: What are the main work values of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z), and how are they perceived by their leaders from the older generation (X)?

RQ2: How does the preferred leader of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z) appear, and how does this compare to their older generation (X) leaders' perceptions of their preferences along with their own?

These research questions are meant to highlight the main areas of focus in this study. Given the extensive scope of the topic, researchers found it essential to identify specific areas for investigation to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the workplace and leader needs and desires of the younger generations. This includes examining whether these needs align with those perceived and expressed by their older cohort leaders. By employing these research questions, the study aims to explore the work values of younger generations and the presence of generational differences concerning leader preferences. The end goal is to outline the preferred leader profile of younger generations and determine how leaders can enhance job satisfaction and employee motivation among younger workers, thus increasing the likelihood of their retention.

1.4.1 Scope of the Study

The researchers aim to examine the needs and desires of the younger generations in the workplace, as well as generational differences. The scope of study involves a meso-level of analysis (group-level), specifically focused on the perspectives from younger cohort employees and older cohort leaders. Despite the potential benefits of incorporating perspectives from older employees and younger leaders, this study is constrained by its small scale and limited time horizon. Consequently, the time constraints did not allow for extensive data collection, prompting the researchers to prioritize the formation of a representative insight into two perspectives within two sectors instead.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters, including the introduction (Chapter 1). The Literature Review (Chapter 2) presents a critical review of relevant literature on generations and generational differences, work values, job satisfaction, employee motivation, leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs) and issues regarding the study of generations. The Research Methodology (Chapter 3) describes the methodological choices related to this study, the data collection and analysis process, in addition to assessing the research quality. The Empirical Findings (Chapter 4) presents the main results of the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews, while the Discussion and Analysis (Chapter 5) presents a thorough analysis of these results in relation to the research questions, along with drawing connections between the main findings and extant theory and research. In the Conclusion (Chapter 6), a thorough response to the research questions is presented, along with the theoretical and practical implications of the thesis' findings and recommendations for older generation leaders. The conclusion will also acknowledge the study's limitations and propose potential directions for future research. In Figure 1.1, the structure of the thesis is displayed, meant to serve as an aid in understanding the organization and flow of the thesis.

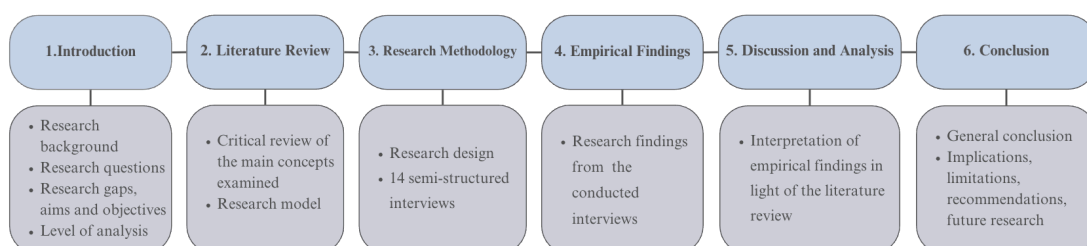


Figure 1.1. Visual of the structure and interconnectedness of the thesis

2. Literature Review

This chapter presents a critical review of the literature relevant to the topics under study in this thesis. It starts by defining the concept of generations, followed by an outline of the recurring characteristics associated with the three generations X, Y and Z, constituting the predominant segment of the contemporary workforce. It will then address the work values held by the younger generations, as documented in empirical studies on generational differences in organizations. The importance of emphasizing work values will be considered in light of literature on both employee motivation and job satisfaction, due to their interconnectedness. Next, the chapter presents younger workers' needs and desires from leaders in organizations, to make them feel satisfied, motivated and enhance well-being in the workplace. Finally, issues concerning generational research will be addressed.

2.1 The Term "Generation": Definition and Overview of the Literature on Generations

Given the focus of this study on younger generation employees (Y and Z) and their older generation leaders (X) in the workplace, it is imperative to start with addressing the origin of the term "generation" and its contemporary usage within the sociological framework. Moreover, in order to understand the generational cohorts X, Y and Z, an introduction to their generational characteristics and identities from academic literature will be provided.

2.1.1 Definition of Generation

The term *generation* refers to genealogical lineage, meaning the study of family descent, but has since expanded into common usage for describing broader social trends and the research area of generational theory (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

From a sociological perspective, generations can be defined as a group of individuals born within the same timeframe and raised amidst similar events. These events may be of socio-cultural and historical significance, leading individuals to be collectively characterized by shared characteristics shaped by their experiences (Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994). This suggests that being part of a certain period entails a unique spectrum of experiences and opportunities, alongside collectively shared memories within generational groups. These aspects are believed to influence individuals' future behaviors, mindsets, cognitive

approaches, and somewhat limit their self-expression within predetermined bounds of potential over their lifespans (Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965; Lyons & Kuron, 2013). *Generational differences* thus refer to the differences in these elements characterizing each generational cohort (Lester et al., 2012).

According to Mannheim (1952), generations are formed through sharing a common location in historical time, in addition to awareness of their location. He argued that people's birth year alone could not place a person within a generational context; rather, the individual has to partake in and experience the defining events of a generation. A shift in historical, social, political or economic circumstances in individuals' youth can lead to creating a new generational consciousness, given that such shifts creates demands for new skills, adjustments in values and lifestyles, and presents new dynamics in social organization (Mannheim 1952; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; NASEM, 2020).

Subsequently, Ryder (1965) presented a similar perspective as Mannheim, describing birth cohorts as a successional process that offers adaptability and introduces novel viewpoints on societal challenges (NASEM, 2020). He argued that generations are objectively defined as a demographic cohort, meaning an observable group that "experience the same event within the same interval" (Ryder, 1965, p.845). Both Ryder (1965) and Mannheim (1952) dismissed the notion that generations emerge at predetermined intervals, emphasizing that their emergence depends on changes in social, historical and cultural contexts that affect people's experiences.

2.1.2 Classification of Present Generations

Throughout the years, various classifications have emerged when it comes to generations, whereas many present conflicting age intervals. The three generational cohorts included in this thesis are referred to as *Generation X*, *Generation Y* and *Generation Z* (Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Costanza et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2019). Due to variations in the commonly agreed boundaries in previous literature, for the purpose of this thesis, the authors adhered to the classification of generations based on the authors Seemiller and Grace (2019). This decision was influenced by their rationale for selecting these intervals, as well as their inclusion of defined intervals for all generations, rather than focusing solely on those under investigation, a practice often observed in other research studies. The generational classifications and their designated age intervals are illustrated below in Table 2.1. Furthermore, for the purpose of

this study, the three generations have been grouped into two main categories. The group of the *older generation (OG)* refers to Generation X, while the group of *younger generations (YG)* refers to Generations Y and Z. Further elaboration on this classification is outlined in Section 3.3.1.

Table 2.1. Generational categories according to year of birth

	Generation Name	From	To
Older Generation (OG)	<i>Generation X / Forgotten Generation</i>	1965	1980
Younger Generations (YG)	<i>Generation Y / Millennials / Generation Me</i>	1981	1994
	<i>Generation Z / Internet Generation / iGeneration</i>	1995	2010

In an effort to achieve a better understanding of the needs and desires of the younger generations in the workplace and uncover potential generational differences, it is relevant to describe each of the three generational cohorts. While the younger generations constitute the central focus of this study, it is relevant to gain some insight to the people who lead the younger generation in the workplace as well. These include their older generation leaders who supervise younger employees in their day-to-day workplace activities. Therefore, this next section will review relevant studies on their prominent characteristics.

2.1.3 Characteristics of the Older Generation (OG)

The era in which Generation X grew up was characterized by uncertainty regarding family, finances, and social matters, alongside considerable diversity and rapid pace of change. This resulted in a shift among that generation, moving away from collectivism and towards individualism (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Consequently, these individuals are described as having reduced loyalty to their workplace, compared to preceding generations. A lot of them had either both parents working full-time or one parent providing for them due to the escalating divorce rate, thus creating a generation that had to rely on themselves and capable of adapting to change (Kraus, 2017). Some important historical and defining events from this period are the Cold War and thus the fear of a nuclear war, exploration of space, the fall of the Berlin wall and the AIDS-epidemic (Chlarence et al., 2022).

2.1.4 Characteristics of the Younger Generations (YG)

2.1.4.1 Characteristics of Generation Y

Various names have been employed to characterize the cohort born between 1981 and 1994. The Digital Generation, Echo Boomers, the Net Generation and Millennials represent some of the most prevalent labels attributed to this group (Dulin, 2008). Referred to as *Generation Y* in this thesis, this cohort makes up the majority of the workforce (Kumar, 2023). They are depicted as prosperous, educated, and culturally varied. They are the pioneers of a globalized community, made possible by technological advancements and the freedom to explore the world (Jeffries & Hunte, 2004). Influenced by the information flow and advertisements disseminated by mass media, this generation has become adept at collecting and processing information, multitasking, collaborating, and seeking individual recognition (Bolelli & Durmuş, 2017). This generation was raised with a strong emphasis on family bonds. They grew up in an environment where their parents sought to maintain equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life. Additionally, the well-being and education of their children were top priorities for their parents. These two factors made Generation Y have quite available parents, which typically advise and support them, even into adulthood (Glass, 2007). Having been the focal point of attention during their childhood, Generation Y exhibits strong self-confidence and has encountered high expectations throughout their upbringing (Bolelli & Durmuş, 2017). Some significant historical events or milestones encompass the demise of Princess Diana, the rise of global terrorism, and the advent of the internet age (Chlarence et al., 2022).

2.1.4.1 Characteristics of Generation Z

Encompassing individuals born between 1995 to 2010, *Generation Z* is either still in education or just starting to enter the workforce (Jones et al., 2019). They were born during an era marked by profound changes, existing in a world with widespread access to the web, smartphones, laptops and freely available networks (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Generation Z can therefore effortlessly access and verify the information they require, and share it with whom they want. This method of acquiring new knowledge and facts may be one explanation as to why some describe them as a generation with a lack of competence in critical thinking (Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Moreover, Generation Z maintains ongoing communication processing, making use of a broad spectrum of communication devices and social media platforms (Dolot, 2018). According to researchers, this generation faces greater difficulty in

being precise, concentrating, and retaining information in long-term memory, largely due to the influence of multitasking-enabled applications (Csobanka, 2016). Generation Z is regarded as very inclusive and they feel at ease with the idea of not conforming to a single identity. Their pursuit of authenticity creates increased freedom of expression and a greater openness to understanding diverse individuals (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Some notable historical or political events include the Norwegian 22nd of July terrorist attack, the #metoo-campaign (Leirfall, 2020), the financial crisis and the great recession (Chlarence et al., 2022).

2.2 Work Values of the Younger Cohorts

In order to investigate how to effectively lead the younger generations (YG), it is crucial to comprehend their needs and desires within a workplace context. Throughout the 20th and 21st century, significant changes have reshaped the workplace, driven by technological advancements (Latham & Ernst, 2006). This has made the workplace generations have, and will enter, different for each of them. Consequently, YG employees may exhibit varying expectations, work values and behaviors than their older generation leaders, shaped by culture, significant events and societal trends (Angeline, 2011). Therefore, this section will present, drawing from relevant academic literature, the work values held by younger cohorts to establish a clear understanding of what they desire and require from the workplace. Although there is no general unanimity within the research area, there are several converging findings. In the following section, work values are defined and prior research on YG employees work values will be presented.

2.2.1 The Notion of "Work Values" and Their Role in Organizations

Work values are typically described as positive reinforcers of job satisfaction (Hansen & Leuty, 2012) and are closely connected to motivation (Latham & Pinder, 2005). Work values serve as fundamental principles or beliefs that individuals hold, which influence decisions, attitudes and goals (Roe & Ester, 1999; Dose, 1997; Twenge et al., 2010). This underscores the importance for leaders to comprehend these values, as it empowers them to cultivate work environments that resonate with employees' values. Consequently, this alignment promotes job satisfaction, motivation, performance and employee retention (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Bizot & Goldman, 1993; Shapira & Griffith, 1990; Meyer et al., 1998). Presently, the challenge for organizations lies not only in attracting suitable employees, but also in retaining

them and motivating them to work with high levels of engagement. To enhance employee loyalty and engagement, it is important for an organization to acknowledge and stay updated on their employees work values, to deploy appropriate motivational programmes (Niezurawska-Zajac et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Connecting Work Values to the Younger Generations

Drawing upon previous empirical findings, five themes have emerged in terms of key work values for younger generations (YG). These themes are depicted in Figure 2.1.

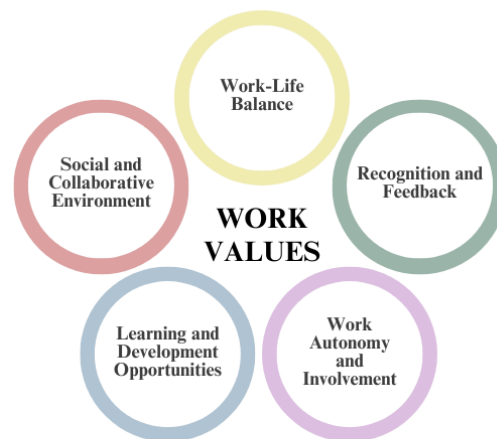


Figure 2.1. Work values prioritized by younger generations

2.2.2.1 Work Autonomy and Involvement (WAI)

Various studies have shown that YG employees value autonomy in their work. *Work autonomy* entails the freedom to propose ideas and make decisions within one's professional responsibilities, alongside the capacity to exercise discernment and work independently (Pierce et al., 2009). A study by Lechler & Huemann (2024) showed that YGs experience a closer connection to their work when given independent control, in addition to a stronger sense of accomplishment and task motivation. Consequently, Generations Y and Z dislike micromanaging, leading to a lessened sense of ownership and freedom in decision-making (Lechler & Huemann, 2024; Jones et al., 2019). The need for work autonomy is further supported by YGs' appreciation for self-reliance, and competitiveness, which appears to be higher than their predecessors' (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Despite favoring autonomy and freedom to creativity in their work, YGs also appreciate leaders being mentors, being involved in their work and subsequently providing advice and input (Bennet et al., 2012).

Including employees in work-related decisions is assumed to be one of the most popular strategies organizations employ to enhance job satisfaction (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). Involvement in decision-making refers to the participation of employees in decisions made regarding organizational issues and specific areas affecting them (Valoyi et al., 2000). YGs desire involvement in decision-making processes and have a strong desire for their thoughts and ideas to be heard and valued by their leaders (García et al., 2019; Racolça-Paina & Irini, 2021; Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

2.2.2.2 Work-Life Balance (WLB)

Over the past decades, there has been a notable increase in attention towards enhancing employee health and well-being, making organizations increasingly attempt to create the right environments where employees experience work-life balance (WLB) (Wood et al., 2020). Some examples of WLB practices include remote working, flextime and family, parental or personal leaves (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019).

Researchers assert that individuals born in the 80s and beyond exhibit heightened expectations from employers concerning work-life programs. For them, happiness equates to attaining a balanced and fulfilling life across all aspects, and they aspire to prioritize "working to live" over "living to work" (Berkup, 2014; Dulin, 2008). They prioritize dedicating time to loved ones and pursuing personal aspirations. Additionally, they anticipate the flexibility to address crises by being able to adjust their workday accordingly (Nieżurawska-Zajac et al., 2023). In other words; life and work seem to no longer be considered separate for YGs, and there is complete integration between the two. Everyday at work, alongside tasks, is supposed to be meaningful and fulfilling, and lead to personal development. Additionally, they have a strong desire to contribute and feel valued by the organization while also expecting to be rewarded with high salaries (Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Evidently, acquiring flexibility from their leaders makes them feel seen and respected, further enhancing their productivity (Valenti, 2019).

2.2.2.3 Social and Collaborative Environment (SCE)

Younger cohorts place a particularly high value on the social dimensions of the workplace. They seek not only to establish professional relationships with their colleagues but also to form friendships, aspiring for a work environment that is enjoyable, engaging and fun (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Berkup, 2014). They express a desire to learn from their peers

and collaborate on tasks, alongside building strong connections with leaders who they expect to inspire them and provide them with direction (Valenti, 2019). Heightened focus on teamwork throughout their education, sport activities and peer networks, have made these generations generally more adapted to teamwork situations than Generation X (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), and they have shown to be effective team players motivated by collaboration (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Conversely, Twenge & Campbell (2009) have identified a rising trend of narcissism among YGs. According to their research, an average college Generation Y man and woman in the 90s had higher self-esteem levels than 86% and 71% of Baby Boomers college men and women respectively (Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Twenge et al., 2010). Additionally, YGs are more supportive of individualistic values (Trommsdorff et al., 2009), display competitive tendencies and are thought to have a strong sense of entitlement (Berkup, 2014; Ng & Johnson, 2015). Some researchers believe this is stemming from their upbringing, i.e. being praised for participation rather than performance (Ng & Johnson, 2015), and a childhood focused on nurturing self-worth by providing praise, acknowledgment, and encouraging feedback from their parents (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

2.2.2.4 Learning and Development Opportunities (LDO)

Owing to the technological advancements that have characterized their upbringing and continue to impact their adult lives, younger cohorts are renowned for their proficiency in multitasking and utilizing various technological devices concurrently (Valenti, 2019). Additionally, a desire for stimulating work assignments drives YGs, and they are prone to losing interest if they are not presented with challenging tasks (Lyons et al., 2010; Valenti, 2019). They are motivated by acquiring new skills and the opportunity to learn in their jobs, viewing knowledge as power (Berkup, 2014). Furthering this notion, YGs exhibit a constant need for change (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). Moreover, they are described as having an “urgent sense of immediacy”. They want to know straight away what their employer has to offer them, what knowledge and skills they can acquire from the position and how they will be rewarded. Martin (2005) suggests that this could be linked to the fast pace of today's world and its ceaseless acceleration.

Younger generations are thought to have high ambitions for their careers and to be high achievers (Alsop, 2008), driven by their high expectations to themselves (Ng & Parry, 2016).

They are focused on career advancements and want to climb the career ladder at a fast pace (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021; Berkup, 2014). Despite this, it has been observed that the younger generations display discernible reduced loyalty towards their employers when compared to preceding generations (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). This is substantiated by high turnover rates among YGs (Khalid et al., 2013). A prevalent reason for them leaving their current employment is a perceived lack of engagement. In addition, as the younger cohorts highly value continuous skills development, they are likely to search in other places to expand their skill set (Bolelli & Durmuş, 2017). As Reisenwitz & Iyer (2009) suggest, one explanation is that they might think they need to move from one role to another to achieve their full potential and progress in their careers.

2.2.2.5 Recognition and Feedback (RF)

The younger generations value structure, guidance and supervision within their work setting. However, it's crucial to balance these needs with sufficient autonomy and flexibility, as this combination enables them to perform their tasks both effectively and efficiently (Gursoy et al., 2008; Kraus, 2017). Despite being characterized as self-reliant, their inclination towards seeking validation and support is notable, with an expectation for communication with their leaders to be not only more frequent but also consistently positive and affirming in comparison to preceding generations (Gursoy et al., 2008; Sweeney, 2005). Bennet et al. (2012) extends this notion by suggesting that Generation Y actively seek mentors, actively pursuing guidance, feedback, or advice, leading to increased productivity and job satisfaction. This assertion holds true for Generation Z as well, depicting a constant need for evaluation and feedback (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021).

2.3 Job Satisfaction and Employee Motivation

There is no doubt that the labor market has undergone major changes in recent decades, especially when it comes to globalization and technological advances (NASEM, 2020). This has meant that companies are now looking at their human capital and there has been an increasing focus on their well-being (Varma, 2017). Job satisfaction and employee motivation are two important concepts that are linked to both productivity and loyalty to the organization. The origin of motivation can be said to lie in future expectations, whereas satisfaction stems from present and past experiences (Kian et al., 2014). Research into generations has found that younger generations might have different sources of motivation and satisfaction

compared to preceding generations (Jeffries & Hunte, 2004). Therefore, in light of this thesis' aim and objectives, focused on understanding the needs and desires of YGs in the workplace, the notions of job satisfaction and employee motivation will be addressed.

2.3.1 Defining Job Satisfaction

According to Locke (1969) job satisfaction can be defined as “*the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values*” (p.316). Furthermore, he also presented job satisfaction as a function of the relationship between what an individual desires to gain from work and what they assume it offers or encompasses. Thus, when an employee is in a state of assessment, there are three elements to consider. First is how a particular aspect of the work is perceived. Second is some form of value standard, either explicit or implicit. Third is a judgment of the relationship between what is perceived and the value standard. Discrepancies in an unfavorable context will lead to dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction among employees correlates with increased retention and engagement in altruistic behaviors like aiding coworkers and taking on extra responsibilities. Conversely, dissatisfaction often leads to turnover, absenteeism, grievance filing, strikes, escalation of issues to senior management and unlawful activities, and reduced productivity (Locke, 1969).

2.3.2 Defining Employee Motivation

The term ”motivation” is polysemantic, however, the word originates from the Latin word *movere* which means to move (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015). This leads to one definition capturing the basics of the term, from Ryan and Deci (2000), who define “being motivated” as being moved to do something. Accordingly, motivation serves as a driving force for employees to act. Highly motivated people have incentives to perform optimally and are more likely to also feel satisfaction and happiness about their workplace, consequently ensuring progress for the organization (Ganta, 2014). Nevertheless, ensuring sufficient motivation proves challenging, as people have both various amounts and sources of motivation. This can provide an explanation to how two people with equal competence level and salary can be recruited for the same position, to perform the same tasks, and still work at a distinctly different pace (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015).

2.3.3 Theories of Motivation

Theories of motivation at the workplace are typically divided into two main categories; process-oriented and content-oriented. *Process theories* focus on the interaction between individual needs, expectations, and work tasks to determine motivation. They examine how cognitive processes influence behavior and how various factors like expectations and values impact motivation (Jalagat, 2016). One example is Adams' (1963) equity theory. In exploring how employees are motivated or demotivated by their interpersonal dynamics with colleagues, equity theory posits that equity exerts predictable and partially potent influences on workplace morale and commitment (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015).

In contrast, *content theories* of motivation focus on identifying and understanding the internal factors and needs that drive employees' behavior and performance. They trace motivations back to internal drives, suggesting that individuals are compelled to act towards satisfying these internal needs. These theories suggest that all employees share a common set of needs, allowing organizations to predict work characteristics that promote satisfaction (Jalagat, 2016). *McClelland's theory of needs* falls within this category, and this theoretical model has been chosen to be further utilized in the thesis. What makes this theory relevant in relation to generations is its proposition that needs evolve in response to environmental changes. Given that generations share experiences, opportunities and memories, it is plausible that the needs of YGs have changed compared to the OG. This may have resulted in their needs not being sufficiently understood and therefore not adequately satisfied, leading them to be motivated by different factors than previous generations. Additionally, as presented in Section 2.2.2, the literature suggests that younger generations have an increased focus on e.g. the social environment, feedback, development and achievement, elements that are prominent in McClelland's theory of motivation, and it therefore best relates to the focus and scope of the research.

2.3.4 McClelland's Theory of Needs

McClelland's theory of needs aims to explain the primary drivers of human motivation in practical contexts, such as the workplace, by delineating three fundamental needs (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015). These needs encompass the pursuit of achievement (nACH), affiliation (nAFF), and power (nPOW) (Miner, 2005), as depicted in Figure 2.2. According to the theory, if a need is pronounced within an individual, the consequence is that the individual becomes

motivated to exhibit certain behaviors, subsequently leading to the fulfillment of that need (Pardee, 1990). The needs are arranged hierarchically, with one being dominant while the other two assume lesser prominence within an individual (Rybnicek et al., 2019). McClelland (1976) suggests that these needs are a product of one's environment and life experiences, particularly influenced by upbringing where individuals encounter positive and negative emotions associated with various situations. For instance, in a situation characterized by achievement-oriented tasks, successfully mastering such challenges triggers feelings of satisfaction, thereby manifesting achievement motivation prominently within the individual. As the needs are structured hierarchically, the need for achievement may occupy the apex while the other two assume more secondary roles (Miner, 2005).



Figure 2.2. Needs of McClelland's theory of needs

Individuals with high affiliation needs are drawn to work settings that entail developing and sustaining amicable relationships with others. They will typically endeavor to make a favorable impression on their colleagues, facilitating the establishment of relationships and thereby enhancing their organizational standing (Baptista et al., 2021). Individuals with strong power needs gravitate towards work environments where they can exert influence over the actions or thoughts of a group, typically to achieve organizational or group objectives (Harrel & Stahl, 1984). Individuals with pronounced achievement needs are drawn to work environments where they are entrusted with personal responsibility for achieving challenging yet attainable goals, followed by the receipt of feedback regarding their performance. Their strong drive for excellence frequently propels them to excel as performers when their work environment embodies these attributes (Miner, 2005).

Research has also examined generations in relation to McClelland's theory of needs. Borges et al. (2010) conducted a study which found that variations exist in the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power between Generation Y and Generation X individuals. Specifically,

Generation X members exhibited a greater inclination towards Power, while Generation Y showed higher levels of motivation towards achievement and affiliation (Borges et al. 2010).

To apply this theory in practice, leaders must first identify and determine the primary motivators of their employees. This could be achieved through observation or dialogue, before commencing adaptations based on the primary motivators of the employees. A new research project or presentation task can be given to someone driven by achievement. For those motivated by affiliation, ample chances to collaborate with colleagues could be offered. Even if their roles are typically solitary, position them in an office space conducive to interaction. As for power-driven individuals, consider assigning them leadership roles or spokesperson duties (Indeed, n.d.).

McClelland's theory of needs is still widely relevant for organizations and organizational research today, however, it has received criticism for exclusively utilizing male research participants during its development. Moreover, upon subsequent studies of female participants, distinct findings were observed compared to the males. For instance, it was discovered that women exhibited a stronger fear of success leading to diminished achievement motivation (Miner, 2005).

2.4 Leading Younger Generations at the Workplace

Some researchers have noted generational differences between the younger and older generations regarding the desired characteristics and behavior of leaders (LCBs) (Sessa et al., 2007). As Generation Y and Z continue to represent a growing proportion of the workforce, largely under the leadership of Baby Boomers and Generation X (DFØ, 2019), it is relevant to investigate if the younger generations' desires and needs differ from those of the older generations. Thus, these leaders can enhance their understanding of younger generations and consequently enhance their job satisfaction and motivate them in preferred ways, ensuring their retention.

2.4.1 Contribution of This Study to the Literature

Generational differences are dynamic, challenging organizations to adopt a long-term perspective to comprehend and effectively respond to them. Additionally, a workforce comprising multiple generations has substantial effects on organizations, especially for

leaders who must skillfully manage the generational diversity to ensure productive operations (Salopek, 2006; Anderson et al., 2017). Jeffries and Hunte (2004) propose that leaders can utilize the unique characteristics of different generational cohorts as a foundation for enhancing their understanding of their employees and their leader preferences. Organizational leaders should perceive these differences as reflections of broader societal trends and work to continuously adapt as generations progress through their respective life stages (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). This is further highlighted in the sense that variances in attitudes, values, and beliefs across distinct generational cohorts are posited to exert influence on each cohort's perception of leadership, thereby leading to the adoption of varying preferred LCBs (Sessa et al., 2007). Furthermore, LCBs are connected to both employee job satisfaction and engagement, and can be associated with employees' levels of performance, motivation, and loyalty (Abiodun, 2010). Hence, it becomes imperative to ascertain whether differences exist among generational cohorts concerning their perspectives on leadership and the outward expressions thereof.

Currently, there is scarce research on generational differences regarding leadership preferences (Burroughs, 2019). Thus, there is a need for further investigation to enhance the understanding of whether differences exist in what different generations desire and require from their leader. Furthermore, a Norwegian study by the State Employer Portal found that the average age of leaders was 58.4 years in the public sector and 56.2 years in the private sector (DFØ, 2019). Given the absence of more recent data, it's reasonable to assume that the majority of leaders consists of individuals from the Baby Boomers and Generation X demographics. Consequently, there may exist a generation gap between what leaders themselves deem as important LCBs and what the younger generations deem significant.

Given that the concept of "generations" is often prevalent in media and popular press (Giertsen, 2022; Kalita, 2023; Leirfall, 2020), it is also plausible that generations hold biases, stereotypes, and perceptions of each other that do not necessarily align with reality (Dick, 2019). Researchers have raised questions about whether generational cohorts truly desire different things in a work context or if the generational differences are merely the result of commonly held biases (Lester et al., 2012). Hence, it is relevant to uncover the perceptions generations hold of each other, which may help ascertain whether the perceived generational differences are greater than they actually are. Researchers, including Lester et al. (2012), have studied this matter, particularly exploring the relation between *perceived generational*

differences and *actual generational differences* in work-related contexts. The study found actual generational differences in 8 out of 45 items, and perceived generational differences in 27 out of 45 items. Thus, the researchers remarked that the perceived generational differences significantly outnumbered the actual. Some researchers believe that perceived generational differences, particularly negative ones or discriminatory views, stem from generational stereotyping. For instance, Arnett (2010) found that the older generations tend to depict the younger generation in a negative light, often perceiving them as self-centered in work-related contexts.

Additionally, few studies delve deeply into examining the relationship between LCBs and employee motivation and job satisfaction (Sessa et al., 2007). Moreover, most of these studies are of a quantitative nature, and the participants thus have little opportunity to elaborate and justify their choices. For instance, the perception of a fair leader might differ for someone from Generation X than someone from Generation Y or Z (Asting & Swanberg, 2020). Further research in this area could uncover generational differences, enhance intergenerational understanding, and facilitate effective multigenerational leadership.

Although the amount of research is limited, especially within a Norwegian context, there exist some studies that address generational differences regarding leadership and have yielded a limited number of findings, covered in the next section.

2.4.2 Research on Generational Differences in Preferred Leader Characteristics and Behaviors (LCBs)

A handful of studies have explored the leadership preferences of different generations to ascertain potential differences. Some studies have discovered significant differences, such as the comprehensive study conducted by Sessa et al. (2007) on the subject. The presented findings constitute a selection from the array of findings available. Regardless, it is important to acknowledge the ambiguity in this area of research.

Generation X is often regarded as an egalitarian generation and does not share the same respect for authority as preceding ones. They seek leaders who are fair, truthful, straightforward and capable (Sessa et al., 2007). Moreover, they are commonly depicted as a generational cohort marked by skepticism or cynicism, displaying a preference for a relatively

informal professional atmosphere and purportedly showcasing a weaker work ethic in comparison to preceding generations (Lester et al. 2012). Generation X are also said to be self-reliant (Lyons & Kuron, 2013) and therefore require autonomy and independence in work settings (Lester et al. 2012).

When it comes to the younger cohorts, Generation Y appreciate inclusive and collaborative leadership, and generally appear to favor leaders who excel at bringing people together and create a team-oriented organizational culture (Sessa et al., 2007; Sanchez, 2024). Nevertheless, as they desire transparency and purpose, both Generations Y and Z require leaders who value diverse opinions, actively include employees in decision-making procedures and advocate for open dialogue. The leader should also recognize the individual's efforts and contributions to the team. Additionally, YGs want leaders that stimulate individual rather than organizational success (Valenti, 2019, after Lyons & Kuron, 2013). A study conducted in 2008 showed that Generation Y prefer leaders to have a clear vision for the organization, have good interpersonal skills, treat them with respect and function as a mentor (Dulin, 2008). Sessa et al. (2007) found that YGs appreciated a dedicated, positive and focused leader more than Generation X. Additionally, they considered big picture orientation, cultural sensitivity and honesty as less important compared to the OG.

In a study conducted in Norway, researchers investigated the preferred leader characteristics and behaviors among younger-generation students. Their findings indicated that the students placed significant emphasis on what the authors refer to as the "relationship-oriented dimensions of leadership". They referred to responses such as "motivating," with synonyms such as "inspiring" and "engaging," as well as "understanding" and "listening." Moreover, "skilled at communication" and "giving and receiving feedback" were mentioned by the students. Furthermore, the notion of being "structured" was articulated, prompting the authors to believe that this inclination might signify a preference among younger cohorts for well-defined structure in their work-life (Asting & Swanberg, 2020).

2.5 Issues Concerning the Study of Generations

2.5.1 Alternative Effects to the “Generational Effects”

Researchers examining the effects of generational differences in the workplace must also consider the confounding or simultaneous influence of age and period effects. Earlier research has addressed the conceptual and methodological challenges for researchers to isolate the influences of each construct (age, period, cohort effects) within fields of economics, demography, political science and sociology, among others (NASEM, 2020; Costanza et al., 2012). Because these variables (age, period and cohort) have a linear relationship, they are also rank deficient and unable to estimate uniquely. This is also known as the *identification problem* (Fosse & Windship, 2019).

Age effects refer to the alterations in thoughts, feelings and behavior caused by factors affecting individuals at various stages of life. They are perceived as developmental influences, stemming from biological factors or maturation, independent from historical context in time. For example, due to the age-related alterations in muscle fibers, younger workers typically exhibit greater strength compared to older ones (NASEM, 2020). *Period effects* suggest that social phenomena or particular historical contexts can influence individuals, resulting in changes in their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic may have caused populations to experience heightened anxiety during a specific period, with the aftereffects being a lingering apprehension about disease (NASEM, 2020).

Similarly, a *cohort effect* can also manifest as a significant change of a population attributed to historical events. However, it distinguishes itself from period effects in that cohort effects refer to a specific historical experience influencing a distinct group of individuals based on their stage of development at the time of exposure, rather than impacting the entire population irrespective of age (NASEM, 2020). An illustration of this can be found in instances of an economic depression. Such an event may induce heightened sensitivity to financial losses among all individuals (a period effect), or it could uniquely impact a specific cohort during their formative years (a cohort effect). This differential effect is caused by elevated negative emotions and the economic repercussions on their earning potential at the time of entry into the labor market (NASEM, 2020). Cohort effects and generational effects share similarities, yet they differ in their focus and scope. Cohort effects concentrates on zooming in on and

examining the impact of specific historical events on particular groups of individuals born within the same timeframe, while generational effects aims to analyze broader patterns and trends across different generations.

Despite these potential methodological challenges, empirical findings indicate that generational differences are existent and significant to investigate further. For instance, a study conducted by Schuman and Scott (1989) demonstrated that historical events during formative years exert a substantial influence on individuals, a finding further supported by a replicated study yielding similar results (Arsenault, 2004). Thus, these findings indicate that generational differences remain a relevant area of study.

2.5.2 Challenges of Generational Generalization

While certain studies have identified differences in characteristics, values, and expectations among generations, others have yielded inconclusive findings or found no significant variations (Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Costanza et al., 2012). A notable weakness within the research domain lies in the lack of clear definitions regarding the age ranges of different generations. This complicates the establishment of a universal understanding.

Another challenge, as mentioned in the previous section, is the problem of isolating age, period and cohort effects. Researchers have detected this methodological problem as the primary challenge when studying generational effects (Costanza et al., 2012). The vast majority of the published literature on the topic of linking generational differences and work values bases their methodology on using a cross-sectional design or informal surveys. Thus, the findings may be misleading, as reported generational differences might only be due to age-related differences. Studies employing a longitudinal design are uncommon, and research offering a conceptual framework for understanding the evolving nature of generations appears even scarcer. In addition, most studies utilize a small convenience sample, making their findings unable to generalize to generations as a whole (NASEM, 2020; Costanza et al., 2012).

Despite these issues, some researchers, like Smola and Sutton (2002), assert that individuals born within the same era share influential experiences that shape their views and values,

leading to differences between generations (Smola & Sutton, 2002). This standpoint continues to have widespread recognition in current discussions (Sessa et al., 2007).

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to provide a critical review to deepen the understanding of the term “generations”, and to present different characteristics of the generations X (OG), Y and Z (YG). Additionally, the review explored key concepts such as employee motivation and job satisfaction, followed by an examination of the work values predominant among younger generations, all in pursuit of addressing the problem statement: *Exploring how Norwegian organizational leaders from older generations (Generation X) perceive and respond to the needs and desires of younger employees (Generation Y and Z) at work, in order to improve their motivation and retention within their organizations.* Studying relevant literature on generational research can provide insights into whether OG leaders are aware of their YG employees' workplace and leader needs and desires, and if there is a generational gap, contribute to increased understanding of the needs and desires of their YG employees. Ultimately, this leads to the development of the thesis' research model, depicted in Figure 2.3.

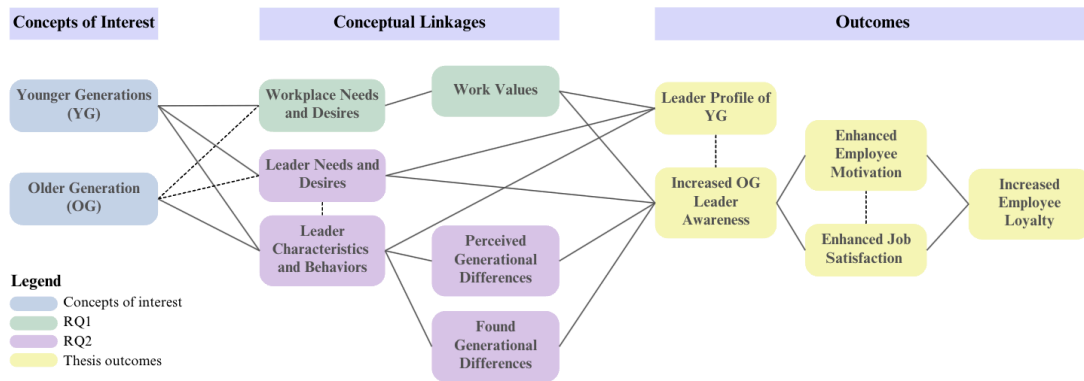


Figure 2.3. The research model of the thesis

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological design of this thesis' research. It starts with an explanation of the epistemological standpoint that guided the choice of methodology. Next, the chapter describes the research design, the methodology for data collection, and the approach chosen to perform data analysis. This scientific framework facilitates a thorough comprehension of the research process and its fundamental principles.

3.1 Scientific Framework

The researchers' journey into this Master's thesis was marked by a strong interest and great curiosity for the subject. The topic of generations captured their interest, leading to several engaging dialogues and discussions. From these conversations, curiosity evolved into ideas. Then, from idea to the current, one has to apply a theoretical perspective to the phenomenon before conducting the research (Tjora, 2018). For instance, researchers often seek to describe a phenomenon or an event, uncover the relationship between two or more phenomena or create predictions regarding events that might happen in the future (Marczyk et al., 2005). To gain a better understanding, come up with reasonable explanations and make correct predictions, it is necessary to rely on an appropriate scientific framework, which has been pivotal to this thesis whilst trying to find answers to the research questions.

There are two central concepts that form the fundamentals of scientific research, namely ontology and epistemology. *Ontology* is the study of reality and what exists, and *epistemology* is the study of knowledge and how it can be acquired. Every researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions determine the research design and the methodology of the study (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The research onion is an analytical tool proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) that functions as a model for designing a research methodology, where the researcher's philosophical viewing point forms the outer layer. The research onion illustrating this study's methodological framework can be viewed in Figure 3.1.

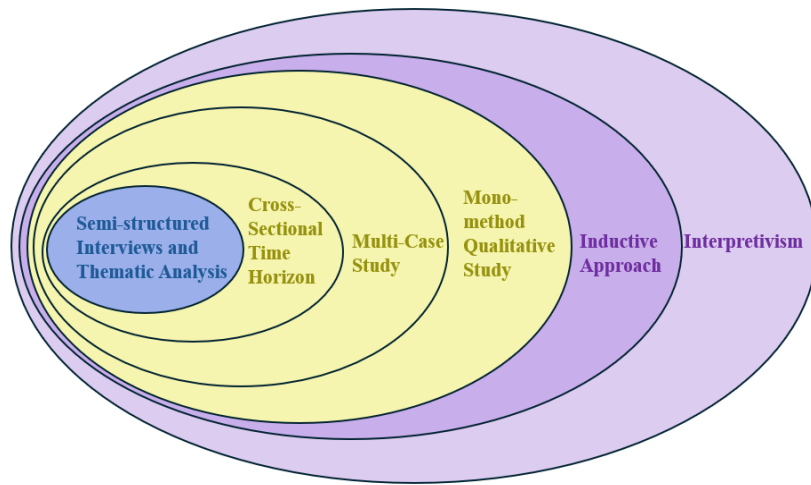


Figure 3.1. “Research onion” illustrating the elements of this thesis chosen research methodology.

Adapted from Saunders et al (2019)

This research aims to study the phenomenon of generations in coherence with leadership in the workplace, and the philosophy of *interpretivism* was therefore considered as most fitting in order to do so. This view serves the belief that rich insights into humanity will be lost of its complexity if we refrain from assessing differences and individuality, and is based on the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivist research intends to create new and rich interpretations and understandings of the social aspects of the world, and to collect data on what is meaningful to research participants. In the context of business and management, and this research, meaning to examine perspectives of different groups of people within the organization.

In extension of this, prevailing theories and conceptual frameworks are deemed overly simplistic according to this philosophy. Epistemologically, interpretivism is subjectivist, positing that knowledge construction is intricately tied to the subjective interpretations of researchers and underlines the connection between researchers and subjects. Subsequently, this research aims to provide novel insights to generations in the workplace. Since business and management situations are considered both complex and unique, some would argue that interpretivism is a favored perspective when conducting research in this context (Saunders et al., 2019). This implication further emphasizes the need for a more in-depth and reflective perspective towards this research topic.

In order to examine aspects related to younger generation employees (Y and Z) and their older generation leaders (X), an appropriate approach to theory development needed to be chosen with options consisting of an inductive, deductive or abductive design. When assessing the problem statement of this thesis; *Exploring how Norwegian organizational leaders from older generations (Generation X) perceive and respond to the needs and desires of younger employees (Generations Y and Z) at work, in order to improve their motivation and retention within their organizations*, an inductive approach was deemed as the appropriate choice for this research project. This approach facilitates researchers to move “from empiricism to theory”, leaving room for the complexity of human behavior as a consequence of the way they perceive the social world and abstaining from rigid methodology constructions (Jacobsen, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). The exploratory nature of the research questions, described in Section 1.4, seeks to uncover novel insights into the participants' work life, values and experiences, which an inductive approach accommodates.

3.2 Research Design and Methodological Choices

To examine the complex nature of generations at the workplace, a qualitative design was favored. A quantitative design, which relies on collecting numerical data, would not be able to capture how, why or what the participants think, feel or experience (Tenny et al., 2022). The purpose of qualitative methods is to explore participants' opinions and the relationship between them, and they aim to bring insight and understanding rather than an overview and explanation of the examined topic (Saunders et al., 2019; Tjora, 2018). In consequence, this research adopted a mono-method, focusing solely on the reflections of the participants through semi-structured interviews. As a result, an intensive design was also preferred. In addition, constraining factors such as time and availability of participants in the organizations further influenced the choice.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of generations in the workplace, both technical and non-technical organizations were included, leading to the selection of a multi-case study approach. This research methodology involves examining multiple cases or examples to deepen the understanding of a particular phenomenon or research problem (Saunders et al., 2019). By adopting this approach, a range of perspectives and experiences within diverse organizational contexts can be explored.

Considering that this research study is a small project with a limited time horizon, conducting research over time would not be possible. Therefore, a cross-sectional time horizon was chosen (Saunders et al., 2019). This means that the research will provide a snapshot of current conditions within Norwegian organizations, allowing the researchers to explore topics derived from the research questions, with the intent to provide valuable insights into contemporary issues and practices in the workplace. Although this area of research could benefit from a prolonged study, external factors preclude this possibility.

3.3 Data Collection

This study has collected primary data. There are mainly two ways of collecting qualitative data, one being through observation, while the other relies on interviews (Tjora, 2018). This section presents how the primary data for this thesis was collected and how the interview guides were developed. Further, it describes how participants were selected, the interview process and the analysis of the collected data.

3.3.1 Selection of the Study Participants

To initiate the selection process, a meeting with the research supervisor was arranged in order to discuss the nature of the data collection. The research statement of this thesis focuses on the workplace needs and desires of younger generations and the perceptions of their older generation leaders. This implies that to thoroughly explore the topic, participants from both leadership positions and subordinate roles were necessary. As generational affiliation is a central part of the research problem, age also served as an essential selection criteria. In addition, it was also decided to recruit from both technical and non-technical companies, to obtain diversity in the sample.

The number of needed participants was proven difficult to decide. As the phenomenon this thesis has chosen to examine is quite large, a sufficient selection of participants were needed in order to establish a base for further discussion of the topic. In a social science Master's thesis relying solely on qualitative interviews as the method for empirical data collection, a range of ten to fifteen is expected (Tjora, 2018; Jacobsen, 2016). Therefore, the determination of the quantity was decided based on availability, with the anticipated number of ten to fifteen serving as a goal for the selection process.

In order to select participants, the *snowball method* was utilized. This is a selection method classified as a non-probability volunteer sampling, where one starts off with a small selection (consisting of *first contacts* and engaged *key informants*), which gradually grows as the researchers receive tips on new informants from the first contacts (Saunders et al., 2019; Tjora, 2018). The researchers utilized their social network to seek out potential participants from relevant organizations, who were then asked to identify suitable informants within the same organization according to the criterias established beforehand. This resulted in, as displayed in Table 3.1, five subordinates and three leaders from two technical organizations, and four subordinates and two leaders from a non-technical organization; a total of fourteen participants.

Table 3.1. The sample of the selected study participants according to their role and type of organization

	Leaders	Employees
	L1	E1
Technical	L2	E2
Organizations	L3	E3
		E4
		E5
	L4	E6
Non-technical	L5	E7
Organization		E8
		E9

Furthermore, five of the participants were affiliated with Generation X, seven with Generation Y and two participants were from Generation Z, illustrated in Table 3.2. As mentioned in Section 2.1.2, a decision was made to group Generations Y and Z under the term younger generations (YG) and Generation X under older generation (OG). This was due to methodological and practical reasons, also given the limited number of participants from Generation Z.

Table 3.2. Overview of the generational affiliation of the participants included in the study

	Generational Affiliation	Number of Participants
Older Generation (OG)	<i>Generation X</i>	5
Younger	<i>Generation Y</i>	7
Generations (YG)	<i>Generation Z</i>	2

3.3.2 Interview Guides

Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be most appropriate for investigating the thematic aspects of the research questions, and the interview guides followed Tjora's (2018) recommended structure consisting of three phases, to create a safe and comfortable situation for the informants. With the aim of addressing the problem statement, the interview guides were divided into two parts: one for leaders and one for employees. The interview guides can be retrieved from Appendix A.1. A substantial number of questions were identical in both parts, with the exception of minor adjustments made in order to tailor questions for each of the designated roles.

The interview guides' first phase started with introductory questions designed to establish rapport, without the necessity for deep reflection. The second phase, named the reflection phase, identified four principal areas of inquiry; *leadership, collaboration, values* and *feedback*. In this phase the informants were meant to elaborate on in-depth questions. These topics were selected in alignment with the research questions outlined in Section 1.4 as primary focal points of investigation (Appendix A.2). Introducing the thematic aspects to the informant establishes a framework for the topic, thereby serving the informant greater latitude in addressing the subject matter (Tjora, 2018). Carefully selected questions were included in the interview guide, with remaining questions being contingent to the interviewees' response. In addition, an attachment (found in Appendix A.1) comprising 40 different leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs) derived from relevant empirical literature was incorporated as a complimentary element. They were predominantly aggregated from Sessa et al. (2007) and supplemented with other favorable LCBs detected by other researchers (Asting & Swanberg, 2020; Brower, 2021; De Cremer & Van Knippenberg 2004; Foote et al., 2011; Johannessen, 2020; Kontochristos, 2023; Morris et al., 2005; Russo, 2022; Russo & Morandin, 2019). This attachment was designed as a supportive tool for the participants and served as a complementary addition.

The third and final phase consisted of closing questions intending to normalize the situation between researcher and informant. Additionally, it was meant to inform about when and where they could expect to access the finalized thesis (Tjora, 2018). The researchers chose to do this spontaneously following phase two during interviews. Organizing the questions into sections in this manner facilitates the informant and researchers in managing the numerous

questions. The finalized interview guide included over 20 questions. This may seem extensive for a semi-structured interview guide, but adopting an exploratory nature in these interviews, some questions were reevaluated and removed after gaining experience in conducting interviews. This process will be explained more specifically in the next section.

3.3.3 Interview Process

All interviews were conducted digitally via Microsoft Teams due to availability and significant geographical distances. By doing this, the participants were provided with the comfort of choosing where to reside during the interview, while the researchers also remained flexible regarding the scheduling of the interviews. As all the participants included in the study were Norwegian, it was decided that the interviews should be conducted in their native language. Speaking their native language was deemed the most comfortable approach for the participants, as it may have allowed them to be more expressive and free without the need to translate their answers into English. Welch & Piekkari (2006) found that interviewees speaking their native language provides more authentic answers that show subtle nuances compared to foreign languages, which further supports this choice.

The first few minutes of the interview has a significant effect on the rest of the interview, especially if the interviewee has not met the researcher before. It is important to gain trust and establish credibility, creating a relaxing and positive environment by initially leading the conversation (Saunders et al., 2019). To start the interview, the participants were thanked for their time and effort, creating a positive environment. They were then informed about the study once more, despite providing the participants with information sheets and collected consent forms beforehand, in order to reduce the uncertainties attached to information sharing.

Adopting an interpretivist approach, the interview guide was utilized in a flexible way, making the flow of the conversation determine how and when to ask certain questions. As mentioned in the prior section, the finalized interview guide contained over 20 questions. Following each of the first few interviews, researchers reevaluated which questions that appeared to generate repetitive and overlapping answers. Subsequently, cases of omitting or modifying questions occurred. The researchers were mindful of asking open-ended questions without seeking to lead the interviewee, and phrase them clearly in a neutral voice to avoid

response bias (Saunders et al., 2019). These were followed up with probing questions, helping to explore certain topics and produce fuller understandings. In addition, new questions emerged during interviews, exploring themes or reflections of participants. As shown in Table 3.3, the interviews lasted on average approximately one hour.

Table 3.3. The interview duration for each participant

Participants	Interview Time (in min)
E1	63:00
E2	61:00
E3	79:00
E4	59:00
E5	63:00
E6	62:00
E7	65:00
E8	50:00
E9	63:00
L1	60:00
L2	58:00
L3	54:00
L4	79:00
L5	62:00

3.4 Data Analysis

In this section, the approach to data analysis is presented. Firstly, a description and elaboration on the process of transcribing interviews is given, and subsequently, the systematization and categorization of the data is presented.

3.4.1 Transcriptions of Interviews

In order to accurately reproduce quotations and data material, it is crucial to utilize tools such as audio recordings (Tjora, 2018). Therefore, audio recordings were conducted using the researchers mobile phones, which were deleted after the transcriptions were completed. Additionally, since the interviews were held digitally, researchers chose to employ the transcription tool within Microsoft Teams. This tool transcribed in real time, provided another source of data to cross-check with and simplified the transcription process thereafter. An option within the tool is to translate the transcription in real time as well, but considering the aspect of losing essential information and nuances within the language, it became an

unfavorable option. These transcriptions were deleted after finalizing the cross-checked transcriptions.

As the interviews were held in Norwegian, the transcriptions had to be translated to English. When translating from one language to another, it is important to be conscious about containing the meaning in an authentic way when reproducing the interview (Saunders et al., 2019). However, it was decided to analyze the transcriptions in Norwegian, making sure that the nuances were captured. Subsequently, the findings were translated to English, so that there was less data to translate and therefore enhancing the likelihood of a fully accurate rendition.

3.4.2 Systematization and Categorization

Having adopted an interpretivist philosophy, it is important to analyze the data with the recognition of the complexity and breadth of the participants' experiences and perspectives derived in the data (Saunders et al., 2019). As the aim of this study is to explore the thoughts and perspectives of younger and older cohorts in regards to topics of work values and leadership, a *thematic analysis* was favored (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This analysis approach is often regarded as the general approach to analyzing qualitative data, and is not tied to any particular philosophy (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019). Due to its flexible and accessible properties, which allows one to analyze large datasets, it appeared to be the most fitting approach for developing rich descriptions and explanations, and some of its attributes can be viewed in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Thematic analysis as an analytical strategy

Thematic Analysis Can Be Used To:	
1	Comprehend large and disparate amounts of qualitative data
2	Integrate related data drawn from different transcripts
3	Identify key themes or patterns from data sets for further explanations
4	Produce a thematic description of the data collected
5	Develop and test explanations and theories based on apparent thematic patterns or relationships
6	Draw and verify conclusions

(Adapted from Saunders et al., 2019)

To begin this analysis, it was important to familiarize with the data. This leads to noticing meanings, recurring themes and patterns, making the process more feasible before the coding starts (Saunders et al., 2019). As the data collecting relied solely on semi-structured interviews, the researchers became familiar with the data concluding transcriptions, and could notice some common features. In order to manage the large amounts of data retrieved from our interviews, coding was utilized. Coding refers to the categorizations of data containing similar meanings, and involves giving a label with a code to each unit of data within a data item that summarizes its meaning (Saunders et al., 2019). Given that this can be done for the entirety of the data collected, researchers had to be mindful of what to include and focus on. As a starting point, the two research questions described in Section 1.4 were utilized as a guide, ensuring continuous awareness of the aspects aimed to be explored. Some may argue that this conflicts with the interpretivist philosophy, as this approach to coding is not purely inductive. However, conducting coding in such a manner requires ample time and is mostly used in major research projects (Saunders et al., 2019). As stated earlier, this study is a smaller project with a limited time horizon, making it severely difficult to do so. To conduct the coding, the researchers utilized NVivo 20 (Release 1.7.1), a software used for analyzing qualitative data.

After thoroughly coding the data, researchers searched for themes and tried to notice recurring elements within codes, evident patterns and related codes. In this context, a 'theme' refers to a broad category encompassing several codes that appear to be interconnected and relevant to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). The search for themes is part of the condensing process of the raw data, where one places the codes within analytic themes. When themes began to form, researchers had to be mindful of potential hierarchies and networks between them, possibly revealing linked themes (Saunders et al., 2019). Following the identification of the most prominent themes related to the research questions, the researchers undertook a refinement process (Saunders et al., 2019). This was necessary because upon reviewing the selected themes, researchers identified instances of overlap among some. Additionally, certain themes were deemed less relevant than others and, therefore, had to be discarded.

Due to the explorative nature of the research philosophy of this study, significant amounts of data was derived through coding of the transcribed interviews, resulting in 858 codes. Not all of the coded data could be utilized to address the research questions and it was therefore categorized as “rest”. Following the completion of the coding process, researchers were left

with eight main themes identified through thorough reading and analysis of the transcriptions, namely ‘*Work Autonomy and Involvement (WAI)*’, ‘*Recognition and Feedback (RF)*’, ‘*Social and Collaborative Environment (SCE)*’, ‘*Work-Life Balance (WLB)*’, ‘*Learning and Development Opportunities (LDO)*’ for research question one, and ‘*an Encouraging and Invested Leader (EIL)*’, ‘*a People-Oriented Leader (POL)*’ and ‘*a Responsible and Sincere Leader (RSL)*’ for research question two. These can be viewed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Overview of main themes in NVivo 20

Main Themes	Codes	Interviews
WAI	78	14
RF	101	14
SCE	84	14
WLB	61	14
LDO	103	14
EIL	92	14
POL	115	14
RSL	26	14
Rest	198	14

To structure the codes within the themes, several subthemes were developed for each main theme. Table 3.6 provides an overview of the subthemes associated with one of the main themes.

Table 3.6. Overview of one main theme with designated subthemes in NVivo 20

Main Theme	Codes (total)	Subthemes	Codes	Interviews
SCE	84	Supportive Peers	15	9
		Collaboration	24	14
		Workplace Enjoyment	20	14
		Openness	11	11
		Friendships	14	9

3.5 Research Quality

To evaluate the quality of the research conducted, some central aspects need to be taken into consideration. In this section, the validity, reliability and transferability of the data will be assessed and discussed. Subsequently, the ethical considerations of this research study will be elaborated on.

3.5.1 Validity

Validation involves verifying research data, analysis and interpretation to establish validity and authenticity. Interpretivist researchers often refrain from using terms such as validity when assessing their research or reject them as a whole. This philosophy considers reality as socially constructed and multifaceted, making it difficult to assess validation when examining people's beliefs, attitudes and interpretations (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is deemed necessary to discuss the validity, as the research aims to reflect on the strength of the method.

There are several aspects to consider when assessing validity. Firstly, a question asked is if the research has encompassed the right participants. As all the data was collected through interviews, the source of the data, being the participants, will have an effect on the validity (Jacobsen, 2016). This poses the possibility of not having recruited the right sources, and how other participants would have encompassed different information and views. Among all participants, only three of them were women, and all leaders were men. This indicates a skewed gender distribution, which could potentially impact the validity of the findings.

In terms of internal validity, choosing to research generations using a cross-sectional study design can be problematic because of the identification problem. The challenge stems from the difficulty of isolating generational effects from age, period and cohort effects, as described in Section 2.5.1 and 2.5.2. Choosing to interview participants in a single point in time implies that the researchers cannot know whether the ones in their 30's are different from the ones in their 50's due to their placement in their lifespans (age effect) and the unique experiences of their generation (cohort effect) (NASEM, 2020). As disclosed in Section 3.2, the time constraints for this study resulted in a cross-sectional time horizon, even though researchers evaluated the benefits of a prolonged study in order to thoroughly examine generations in the workplace. These challenges indicate that the internal validity is considered limited, as the

study design makes it impossible to exclude other explanations for the findings (NASEM, 2020).

In addition, the majority of the participants within the younger generations belonged to Generation Y, meaning that a minority of participants from Generation Z were recruited for the study. The reason behind this uneven distribution is the randomness of the snowball method, as the responsibility of finding further candidates was given to the first contacts within the organizations. In terms of data quality, it is arguable if this research study has collected enough data about the thoughts and perspectives of Generation Z to make assumptions about their views on this thesis' research questions. However, researchers decided to merge Generations Y and Z under the term younger generations (YG), meaning that the aim was not to generalize to each generation. Subsequently, it is also important to consider if this study has collected the right information. The possibility of participants not willing to tell the truth or exclude relevant information must be taken into consideration (Saunders et al., 2019). The area of interest for this study may be considered relatively non-sensitive, thereby enhancing the credibility of the informants' willingness to speak truthfully.

3.5.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the assessment of reproducibility and consistency in research findings. In other words, if subsequent attempts to replicate a study using the same research design yield consistent results, the research is considered reliable (Saunders et al., 2019). Similarly, as mentioned in Section 3.5.1, interpretivists also avoid or sustain from using reliability as a measure of quality. This assertion aligns with the viewpoints mentioned above, with the addition that qualitative research is not necessarily meant to be replicated due to the nature of the research (Saunders et al., 2019). However, it is pertinent to evaluate the aspects of reliability in terms of trustworthiness to contemplate the data collection and framework employed, thereby enabling an assessment of data quality.

Given the lack of standardization using semi-structured interviews, the reliability can appear concerning. Despite this form of data generation method not aiming to be replicable, there are three types of potential bias that should be evaluated; *interviewer bias*, *response bias* and *participation bias*. The former, also known as interviewer effect, addresses the bias created by the tone, comments or non-verbal behavior of the interviewer, affecting the way the

interviewees respond (Saunders et al., 2019). This source of bias may be lessened by the usage of digital tools such as Microsoft Teams (Jacobsen, 2016). In addition, using several interviewers can also lower the risk of interviewer bias, as different interviewers will reduce the possibility of being biased in the same areas. Researchers of this study, comprising two individuals, made sure to conduct an equal amount of interviews with the aim to avoid potential bias. Subsequently, researchers made sure to appear understanding and interested during interviews, giving off affirmative sounds and body language (Jacobsen, 2016).

In relation, *response bias* is caused by the interviewees' perceptions about the interviewer or the interview itself. In a semi-structured interview, the aim is to explore events or explanations, and participants may be reluctant to reveal too much about certain topics or exclude relevant information leading them to decline to answer truthfully (Saunders et al., 2019). To reduce response bias, participants were assured about their anonymity, informed about the purpose of the research and were asked if it was okay to audio-record and transcribe the interview. Researchers also made sure to ask open questions before specifying based on the answer of the interviewee, in addition to reminding the interviewee that there is no answer key to any of the questions. This was done with the intention to facilitate the interviewee to be more comfortable and truthful.

The latter bias, *participation bias*, consists of the willingness to take part in a study, for instance depending on the amount of time required. This may bias the sample of the research, possibly compromising dependability (Saunders et al., 2019). This study utilized the snowball sampling method and a possible consequence of this is creating a bias within the initial contacts, resulting in a homogenous group. This implies a low possibility of the sample being representative, even if the chosen participants are likely to have characteristics that are stated as desired (Saunders et al., 2019). As statistical generalization is not the aim for this thesis, this aspect has been evaluated to be a reasonable data limitation. This research intention was to explore generations in the workplace and gain insight rather than being able to generalize to entire populations.

In addition, some denied requests occurred, leading to a possibility of *non-response error*. This refers to the case where non-respondents that were in the intended sample differ in significant ways from those who chose to participate. As a result, this may affect the data,

leading to a non-response bias which in turn can bias the data and make it unreliable (Saunders et al, 2019).

3.5.3 Transferability and Generalizability

The aspect of transferability and generalizability refers to in which manner research studies are applicable to other contexts. This measure is often related to the statistical generalizability of quantitative studies with larger sample sizes, and therefore, should not be evaluated equally when assessing qualitative studies (Saunders et al., 2019). On the contrary, the intention of this thesis' study was to explore and provide insights to several topics regarding generations, meaning that the aim was not to generalize. Therefore, the result of the study should not be viewed as less valuable compared to quantitative studies. However, when utilizing a qualitative design, the transferability of the study should be evaluated (Yin & Scoring, 2008).

Some measures can be made in order to strengthen the study's transferability. When having a limited number of cases, the nature of them should be examined to evaluate the diversity of participants. To do this, informants from both technical and non-technical organizations were included in order to create a somewhat diverse sample. In addition, recruitment from two different technical companies was made, facilitating more data for comparison and evaluation. Transferability can also be executed by providing a full description of research questions and design, contexts, findings and resulting interpretations in the finalized thesis. This allows researchers to utilize the framework to design a similar research project in different settings. Throughout Chapter 3, a thorough framework with full descriptions has been constructed, thereby strengthening the aspect of transferability. As only a small non-probability sample has been included and data has only been collected through semi-structured interviews, the results of this study cannot be used to make statistical generalizations about the entire populations of employees and leaders in Norwegian organizations.

3.5.4 Ethical Considerations

When conducting any research, ethical considerations and principles must be taken into account. Most of the ethical considerations are possible to anticipate during the design of the research study, and it is crucial to plan out how the research can be conducted in line with ethical principles.

Aspects such as trust, respect, confidentiality and mutuality should characterize contracts with informants (Tjora, 2018). As a main rule, research demanding an active participation should only be executed when free and informed consent is given (Fossheim, 2015). This means that individuals need to participate freely and by their own choice, they must be informed of the research study's intent and gain complete understanding of the information (Jacobsen, 2016). To comply, *participants in this research study received an information sheet and consent form prior to scheduling interviews*, ensuring that no pressure was applied by the researchers. The snowball technique was selected and adopted in order to recruit participants, and the utilization of the researcher's network to seek out and ask individuals to join the study can be viewed as somewhat concerning. For instance, if the individuals who received a request were known to the researchers besides in a professional manner, they may feel forced to accept the invitation due to the nature of their relationship. Individuals should not experience any pressure to participate (Saunders et al., 2019). To avoid this, *the requests to join the study only occurred through messaging*, since asking in person or through the telephone may apply a sense of pressure. Refusals to participate were respected without further questions.

Another central ethical principle is the right to privacy. Based on this principle, it is crucial to consider how great the possibility of revealing participants' identity is. Since this research has included a small sample conducting research in a qualitative manner, this has increased the possibility of gathering revealing information about the informants (Jacobsen, 2016). In order to ensure anonymity and manage data in an ethical and legally compliant way, *a data management plan was constructed, outlining the intentions of how to collect the data, organize it, manage and store it* (Saunders et al., 2019). Revealing information about the participants (such as emails, roles, names and generational affiliation) was stored separately from the transcribed interviews and results of the analysis. This was also communicated to the participants through the information sheet. Furthermore, *each participant was given a pseudonym*, which was used after the interviews were conducted. The linkage to the pseudonyms was stored separately from the rest of the data, in order to ensure that their identity would not be exposed.

In terms of anonymity of the organizations, it was contemplated if their identities were deemed necessary to include in the study. Initially, the researchers received approval to publicize with official names, with the exception of one leader. The non-technical organization gave permission after an official application process, however, researchers

deemed it confusing to only anonymize some of the organizations, and therefore *all of them will be referred to using their pseudonyms*. In addition, the organization was considered to be of a significant size, meaning that anonymity of the participants would not be difficult to maintain. As for the technical organizations, both were smaller in size and had a dissimilar number of informants participating, meaning that anonymity could more easily be compromised. Furthermore, researchers were unable to uncover sufficiently compelling reasons to include the organizations names, and consequently, it was decided that pseudonyms would be assigned to them as well.

3.6 Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, methodological choices of this research study have been presented and justified. In order to answer the research questions of this thesis, an interpretivist philosophy has been adopted, alongside an inductive approach to theory development. The data material has been retrieved through a mono-method qualitative multi-case study, using semi-structured interviews to gain insight into Norwegian organizations using an intensive design. With the aim to examine aspects related to younger generation employees (Y and Z) and their older generation leaders (X), five leaders and nine employees from three Norwegian organizations were selected through the snowball method. Furthermore, the interviews were transcribed, translated and coded with the use of NVivo 20 software, and using thematic analysis as an analytical strategy. Subsequently, an assessment of validity, reliability and transferability was conducted. Ethical considerations were also assessed, evaluating informed consent, the sampling method and anonymity. The empirical findings are presented in the next chapter.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of this thesis. As described in Section 3.4.2, the coding of the transcribed interviews resulted in eight main themes with their designated subthemes, aiming to answer the research questions of this study. In consequence, the coded data from the main themes will be presented in this chapter.

Firstly, findings regarding younger generations' (Generations Y and Z) workplace needs and desires in terms of work values are presented in Section 4.1. This section describes the thoughts and viewpoints of the younger generations regarding work values. In addition, the older cohort leaders' (Generation X) perceptions of what the younger generation workers value within the workplace context are presented. Thus, five of the eight main themes are related to work values; '*Work Autonomy and Involvement (WAI)*', '*Recognition and Feedback (RF)*', '*Social and Collaborative Environment (SCE)*', '*Work-Life Balance (WLB)*' and '*Learning and Development Opportunities (LDO)*'.

The chapter (Section 4.2.1) moves on to present the older generation's thoughts on what the younger cohorts will choose in terms of leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs). Subsequently, the responses of both older and younger generations regarding LCBs will be presented (Section 4.2.2). Finally, findings related to the leader needs and desires of the younger generations will be presented, along with the older generation's understanding of the expressed needs and desires (Section 4.2.3). Thus, three of the eight main themes are related to preferred leadership; *Younger Generations' Desire for 'an Encouraging and Invested Leader (EIL)*', '*a People-Oriented Leader (POL)*' and '*a Responsible and Sincere Leader (RSL)*'. This chapter ends with a summary of the main findings and connects them to the research questions under study.

4.1 Work Values of the Younger Generations

The data collection process made researchers examine various facets of potential generational differences to understand how they may present themselves in the context of a leader-employee relationship, and how they are addressed by older and younger cohorts. As the aim of this research is to investigate how to lead the younger generations (YG), their expressed workplace needs and desires in terms of work values will be addressed in this section, in

addition to the perceptions of these from the older generation (OG). Subsequently, as described in Section 3.4.2, five of eight main themes have been formulated through coding; ‘WAI’, ‘RF’, ‘SCE’, ‘WLB’ and ‘LDO’.

This section is intended to present findings in the context of RQ1: *What are the main work values of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z), and how are they perceived by their leaders from the older generation (X)?*

4.1.1 Work Autonomy and Involvement (WAI)

All participants from *younger generations* had opinions about the significance of autonomy in their work regarding work values and expectations. They consistently expressed a notable interest in participating in decision-making processes, voicing their opinions, freedom within their work and engaging in projects and organizational activities. The YGs emphasized that this leads to a sense of ownership among employees. Subsequently, participants also emphasized that expressing their opinions makes them feel like essential contributors to the workplace.

“When we're about to present something new or a new concept, or showcase something, we kind of go through it and demonstrate what we're actually going to build and deliver. Not just, 'yeah, we're going to deliver this and that, so yeah, okay.' Not that it's so important for the role that I have but you get more ownership then.”

- E5

The absence of employee involvement in decision-making is met with disapproval. Some respondents from Generation Y and Z expressed that feeling neglected contributes to an unfavorable work environment. In addition, several participants stated that it was vital not to feel like they are under surveillance, but to have the autonomy to fulfill assigned duties, reflecting trust in the employees.

“At times, decisions might be made somewhat over your head. And that, in my opinion, creates a poor work environment because you haven't had the opportunity to voice your opinions and contribute, and there hasn't been an open process and clarity about what you think. Suddenly, you just get told, 'this is how it is,' and it's like 'okay, fine.’” - E7

“Yeah, that you have workplace peace, that people don't engage in micromanagement, feeling like someone is there looking over your shoulder. Because it's somewhat connected to people trusting each other.” - E2

Despite the younger cohorts' desire for autonomy, it appears that they also seek guidance and support as they navigate their roles, searching for a sense of security or a safety net to catch them if things get difficult or go awry. However, it was specified that this should not come at the expense of their autonomy.

“[...] I consider it very positive that a leader wants to take part in the decisions being made, shows it, is present, and contributes [...] with their thoughts and experiences. And then it's important to be able to find the balance between contributing oneself and letting others work and contribute with their own.” - E7

However, the **older generation** expressed that Generations Y and Z tend to find independent decision-making challenging and may dwell on their decisions afterward. Participants from the OG perceived them to value work autonomy, but that they appear fearful of making mistakes.

“[...] and what perhaps one needs some experience with, and what some might struggle with, is decision hesitation, meaning making decisions and moving forward. It might be among some of the younger ones here, that one is a bit afraid of making decisions and then moving on.” - L1

Furthermore, participants from the older cohort presumed that the younger cohorts value the chance to offer input and have the freedom to express their opinions without excessive micromanagement from leaders. Several respondents indicated that they perceive them as seeking trust from their leaders and enjoying feeling valued and acknowledged.

“That one is listened to and able to provide input, and that it is addressed and considered in a serious manner. That it's not just like 'no, we've talked about that before' and just dismiss it. That one feels appreciated and plays an important role in the group.” - L2

4.1.2 Recognition and Feedback (RF)

All participants from *younger generations* had thoughts on the importance of recognition. They want to be perceived as significant contributors to the workplace and the tasks they undertake. Some also mentioned the potential consequences of not experiencing recognition, and how this can be linked to decreased motivation.

“[...] but I also think it's important to be seen in the workplace, that you're not just one of those who kind of do their job who disappear and becomes invisible. I also think [Org B] is very good at that. I feel like I'm in a place where you're recognized for the work you do.” - E4

Another prominent finding was the participants' opinions on feedback. The younger generations elaborated on its positive effects on motivation, and its significance when they experience uncertainties in regards to their work presentation.

“I am extremely motivated by feedback, especially the positive ones. So if I do something right and receive some praise for it, I'm extremely satisfied and highly motivated to continue doing well. [...] regardless of whether it's coming from a leader or colleagues.” - E9

“[...] I believe that receiving feedback on what one does is extremely beneficial. Am I doing poorly, am I doing well, am I doing it right? Are the expectations being met? Am I overperforming, underperforming? And I really believe that... It's a recurring theme, but clearer communication, like nothing is unclear.” - E3

Subsequently, participants had thoughts on how their need for feedback may be linked to the social pressure many mentions during interviews. One participant from the younger cohorts also elaborated on how they believe that the need for feedback also stems from wanting to be recognized and the increased focus on personal development.

“I think it can be traced back to the pressure and the burden placed on the shoulders of young people or the younger generation. Firstly, one desires a lot of feedback because they want to become as good as they can be. And I also believe that it has

become important, it will always be important, but perhaps it has become more crucial to receive confirmation that what one is doing is good. And these two aspects are very interconnected.” - E7

Regarding the **older generation’s** thoughts on important workplace values and expectations, they perceived recognition and feedback as important factors for the younger generations. During interviews, they spoke on how the younger ones need to feel as though their work holds significance and that acknowledgement is key. They discerned that younger generations want to be involved and be recognized as important for the team.

“[...] if we have delivered part of the project and are receiving feedback from customers, then I think it's incredibly important to convey that back to the project team so that people see that [their work] is being acknowledged. It's being appreciated. At least, I try to do that to the greatest extent possible.” - L1

“The desire to be seen and appreciated. That's important. You can never praise too much, so it's important to be mindful of that.” - L5

The older generations also had thoughts on why the perceived need for feedback among younger generations may be associated with the academic pressure several have mentioned. One participant spoke about their experience with feedback regarding younger generations, and how their perspective often makes them focus on the negative aspect.

“And what we experience a bit with generation... The younger generations, actually. We have many high achievers in school who have performed very well academically, top grades in all subjects. But then suddenly they're working with people where there's no definitive answer, and then... they receive feedback that isn't 100% positive, and it can be difficult to balance that. Even if you praise their good work, there's always this 'but' that shouldn't come, but then there's a point for improvement. So the point for improvement becomes what they're left with, none of the praise. So I have [employees from younger generations] who have received great feedback, but still feel like they've done a terrible job. So it's a challenge” - L5

4.1.3 Social and Collaborative Environment (SCE)

Participants from *younger generations* underscored the social dimension of their workplace as a key factor contributing to their well-being, especially in regards to colleagues and tasks. These factors were also emphasized as key, influencing their decision to remain in the organizations.

“One of the things I value most is well-being. Enjoying the company of my colleagues, enjoying my tasks, it's about the fact that such a huge part of my life is spent at the workplace, so for me, it's very important that going to work is enjoyable, that it's a positive thing and not something I dread - that would be incredibly disappointing”

- E9

The YGs accentuated the value they place on initiating friendships with their colleagues outside of the workplace and describe this as a crucial part of an ideal work environment. They also appreciate if their workplace accommodates social interactions among employees.

“I'm actually the type of person who, for me, I don't necessarily see a colleague as just a colleague. I always want to approach and get to know a colleague and turn them into a friend. I find that many only see each other as colleagues and nothing more. But I'm always focused on making my colleagues my friends as well. So, that's why the work environment has always been very important to me.” - E4

The YGs also expressed their view of collaboration as positive in various ways. Among other things, they appreciate learning from their coworkers and get influenced by others' work ethic. Multiple participants point to teamwork as a factor concerning their motivation at work and as an important work value to them. They value input and support from their colleagues and the collaborative approach to task-solving, mentioning that this can contribute to increased motivation, feeling more safe and potentially contributing to better performance.

“I would have liked to see more opportunities to collaborate on tasks. It often happens that you sit alone with your tasks, and I think that it can be beneficial to receive input from others, but also that... It feels safer, and maybe it becomes a bit more efficient

because if you become unsure about a task, it's not exactly conducive to becoming more effective.” - E7

During interviews, the **older generation** also underscored the social aspect as a fundamental value of the YGs. Generation Y and Z are perceived as desiring to enjoy their work, while also valuing a positive work environment where the social element takes center stage.

*“[...] that it should be enjoyable and fun to go to work, you should feel good about it.”
- L1*

“The social aspect, that's important to them. It's very important.” - L3

Contrarily, the older generation has noticed an increased competitive mentality. Participants express a discerned individualism in Generations Y and Z, and sometimes at the expense of collaboration.

“They are good with people, they are informal. Seek knowledge. Perhaps there's a slightly strong competitive mentality, so sometimes we notice in those collaborative tasks that... It can occasionally affect collaboration. The idea of 'playing each other good' can sometimes take a backseat to highlighting oneself and getting the most out of, you know... Yes, getting the best benefit for oneself.” - L5

4.1.4 Work-Life Balance (WLB)

A recurring theme among the respondents from the **younger cohort** was the need for and appreciation of flexibility. This refers to achieving work-life balance (WLB) concerning family and childcare responsibilities, health-related accommodations, as well as the expectation for leaders to establish boundaries between work and personal life. In addition, the ability to work remotely or adjust their office hours as needed was appreciated.

“[...] but flexibility, well, that's also a perk, but it's important that they continue to give us the opportunity to have some flexibility in our daily lives, such as when we start, when we finish, and when we take vacation or use flexitime and so on. Also, the fact that I'm allowed to work from home for a week so that I can go on vacation really, and work from there and so on. Yes, that's important for me to remain.” - E1

Some also expressed that salary serves as a foundational aspect for them, as this mediates their ability to lead the personal life they desire and thereby contributing to the WLB. Subsequently, some expressed reliance on their professional networks to benchmark salaries, utilizing this as a reference point to determine satisfaction with their current situation or the necessity to negotiate for more.

“And it's important to keep up regarding what other companies offer in terms of benefits and salary, and to follow. [...] and if I see that I'm falling far behind in salary and benefits compared to classmates, then [Org B] should work a bit to retain me. Otherwise, I'll end up changing jobs, so yeah, it's important” - E1

During interviews, younger generations were asked if they believed their values differed from those prioritized by older generations, and they provided some potential explanations as to why there might be differences. Some participants explained that it may stem from a shifted perspective on the significance of WLB.

“What I imagine is typical for my generation is perhaps that they value a bit more leisure, that it's more important now than before to distinguish between work and personal time... I think that for the older generation [...] work was kind of more life, especially in professions like police and medicine, that if you were a police officer, you were a police officer even in your private life, same as a doctor.” - E8

A few participants from the **older generation** viewed WLB as one of the perceived central work values of YGs. Some emphasized that establishing a good relation to their YG employees was essential for leaders, as it enables them to understand their employees, thus allowing them to accommodate more according to their personal lives. One participant also speculated that leisure may be more significant to the YGs than themselves.

“Making the puzzle fit in everyday life, daycare and such things of course, but it may also have to do with that work-life balance, meaning more leisure time... means a bit more for the younger generation, but that's speculation on my part.” - L1

4.1.5 Learning and Development Opportunities (LDO)

One of the most recurring themes among *younger cohorts* in the context of work values was the ability for development. All participants accentuated the importance of being able to experience some development or growth within their position and organization, and noting that these factors increase their motivation. This appeared as a prerequisite for them wanting to remain loyal to their workplace.

“That one has a development program to follow in order to reach some goal. [...] If you don't have the opportunity, right, to apply for further education or training, then you don't feel like you're being invested in. Then it's not a place to be either.” - E6

“[...] and challenge, mastery, feeling like you're developing, that you're progressing along a path. That there's development over time. That you can envision a future. That you can, in a way, grow as an employee within the company.” - E3

The YGs also highlighted the need for change. Several mentioned the importance of changes in tasks and the need for variety to avoid boredom or becoming disinterested. Participants also expressed a desire for dynamic environments that provide them with new experiences and stimuli to counteract this. Some speculated that their upbringing with technology may have influenced them, and one linked it to Generation Z's struggle to maintain focus.

“Beyond that, it's also very important for me to, let's call it being challenged a bit, you know, that I don't start getting bored with the tasks I have, that I've done a million times before. And I've thought several times that if I ever start getting bored, then I must, you know, I must find another department to work in or do something new.”

- E9

“For example, Generation Z, meaning individuals born after 1995, they are born when all technologies were already in place, right? You can say they don't know life without the internet and social media. For example, they are very open and creative, but what I observe is that they may have challenges staying focused on one task, for instance.” - E2

Younger generations appear to be unwilling to stay in their jobs if their needs for development are not met. The notion that Generation Y and Z have a lower threshold for changing jobs if they are not satisfied recurred among several participants.

“I think the reason [younger generations] may be less loyal is because they are ambitious and want to climb the ladder at a faster pace because they are innovative. [...] if you look at the young people now, they study much, much longer than the older generation. And I think that stems from being much more ambitious and innovative and forward-thinking, and wanting to achieve high positions in the workforce.” - E4

The **older generation** perceived Generation Y and Z as eager to develop themselves as well. They considered development as an important value for the YGs, along with the desire to be invested in. Additionally, it was pointed out that the younger generation's eagerness to learn and develop may exceed their capacity and wear them out in the early stages of their careers.

“That you have a good culture and that you get challenging tasks that provide you with development. That you don't feel like you're standing still, but rather that there's progress you can be a part of and that there's also room to contribute.” - L2

“The new generation, that's what I've seen myself, they are very hungry for knowledge and to excel, and that's very good. But they quickly get burned because...How should I put it? It becomes a bit too much for them... I mean if you imagine...You go straight from school and then into a big organization.” - L3

The younger generations' low threshold for remaining loyal has also been noticed by the OG. Generation Y and Z are mentioned by some participants to appear demanding, and they expressed that if younger cohorts' needs cannot be met by their current employer, they are more likely to seek new employment. This led their OG leaders to speculate that they must find alternative ways to motivate them.

“The younger generation doesn't stick it out, and they will also more easily change jobs if they are dissatisfied with their workplace. Before, it was about holding on tightly, and once you were there, you stayed. So [now] you have to motivate in a different way.” - L5

4.1.6 Overview of Work Values

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the findings concerning work values, showcasing the similarities and differences in work values as revealed between leaders' (OC) and younger employees' (YC).

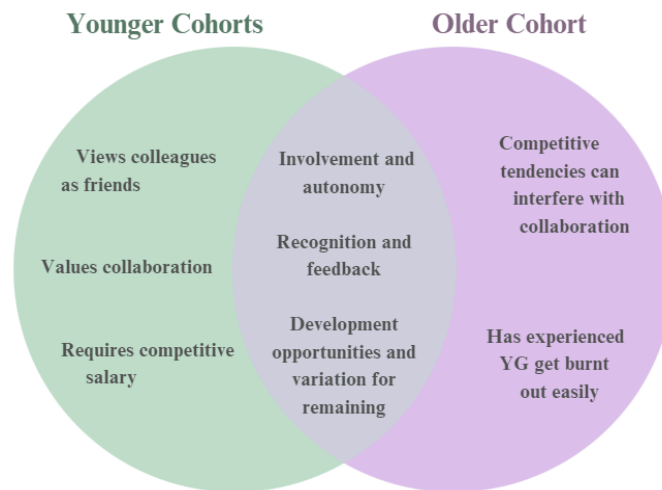


Figure 4.1. Venn diagram illustrating a summary of findings from Section 4.1

4.2 Generational Differences in Leader Characteristics and Behaviors (LCBs) and Needs and Desires for a Particular Type of Leader

First, the leaders' viewpoints regarding the younger cohorts' needs in terms of LCBs (Section 4.2.1) are presented; next the differences and similarities between younger cohorts and the older cohort in terms of LCBs (Section 4.2.2) are shown; and finally, the last section displays the needs and desires for a particular type of leader, as expressed by the younger generations during the interviews (Section 4.2.3). This covers the content of RQ2: *How does the preferred leader of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z) appear, and how does this compare to their older generation (X) leaders' perceptions of their preferences along with their own?* The process is depicted in Figure 4.2.

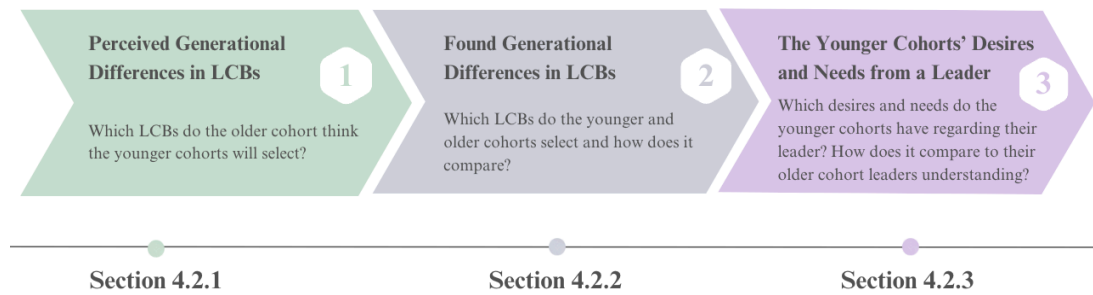


Figure 4.2. Overview of the content of Section 4.2 comprising RQ2

Although the authors of this thesis will adopt the term ‘perceived generational differences’ from Lester et al. (2012), the generational differences that emerge from the empirical findings will be referred to as ‘found generational differences’ (Figure 4.2). This is because the generational differences have been empirically identified through the current research, and cannot be considered to be absolute.

4.2.1 Older Cohort’s (Leaders) Perceptions of Younger Cohorts’ (Employees) LCBs

The *older generation* highlighted that they envisioned the YGs would opt for typical characteristics that sound appealing, such as *innovative* and *a good spokesperson*. Another participant assumed *inclusive and culturally aware* and *humble* would be present among the YGs responses.

“So, a younger colleague might perhaps think a bit more...I imagine something like innovative, maybe energetic. What is considered, I don't know, exemplary? [...] But, I do think that there's probably differences between the generations.” - L4

“Focused, energetic, a good spokesperson, I mean all those things that are very... Let's say flexibility maybe. Seeing the bigger picture? Innovative and all that, other things that are more... sounds very nice.” - L3

“Maybe some of the younger ones would place greater emphasis on, for instance, inclusive and culturally aware? Maybe also humble.” - L1

4.2.2 Generational Differences and Similarities Concerning LCBs

Both cohorts were asked about their perceptions of the most and least significant LCBs to them. This resulted in a range of responses. While there were instances of shared responses between younger and older generations, there were also those responses that were unique to or more prevalent within one of the generational cohorts. The prevalent responses from each generational cohort regarding most significant LCBs are illustrated in Figure 4.3.

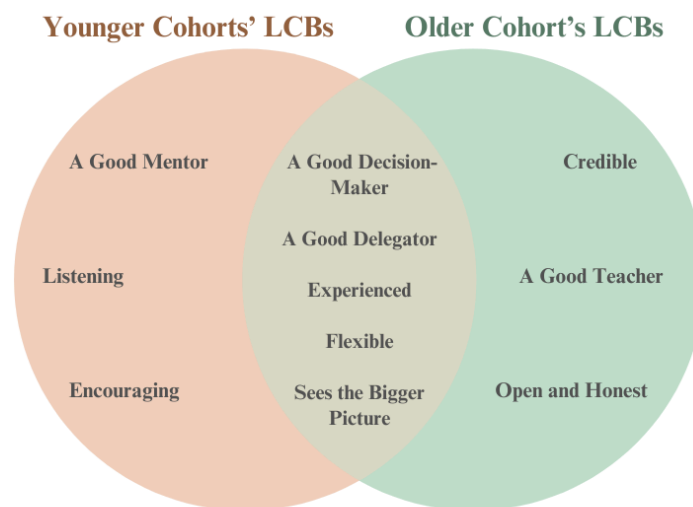


Figure 4.3. Venn-diagram of the generations' most important LCBs

In addition, the participants indicated which LCBs they perceived as least crucial. The aspects predominantly highlighted by the generational cohorts are showcased in Figure 4.4.

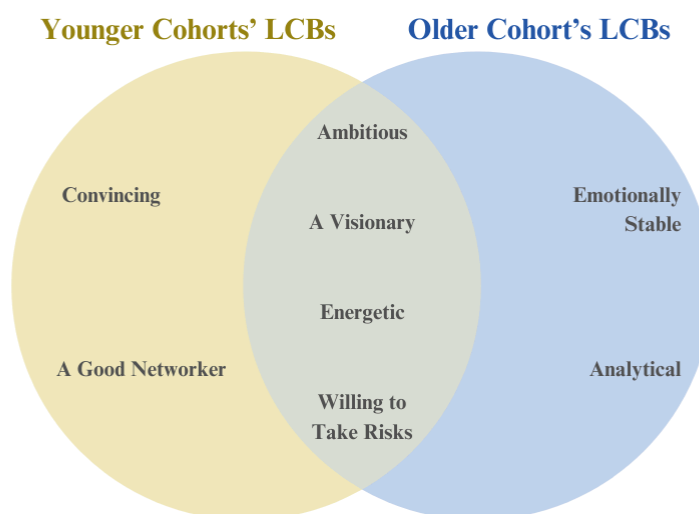


Figure 4.4. Venn-diagram of the generations' least important LCBs

The responses presented in these diagrams and additional responses by the younger generations states that a leader characterized by being *listening*, *encouraging* and a *good mentor* is favored. It is noted that a leader acting as a mentor stimulates motivation towards acquiring new knowledge. Conversely, none of these LCBs were articulated by the older generation; instead, they expressed a preference for a leader who embodies qualities of a good teacher and cultivates an environment conducive to learning.

“A good mentor, I think that's important because then they can... motivate me to... do the right thing and also motivate me to learn new things.” - E1 on a leader being a good mentor

“It is to promote continuous learning.” - L4 on a leader being a good teacher

Among the older generation, there was a discernible inclination towards a leader who is *credible* and *open and honest*. Central to their perspective is the role of trust among employees with particular emphasis on the leader's genuine dedication to advancing the interests of the employees as well as those of the organization.

“If I am credible, people will dare to speak up to me and be open about the challenges they face as employees, and if I don't have that credibility, then I won't gain their trust either. But then it's important for me to be open and honest, that is, it's about creating a safe environment for giving feedback, having an open and honest feedback culture.”
- L5 on a credible, open and honest leader

“This openness and honesty, it's important to me at least, and it's also something I value as a good quality in others. You can trust them, and what they say is in the best interest of both the company and you as a person. That's an important quality.” - L2 on an open and honest leader

Among the responses of preferred LCBs shared between generations, various aspects of these constructs were presented. An illustrative instance is accorded to being a *good delegator*, which all generations have identified as significant. Nonetheless, differences emerge in the nuances that the older and younger cohorts associate with this concept. The younger cohorts

accentuated the significance of garnering trust in the tasks they undertake, whereas Generation X directed its focus more towards workload management and relief.

“I would say that the main task of such a leader is to delegate and sit at the top and help where needed in those situations. [...] That when you give a task to someone, you have to trust that they will do it, that it's not like you give a task, and then you have to go and micromanage every single thing.” - E5 on a leader being a good delegator

“One must not hold onto all the tasks oneself [...]. A leader should be good at delegating work to others instead of holding onto it themselves, or else it becomes too much.” - L3 on a leader being a good delegator

At other times, there were also dissent internally within the generational cohorts. This could be observed, for instance, among the YGs regarding a *professionally skilled* leader.

“You sort of quickly become a role model, at least in terms of work, when you're professionally skilled, because you become a great asset to the team. And then again, I think when you become a great asset to the team, automatically, at least for my part, you gain respect.” - E4 on a professionally skilled leader

“It's always an advantage to be professionally skilled, but it's not among the most important in my eyes. As long as you have people around you with different abilities, knowledge, and experiences, that's what makes the overall picture good.” - E7 on a professionally skilled leader

4.2.3 Younger Workers' (YG) Needs and Desires for a Particular Type of Leader

In order to process the responses of the younger generations regarding leader needs and desires systematically and comprehensively, a decision was made to categorize the most recurring data into three main themes: “*EIL*”, “*POL*”, and “*RSL*”. These categories were derived from the data systematization and categorization stage, and are based on responses from the YGs regarding LCBs, a leader's primary functions, characteristics of an effective leader, and how a leader can motivate them. Responses of the OG leaders have also been

included to obtain a better insight into their understanding of the leader needs and desires of their YG employees.

4.2.3.1 An Encouraging and Invested Leader (EIL)

Younger generations' responses underscore a preference for a leader who actively promotes and motivates continuous learning, alongside a genuine dedication to their employees' growth. Additionally, this extends beyond individual concerns to encompass the dynamics of the workplace team as well. Of particular significance is the expectation that the leader should provide a structured developmental framework to facilitate employee progression. Emphasized also, is the necessity to establish a secure work environment.

“I think that, I mean showing that one has development, and that one has plans for further development. It can be both within the same role or other roles.” - E5

“In that case, I think he or she must be able to motivate the team. And at the same time, create a good work environment, a safe work environment, so that the team can grow, and ideally find ways to help those from the team to grow and develop.” - E2

However, failure to prioritize the team and the employees, instead being invested and ambitious solely towards production, metrics, and personal advancement is identified as a negative characteristic by the younger generations.

“It could be an ambitious leader in a position that requires ambition. But what I'm thinking about is that... An ambitious leader who then has more focus on, that one should in a way move up and forward oneself. [...] I think a leader who then has personnel responsibility, he can lose a bit of touch with what the tasks are currently.”
- E8 on an ambitious leader

“It's someone who is very focused, you could say, on the professional aspect, but doesn't have a grip on the more personal aspect, not seeing the workers, too absorbed in figures and production rather than how they are doing.” - E6 on a former difficult leader

In the context of development, the younger generations mentioned a leader who can encourage employees to challenge themselves and subsequently provide genuine feedback, enabling the employee to understand what should be done differently next time. Additionally, if an employee encounters a challenge and feels uncertain, the leader should be inclined to assist them in finding a solution and offer assistance by having experience concerning the organization's tasks.

“When I bring up an issue, which I might be a bit unsure about myself, they manage to guide me to find a solution.” - E2 on a leader being a good mentor

“Experienced, [...] that one must sort of know what we're working on to be able to be a good supporter and help me when I get stuck in a way, like technically.” - E1 on an experienced leader

There are also uncomfortable ways of being subjected to challenges, as mentioned by another respondent who expressed a negative viewpoint, having experienced frequent, abrupt challenges, often in uncomfortable situations in front of others.

“We almost felt like he could, in a way, test us a bit [...] often in the presence of others. An example of that could be 'if you're in this and that situation at work, how would you solve it' kind of like, out of the blue. [...] I felt a bit uncomfortable, afraid of embarrassing myself in front of the others [...] and it made me tense up a bit, and I found myself feeling a bit relieved when he wasn't at work. I think the intentions were good, and he probably didn't mean any harm by it, but the execution was a bit unfortunate” - E9 on a former difficult leader

The **older generation** also underscored the essentiality of a leader facilitating the development of their employees. It was noted that a leader should coach and provide guidance effectively, ensuring that employees perceive the leader as available for assistance when needed.

“We have very complex cases and such, so I usually act as a very good mentor to coach employees further on the right path and try to guide them to solve these cases in a good way. And I get good feedback that I am available there... just so they feel they get the help from me as a mentor.” - L3

Furthermore, another respondent mentioned the necessity for a leader to inherit experience in their field so that they can understand the tasks that their employees are involved in.

“It's about having significant knowledge, background, and practical insight in my field. It also gives a kind of recognition. [...] It shows that I've acquired a kind of foundation, so that I can easily understand, for example, [difficult tasks] they have been involved in” - L4 on an experienced leader

4.2.3.2 A People-Oriented Leader (POL)

The *younger generations* accentuated their preference for a leader who is readily available to address not only professional concerns, but also personal matters.

“It makes the threshold for discussing things with a leader much lower. And when there's a low threshold for bringing up issues, I think it affects the work environment in a positive way. Especially when there are several people, right? If there are usually several people in a department, then it's important to know that you have a leader you can turn to; both regarding professional matters, but also perhaps personal things that you need to discuss with your immediate leader.” - E4 on a leader who listens

This also entailed a leader who listens to each individual, and instead of necessarily solving the problem presented, listens attentively. This is associated with caring leadership and highlighted as an important characteristic.

“I need to be able to tell what my problem is and be heard instead of solutions coming right away, in a way. He shows that he cares.” - E1 on a leader who listens

A leader adept in interpersonal relationships is also a characteristic valued by respondents from the younger generations. This became evident as they considered that a leader who is visionary and charts the course for the organization's future is ineffective if they lack relational skills. They also prioritize a personal nature in the relationship, highlighting that the most imperative for an immediate leader is not necessarily to have established an extensive network. Instead, they underscore the significance of the interpersonal connection between employees and their leader.

“Some professions may indeed require you to be visionary, but [...] I don't think that covers all needs [...]. It doesn't really help to be visionary if you can't be good with relationships, like... Yeah, it's not important as a leader, viewed in isolation.” - E3 on a leader being a visionary

“In some aspects, it's important to have a large network, but in relation to my immediate leader [...] I think that the size of the network doesn't matter much as long as one has that interpersonal-relationship.” - E6 on a leader being a good networker

Furthermore, the younger generations value a leader who inherits the ability to seek out and be open and accepting to others' viewpoints. It is mentioned that it can be draining when a leader does not take the employee's opinion into account during the execution of tasks.

“To a certain extent, it's nice to have leaders who are clear about what they think, but when they always insist on imposing their opinion and constantly show you what's best... It becomes very draining, because I have experienced that. True, it's the leaders who ultimately control what you should do, so you do what you're told. But it's very draining when it reaches the point where they control what's important when you might have a different opinion yourself and can't express it.” - E5 on a convincing leader

Being available and understanding was also recognized as an important leader behavior among the **older generation**. An absent leader, unfamiliar to them, would portray an image of a leader who may struggle to effectively lead their employees. Merely possessing expertise in one's field does not suffice as the sole characteristic of a good leader according to another respondent; rather, it must be coupled with interpersonal skills and adept social abilities.

“Then you have to support and understand that it's difficult so... And there are life crises and all sorts of things that come up [...] you have to have a good relation and know your [employees] and not be an absent leader who sits in the office [that] no one calls. Then I don't think you can lead people either.” - L5

“I believe social antennae are crucial in terms of recognizing oneself as a leader. You can be exceptionally skilled in your field, but especially in [Org C], if you're not socially adept, it really doesn't work very well.” - L4

4.2.3.3 A Responsible and Sincere Leader (RSL)

The **younger generations** mentioned the necessity for a responsible leader to turn to when issues arise or where they lack the authority to make a decision, and they perceived it positively when a leader stands firm in their decision-making.

“When you have a specific problem or case where either you're not allowed to make your own decisions, or you need a backup [...] Then it's incredibly comforting to go to a leader who can make a decision themselves so you don't have to keep going back and forth endlessly. Because it creates a lot of noise and delays, and then [...] you end up having to make decisions on your own, which you're not really supposed to.” - E5
on responsible decision-maker

“And last not to mention that they are able to make decisions. Preferably informed decisions, that they don't have any decision-making hesitations. I think that's very important.” - E9 on a responsible decision-maker

Furthermore, a vast majority of younger employees emphasized the need for a leader to adopt a holistic perspective. They frequently mentioned the concept of "holistic thinking" in their responses, arguing that employees should concentrate on executing tasks while the leader engages in forward-thinking and comprehensive strategizing.

“Those who are under leaders have a much more narrow-minded focus and are much more close-minded in their way of thinking, [...] and are really focused on the work. And so leadership is sort of about seeing more what the work should lead to, where one should go. That one is forward-thinking and thinks in terms of the whole, everything together.” - E3 on a leader who sees the bigger picture

Multiple representatives of the younger generations stated that they require a leader who is honest, sincere, and open. The lack of clarity regarding the leader's thoughts and intentions may lead to conjecture and insecurity among the employees. Furthermore, there was a

negative reception towards leaders who exhibit excessive optimism while failing to uphold the commitments made through their actions and decisions.

“A leader who is not clear and honest about what they think and mean [...] leads to speculation [and] can lead to uncertainty. You don't really know where you have people. And then if you're wondering whether it is right, what the leader is saying, or if there's an ulterior motive, I think it quickly creates a bad atmosphere” - E7 on an open and honest leader

Moreover, younger generations stressed the significance of clear and explicit communication by the leader regarding expectations and demands, thereby ensuring a stable environment conducive to effective work, and preventing chaos and uncertainty among employees.

“She changed her mind every day and came up with new demands a couple of days after. She could for example never admit that she was wrong. [...] It was very chaotic and therefore a lot of uncertainty about expectations and demands. It would be useful for us as employees to have clearer communication and more explicit guidelines in order to work effectively.” - E2 on a former difficult leader

To be responsible and capable of making decisions, even when they are of a challenging nature and require tough prioritization, is a behavior that the **older generation** also acknowledged as important in a leader.

“And then we think that the time we are in now, it entails rather tough prioritizations. What concerns responsible decision-making; being able to make these decisions that are expected or appropriate in a given situation. I think that is incredibly important.” - L4 on responsible decision maker

Inheriting holistic thinking was echoed by some members of the older generation, who accentuated its significance.

“And then it's also important to see the bigger picture, that you have a kind of understanding of the totality of things. Often it can be a bit easy to maybe dig too

much into things, but [it's] important to have a bit of that helicopter perspective.” - L2
on a leader who sees the bigger picture

A leader from the older generation shared a similar viewpoint on communication as the younger generations, elaborating that an inadequate leader can be recognized by their failure to communicate clearly and concisely.

“Yes, I've noted someone who isn't clear and concise. I think it's one of the worst things and it's perhaps often described as a bit of a Norwegian phenomenon, that we can be a bit vague and I don't care for it.” - L1 on their employees perception of a difficult leader

Moreover, openness, honesty, and credibility were notably significant for the older generations, as specified in Section 4.2.2.

4.3 Chapter Summary

The key findings from the fourteen interviews conducted with the study participants are presented in Figure 4.5 (related to RQ1) and Figure 4.6 (related to RQ2).

Additionally, there were visible differences in the perceptions of the older cohorts regarding the responses of the younger ones concerning leadership. Furthermore, some generational differences and similarities regarding LCBs were identified.

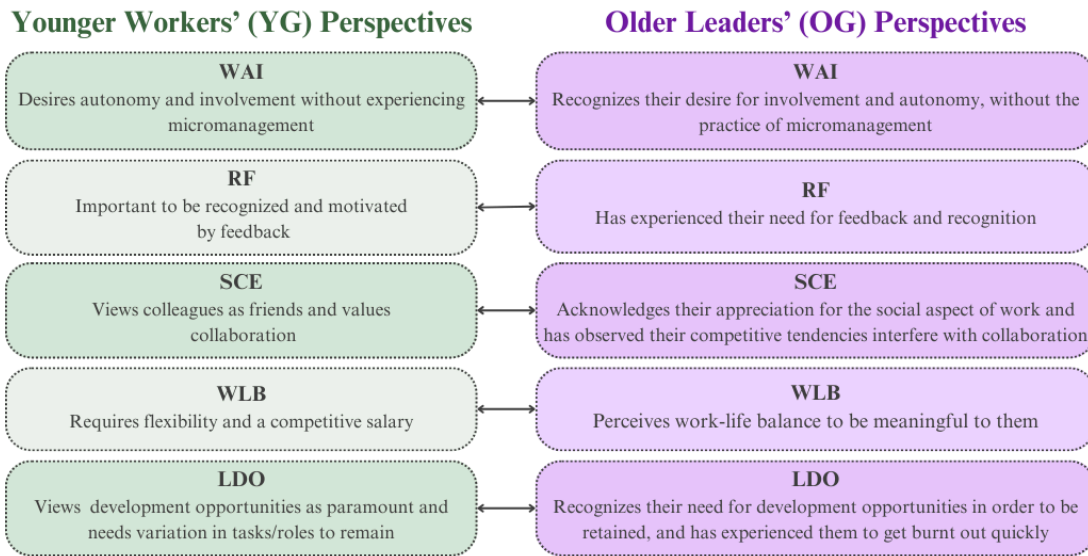


Figure 4.5. Overview of key findings related to RQ1

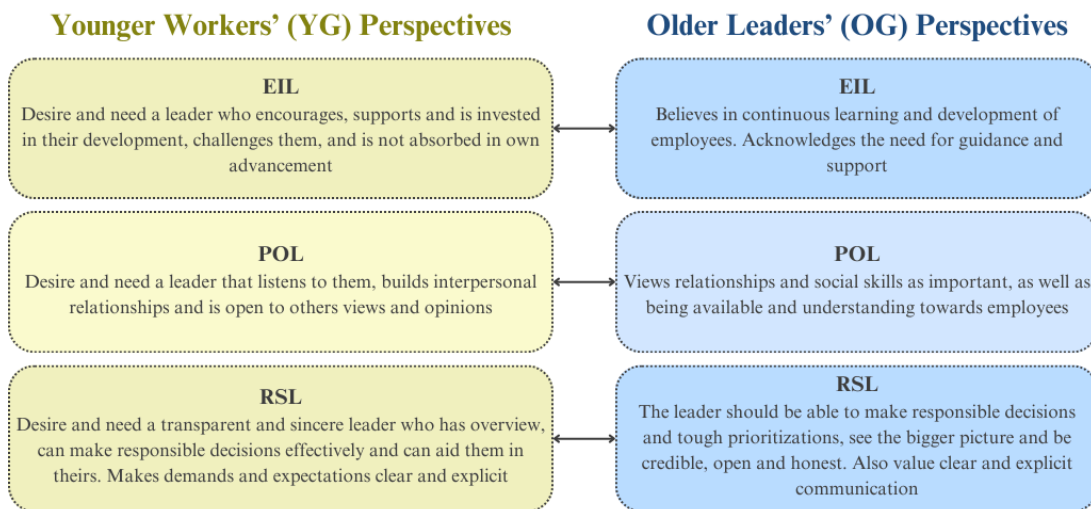


Figure 4.6. Overview of key findings related to RQ2

5. Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter, the findings presented in Chapter 4 are discussed in light of the previous research and relevant theories from the Literature Review. The chapter is structured around the research questions, where the discussion and analysis are intended to provide a foundation for the conclusion. Addressing the first research question (Section 5.1), relevant findings regarding younger generations' (YG) workplace needs and desires in terms of work values will be discussed, in addition to the perceptions of them by the older generation (OG). Furthermore, the thoughts of younger and older generations on leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs) will be discussed in relation to the second research question (Section 5.2), with the aim of understanding what they prioritize in a leader and how the different viewpoints compare between the older (leaders) and younger (employees) generations.

5.1 Work Values of the Younger Generations (Employees)

Previous literature has identified differences in work values as a result of individuals' belonging or affiliation to a given generational cohort (Gursoy et al., 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Twenge et al., 2010). This section discusses our first research question: *What are the main work values of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z), and how are they perceived by their leaders from the older generation (X)?*

Work values refer to the positive reinforcers of job satisfaction and influences behavior, attitudes, motivation, decisions and problem-solving (Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Dose, 1997; Twenge et al., 2010). Ensuring alignment between what younger generations desire and expect from a workplace and what is actually provided increases the likelihood that they will experience job satisfaction and, consequently, wanting to remain (Locke, 1969). The findings of our study suggest that the younger generations within Norwegian organizations exhibit values regarding involvement and work autonomy, recognition and feedback, the social aspect of work, work-life balance, and development opportunities.

5.1.1 Importance of Involvement, Autonomy, Recognition and Feedback Among Younger Generations

Our findings suggest that the YG employees in Norwegian organizations favor autonomy within their work. Work autonomy refers to the ability to control and manage one's own work

activities independently, without constant supervision or micromanagement (Pierce et al., 2009). This is also confirmed in the literature, whereas having high levels of autonomy will commonly result in feelings of accomplishment and responsibility (Wan & Duffy, 2022). Having freedom over their work makes YGs experience a greater sense of ownership and responsibility regarding their tasks. In the same vein, a study from 2024 showed that YGs experience closer connections to their work when they are able to operate independently, giving them a stronger sense of accomplishment and task motivation (Lechler & Huemann, 2024). Their desire for work autonomy may stem from the observed self-reliance of younger cohorts, which, according to Lyons & Kuron (2013), has appeared to be higher than in previous generations. This desire of the YGs indicates a preference for operating independently, reflecting trust from their leaders.

The younger generations also showed a desire to be involved in decision-making, creating a sense of ownership of their work. The involvement of employees in decisions that are work-related has proven to be a popular strategy organizations employ in order to enhance job satisfaction among employees (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). The YGs dislike to be excluded from these situations, and claim it to affect the work environment in a negative manner. The notion that the younger cohorts find voicing their opinions important corresponds with previous literature, stating that these generations highly appreciate this (García et al., 2019; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). The OG also perceived younger cohorts as desiring the opportunity to provide input and express opinions on decisions. Emphasizing the importance of listening, creating space for input, and acknowledging their viewpoints reflects alignment between the YGs' desire for involvement and the older generation's perception of this desire.

Moreover, our results indicate that younger generations exhibit a great dislike towards micromanagement, as this impedes on their ability to operate independently. The feeling of being under surveillance was associated with the perception that leaders did not trust their employees. This observation is echoed by, and is consistent with, the literature on the topic, stating that YGs experience it to create a lessened sense of ownership and freedom in decision-making (Lechler & Huemann, 2024; Jones et al., 2019). This can further be associated with YG's purported appreciation for self-reliance (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). However, the results also indicate that YG workers seek support and reassurance from their leaders, as they appear to be afraid of making mistakes, conflicting with their appreciation for autonomy in their work. This was also perceived by the OG, who noticed that the younger

cohorts are hesitant to make decisions and struggle to move forward afterward. Thus, their desire for autonomy cannot be viewed in isolation. Aligned with younger cohorts, the older cohort also noted that micromanaging was perceived to be disliked, expressing that younger generations should be able to work with minimal involvement from their leaders.

Conversely, despite disliking excessive involvement from leaders, findings revealed a prominent need for feedback among younger cohorts. They considered this to be a useful and essential indication of whether their contributions are effective or ineffective, and they prefer to receive ample feedback rather than face ambiguity. Supported by earlier research, YGs have an expectation of frequent and positive feedback from their leaders, this to a larger degree than previous generations (Gursoy et al., 2008; Sweeney, 2005). Generation Y and Z generally exhibit a significant need for feedback from their leaders, and this is shown to have an effect on productivity and job satisfaction (Bennet et al., 2012). The OG expressed having experienced the younger cohorts' need for feedback, perceiving it to be highly important to them, particularly when it includes affirmative aspects. However, they also reported that younger cohorts find it challenging to emphasize the positive aspects when constructive feedback is provided simultaneously. They tend to fixate more on areas for improvement rather than being content with their accomplishments. This can be attributed to the younger generations' propensity to set demanding standards for themselves (Ng & Parry, 2016). The findings of the older generations' perceptions echoed this sentiment, as they experienced the younger cohorts as high achievers, speculating that this could be correlated with their high academic performance. This is plausible, as younger generations have been observed to set high standards for themselves and exhibit a drive for continuous development of their knowledge and abilities (Ng & Parry, 2016; Berkup, 2014). Therefore, it is probable that their heightened focus on constructive criticism originates from their emphasis on personal growth.

Furthermore, the desire for recognition is also prominent among YG workers, with the results suggesting a close connection with motivation. Generations Y and Z need to be acknowledged by their leaders to feel seen and valued in the workplace. Previous literature indicates that YGs tend to seek validation and support, in addition to an increased desire for appreciative and positive feedback from their leaders compared to previous generations (Gursoy et al., 2008; Sweeney, 2005). The OG leaders have also found their desire to be recognized as important, as our findings indicate having awareness of the significance of praise and their value in feeling like essential contributors. YGs' upbringing may have influenced their need

for affirmations and recognition, as research shows that these generations tended to be the center of attention during childhood (Bolelli & Durmuş, 2017). Having been raised in environments where praise was prevalent, this need may have persisted into the workplace.

5.1.2 Views of Younger Generations Regarding the Significance of Social Aspects of Work and Work-Life Balance

Our findings suggest that the younger generations within the Norwegian context view the workplace not only as a means of earning a livelihood but also as a social arena. They consider the social aspect of their work essential for their well-being and job satisfaction. Furthermore, YGs place greater emphasis on enjoying their time at work, with well-being ranking high on their list of priorities. Prior studies have also highlighted that younger cohorts place significant importance on the social aspect of work, desiring a pleasant and enjoyable workplace environment (Berkup, 2014). Regarding colleagues as friends is emphasized among them, recognizing the value in forming friendships in the workplace. This is consistent with former findings, which suggests that YGs actively seek to cultivate friendships with their coworkers, aiming to positively influence the work environment (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Our results also demonstrate that younger cohorts regard collaboration as motivating, valuing the opportunity to learn from their colleagues and being influenced by their enthusiasm. Collaborating instills a sense of security as responsibilities are shared, enhancing their motivation. This aligns with preceding research which suggest that YGs are perceived as highly proficient in collaboration compared to OGs (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Younger cohorts are observed to have a desire to learn and collaborate with their colleagues, becoming motivated when they can work together to solve tasks (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Conversely, the OG leaders have also experienced them to possess competitive behavior, possibly conflicting with collaboration. This finding is consistent with results from other studies, where younger cohorts have shown tendencies to exhibit competitive attitudes and endorse individualistic values (Trommsdorff et al., 2009; Berkup, 2014). These attitudes and behaviors may stem from YGs' academic focus, where they set high standards for themselves and strive for achievement. It is possible that these individualistic tendencies may hinder workplace collaboration if individuals prioritize their own needs over the needs of the team as a whole. The older cohort emphasizes that younger cohorts prioritize the social aspect of work, yet they have observed them to be egotistical and focused on reaping personal benefits rather than prioritizing the team's success. However, the YGs are clear in their assertion that

collaboration with others is important to them, contradicting the notion that this trait is as prominent as the OG and previous research has found it to be. Furthermore, research also indicates that YGs have been shown to be effective team players (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022), supporting our findings that they are motivated by collaboration and desire more of it in their work lives. Therefore, the finding regarding work values related to collaboration must be considered in conjunction with their competitive mentality, where it is likely that this aspect may, in some cases, hinder their ability to collaborate effectively.

Another main finding from our results was the younger generations' need and appreciation for flexibility, suggesting that an adequate work-life balance (WLB) is deemed essential for their job satisfaction. The concept of WLB has become increasingly important for employers to provide in order to be regarded as an attractive workplace (Wood et al., 2020). This is especially true for YGs, as they do not possess the same mentality as previous generations that viewed work as their life. On the contrary, YG workers believe that work should fit into their life, not the other way around. This sentiment is supported by previous research, suggesting that younger cohorts believe that work should be viewed as a means to live the life one desires, emphasizing the concept of working to live (Berkup, 2014; Dulin, 2008). Research also indicates that facilitating a good WLB can contribute to increased productivity among employees, as well as the perception of feeling seen and respected (Valenti, 2019). The younger generations seek autonomy in managing their workdays, desiring the ability to adjust their office hours as necessary, the option to work remotely, and the freedom to schedule vacations or use flexitime to conclude their workday earlier. These desires reflect an evolving perspective on WLB, accentuating individual control over work arrangements to align professional responsibilities with personal pursuits. Research also shows that younger cohorts expect this from their employers, anticipating the flexibility to adjust their workday (Nieżurawska-Zajac et al., 2023). Our findings also support this, as the younger individuals express that they consider facilitating WLB as a prerequisite for them to remain.

Results regarding the older generation also revealed a perceived increase in importance of WLB for younger generations, however, the leaders perceptions were not as prominent as the younger cohorts opinions on the matter. This may suggest a disparity between generations, as older individuals may not regard this work value as indispensable as YGs do. The younger cohorts also perceived that older generations are not as concerned about WLB, attributing this to the older cohorts living more within the mentality that work is life. This assumption is

further supported by the acknowledgment from older generations that WLB is considered more important for the younger generations when compared with their own cohort.

The younger generations also considered salary as important, with our findings suggesting that they view it as a fundamental aspect of being able to live the life they desire. They also utilize their networks to compare salaries, ensuring they are updated on what their peers, friends and acquaintances are earning. Previous research has demonstrated that YG workers are concerned about their earning potential, with an emphasis on their expectation of being fairly compensated for their work (Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Consequently, they strive to earn well while also prioritizing a healthy WLB. The increased willingness to share income information may be attributed to the upbringing of YGs, characterized by the pervasive influence of technology, which made the world seem smaller and facilitated greater information flow. The OG leaders did not seem to have a distinct perspective on the topic of salary. However, this could be attributed to their belief that it is a given aspect of employment, leading them to prioritize other values that they perceived as more within their control.

5.1.3 Younger Generations Need for Development and Learning Opportunities to Remain in the Workplace

A key finding, possibly the most prominent in the context of work values, was the opportunity for personal development and learning. All participants from YG emphasized the aspect of developing themselves in their jobs and stated that this was an absolute requirement for them to remain in their jobs. Our findings suggest that they do not want to end up in a static role without room for development, expecting the workplace to provide this as a prerequisite. Previous research indicates that YG are motivated when presented with opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, as they perceive knowledge as empowerment (Berkup, 2014). The YGs' desire to progress in the workplace may be seen in relation to another finding of earlier research, suggesting a desire to climb the career ladder at a faster pace (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021; Berkup, 2014). Being academic generations with competitive mentalities, it is likely that this trait will be reflected in their work roles and have an impact accordingly, indicating that their need for development arises from these tendencies.

As expressed by a participant from the older generation in the context of loyalty; the younger generations need to be motivated in a different way in order to retain them. In addition to

personal development, many from Generation Y and Z highlighted the need for change in their role and tasks. Our findings suggest that they desire a dynamic work environment where they can be challenged by varied tasks, without feeling trapped in static routines that require little from them. The younger generations will quickly grow tired of what they are doing, and they expect the workplace to facilitate variety to maintain their motivation. Previous literature indicates that these generations are influenced by their technological upbringing, where they have acquired strong multitasking abilities (Valenti, 2019). This can be linked to why they are more prone to becoming bored with what they are doing if they do not find it challenging, as they constantly seek stimulation in their jobs (Lyons et al., 2010; Valenti, 2019).

The older cohort also noted the enthusiastic pursuit of learning and development opportunities among the younger generations, with our findings suggesting their recognition of the importance of this as a fundamental work value for them. However, the older cohort underscored the adverse outcome of this enthusiasm, as they have observed that the younger cohorts may face burnout if this eagerness becomes excessive. This can be linked to the ambitious characteristics of Generation Y and Z, as they set high aspirations for themselves and their professional trajectories (Alsop, 2008; Ng & Parry, 2016). Therefore, the younger generations' aspiration for development must be understood in conjunction with the older cohort's experience of the adverse consequences if there is an excessive focus on this aspect.

Aligned work values between the individual and the organization may increase the possibility of them remaining loyal to their current employer (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). As our findings suggest, employees of Generations Y and Z expressed that they encompass a low threshold regarding loyalty, and explained that if their needs are not met, they will likely look for them elsewhere. Many organizations today face the challenge of motivating and retaining their employees, necessitating them to shift focus to their employees' work values (Niezurawska-Zajac et al., 2023). The OG leaders also expressed that they perceive YGs to refrain from staying loyal, as their predecessors were often observed to do. The older cohort perceive the younger cohorts to be more assertive in their demands for what they value in a workplace, and that they do not remain solely on the basis of loyalty. They appear to be more demanding in comparison to preceding generations, but this could also be due to previous generations being less open and firm in their workplace demands and desires. Nevertheless, this finding is supported by previous research, indicating that YGs exhibit reduced loyalty compared to previous generations (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). High turnover rates among YGs

further underscore this (Khalid et al., 2013), supporting the assumption that younger individuals today demand more from a workplace. They have also previously been reported to possess a sense of urgent immediacy, that they need to know what knowledge and skills the employer can offer them from their position straight away (Martin, 2005). This sentiment is mirrored in findings concerning development, with participants stating that they will not stay if they perceive a lack of development opportunities.

Participants also speculated on potential reasons why the loyalty of younger generations is perceived as less prevalent than in preceding generations. One individual from their cohorts suggested that this may be attributed to Generation Z and Y being more ambitious and desiring to attain high-level positions. This statement is supported by previous research, where YGs were found to possess high career ambitions and be high achievers (Alsop, 2008; Ng & Parry, 2016). A possible explanation for them reporting low loyalty among them could be that YGs believe they need to change roles to realize their full potential and advance in their careers (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). If their leader does not facilitate their engagement in what they are doing, they will respond by seeking a new job. This is echoed by themselves, stating that they will leave if their needs are not met.

5.2 Found Generational Differences in LCBs and The Younger Cohort's Preferred Leader Profile

Some researchers have studied whether the generations believe there to be greater generational differences (perceived generational differences) in work-related contexts than there actually are (actual generational differences) (Lester et al., 2012). Other researchers have identified generational differences in leadership preferences between older and younger generations (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa et al., 2007). This section discusses our second research question: *How does the preferred leader of Norwegian employees from younger generations (Y and Z) appear; and how does this compare to their older generation (X) leaders' perceptions of their preferences along with their own?*

5.2.1 Comparing Perceived and Found Generational Differences in LCBs

In contrast to the presumptions made by the older generation regarding leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs), there is a notable disparity between their perceptions and the responses of the younger generations. While certain characteristics like *innovative and culturally aware*,

mentioned by the OG, were indeed reflected in a minority of responses from the YGs, others such as *humble* were entirely absent from their responses. Moreover, leader characteristics presumed by the older cohort, like being *energetic* and *ambitious*, were unexpectedly among the least important LCBs according to the younger cohorts.

Based on these findings, a gap can be observed between the OG leaders' perceptions of what is important and less important for the YG employees in terms of leadership, and what is actually emphasized by them. However, this is only the case when they are asked directly if they believe the responses of YGs will differ from their own. On most other occasions, it appears that they have a good understanding of the needs of their YG employees and what it takes for them to thrive and be motivated. This is consistent with the research of Lester et al. (2012), who also noted that the perceived generational differences were greater than the found generational differences. The exact cause of this is difficult to determine, but it is likely that media has a significant influence and perpetuates stereotypical profiles in society. Although our findings suggest that perceived differences did indeed exceed the found ones, indications of certain generational differences were identified.

5.2.2 Found Generational Differences and Similarities

From the empirical data, both differences and similarities within and between generations were observed regarding which LCBs they considered most and least important. The findings indicate that younger generations tend to favor more dependent LCBs, such as *a good mentor*, *encouraging*, and *listening*. It can be argued that these are LCBs they require due to their life situations and early career stages which can be marked by uncertainty, rather than these LCBs being typical of their generations. Nonetheless, our findings align with those of Dulin (2008), who also reported that YGs seek mentorship from their leaders, a role characterized as more personal and guiding. Additionally, other authors suggest that YGs have greatly benefited from ongoing parental support and guidance extending into their adult lives (Glass, 2007). Considering these aspects, it is plausible that they seek similar characteristics and behaviors in their leaders.

However, these three LCBs were not mentioned by the older generation leaders. A possible explanation may be that the older cohort holds leader roles, which could influence their responses and choice of LCBs. An individual in a leadership position may not have the same need for someone who is *listening*, *encouraging*, and serves as *a good mentor*, as these

individuals have several decades of work experience behind them. These LCBs might be more reassuring for individuals characterized by inexperience and uncertainty, such as the YG employees, given their life situations. This could explain why the OG leaders were more inclined to choose *a good teacher* over *a good mentor*, as the role of a teacher is described as someone who promotes broad, continuous learning and inspires curiosity. Thus, this may be a result of an age effect rather than generational effects. However, Generation X is described as an independent generation that has had to rely on themselves (Kraus, 2017) and prefers autonomy in their work (Lester et al., 2012). Accordingly, this could also explain why they opted for less dependent LCBs. In any case, it is a useful insight for OG leaders that their YG workers have a greater need for them to take on a mentor role rather than a teacher role.

Another interesting finding that emerged was that the younger generations are highly concerned with having an open, honest and trustworthy leader, but despite this, these LCBs concerning these aspects were not chosen. Instead, LCBs that can be considered as conducive to learning and development were emphasized by the YG employees. On one hand, Sessa et al. (2007) reported that the younger cohorts valued honesty less than their older counterparts; thus, this may constitute a converging finding. However, on the other hand, Valenti (2019) argued that the YGs have a need for a transparent leader. While there is no doubt that these two perspectives partially overlap, it may be conceivable that more individuals from the younger cohort would have chosen 'transparent' over *open and honest* if it had been presented as an alternative. It is possible that the YGs have a different perception of these terms and perhaps consider transparency to encompass elements that openness and honesty do not, or vice versa. In contrast to this, *open and honest* and *credible* were ranked as some of the most important LCBs among the older cohort. Previous research has described Generation X as skeptical (Lester et al., 2012), and that they value leaders who are truthful (Sessa et al., 2007). The fact that the OG leaders in this study ranked *open and honest* and *credible* highly may correlate with these findings from previous research, suggesting that their skeptical nature necessitates a truthful leader. Although the exact cause of this skepticism remains uncertain, it is possible that it is linked to an upbringing characterized by economic, social, and political instability (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Flexible, a good delegator, a responsible decision-maker, experienced, and sees the bigger picture emerged as the top LCBs mentioned among both the older and younger cohorts. Specifically, the justifications behind *flexible, a responsible decision-maker, and sees the*

bigger picture were largely overlapping across cohorts. Regarding *sees the bigger picture*, there appears to be a common expectation and understanding that leaders should possess a comprehensive perspective, while employees may, however, have a more detailed focus. This finding contradicts the results of Sessa et al. (2007), who asserted that younger cohorts placed a lower importance on big-picture orientation. Although the responses from the OG and YGs regarding being *experienced* and *a good delegator* contained similarities, it is evident that the generations' organizational roles likely contributed to shaping their answers. For instance, concerning *a good delegator*, YG workers emphasized the importance of trust through task delegation, whereas the OG leaders primarily focused on the overall workloads for their employees, indicating nuanced differences in perspectives. Consequently, it becomes challenging to discern any generational differences in this instance.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the younger generations have framed these LCBs to embody a more personal aspect between each employee and their leader. This is a recurring theme in most of their justifications. For example, they emphasize trust in the relationship in the context of justifying the importance of being *a good delegator*. Another example is their description of the low priority given to being *a visionary*, arguing that it is ineffective for a leader to be visionary if they are not good at building and maintaining relationships. In relation to Asting & Swanberg's (2020) findings, it could be anticipated that more of YG employees would choose relationship-oriented LCBs. A possible explanation for why this was not the case could be that relationship-oriented LCBs were deprioritized in favor of LCBs that promote learning and development, such as being *a good mentor*. Regardless, it is evident from their justifications of the LCBs that having a leader who is people-oriented and builds strong relationships is highly important.

When considering the LCBs deemed less important for a leader to possess, being *persuasive* and *a good networker* emerged as notable findings among the younger cohorts. These LCBs did not appear in the responses of the older cohort. An argument among the younger generations regarding being *a good networker* is that this prioritization can come at the expense of individual relationships. This means that leaders end up spending more time and effort expanding their networks with other departments or external contacts, thereby dedicating less time to nurturing and strengthening relationships with their employees. The YGs perceive this as a less desirable trait in their leaders. Dulin (2008) suggests that Generation Y, in particular, has a preference for leaders who excel in interpersonal skills,

further emphasizing their need for relational abilities in a leader. Additionally, Valenti (2019) implies that leaders should prioritize individual success over organizational success. This means that YGs prefer leaders who limit their networking activities and instead focus on building strong relationships and ensuring the individual success of their direct subordinates.

Valenti (2019) also observed the preference of younger cohorts for leaders who appreciate diverse perspectives, incorporate inclusivity in decision-making processes, and facilitate open dialogue. Additionally, Francis & Hoefel (2018) specifically characterize Generation Z as exceptionally inclusive, advocating for freedom of expression and heightened receptivity to diversity. Consequently, it raises speculation as to whether they perceive *persuasive* as contradictory to openness and their autonomy in self-expression, a concern seemingly unaddressed among members of the older cohort. However, participants had the opportunity to choose *inclusive and culturally aware*, which the OG also presumed they would select. The amalgamation of these two terms might have influenced the decision. If "inclusive" had been assessed separately, different outcomes might have emerged among the younger cohorts.

Findings from both the older and younger cohorts revealed dissatisfaction regarding ambiguous communication and goal-setting. This is particularly evident among the older cohort, who emphasized the importance of concise and clear information, a sentiment consistent with the findings of Sessa et al. (2007) who highlights Generation X's preference for a direct leader. For YG employees, our findings may support Asting & Swanberg's (2020) assertion that the younger cohort requires good structure in their work environment. This may imply a leader who is clear and direct in communication and ensures clear guidelines in the work process. It could be argued that having good structure in the daily routine contradicts the discussion in Section 5.1.3, which addresses the younger generations' need for change; however, this is not necessarily the case. A plausible explanation could be that they require a leader who occasionally introduces changes in work routines, provided that new expectations and requirements are clearly expressed and communicated.

Regarding LCBs of being *energetic, ambitious, a visionary, willing to take risks, analytical,* and *emotionally stable*, there is a high level of agreement among the cohorts; these are LCBs that may be beneficial in certain contexts, but not in the organizations and work environments where the cohorts are situated. *Analytical* and *emotionally stable* are mentioned as less important LCBs, primarily by the OG leaders, where, for instance, *analytical* largely pertains

to the same rationale as the concept of *sees the bigger picture*; to avoid becoming excessively involved with the details.

5.2.3 The Leader Profile Inferred From the Younger Generations' Leader Needs and Desires

This section will discuss the empirical findings from Section 4.2.3 alongside elements outlined in Sections 5.1 and 5.2.2. Following this, the findings from this section pertaining to the needs and desires articulated by the younger generation employees will be used to compile a leader profile for leaders of younger generations. This profile can be found in the Recommendations in Chapter 6.

5.2.3.1 Looking at the Work Values and Leader Needs and Desires

Perhaps the most prominent finding is the younger generations' need for progression, development, and learning. This is evident in their work values regarding *Development and Learning Opportunities*, but also through their need for a leader who is invested in their development, encourages and motivates them to learn. Additionally, this is manifested in their work values of *Recognition & Feedback*, where they appear to greatly require acknowledgment for their efforts and contributions, but also feedback to ensure they are on the right track in their development. Drawing from McClelland's theory of needs, individuals with pronounced *Need for Achievement* (nACH) feel ownership and personally responsible in regards to their work (Miner, 2005), which is expressed through the younger generations appreciation for *Work Autonomy and Involvement*. Hence, there is reason to posit that this constitutes the foremost motivator for younger generations. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that younger cohorts articulate a readiness to seek alternative employment if their aspirations for learning and development remain unfulfilled. Overall, this leads us to believe that younger generations have nACH highest in the hierarchy of needs (Figure 5.1). This is supported by the findings of Borges et al. (2010), which found nACH to be significantly higher among members of Generation Y than those of Generation X.

The affiliation need, as described in McClelland's theory of needs, highlights that individuals who strive to build relationships in the workplace and engage in collaborative tasks are motivated when given the opportunity to do so (Baptista et al., 2021). Derived from the younger cohorts' requirement for a *Social and Collaborative Environment*, it becomes apparent that the *Need for Affiliation* (nAFF) is also pronounced within them. This

observation is consistent with their preference for a people-oriented leader who establishes relationships built on trust, attentive listening, and refrains from imposing personal opinions or being overly preoccupied with self-development. The rationale behind our positioning of nAFF slightly lower in the hierarchy compared to nACH is the competitive mentality that leaders had noticed (Figure 5.1). This phenomenon may serve as an indication that the younger generations' need for recognition is so prominent that it occasionally supersedes the nAFF. Their *Need for Power (nPOW)* appears to be the least prominent (Figure 5.1), thus serving as a less compelling motivational force for them. Individuals with a strong need for power are often attracted to situations where they can exert influence over the actions or thoughts of a group (Harrel & Stahl, 1984). Younger generations may value this aspect as they exhibit behaviors that are sometimes perceived as narcissistic and entitled (Ng & Johnson, 2015). It is evident that it motivates to some extent, as they desire to influence and be involved in decisions, to be heard and not micromanaged. However, younger cohorts seem to have an equally strong need for support and guidance, implying nPOW to be lower in hierarchy compared to nACH and nAFF.

Overall, this results in a hierarchy of needs wherein nACH emerges as the primary motivator, succeeded by nAFF and with nPOW representing the least significant motivator, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. Moreover, the derived hierarchy of needs is consistent with the findings of Borges et al (2010), which derived the same order of the three needs among members of Generation Y.

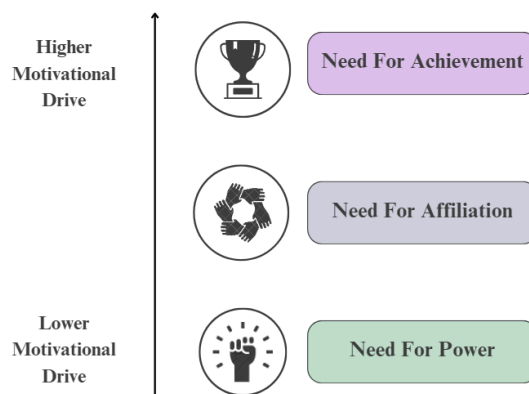


Figure 5.1. The derived needs-hierarchy of the younger generations based on our findings

However, as the needs can change (Miner, 2005), it is important to mention that it is possible that nPOW, for instance, will become more dominant as the younger generation employees

mature within the organizations, thus implying that this hierarchy might be influenced by age effects.

5.2.3.2 The Profile of an Encouraging and Invested Leader

The younger generations emphasized the need for a leader who serves as *a good mentor, encouraging* and, based on other responses, one who provides support and feedback. This becomes even more apparent when considering LCBs such as *experienced* and *professionally skilled*, which the younger generations associate with a leader's ability to offer guidance and advice. When considering the younger cohorts' work values, such as DLO and RF, in addition to their pronounced nACH, it is evident that they require a leader who facilitates their development and learning.

This entails that it must be clear from the leader's side what the plan is for the younger cohorts' development and what opportunities exist for them. The leader must then support and follow up on this process, so they feel invested in. A leader who can do this will seemingly have a motivating effect on employees of the younger generations. The leader should also facilitate variation to avoid repetitive and monotonous tasks and offer challenging assignments so that the younger generations can experience mastery. However, it is important that they do not feel tested and that these tasks are not simply "thrown" at them. The younger cohorts must be able to approach the leader if they feel uncertain or stuck. Additionally, it is essential that they receive feedback from the leader along the way, making it easier for them to estimate if they are on the right track. In addition to receiving feedback on their work, it is also crucial that they feel recognized for the work they have done. Based on our findings, this will have a highly motivating effect. A leader who can facilitate all these aspects will likely result in the younger cohorts feeling that their need for achievement is sufficiently satisfied, which will increase motivation. Additionally, it will seemingly lead to increased loyalty, as they may be less inclined to seek employment elsewhere to fulfill this need.

While the characteristics and behaviors chosen by older generation leaders may not always align with the desires of their younger generation employees for encouragement and support, it seems that these leaders are well aware of the younger generations' eagerness to progress and learn, while also recognizing their impatience. Older generation leaders, as reflected in their responses, appear deeply committed to supporting and encouraging their employees in both learning and development. However, it is important for these leaders to be mindful of the

younger cohorts' high expectations for themselves, which they have likely experienced since childhood according to Bolelli & Durmuş (2017), in addition to their sense of immediacy. Over time, consistently exceeding work capacity could lead to overload and burnout.

5.2.3.3 The Profile of a People-Oriented Leader

Based on the younger generations' selection of important LCBs such as *listening*, in addition to their rationale when assessing the aspects of the lower prioritized LCBs such as *a good networker*, *a visionary* and *ambitious*, it is evident that they desire a leader who is people-oriented. Particularly noteworthy is their aspiration to be regarded seriously, underscored by their anticipation that their leader will dedicate time to attentively listen to the matters they seek to raise, encompassing both personal and professional matters. Moreover, this notion extends to the leader's recognition of younger cohorts' valuation of flexibility and their need for WLB. When the younger generations perceive their leader as open to addressing such matters, it lowers the threshold for approaching them. This aspect appears to be crucial in establishing a strong leader-employee relationship preferred by the younger generations. Additionally, Asting & Swanberg's (2020) study found that "listening" and "understanding" were among the most emphasized leader characteristics, further supporting our findings. Moreover, they seem to desire a relationship that diverges from the traditional leader-employee dynamic where the leader dictates tasks, instead preferring an environment where opinions and ideas can be exchanged freely, indicating mutual respect. This aligns with the findings of Dulin (2008), who highlights Generation Y's desire for respectful treatment from their leaders.

Our findings related to the work value SCE indicate that younger individuals value an environment where they can collaborate with colleagues and enjoy their company. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by Sessa et al. (2007) and Sanchez (2024), who expressed that younger individuals desire inclusive and collaborative leadership. Given the significant importance of the social aspect of the workplace for younger individuals, it may seem somewhat peculiar that LCBs such as being *relation-oriented*, *diplomatic*, *inclusive and culturally aware*, and *emphatic* were not chosen to a greater extent by the younger generations. One possible explanation for this is that they have specifically considered what is important to them as individuals. Perhaps this includes some aspects that were less appealing to the younger cohorts, but it remains difficult to further elaborate on this based solely on the current findings. However, regarding *inclusive and culturally aware*, one explanation could be

that these qualities are so ingrained in them that they take them for granted, and therefore, they are not consciously choosing them. This is highlighted by Francis and Hoefel (2018), who found that Generation Z, in particular, is a highly open and understanding generation when it comes to diversity, suggesting that it may be entirely natural for them to expect an inclusive workplace environment.

The younger cohorts possess a need to form friendships with colleagues and to have a supportive and social environment where employees can learn and inspire each other, and it is important to acknowledge this need. It is evident from the results that such an environment will lead to increased job satisfaction, thereby also enhancing their motivation. Our results suggest that leaders widely comprehend the younger generation employees' requirement for the social dimension of the workplace. Yet, younger generations appear to place a greater emphasis on the need for a personal connection between leader and employee than the older generation does.

5.2.3.4 The Profile of a Responsible and Sincere Leader

The younger generations also expressed a need and desire for a leader who *sees the bigger picture* and is *a responsible decision-maker*. These LCBs entail a leader capable of effectively making decisions, displaying confidence and conviction without hesitation, which seems to provide reassurance to the younger cohorts. It is possible that this is linked to the younger cohorts' challenges with independent decision-making, thus emphasizing the importance for them of having a leader who stands firm in their choices and can support them in the decision-making process. The exact reason for this is not easily discernible, but one possible explanation could be the need for more experience within the organization, suggesting a potential age effect. An alternative explanation could be Csobankas's (2016) proposition that particularly Generation Z can find it challenging to be precise, maintain focus, and retain information in long-term memory, all factors that may have influence in decision-making processes. Another finding from our study that may be relevant to this is the younger generations' fear of making mistakes. Perhaps the fear of making the wrong decision makes the decision-making process even more daunting for them, necessitating a leader with these LCBs.

Younger cohorts may also perceive these LCBs as important in light of their appreciation of the WAI work values. They desire autonomy in their professional lives, and if a leader can

facilitate this, it can be viewed as a sign of trust. They must have room to work without being micromanaged by their leader, as it can potentially lead YGs to lose ownership over their work, resulting in a demotivating effect on them. A responsible leader with a holistic perspective will be able to delegate effectively and trust that employees fulfill their duties without micromanaging, thereby fostering work autonomy. It appears to be important and motivating for the YGs to have a leader who can act responsibly, involve them in such processes, and support them along the way if necessary. Furthermore, a leader with a holistic perspective enables YG employees to delve into details while feeling secure that the leader is thinking ahead and considering the bigger picture. This sentiment resonates with a discovery by Dulin (2008), who concluded that YGs seek a leader with a clear vision for the organization.

YG employees also expressed a desire for a leader who is transparent and honest about their thoughts and opinions. When this transparency is lacking, it can lead to uncertainty and speculation about hidden motives among employees. This expectation for transparency may be rooted in their exposure to a society where information is readily accessible, as noted by Shatto & Erwin (2016). In consequence, they expect a similar level of transparency in the workplace. This expectation might also be influenced by Valenti's (2019) finding that younger cohorts prioritize meaningful work. If the leader behaves in a non-transparent and insincere manner, causing employees to question their words and actions, it can diminish the meaningfulness of their work and thus demotivate them. Enhancing the perception of a transparent and sincere leader, as valued by the younger cohorts, requires clear and consistent communication. This involves explicitly articulating expectations and requirements in unambiguous terms, empowering employees with clear guidelines and goals to work towards.

It also appears that leaders of the OG leaders are cognizant of the YGs' desire and need for a responsible and sincere leader. While the nPOW is seemingly less latent in YG employees compared to the OG, they feel motivated when included and allowed to contribute to decisions, provided that they can receive guidance when requested. However, a point of consideration may be that the younger cohorts seem particularly concerned with the leader being transparent about their intentions and the direction they have set for the employees.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Research Question 1

The aim of RQ1 was to uncover main work values held by Norwegian younger generation employees (Y and Z) and explore how these are perceived by their leaders from the older generation (X). The findings of this study shed light on the needs and desires of younger generations (employees) in regards to work values in a Norwegian context. Moreover, they reveal a close convergence between the responses from younger generation (YG) employees and the assumptions made by their older generation (OG) leaders regarding what YG employees need and desire. Although many of our findings were consistent between cohorts, our research also indicates that YG employees prioritize competitive salaries, a value that was not mentioned by the OG leaders during interviews. Furthermore, OG leaders had observed tendencies of competitiveness among YG employees in terms of collaboration and an increased risk of burnout. This observation contrasts with the emphasis placed by the younger generations on the importance of collaboration and development as essential values for remaining in the workplace. Our findings are consistent with other empirical works from the literature on generations in organizations, as presented in Chapter 5. The theoretical contribution of this study underscores the importance of alignment between the work values of YG employees and the understanding of them by their OG leaders, as this alignment can enhance job satisfaction, motivation, well-being, and improve retention among younger employees in the long run. By being aware of what YG employees wants, needs, and expects from an employer and a leader, the OG leaders can increase the likelihood that YG employees will thrive and decide to remain part of the organization.

Research Question 2

The aim of RQ2 was to identify the preferred leader of younger generations, and compare with their older generation leaders' understanding of their preferences. Additionally it sought to uncover generational differences in leader characteristics and behaviors (LCBs), and see how it compared to the perceived generational differences. This study's results indicate that the perceived differences in LCBs between YG employees and the OG leaders exceed those substantiated through the empirical research. We also identified some notable differences, specifically in that YG employees showed a preference for a more personalized dynamic between each employee and their leader compared to their older counterparts. However, upon deeper examination of their most significant and less significant LCBs, it emerged that

Generations X, Y, and Z shared a number of perceptions regarding the characteristics of a preferred leader and their related behaviors.

Based on our interviews and analysis regarding work values and leader needs and desires, we have represented in Figure 6.1 the profile of the leader as desired by YG employees. This profile describes a leader who provides feedback and guidance, gives challenges accompanied by support and is invested in employee development (*Encouraging and Invested*). Moreover, a leader who listens and is understanding, connects to employees and is open to others viewpoints (*People-Oriented*). It further outlines a leader who is responsible and involves others in decision-making, has a holistic perspective and appears sincere, transparent and communicates clearly and explicitly (*Responsible and Sincere*). By immersing themselves in the needs and desires of YG employees, the OG leaders can deepen their awareness and understanding of their YG employees, which in turn could enable them to identify adequate means to motivate the younger workers and ensure their job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Our research indicates that OG leaders understand the needs and desires of YG employees regarding leadership and work values to a considerable extent, as well as factors influencing their job satisfaction and motivation. Although they recognize challenges such as the risk of burnout and competition among YG employees, OG leaders may overestimate generational differences. Nonetheless, their understanding suggests they can develop effective strategies to motivate younger workers. Additionally, our analysis identified a leader profile (see Figure 6.1) tailored for older leaders of younger employees, emphasizing, among other things, mentorship, inclusion in decision-making, relationship-building, and sincerity. This profile serves as a practical tool to ensure alignment with younger employees' work values, contributing to enhancing job satisfaction, motivation, and their likeliness of remaining.

In Table 6.1, the research aim and objectives, as stated in Section 1.3, are presented alongside an assessment of their fulfillment, as well as the chapter from which a more detailed response can be retrieved.

Table 6.1 The assessment of research aim and objectives of this thesis

Research Aim and Objectives	Objective Completed (Yes/No)	Refer to Chapter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To conduct a critical review of literature on generations and generational differences in the workplace. 	Yes	2. 5.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore first-hand how Norwegian leaders from the older cohort understand the needs, desires, and work values of younger cohorts in the workplace, in a Norwegian organizational context. 	Yes	4. 5.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop evidence-based recommendations that could help leaders' awareness of what factors contribute to motivate and retain younger cohorts in the workplace. 	Yes	6.

Recommendations

In summary of the responses of the younger generations within Section 5.2.3, a leader profile has been devised for OG leaders of YG employees. This is depicted in Figure 6.1. The green circles correspond to Section 5.2.3.2, the purple circles to Section 5.2.3.3 and the blue circles to Section 5.2.3.4.



Figure 6.1 Leader profile for YG employees devised from their expressed needs and desires

Drawing from the needs and desires of the younger cohorts, they seek a leader who is *Encouraging and Invested*. Our findings suggest that they desire the leader to adopt a

mentorship role. This role entails a leader who is dedicated and invested in the development of their employees, as well as the growth of the work team. Moreover, they seek challenges as part of this development, but under certain conditions. The leader should provide supportive guidance along the way and ensure that they do not feel "tested," while also being mindful of the risk of burnout among younger cohorts due to their high expectations of themselves. Additionally, the leader should facilitate task variation, given that younger cohorts deem this to be highly important. YG also expresses a significant need for regular feedback and guidance, indicative of an involved leader who acknowledges their contributions and concern for their development. However, this should not imply a leader practicing micromanagement, as this is viewed as intrusive and detrimental by the younger cohorts.

Moreover, the leader of YG should exhibit *People-Oriented* behavior. This involves attentive listening to employees and valuing their input. It involves understanding the younger generation's need for flexibility and WLB. Moreover, they seem to seek a genuine connection with their leader, extending beyond surface-level interactions. Therefore, it might be worthwhile for the leader to invest effort in fostering a strong relationship with employees and demonstrating trust, as this appears to resonate positively with the YG and enhance motivation. The leader should also recognize that YG employees highly value the social aspect of the workplace. Accordingly, they should strive to facilitate social interactions and increased collaboration, as these aspects are appreciated by employees. Concurrently, the leader should be aware of competitive tendencies among YG, as OG leaders have experienced instances where such attitudes have hindered collaborative success. Furthermore, it is imperative for YG that the leader demonstrates openness to diverse viewpoints, avoiding a persuasive demeanor that may detract from genuine engagement with others' ideas and perspectives.

The leader of YG should also be *Responsible and Sincere*. YG employees aspire to participate in decision-making processes, yet they also require a leader who can act responsibly and stand firm throughout the process. YG employees perceive it as reassuring when the leader demonstrates an ability to see the bigger picture, and they are motivated by being entrusted with responsibilities through delegation of tasks. In line with this, the leader should provide them with clear, explicit demands and expectations, thus mitigating any feelings of uncertainty that may lead to demotivation. Lastly, the leader should maintain transparency and

sincerity. Failure to do so may suggest hidden motives or agendas of the leader, potentially resulting in decreased motivation and job satisfaction among YG employees.

6.1 Implications for Practice and Research

Our study provides valuable insights into the needs and desires of YG employees within a workplace context. These findings align closely with prior research in the field, thereby reinforcing existing literature. By analyzing the perspectives of both younger and older cohorts, organizational leaders (OG) can integrate input from these groups to align the organization's practices with the needs of younger employees while considering the awareness of older ones. Such alignment increases the likelihood of enhancing job satisfaction and motivation among younger generations, consequently ensuring their retention within the organization. Moreover, our study underscores that perceived generational differences outweigh the found generational differences. This highlights the importance of critically evaluating and contextualizing generational stereotypes within organizational settings. Leaders should recognize this disparity to emphasize intergenerational similarities and avoid perpetuating popular press stereotypes. By actively addressing employees' desires and needs, including both work values and LCBs, leaders can proactively foster an environment where younger generations thrive and are motivated to remain within the organization.

6.2 Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to consider regarding the study conducted that necessitates evaluation. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that the findings can also be viewed in light of age, period, and cohort effects, as mentioned in Section 2.5.1 and further discussed in Section 5.2. There are methodological and conceptual challenges associated with distinguishing and isolating the influence of each construct, a phenomenon referred to as the identification problem (Fosse & Windship, 2019). Consequently, assessing whether the findings in this research can be directly linked to generations or are instead products of these effects proves challenging. Additionally, considering the aforementioned effects, there are limitations associated with employing a cross-sectional design when examining generational differences. This concern is also recognized by scholars who highlight that such a design fails to accommodate age, period, and cohort effects (NASEM, 2020; Costanza et al., 2012). Furthermore, there are limitations stemming from the diverse age ranges assigned to different generations, as previous research has revealed disparities in the definitions of age intervals for

each specific generation (Costanza et al., 2012). In our study, we adopted age intervals from Seemiller & Grace (2019); however, choosing alternative age ranges could have impacted both our sample composition and, consequently, our findings.

Moreover, time constraints hindered the ability to include a more extensive participant pool, resulting in a sample size of only 14 participants. This limitation may restrict the applicability of our findings when interpreting other work situations. Notably, the sample comprised two individuals from Generation Z and seven from Generation Y, indicating an uneven distribution across the generations and further underscoring the challenge of generalization. Only leaders from Generation X were included as representatives of older generations, as Baby Boomers are exiting the workforce, and the study failed to recruit any participants from this generation. Despite the potential relevance of including them, researchers were unable to do so. Additionally, some demographic characteristics of the participants in this study, such as gender, revealed an imbalance where all leaders were male, and among employees, only three out of nine were women. Further research should aim to recruit a sample with a more balanced distribution across generations and genders to improve the generalizability of the findings gleaned from this study. It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study were obtained from three Norwegian organizations, suggesting that the results may not be applicable to other contexts.

In summary, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to other contexts, as further research is necessary to validate the existing results.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

There are several avenues for further research that could build on the findings of this study. After Cennamo & Gardner (2008) underscored the importance of understanding generational differences and similarities between cohorts to enhance communication, satisfaction, and retention, it becomes evident that further research on this topic is essential. As the composition of the workforce continues to evolve, leadership practices must evolve in tandem. Anderson et al. (2017) suggest that shifts in employees' values and attitudes raise concerns about the applicability of current leadership theories and practices. Therefore, conducting future research on generational differences within today's workplace becomes crucial. This research would help ensure that leadership approaches are not only adaptable but

also aligned with the diverse needs and work values of employees to ensure job satisfaction and retention.

Moreover, examining younger generation leaders would be valuable in uncovering potential differences in awareness regarding the needs and desires of different generations among leaders of various cohorts. Anderson et al. (2017) suggested that characteristics of younger generations may influence how they assume leader roles, underscoring the relevance of investigating younger cohorts' approaches to leader roles. With Baby Boomers and Generation X approaching retirement, Generations Y and Z will inevitably step into leader positions, highlighting the necessity for research in this area.

In addition, it is advisable to investigate work values across all generations present in the workplace. This facilitates an assessment of whether these values are distinct to particular generations or if generational differences in cohort priorities exist. Hansen & Leuty (2012) argue that gaining insight into the distinct work values and needs of various generations is crucial for discerning whether similarities or differences exist among them. This notion is further emphasized by Costanza et al. (2012), who advocate for the significance of incorporating all generations to establish a comparative framework across cohorts.

Finally, conducting a longitudinal study to uncover potential changes in work values or preferred leader profile over several years, specifically within a Norwegian context, would be highly relevant. This suggestion is also emphasized by Costanza et al. (2012), Dick (2019) and NASEM (2020), who highlight the weaknesses of employing a cross-sectional design, a method commonly used in generational research. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it is crucial to interpret findings within the cultural context. Given the scarcity of generational studies in the Norwegian context, this area also warrants further research attention. Such a study, focusing on generational differences over time within a Norwegian context, holds significant value as it can examine the phenomenon while accounting for age effects.

Despite the increased attention from researchers in recent decades, the field of generational studies in the workplace still requires further exploration of various aspects and perspectives.

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