

Theses and Dissertations

---

2023

## A preliminary exploration of the workplace expectations of Generation Z amidst Covid-19

Elizabeth Robertson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

---

Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THE WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS OF  
GENERATION Z AMIDST COVID-19

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

Elizabeth Robertson

May, 2023

H. Eric Schockman, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Elizabeth Robertson

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Doctoral Committee:

H. Eric Schockman, Ph.D., Chairperson

Martine Jago, Ph.D., Committee

Santor Nishizaki, Ed.D., Committee

© Copyright by Elizabeth Robertson (2023)

All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
DEDICATION .....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	x
VITA.....	xii
ABSTRACT .....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background of Study .....	2
Statement of the Problem .....	6
Purpose Statement .....	12
Research Questions .....	12
Nature of Study.....	12
Theoretical Frameworks .....	13
Significance of the Study.....	14
Definition of Key Terms .....	15
Limitations of the Study .....	17
Organization of Study.....	18
Chapter Summary .....	19
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	21
Theoretical Frameworks .....	21
Leadership Theory .....	22
Diversity .....	28
Impact of COVID-19.....	30
The Great Resignation .....	31
Generational Theory .....	37
Modern Generations .....	49
Conclusion .....	72
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	74
Research Questions .....	74
Research Design .....	74
Sources of Data.....	77

Data Collection Strategies and Procedures.....	78
Tools/Instruments Used.....	79
Human Subject Consideration.....	81
Proposed Analysis.....	82
Means to Ensure Validity.....	83
Plan for Reporting Findings.....	84
 Chapter 4: Findings.....	 86
Data Collection.....	88
Data Analysis.....	88
Study Findings.....	89
Themes From RQ1.....	89
Themes From RQ2.....	102
Themes From RQ3.....	112
Themes From RQ4.....	118
Summary of Key Findings.....	124
Conclusion.....	126
 Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations.....	 127
Need for Study.....	127
Gap in the Literature.....	127
Theoretical Frameworks.....	128
Research Questions.....	128
Methodology and Design.....	129
Organization of Chapter.....	130
Key Findings for RQ1.....	130
Key Findings for RQ2.....	133
Key Findings for RQ3.....	136
Key Findings for RQ4.....	138
Servant Leadership.....	138
Trust.....	139
Revisiting Theoretical Frameworks.....	139
Limitations of Study.....	142
Trustworthiness of the Data.....	142
Analysis and Implications of Findings.....	144
Recommendations for Future Scholarly Research.....	148
Conclusions.....	148
 REFERENCES.....	 150
 APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Notice.....	 174
 APPENDIX B: Recruitment Script.....	 175
 APPENDIX C: Informed Consent.....	 176

APPENDIX D: Dates of Participant Interviews.....179

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Modern Generations in the United States (1920–2022).....	50
Table 2: Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Items.....	80
Table 3: Participant Demographic Information.....	87
Table 4: Summary of Research Questions and Emergent Themes .....	126



## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of an Ideal Workplace .....	90
Figure 2: Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of a Challenging Workplace.....	94
Figure 3: Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of an Ideal Supervisor .....	103
Figure 4: Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of a Challenging Supervisor.....	106
Figure 5: Number of Participants Characteristics of Their Perception of Leadership .....	120

## DEDICATION

To my favorite Traditionalists: my grandparents, Wally & Ruth Campbell, and Louis & Muriel Henderson. Thanks for instilling a love for learning in your children and grandchildren.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful for my dissertation committee. Dr. Schockman—you have pushed and challenged me to be a more global thinker. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and belief in me, and for always taking the time to answer just one more question. Dr. Jago—your commitment to honoring people’s stories in the way you conduct research is inspiring. Thank you for the ways you have shaped me as a student and a scholar. Dr. Nishizaki—your class planted the idea that I could pursue this topic for my dissertation. I have benefitted from your expertise on generations in the workplace.

Mom and Ralph, thank you for taking such an interest in my doctoral program. I am grateful for your prayers, editing skills, and conversations about German philosophers. Dad and Georgiann, thanks for the myriad ways you have supported me in this program. I am grateful for the articles you sent and the time you took to talk through ideas with me. Mom and Dad Robertson, thank you for your support of me. Becki and Andrew, thanks for being the best siblings and for your constant encouragement in my doctoral program!

To the St. Amand crew, our California family, thanks for your love and support, and a special thanks to the Goeglein family for sharing your beautiful home with me when I attended class. Thanks to the Oates family for your interest in my research and your care for me and Brad.

Thank you, Kelly, for being there for me since day one of this program—I could not have done it without you! Thanks for always answering my questions and encouraging me every step of the way. I am so grateful for the gift of your friendship! Manny, thank you for agreeing when I told you we were going to be friends during Orientation. I appreciate your investment and belief in me! Special thanks to Jennifer, Katie, Di, and the Schock Squad (Panagiote and Wali)

for sharing the doctoral journey with me. I am also indebted to Sarah Kaip for her professional editing of my dissertation and to Adam Kaney for coaching me in how to use NVivo software.

Luis, Ryan, Rachel, Jocelyn, Kara, Aimee, Leah, Margaret, Helen, and Aaron—thanks for being steadfast friends. To many others (you know who you are), thank you for encouraging me, asking me questions, and praying for me throughout my doctoral journey.

Thank you to Dr. Edee Schulze, Dr. Rob Ribbe, Dr. Barrett McRay, Dr. Steve Ivester, Dr. Marlene Wall, and Johannah Wetzel for your academic support in this process.

Thanks to the RAs with whom I have had the privilege of working. You have inspired me to learn more about Gen Z.

To the most important person of them all: my husband, Brad. Thanks for being my best friend and for always cheering me on. I am a better person because of the way you love and support me! Thank you for sharing all of life's adventures with me, including this doctoral journey!

## VITA

**SUMMARY**

Experienced educator with a background in higher education student development, leadership development, team development, and teaching.

**RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Leadership Development; Organizational Change; Conflict Management; Leadership Among Higher Education Professionals; Experiential Education; Systems Theory; Generation Z

**EDUCATION**

*Pepperdine University*, Graduate School of Education & Psychology, Malibu, CA  
**Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Global Leadership and Change**, May 2023

*Bethel University*, Arden Hills, MN  
**Master of Arts (M.A.) in Organizational Leadership**, December 2014

*Wheaton College*, Wheaton, IL  
**Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Spanish/Secondary Education**, May 2004

## ABSTRACT

For the first time in modern history, up to five generations are working side-by-side in the same organizations. The high number of generations working together can cause intergenerational conflict. Generation Z (Gen Z), born after 1995, is significantly different from previous generations due to the cultural realities that have shaped their development. Gen Z has their own attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about the workplace and the centrality of work. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about work and toward leadership in the workplace and how those expectations may have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic for Gen Z. This study placed a particular focus on Gen Zers from the United States, Canada, and Eastern Europe. This research was rooted in Mannheim's (1952) problem of generations, Mead's (1970) generation gap, transformational leadership, and generational theory. Previous generational research has indicated that Gen Z is profoundly different from previous generations due to being digital natives. This study drew 15 participants from six countries who were seniors at Consortium of Christian College and Universities (CCCU) institutions. Each participant was interviewed over Zoom and asked to describe their expectations for their ideal workplace and ideal supervisor while also asking questions about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research findings indicated that participants seek to be treated as worthy of dignity in their work and desire to be respected as having a life outside of work. Findings showed that Gen Z is particularly drawn to leaders who exhibit humble and vulnerable leadership. Gen Z is concerned about mental health and wellbeing and places a high priority on being respected. Those who supervise Gen Z would benefit from learning more about the workplace expectations of Gen Z so they can lead them most effectively. Recommendations for further research include expanding this research once

Gen Z has had more years of experience in the workforce and extending the number of countries from which study participants are drawn.

*Keywords:* Gen Z, global leadership, multigenerational workforce, workplace expectations, work-life balance, authentic leadership, meaningful work, mentoring, digital natives

## Chapter 1: Introduction

For the first time in modern history, up to five distinct generations are working side-by-side in some organizations. This dynamic often creates significant intergenerational conflict as each generation brings its own expectations, preferences, beliefs, and values to the workplace. Every new generation is “subjected to a certain level of disdain from older generations” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 1). Generations can be challenged by the expectations of traditional workplace structure because those in power tend to be older, which can result in power dynamics and generational conflict (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Prior to globalization, older generations were the primary source of information, and they personally passed down knowledge and experience to younger generations. While that still happens, access to the internet has provided opportunities for younger generations to expand their sources of knowledge beyond reliance on someone older and more experienced. The newest generation entering the workforce is Generation Z (Gen Z), and generational expert Twenge (2017) stated they will determine the future of the United States. In the 2022 midterm elections, members of Gen Z turned out in record numbers to vote (Chery, 2022; Debusmann & Sherman, 2022). Gen Z is actively shaping the future by voting about issues they care about rather than adhering to political party loyalty, and they just elected the first Gen Z member of Congress (Aylward, 2022; Chery, 2022).

The concept of generations is not new. Generations have been referenced in history and literature in sources from the Bible to the *Iliad* to Greek mythology (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Throughout the Bible, the term “generation” is used to describe the passing of time in genealogies which record the history of parent-to-child lineage (*The Holy Bible*, 1973/2006; Strauss & Howe, 1991) and is recorded in Old Testament books such as Genesis and I Chronicles and the New Testament books of Matthew and Luke. Over time, generations have



come to take on a new meaning, and today generations are generally understood sociologically instead of biologically (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Generational cohorts merit investigation because they are a demographic reality that impacts all levels of human interactions (Arsenault, 2004; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Most people in the United States have a general understanding of generations which often reveals itself in the way individuals describe those outside their generation. From disparaging remarks about Baby Boomers to disdain for the emerging Gen Z workforce, a lack of understanding of and appreciation for different generations persists. George Orwell (1968) famously said, “each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one who went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it. This is an illusion, and one should recognise it as such” (Orwell, 1968, p. 51). Several prominent generational researchers (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Seemiller & Grace, 2016) reference Orwell’s prescient quote in their own work.

### **Background of Study**

For the first time in modern history, there are up to five distinct generations working side-by-side in the same organizations (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Fratičová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Haeger & Lingham, 2013; Hillman, 2014; Jiří, 2016; Kiiru-Weatherly, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015; Zemke et al., 2022). One concern impacting the number of generations working together is the delayed retirement of Baby Boomers. Due to a combination of longer life expectancy and economic uncertainty, Baby Boomers who are the second oldest members of the workforce, are continuing employment (Abercrombie, 2014; Zemke et al., 2022). This amalgamation of generations is unprecedented (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) and adds layers of complexity for leaders who are trying to understand how to manage so many generations simultaneously (Fratičová &

Kirchmayer, 2018). Hillman urged leaders to provide effective supervision, which can only occur if they understand what makes each generation unique. By educating the workforce about generational differences, organizations can be more effective and competitive (Jiří, 2016).

While many strengths come from a diverse workforce, the high number of generations working together often causes intergenerational conflict (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Glass, 2007; Kiiru-Weatherly, 2017; Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Due to competing needs and being at different stages of life, workers from different generations find many areas of disagreement (Kiiru-Weatherly, 2017). Glass acknowledged the types of conflict that occur in a multigenerational workforce and identified the role of supervisors in addressing the various conflicts and differences. Leaders who are aware of the unique contributions of each generation are better equipped to leverage generational cooperation for success. Martin and Tulgan (2006) identified several multigenerational leadership challenges that require attention. Leaders need to find ways to retain the knowledge and experience of those who are preparing to retire. Leaders should invest more deeply in Generation X (Gen X) and Millennial employees to address the current lack of mid-level leadership. Leaders can help develop young supervisors who are currently managing employees who may be the same age as their own parents or grandparents. Understanding how to manage those who are older is a unique challenge (Martin & Tulgan, 2006).

McCrinkle and Wolfinger (2009) underscored the need for leaders to understand generational issues by acknowledging that each generation is a unique demographic group. They went on to explain that generational differences are one of the more visible characteristics in society and that there are more differences among generations than other social identities. Due to life expectancy and the shrinking of generational spans, there are more generations alive than

ever before. The sense of shared understanding among individuals in the same generation is profound (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009), especially as generations can become tribal. When Millennials began to enter the workforce, many books were written to help leaders understand how best to manage their newest employees; however, little has yet been written to help Millennial leaders know how to manage Gen Z (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021).

All these factors create an environment where intergenerational conflict can occur (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; DeMarino Watts, 2018; Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Mann, 2022; Perilus, 2020). Each generation tends to have a unique set of beliefs, attitudes, and preferences, all of which shape their approach to the workplace (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Generational conflict often happens due to differing work values and communication styles. Work values are defined by Dobewall et al. (2017) as “beliefs that guide and justify people’s actions while also reflecting cultural ideals and a shared understanding of what is right or wrong and good or bad in a given society” (p. 264). Work values play a vital role in shaping the workplace, and a current shift happening in the workplace is due to the convictions of Gen Z and how those beliefs require ethical behavior (Mann, 2022). Intergenerational conflict is problematic, not only due to the impact on interpersonal relationships, but also due to how it impedes workplace effectiveness (Perilus, 2020). DeMarino Watts also explored how differing expectations about work-life balance, leadership style, and interpersonal communication can all be sources of conflict. People in distinct generations often have their own perspective on what it means to be a good leader in the workplace (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021).

Twenge et al. (2010) predicted one of the most pressing challenges for organizations would be the retirement of millions of Baby Boomers who would then be replaced by Gen Z. Researchers predict that by 2030, almost all entry level positions in the United States will be

filled by the youngest members of Gen Z (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Twenge et al., 2010). The retirement of both Baby Boomers and Traditionalists will unfortunately result in the loss of much intellectual capital if the transitions are not facilitated effectively (DeMarino Watts, 2018). The retirement of seasoned employees and the loss of knowledge transfer between generations is a growing concern for organizations (Bencsik et al., 2016; DeMarino Watts, 2018; Hsieh, 2018; Joshi et al., 2010; Kick et al., 2015). Knowledge transfer is a complex process involving communication, documentation, and relationship-building (DeMarino Watts, 2018). Poor interpersonal communication skills make knowledge transfer extremely difficult (Kick et al., 2015). Bencsik et al. discussed the importance of knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing in the workplace and described the tendency for people to question knowledge and distrust information from others. Organizations need to create an environment of trust where knowledge transfer can occur effectively. Joshi et al. explored the complexity of retirement and of training new employees to fill the gaps left by those who retire. Workplace leaders face significant challenges both in sunsetting retirees and onboarding new employees.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are vital to success in organizations. Generational differences are one type of diversity in the workplace (Dittman, 2005; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Murray et al., 2011) and organizations must understand those differences to be competitive (Jiří, 2016). Lyons and Kuron asserted that generational differences are one important facet of diversity, but the impact of those differences can be temporal due to stage of life. While there is a tendency for leaders to place a higher focus on visible forms of diversity, more subtle forms of diversity such as differences in age, values, and attitudes are also a concern (Murray et al., 2011). Arsenault (2004) argued that each generation plays a significant role in creating its own culture, which is why leaders should be mindful of the age diversity of

their workforce. Martin and Tulgan (2006) also acknowledged the reality of age diversity within the workplace and encouraged people to find understanding and common language to better promote effective communication.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The general issue needing investigation is that Gen Z is profoundly different from previous generations (Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Grow & Yang, 2018; Twenge, 2017); indeed, Twenge stated that Gen Z is radically different from previous generations. One specific difference is how Gen Z was raised with immediate access to technology, making them the first generation to have entirely digital lives (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Gen Z is often criticized for having unrealistically high expectations. While some may perceive Gen Z as having unreasonably high expectations, members of Gen Z have been shaped by what they are accustomed to and have experienced for their entire lives (Dorsey & Villa, 2020).

The generation gap between Gen Z and the Millennials who precede them represents the biggest generation gap in modern history. This has been referred to as a “generation lap” where Gen Z’s technological acumen is surpassing those in older generations due to easy access to technology and the speed of change (Hardin, 2020; Tapscott, 2009). The term “generation gap” was coined by Mead (1970) to describe the unprecedented differences between the attitudes and beliefs of Traditionalists and the Baby Boomers who followed them. Mead observed that younger generations are living in a world that older generations will never understand. Tapscott (2009) acknowledged that Gen Z has innovated beyond previous generations due to their ease with technology, even going so far as to say that Gen Z has a unique level of authority over other generations. When discussing the gap between Gen Z and Millennials, Hardin (2020) observed it would be difficult to understand the depth of differences because so much is yet unknown about

Gen Z. Related to the gap between generations, Mannheim (1952) made a distinction between “*appropriated* memories and *personally acquired* memories” (p. 296). For example, in the context of current generations, Millennials have personally acquired memories of 9/11 while Gen Z may have appropriated second-hand memories because of what they have learned and stories they have heard. That creates a clear distinction between the generations.

As previously mentioned, in comparison to previous generations, Gen Z has different expectations for life and work because their formative years have been profoundly shaped by cultural realities such as constant access to the internet, the long-term effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and social justice movements (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Seemiller and Grace (2016) observed that Gen Z in the United States has only known a world where their country has consistently been at war overseas. Due to 9/11, they have rarely lived through a time of peace. While it is easy to assume Gen Z is the same as the Millennials before them, this is not the case. Gen Z does not remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Dorsey & Villa, 2020) but instead learned about it at school. The parents of Gen Z were also impacted by 9/11, resulting in a culture where they were very concerned with the safety of their children (Schroth, 2019). Members of Gen Z in the United States are significantly less likely to believe in the possibility of the American dream than previous generations (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Overall, the literature suggests that Gen Z has observed the limitations due to systematic oppression and racism, and they no longer believe that working hard guarantees financial security.

Gen Z has their own unique attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and expectations (Anderson et al., 2017; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Maloni, 2019; McGaha, 2018; Schroth, 2019). More specifically, Gen Z has their own perspective on the centrality of work, believing their jobs should be less important than their families or their mental health and wellbeing (Anderson et al.,

2017). They also believe they should be able to bring their full selves to work regardless of their race, ethnicity, or orientation. Leaders should not expect Gen Z to approach work in the same way previous generations did and will likely need to change best practices to fit with new expectations (Maloni et al., 2019). Much remains unknown about Gen Z at work as well as what expectations they have for workplace leadership (McGaha, 2018). Schroth (2019) acknowledged that Gen Z is entering the professional workforce with less previous work experience than generations that preceded them.

One of the defining characteristics of Gen Z is that they are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the history of the United States (Deloitte, 2021; Mordechay et al., 2019; Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Schroth, 2019). Demographers have predicted that by 2045, the United States will become a minority-majority nation, meaning that those populations that have historically been minorities will be larger than the White population (Mordechay et al., 2019). This trend is already happening in major metropolitan areas with preschool members of the population. According to Parker and Igielnik (2020), only 52% of Gen Z are non-Hispanic White, making them more racially diverse than any previous generation. About 20% of Gen Zers say they frequently experience discrimination due to their identity and background (Deloitte, 2021). They are frustrated by the lack of racial equality in the United States (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Gen Z is composed of the first digital natives: they have always had access to the internet and smartphones (Chillakuri, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020; Lanier, 2017; Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Stillman & Stillman, 2017). While other generations have adapted to technology over time, Gen Z was born with immediate internet access. Stillman and Stillman used the phrase “phigital” to describe Gen Z because members of Gen Z do not see the

difference between the physical and digital worlds. They have access to information at a very fast rate. Gen Z has less deferential respect for authority because they can get knowledge immediately rather than depending on someone older to answer their questions (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). There are also many negative effects of the high use of technology and social media among Gen Z, most notably in the areas of mental health (Hunt et al., 2018). Much is yet to be determined about the overall impact of technology on the mental health of Gen Z.

When it comes to the workplace environment, early research indicates that Gen Z expects and demands transparency and highly ethical behavior (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Chillakuri, 2020; Magano et al., 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Gen Z wants to ensure that people in their workplace act in alignment with their organization's espoused values. Gen Z wants to know and understand an organization's values because they have such a high personal value on ethical behavior (Chillakuri, 2020). They believe that people should be treated fairly, that leaders should act ethically, and that there should be open communication (Magano et al., 2020). Gen Z will intentionally pursue employment in organizations that have high ethical standards (Leslie et al., 2021), and indeed Mann (2022) predicted an imminent shift in the workplace toward more ethical decisions due to the demands of Gen Z.

Amid these shifts, a global pandemic occurred, which has become the defining moment of this generation (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Hirsch, 2021). Dorsey and Villa predicted that Gen Z will completely reshape the future of business, and the impact of the pandemic will be part of that. The Center for Generational Kinetics asserted in its study that COVID-19 is the defining experience for Gen Z and predicted that the impact of the pandemic will continue to shape them for the rest of their lives. The study also showed that 43% of those surveyed plan to leave their job or change their industry because of things they learned



during COVID. While COVID-19 has impacted everyone around the globe, it has had a unique effect on Gen Z due to their age and developmental stage, creating confusion, massive insecurity, and high levels of fear (Dorsey & Villa, 2020).

Members of Gen Z have different workplace expectations from previous generations (Chillakuri, 2020; Fodor & Jaeckel, 2018; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Chillakuri (2020) acknowledged that Gen Z presents unique challenges for supervisors because so much is still unclear about their workplace preferences. One limitation from Gen Z research is that most of the existing data about Gen Z and their workplace preferences have come from studies with Gen Z while they were still in high school. For example, research by Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) was published when the oldest members of Gen Z were 20 years old and projected that Gen Z would want to enjoy where they work and would be likely to leave a job if they did not enjoy it. Research since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that Gen Zers expect to be respected in the workplace and are unlikely to remain in an environment with a disrespectful or abusive supervisor (Hirsch, 2021). Gen Z appears to be highly entrepreneurial and will likely seek out opportunities to develop those skills (Chillakuri, 2020). At the same time, many members of Gen Z are entering the workplace lacking face-to-face social skills and will need opportunities to further develop those skills (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021), perhaps through mentoring within the workplace (Fodor & Jaeckel, 2018). Organizational leaders were trying to respond to data about why so many Millennials and Gen Zers were leaving their jobs in pursuit of organizations that were more committed to equity, social issues, and employee wellbeing. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic began (Hirsch, 2021).

It is unclear what the full impact of COVID-19 on workplace expectations will be for Gen Z and why Gen Zers are choosing to leave jobs through the “Great Resignation” (Abate et

al., 2018; Cassell, 2017; Deloitte, 2022; Hirsch, 2021; Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022). Abate et al. (2018) and Cassell (2017) described employees as the most valuable asset of any company, so it is worth exploring and understanding why people leave their roles. Many individuals who have quit during the Great Resignation have done so because of how they were treated or perceived they were treated at work (Hirsch, 2021). According to the Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z Survey, the primary reasons people left jobs since the start of COVID are poor compensation, negative impact of work on mental health, and burnout (Deloitte, 2022). It is evident Gen Z is demanding human dignity across all spheres of work (Hirsch, 2021). Lazányi and Bilan (2017) described how respect and trust in the workplace are no longer automatic and must be earned.

What researchers want to find out is how Gen Z is different from previous generations and what expectations Gen Z has for the workplace (Cresnar & Nedelko, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; McGraw & Stewart, 2020; Sessa et al., 2007). Sessa et al. (2007) urged future researchers to explore how age diversity impacts employee interactions in the workplace. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) described an emerging need for research about Gen Z attitudes toward work and what values and beliefs will impact their behavior. Cresnar and Nedelko (2020) observed that the work values of Gen Z are not yet clear in the literature, and leaders must learn more about Gen Z and seek to understand them if they want to manage them effectively. Scholars are still trying to understand how the attitudes and expectations of Gen Z are formed (Hassan & Kodwani, 2020). Lyons and Kuron (2013) and McGraw and Stewart (2020) expressed that further qualitative work is needed to better understand Gen Zers and how they approach the workplace setting. Arsenault (2004) observed that generational diversity is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about work and toward leadership in the workplace and how those expectations have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic for Gen Z individuals. This study placed a particular focus on Gen Zers who will graduate from college in 2023 from the United States, Canada, and Eastern Europe to allow for a more global perspective on Gen Z.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: When Generation Z anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?
- RQ2: What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?
- RQ3: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace?
- RQ4: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?

## **Nature of Study**

This research used qualitative methods to address the research questions. There is extensive quantitative data about the general characteristics of Gen Z (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Deloitte, 2021, 2022; Dimock, 2019; Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019), but there is a lack of qualitative data about the lived experiences of Gen Z. Qualitative phenomenology seeks to describe what participants have in common

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal is to discover the universal essence of a lived experience, and in this case, is focused on expectations pertaining to the workplace environment and leadership in the workplace considering the COVID-19 global pandemic. Qualitative phenomenology is the best approach to get rich data about the lived experience of participants (Richards & Morse, 2013).

The qualitative phenomenological approach is most attributed to Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014). According to van Manen, phenomenology is a helpful approach to learn more about everyday issues and is especially relevant in professional fields. Qualitative phenomenology is focused on finding the common meaning among a group of individuals about their lived experience or a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). This research study focused on individuals who have shared experience—in this case, members of Gen Z who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic and are preparing to enter the workforce. Data were collected through individual interviews, and the data were analyzed to find a rich description or the “essence” of the participants’ experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research is based on several theoretical frameworks which will be expounded in the literature review. Leadership theory provided a foundation for how people interact in the workplace. Over the last century, various leadership styles have been used in the workplace according to the times and the people working (Olmeda, 2022). In recent decades, transformational leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978) and authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) have emerged as effective leadership

styles. Both have a higher emphasis on relationships, authenticity, and ethical behavior than other leadership theories and are favored by Millennials and Gen Z.

Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations provided an overall framework for the study of generations. Mead's (1970) concept of the generation gap was also explored to describe the differences among modern generations and how the gaps are indicative of cultural shifts and new generational identities. Generational theory provided a theoretical framework for the studies conducted by modern generational researchers (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory is discussed in the context of how generations form an identity and imitate those within the same group. An application of social identity theory (Avolio et al., 2004) was used to underpin generational identity. Finally, phenomenology was used to answer the research questions in the study. These theories are historical antecedents to the study of generations and provided a helpful application to understanding Gen Z.

### **Significance of the Study**

For the first time in the modern global world since the beginning of the Industrial Age, there are many generations working together in organizations. This is due to a combination of longer life expectancy and a compression of years that span a generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim (1952) observed that new generations could emerge every year, every 30, or every 100 years depending on the social and cultural occurrences of their day. Strauss and Howe discussed the ways that generations have become more compressed in the last 100 years due to the impact of sociological and technological forces. Sessa et al. (2007) urged that future research is needed to explore and define the differences among generations. Research is needed on how those differences impact the workplace. Zemke et al. (2022) referred to the socialization of work as a rite of passage and acknowledged that it can be awkward and difficult to graduate from

college and transition into full-time employment. One moderating factor to this research may be understanding the differences between generational identity and overall maturity or life stage.

Using Mannheim's (1952) problem of generations as a foundation, this research expanded on Mannheim's notion that generations are socially located. Mannheim likened generational identity to socioeconomic status in the way both are in societal structures. It is hypothesized that research will show that Gen Z is significantly different from previous generations in their expectations for the workplace because their expectations have been shaped by their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mannheim's theory was focused on generations within specific countries, but with current access to technology and globalization, there may be a global sense of generational identity that is more salient than national identity.

This study is significant because it used qualitative phenomenology to understand the essence of the experiences of Gen Zers who lived through the pandemic and who are planning to enter the workforce soon. While there is extensive quantitative research about the attitudes, behaviors, characteristics, and perceptions of Gen Z, there is a lack of rich qualitative data about the impact of COVID-19 on Gen Z's expectations for the workplace. Most existing quantitative data are focused on Western nations and the United States in particular. A few notable exceptions are the Deloitte (2021, 2022) global surveys that gathered data from respondents in 46 countries. This research will begin to fill the gap of qualitative data and will bring a more diverse and global focus to generational differences and their implications for the global workplace.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Baby Boomers.* The generation born between 1946–1964 and named for the boom of babies born after World War II.

*Cuspers.* Individuals who are born on the dividing line between generations who may embody certain characteristics of both generations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

*Generation.* A “cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 60).

*Generational cohort.* A generational group that is shaped by a variety of forces such as media, popular culture, economic events, and peers, which then help to create value systems (Twenge et al., 2010).

*Generational characteristics.* The thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, values, and expectations that typify a generation.

*Generation gap.* A term coined by Mead (1970) to describe the significant differences in attitude and behavior between Baby Boomers and the Traditionalists before them.

*Generation X.* The generation born between 1964–1979, also known as Latchkey Kids or 13ers.

*Generation Z.* The generation born between 1996–2010, also known as Gen Z or iGen.

*The Great Resignation.* A term coined in 2021 to predict the large number of people who were resigning from jobs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in search of better pay, more flexibility, and more ethical treatment in the workplace (Cohen, 2021).

*Intergenerational conflict.* “Differences in values, views, and ways of working, talking, and thinking that set people in opposition to one another and challenge organizational best interests” (Zemke et al., 2022, p. 12).

*Knowledge transfer.* The process of documenting and communicating knowledge within an organization, often referring to the intellectual capital of retirees being shared with the newest members of the workforce.

*Millennials.* The generation born between 1980–1995, also known as Generation Y, Generation Me, Generation Next, and Nexters.

*Peer personality.* A “generational persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 64).

*Traditionalists.* The generation born between 1925–1945, also known as the Silent Generation, the Greatest Generation, Veterans, Seniors, Loyalists, and GI Joes/GI Janes.

*Work values.* “Beliefs that guide and justify people’s actions while also reflecting cultural ideals and a shared understanding of what is right or wrong and good or bad in a given society” (Dobewall et al., 2017, p. 264).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Every research study has limitations. In the case of qualitative phenomenology, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher has human limitations and existing biases, although the goal is to bracket a priori knowledge. Researcher bias and the researcher’s assumptions and perception of issues can limit the study. Collecting data via interviews can be helpful in allowing the researcher to control the questions. However, there are limits because the information gleaned in an interview is filtered by the interviewee (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is possible that the presence of the researcher could bias the responses of the participants due to the inherent power dynamics in an interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must be mindful of what questions are asked and how they are asked to ensure that the researcher is not leading the interviewees to specific conclusions.



Another limitation of current research about generational cohort differences is regarding the populations studied. Most of the academic literature about generations is focused on college-educated individuals, so there is a lack of research on production workers who are not college educated (Moore et al., 2015). Further, most of the generational research has been conducted by Western academics on Western populations (Parry & Urwin, 2011). While this study sought to be global in its approach to finding a sample, phenomenology tends to use a small sample size. There are limitations based on my network from which to draw a sample. For this research, the population and sample were limited to members of Gen Z who speak English fluently, have had some previous work or internship experience, and are currently in their final year at a university. I used convenience sampling based on university contacts in Eastern Europe, which limited the study.

### **Organization of Study**

The first chapter of this study explored the background of the problem which is the dynamic of five generations working side-by-side in the workplace. It identified the challenges and opportunities being brought by the newest generation about to enter the workforce. The chapter then identified the purpose and significance of the study, with an emphasis on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It discussed the research questions and defined key terms for understanding the study. The chapter then identified the theoretical frameworks and the research approach for the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of current literature, beginning with an overview of leadership theory with a particular emphasis on transformational leadership and authentic leadership. The literature review also explores the historical theoretical frameworks that underpin generational studies, such as Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations and Mead's (1970) generation gap,

and current researchers who investigate generational cohort theory and generational identity in the workplace. Then a review of modern generations in the United States is provided, with a particular focus on Gen Z. The literature review identifies the gaps in current research and the need for more qualitative data about Gen Z.

Chapter 3 explores the methods and methodology for the study. It describes the qualitative phenomenology research method used to address the research questions. The chapter provides a framework and plan for the interview protocol and the data collection process. The protection of human subjects and ethical considerations are also described. Finally, the plan for analyzing the data is explained.

Chapter 4 reports and provides analysis of the research findings. The purpose of this chapter is to give rich descriptions of the lived experiences of Gen Zers based on interview data so the essence and meaning can be explored.

The last chapter, Chapter 5, provides an overview of how the research questions were or were not answered by the study. It includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the research process, conclusions, and recommended areas for future study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter identified the general concern that for the first time in recent history, there are up to five generations working side-by-side in the workplace (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Fratičová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Haeger & Lingham, 2013; Hillman, 2014; Jiří, 2016; Kiiru-Weatherly, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015; Zemke et al., 2022) and described the challenges of leading a multigenerational workforce and the issues that can arise as a result. The chapter briefly outlined some of the ways Gen Z is different from previous generations and how the generation gap between Gen Z and Millennials represents the most profound generation gap in history. Much is

yet unknown about Gen Z and their expectations for leadership and the workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has become the defining moment for Gen Z and has exacerbated existing challenges. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of Gen Z individuals about work and toward leadership in the workplace in light of COVID-19.

The next chapter will provide a review of the current literature on leadership styles, generational theory, and modern generations. The literature review will describe the body of known research about generations in the workplace. It will also shed light on the gaps in research around Gen Z. While there are quantitative data about the defining characteristics of Gen Z, there is a lack of qualitative data about the impact of COVID-19 on their workplace expectations. This research study sought to explore the lived experiences of Gen Z through the COVID-19 pandemic and how their expectations for work may have been shaped because of the pandemic.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Leading a multigenerational workforce is complex. The most recent generation to enter the workforce, Gen Z, is significantly different from previous generations; thus, it is necessary to explore previous research on generations and how they function in the workplace (Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Grow & Yang, 2018; Twenge, 2017). Much of the literature explored in this literature review is from academic journals, books, and dissertations. However, research on Gen Z in the workforce is in a nascent stage (Anderson et al., 2017; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Chillakuri, 2020; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020). Much of the research about Gen Z at work was written while its members were still in high school and had not yet entered the workforce (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2009; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Stillman & Stillman, 2017; Twenge, 2017). Some of the research used in this literature review describing Gen Z is from recent large-scale quantitative studies by Deloitte (2021, 2022), the Pew Research Center (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), the Center for Generational Kinetics (2022), and the Workforce Institute at Kronos (2019). Some current research on COVID-19 and the Great Resignation is primarily from trade literature. The breadth of sources in the literature review underscores the need for high quality research on these timely and emerging topics.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research is rooted in social science theory and explored the concepts of leadership theory, as well as how generations are defined, formed, and interact with one another. Through the 1900s, the definition of leadership evolved and changed (Northouse, 2019). To understand current leadership issues and how they intersect with various generations at work, a brief history of leadership theory is explained, with a particular emphasis on transformational leadership and authentic leadership theory. The next section discusses current research about the

multigenerational workforce and the challenges of intergenerational conflict and knowledge transfer in the workplace. Then, the literature review focuses on the theories that underpin generational cohort theory beginning with Mead's (1970) generation gap. Several social philosophers such as Karl Mannheim, August Comte, and John Stuart Mill have discussed the role of generational identity as a lens through which to understand history (Strauss & Howe, 1991), and the work of Mannheim (1952) served as the primary theoretical lens through which to understand generations in the workplace. Social learning theory, social identity theory, and generational identity theory are also explored. The next section provides an overview of modern generations (1925-present) with a description of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials, and Gen Z with particular emphasis on the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors of the most recent generation.

### **Leadership Theory**

Bass and Bass (2008) acknowledged that the issue of leadership has become a focus for scholars over the last 100 years and that with each successive decade the volume of leadership literature has grown exponentially. Definitions of leadership have changed throughout that time due to world events, political leaders, and the tendency for academic disciplines to be siloed from one another. Northouse (2019) defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5), while Rost (1993) said "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 101). From 1900–1930, leadership was primarily focused on power and control, but in the 1930s leadership concerns became more focused on the individual traits of a leader and how a leader influenced a group (Rost, 1993). The 1940s and 1950s brought a higher emphasis to group theory, relationships, and leadership effectiveness. In

the 1960s, leadership was more strongly characterized by leader behavior. The 1970s saw an expansion of leadership from focusing on small groups to a more comprehensive view of organizational behavior and goals. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, political scholar Burns (1978) began to define leadership as a transformational process. Rost observed the preponderance of the word “influence” as a part of leadership definitions in the 1980s. The following decades were filled with a great deal of debate about leadership and management, servant leadership, followership, and authentic leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008; Northouse, 2019). There is an assumption that older generations have different expectations for leaders based on the leadership models of their era. As culture and people change in a more globalized world, younger generations have new expectations for their leaders, and they appreciate different styles of leadership from older generations.

### ***Leadership Styles***

Maxwell (2019) emphasized the need for leaders to adapt if they want to be successful in a global world which requires them to be aware of the global influences and generational shifts happening around them. Leaders cannot continue functioning the way they always have if they want to remain relevant, and they must be prepared to adapt and change (Panwar & Mehta, 2019). Leaders will need to use multiple leadership styles so they can meet the needs of employees and influence them effectively (Anderson et al., 2017). The onus is on leaders to understand the characteristics, attitudes, and experiences that have shaped the generations they serve (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). Human capital is one of the most valuable assets of any organization, so it would behoove leaders to understand what keeps employees engaged at work versus what makes them want to quit (Abate et al., 2018; Cassell, 2017). Some leaders in workplaces do not care well for employees which can result in burnout.

As generations change over time, it is reasonable to assume that leadership styles and preferences may also change with the times (Olmeda, 2022). Haeger and Lingham (2013) observed that the merging of five generations in the workplace presents the need to provide new types of leadership. Millennials came of age when the concept of emotional intelligence became popular, and as a result, they expect leaders to demonstrate emotional intelligence in their interactions in the workplace (Gillespie, 2019). Leaders can adapt to the cultural changes around them by being nimble in utilizing leadership styles that are effective in each set of circumstances. In the past, transactional leadership was a preferred method for managing employees; however, it falls short of meeting the needs of current organizations. Transactional leadership focused on the outcome of what employees did, while transformational leadership focused on how employees got a job done and recognized the process of work (Pradhan & Jena, 2019). Bornman (2019) asserted that transformational leadership is considered the most successful approach to leadership in the 21st century, and Jain (2020) claimed it is the most effective style for Gen Z. Leaders must be ready to facilitate change and encourage their employees to also embrace change (Pradhan & Jena, 2019). Transformational leaders push followers to ask hard questions, challenge the way things have always been done, and seek creative solutions. Transformational leadership demonstrated by authentic leaders can create a positive and supportive environment (Seamon, 2022). Within an environment that promotes innovation, followers can thrive.

Meister (2020) urged leaders to focus on employee wellbeing as an organizational priority. A study by Aguas (2019) revealed that Gen Z describes effective leadership as characterized by servant-heartedness, influence, focused on teams' needs, and committed to transparency. Authenticity, support for work-life balance, and flexibility are also key components of effective leadership. Bornman (2019) conducted research on the preferred

leadership styles of Gen Z college students. The research suggests that Gen Z students prefer leadership that is transformational over transactional. They also prefer business leaders who embody what have traditionally been viewed as feminine traits. Hillman (2014) recommended that leaders in generationally diverse workforces focus on using a flexible leadership approach to be most effective. Anderson et al. (2017) challenged organizational leaders to reconsider current leadership theories so they can adapt to the emerging workforce. Gen Z and Millennials are drawn to leaders who are willing to put in the work and be honest, open, and direct (Aguas, 2019). Both Gen Z and Millennials have a keen awareness for deception (Tulgan, 2016). Weeks and Schaffert (2019) believed that organizations have an ethical responsibility to provide meaningful work for their employees. This very naturally requires leaders to know how their employees define meaningful work.

Many organizations have not created pathways to develop their mid-level leaders (Martin & Tulgan, 2006), which is creating a leadership vacuum in the workplace. Fewer individuals who are qualified for mid-level leadership roles pursue them. When Millennials entered the workplace, organizations learned about the best way to manage them. Now that Gen Z is beginning to enter the workplace, many organizations are unprepared to lead them effectively (Hardin, 2020). Spiegel (2013) acknowledged the role of relational leadership, which is marked by collaboration and high levels of trust. Traditional top-down leadership approaches that have been a hallmark of hierarchical organizations and institutions are falling out of vogue as employees demand and expect better relationships with supervisors in which information is freely shared and employees are empowered.

Gen Zers desire to have supportive supervisors (Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019), and almost one third acknowledge that having a poor supervisor would impede their ability to



work productively. In a recent survey by the Workforce Institute at Kronos, Gen Z identified the top leadership traits they want in a leader as trust, support, and care. Gen Z has high expectations for their leaders and will not continue in a job where they feel disrespected or devalued. Both transformational leadership and authentic leadership are approaches that frame an understanding of how leadership intersects with five different generations in the workplace.

**Transformational Leadership.** Transformational leaders have a goal of changing people, and they deal with feelings, ethics, and values while having a high regard for the dignity of everyone (Northouse, 2019). Transformation leaders have an approach that is rooted in connection and seeks to understand the motivation of followers so that all can make ethical decisions. Transformational leaders can provide a compelling vision for the future and encourage others to be part of it. Burns (1978) questioned the ultimate test of leadership and concluded that “the test is one of *transforming* power” (p. 396). True leaders have an ability to change and transform people.

Burns (1978) was concerned with the relationship between conflict and power and brought a new perspective into the field of leadership. Burns (1978) said, “The crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power, but leadership rarely rises to the full need for it” (p. 20). One failure in the field of leadership study stemmed from the separation between leadership and followership, and Burns was interested in exploring the values and motivations of leaders and followers. Burns believed that leaders had a role in social change that was rooted in their ideal for leadership and a desire to serve their followers and themselves.

Lee et al. (2021) and Stewart (2006) discussed the work of Burns (1978) in distinguishing between transactional and transformational leadership. Burns characterized most interactions

between leaders and followers as transactional. Transactional leadership is characterized by passive management, contingent rewards, and management by exception (Lee et al., 2021). On the other hand, transformational leadership has a different kind of power (Burns, 1978). With transformational leadership, leaders are acutely aware of the individual needs of their employees and find ways to help align employee needs and values with that of the organization, which ultimately empowers employees and helps them to be more motivated (Lee et al., 2021). Bass and Bass (2008) described the power of transformational leadership to motivate followers to exceed their goals.

**Authentic Leadership.** According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), the concept of authenticity dates to the era of ancient Greece. Authentic leadership is rooted in transformational leadership (Duncan et al., 2017; Northouse, 2019) and is still being explored by researchers. Authentic leaders have a strong sense of self and are principled; they know their personal values and their behavior matches their values (Gardner et al., 2011). They seek to empower and serve their followers (Avolio et al., 2004). Self-awareness is an important component of authentic leaders. Duncan et al. recognized the relationship between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership. Northouse observed that authentic leadership meets society's need for trustworthy leaders. Corporate malfeasance and unethical leadership behavior have created a need for authenticity to restore trust (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Avolio et al. (2018) identified an authentic leadership model characterized by self-awareness, moral perspective, transparency, and balanced processing. Authentic leaders have a calling to take on the mantle of leadership. "Truly authentic leaders must lead, but they must do so in a way that honors their core values, beliefs, strengths—and weaknesses" (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 1142). Leaders can shape the social identity of their followers by consistently demonstrating

honesty and integrity (Avolio et al., 2004). Bass and Avolio (1993) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to identify the dimensions of authentic leadership and found four defining characteristics: charisma, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (as cited in Lee et al., 2021).

Walumbwa et al. (2008) acknowledged that almost all leadership research has been done in Western countries, and there remains a need for global research on leadership theory. Therefore, Walumbwa et al. used a research sample from the United States, China, and Kenya to get a more global perspective on authentic leadership. “Authentic leaders are anchored by their own deep sense of self (self-awareness); they know where they stand on important issues, values, and beliefs, and they are transparent with those they interact with and lead” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 104). Many philosophers extol the merits of authenticity, self-awareness, and honesty. Fusco et al. (2015) proposed that authentic leadership should be conscious, competent, confident, and congruent. Some researchers criticize authentic leadership because it is so challenging to measure. Gardner et al. (2021) acknowledged it is difficult to quantify authentic leadership because many elements of authenticity are internal and cannot be seen by others. Fusco et al. argued that authentic leadership has emerged as a response to the changing needs of the time.

## **Diversity**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental to workplace success in today’s global world. Diversity comes from a variety of social identities, and generational differences are one form of diversity in the workplace (Dittman, 2005; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Murray et al., 2011). For organizations to be competitive, they must have a strong commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion and to understanding generations. Arsenault (2004) researched how generations are shaped by their shared experiences and

concluded that “generational differences are a legitimate diversity issue that organizations need to recognize and understand and an issue that needs to be addressed in developing current and future leaders” (p. 124). Arsenault’s perspective creates a sense of urgency in identifying and addressing the very real issues that arise due to a multigenerational workplace.

In recent decades, many organizations have become less hierarchical, and as a result, individuals from different generations are working more closely together (Murray et al., 2011). As employees collaborate with greater frequency, organizational leaders must be prepared to effectively manage their diverse workforce. While race, ethnicity, and gender are frequently acknowledged as types of diversity (some of which are enshrined in law depending on the specific country), there has been movement to consider types of diversity that are less visible. For example, religious beliefs, behaviors, personal values, and sexual orientation may not be observable but are nonetheless important factors of diversity. Diversity of generational cohorts may be an important factor to explore (Murray et al., 2011). While generational cohort theory is a helpful tool in understanding workplace dynamics, leaders and managers should be mindful not to overlook other aspects of diversity and focus solely on generations (Larson, 2014).

According to Twenge (2017), Gen Z has “no patience for inequality based on gender, race, or sexual orientation” (p. 3). They cannot comprehend why other generations do not share their commitment to equality. In the workplace, they will demand inclusivity and diversity from every level of the organization, including executive leaders (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Seemiller and Grace (2016) observed that the debate on racial equality is “getting old for Gen Z students. They are frustrated that there is not racial equality and that people are still arguing about it at this time in history” (p. 104). Diversity, equity, and inclusion are high values for Gen Z, and they are more likely to be drawn to organizations that share those values (Center for Generational

Kinetics, 2022). Regarding social causes, Gen Zers are ready to mobilize to effect change. They are less trusting of institutions than previous generations were and relate to institutions pragmatically and analytically (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z seeks to pursue truth and authenticity. Their commitment to authenticity makes them more open to and accepting of people who are unlike them. Members of Gen Z prefer to address issues head-on and expect leaders to be authentic and direct (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

### **Impact of COVID-19**

Early researchers predicted that the COVID-19 pandemic will be the defining moment for Gen Z (Becker, 2022; Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Gen Z's key developmental milestones such as prom, graduations, and entering the workforce have been deeply impacted by COVID-19, which has created a feeling of loss and disappointment (Becker, 2022). The pandemic has also influenced the workplace and how people feel about work. Becker (2022) said, "It is critical we understand how Gen Z perceived the impacts of [COVID-19] as it is the basis for their worldviews" (p. 3). Hirsch (2021) articulated that just while companies were scrambling to get into alignment with the new social values of their employees, the pandemic started. COVID-19 has pushed many people to think more deeply about what they value in the workplace and to demand better treatment from companies and supervisors.

Research on Gen Z prior to and again during the pandemic uncovered novel trends. Gen Z's priorities have changed when it comes to job seeking (Deloitte, 2022). They are now far more interested in a high and stable salary than they were prior to the pandemic (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Deloitte, 2022). This expectation will impact future workplaces that may struggle to hire employees if they do not have competitive wages. Forty-three percent of Gen Z intends to change jobs or industries because of the pandemic and what they learned during

that time (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022). Ferrazi and Clementi (2022) argued that COVID-19 pushed people to reorient themselves and ask meaningful questions about work. This provides an important opportunity for leaders to come alongside their employees and help them understand their own sense of purpose and motivation.

COVID-19 also created novel challenges for knowledge transfer in the workplace (Urlick, 2020). Moving a multigenerational workforce online was fraught with misunderstanding, different levels of technology competency, and communication breakdowns. Each generation had a differing level of ability to engage with an online platform. According to Valcour (2013), emerging generations are accustomed to quickly and easily accessing and sharing information. Hierarchical systems seem antiquated to members of Gen Z because they do not understand why hierarchical organizations hide information. Leaders can adapt by openly sharing information and collaborating so the organization can meet its goals, which will be a unique challenge in organizations that have historically been hierarchical (Valcour, 2013).

### **The Great Resignation**

The term “The Great Resignation” has been used to describe the number of people leaving their jobs in search of something better (Hirsch, 2021). In an interview with Bloomberg, Texas A & M professor Anthony Klotz predicted that a great resignation was coming, and the term has now entered the lexicon (Cohen, 2021). Many members of Gen Z are participating in the Great Resignation (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Deloitte, 2022). According to a global survey by Deloitte (2022), most who are leaving are doing so due to mental health issues, lack of competitive pay, and burnout. Data collected by the Parker and Menasce Horowitz (2022) indicated many people left jobs due to poor compensation and being disrespected at work. Sull, Sull, et al. (2022) researched why so many people in all generations are leaving jobs, particularly

as organizations seek to retain valuable employees. They believe toxic corporate culture is driving the Great Resignation and have pointed out the following markers of toxic culture: (a) failure to value diversity, equity, and inclusion; (b) disrespect toward employees; and (c) unethical behavior on the part of leaders. Their research further revealed that toxic culture was 10 times more significant in predicting worker turnover than salary (Sull, Sull, Cipolli, et al., 2022). It is evident that leaders need to pay attention to diversity, respect, and ethical behavior if they want to retain top talent. Hoff (2022) asserted that members of Gen Z are thoughtful about ensuring that an organization's values align with their own, and are carefully considering the types of jobs available to them and what skills and experience they will gain as a result of working there.

### ***Multigenerational Workforce***

Today's workforce is multigenerational with employees from five distinct generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z (Wiedmer, 2015). While few Traditionalists remain in the workforce, there will continue to be Baby Boomers in the workforce until at least 2030, so leaders will need to manage a multigenerational workforce (Zemke et al., 2022). Fratičová and Kirchmayer (2018) identified the layers of complexity in leading five generations. Twenge et al. (2012) said, "There is considerable intellectual, cultural, and economic interest in discovering and predicting generational trends" (p. 1060). There are unique challenges to managing a multigenerational workforce, and leaders need to be aware of each generation's characteristics to lead effectively and keep employees engaged at work (Wiedmer, 2015). The multigenerational workforce also brings incredible opportunities for growth, and if each unique generation is understood, their characteristics can be leveraged to increase

organizational success (Glass, 2007). Jiří (2016) urged organizations to understand generational differences as diversity in order to remain competitive in a global field.

Zemke et al. (2022) identified ways to be successful in facilitating a multigenerational workforce. First, as leaders acknowledge, prepare for, and expect intergenerational conflict, they will be positioned to address issues when they arise. Second, leaders can create strong multigenerational teams, thus giving them a competitive advantage. While multiple generations working in the same organization is not a new concept, in the past they were likely to be separated based on organizational structure (Zemke et al., 2022). Traditional organizations were hierarchical, and those in the highest levels of leadership tended to be older White males who worked in offices while employees who were new and physically strong did more work on the floor or in training.

Joshi et al. (2010) posited that generational identity is at the root of many organizational challenges. Martin and Tulgan (2006) recommended addressing several multigenerational issues: (a) training young leaders in how to respectfully manage employees who could be the same age as their own parents or grandparents; (b) sharing the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of retiring employees; and (c) strengthening mid-level leaders who are Gen Xers and Millennials. Bishop (2004) observed that leadership in the future must involve all the generations. Mann (2022) conducted doctoral research on work values and concluded that while many people share common work values, there are statistically significant differences among the generations regarding work-life balance and professional development. Weeks and Schaffert (2019) conducted research to explore the differences among generational cohorts on how they define meaningful work. Findings show that each generation defines meaningful work differently, and they tend to have a negative perception of how other generations define it. Meaningful work



requires congruence with personal values and beliefs, so employees must be active participants in finding purpose in their work so they can see how their personal values and strengths influence their work and their relationships with coworkers.

Panwar and Mehta (2019) observed that many organizations prioritize finding and developing future leadership talent. One significant area of interest among future leaders is corporate social responsibility (Hassan & Kodwani, 2020). Millennials and Gen Z are more sensitive to ethical issues in the workplace than previous generations, and they have their own expectations about trust in the workplace (Lazányi & Bilan, 2017). Trust can be influenced by gender, race, education, and social connection. Leaders would benefit from addressing trust in the workplace and seeking to understand how generational differences impact trust. Some generations default to trust being demanded, while others believe trust should be earned; younger generations will respect and trust those in leadership once they believe leaders have earned it (Lazányi & Bilan, 2017).

Twenge et al. (2010) predicted one of the largest challenges for organizations will be the retirement of millions of Baby Boomers who will then be replaced by Gen Zers entering the workforce. However, many Baby Boomers are delaying retirement (Abercrombie, 2014; Zemke et al., 2022). This delay has left some Gen Xers languishing in middle management and Millennials underemployed (Zemke et al., 2022). Perilus (2020) posited that it is easier to motivate Baby Boomers and Gen X in the workplace than it is to motivate younger generations. Martin and Tulgan (2006) identified the “concept of ‘just-in-time loyalty’ and the idea that I’ll be loyal to an employer until I get a better deal” (p. 142). This is a significant shift from previous generations who were more likely to work for one company for their entire careers.

### *Intergenerational Conflict*

Intergenerational conflict is “differences in values, views, and ways of working, talking, and thinking that set people in opposition to one another and challenge organizational best interests” (Zemke et al., 2022, p. 12). Strauss and Howe (1991) said, “Much of the stress in cross-generational relationships arises when people of different ages expect others to behave in ways their peer personalities won’t allow” (p. 13). Intergenerational conflict can stymie progress in the workplace (Dittmann, 2005). Schroth (2019) observed the tendency for older generations to doubt younger generations. When Millennials entered the workforce, this tendency resulted in a high level of blame and stereotyping rather than finding constructive solutions. Every generation is narcissistic (Schroth, 2019). Frequently, older and younger generations compete for status and resources (Lyons et al., 2019).

As has been mentioned, multiple generations working together can be filled with conflict around how different ages groups think, behave, and use technology (Bencsik et al., 2016). Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) explored intergenerational conflict due to differing generational expectations for leaders and managers. Glass (2007) identified the following five areas for potential intergenerational conflict: expectations, work ethics, attitudes, conflicting perspectives, and different motivation. COVID-19 set the stage for a new set of intergenerational challenges due to remote work, and Urick (2020) posited that communication breakdowns will increase exponentially with more online work. Gen Z brings different expectations to work, so leaders must be ready to adapt to new expectations, particularly considering the increase in virtual teams (McGraw & Stewart, 2020). Understandably, employers are concerned about how to manage Gen Z employees because they perceive that Gen Z is unprepared to enter the workforce (Maloni et al., 2019). On the other end of the spectrum, younger employees tend to think that older

employees are unwilling or unable to change or try new things (Urick, 2020). Businesses can turn the potential for intergenerational conflict into a competitive advantage if they can be flexible, educate themselves, encourage healthy relationships among employees, and educate their employees about generational differences (Jiří, 2016).

### ***Knowledge Transfer***

Knowledge transfer is an urgent issue for organizations (DeMarino Watts, 2018; Joshi et al., 2010). More specifically, retiring employees preparing to leave an organization hold an immense wealth of organizational knowledge and a specific skill set. Prior to retirement, many employees are asked to share their knowledge and skills with new hires, which can be quite challenging due to generational attitudes, differences, and communication styles (Joshi et al., 2010). Effective knowledge transfer depends on effective interpersonal communication among generations (Kick et al., 2015). Bencsik et al. (2016) explored how Millennials and Gen Z interact in the workplace. They discovered that cooperation among different generations in the workplace can provide positive results for an organization. However, communication between generations is frequently fraught with conflict and misunderstanding.

Martin and Tulgan (2006) urged leaders to consider the role of Traditionalists as they exit the workplace. They hold significant organizational knowledge, and it would be a waste for them to retire without passing on their insights. Currently, some Baby Boomers are holding onto organizational knowledge and are unwilling to share their knowledge with younger employees. Stillman and Stillman (2017) cautioned that companies should be mindful of knowledge hoarding, particularly as Gen Z is pushing to get ahead at work. Communication styles shape how teams work together and the way they transfer knowledge among individual members (Bencsik et al., 2016; DeMarino Watts, 2018). Knowledge transfer is inherently challenging

because people mistrust knowledge that comes directly from others. Most individuals overinflate the importance of their own knowledge and do not want to hear the perspective of others. This poses a unique challenge for organizations because to effectively transfer their knowledge, they must find ways to communicate and build trust with one another (Bencsik et al., 2016.).

Mehra and Nickerson (2019) explored the relationship among generations and their expectations for organizational communication. Their research findings indicate that organizational communication is closely related to job satisfaction. More specifically, Millennial managers were found to be the least satisfied of any of the generations at work and that they defaulted to avoidance when interacting with older adults in the workplace (Mehra & Nickerson, 2019). This underscores the need for positive communication and understanding in the workplaces so employees can bridge generational divides.

### **Generational Theory**

Modern generational theory was borne out of a global context, and the primary thinkers, philosophers, and sociologists addressing generational theory came from Europe (Caballero & Baigorri, 2019; Popescu, 2019; Timonen & Conlon, 2015). In the early 20th century, there were two primary schools of thought around the notion of generations (Popescu, 2019). The first came from the positivist school of thought developed by August Comte, which focused on logic and quantitative data to determine how long it would take one generation to replace another. Comte described the ways in which each generation developed as its members adhered to specific beliefs (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The romantic-historical school of thought was developed by Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey identified how multiple generations coexisted yet members of the same generation could be defined as a unified group due to their social circumstances and shared experiences (Popescu, 2019). Another significant contributor to generational theory was José

Ortega y Gasset who was a Spanish philosopher in the 1930s. Ortega y Gasset characterized a generation as a group who had shared characteristics and who therefore formed a similar expression (Popescu, 2019). He declared that the generation was “the most important conception in history” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 59). Caballero and Baigorri (2019) credit Ortega y Gasset with the foundational work of viewing generational theory as a philosophy of history while Mannheim (1952) viewed generations sociologically.

In discussing the importance of understanding generations, McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009) stated:

The demographics give us the society by numbers—the what and who—while the sociographics define how we interact and operate as a society—the how and where.

Finally, the psychographics give insights into the values, motivators, and behaviors of the population—the why. An understanding of each of these factors, as expressed in the generations, gives a great snapshot of where our society has come from—and a forecast of the shape of things to come. (p. 36)

The concept of generation is ambiguous and difficult to define (Caballero & Baigorri, 2019; Timonen & Conlon, 2015). While many historical uses of the word generation refer to generations of families, the word generation can also be used to refer to a group of people born within a specific range of years. Magano et al. (2020) and Bennis and Thomas stated that the years in which people are born and grow up matter because of how those years impact their life experiences. Values are shaped primarily within the first decade of life (Codrington, 2008). Glass (2007) argued that the defining events that shape a generation occur during the developmental ages of five to 18 years. Generations are shaped by beliefs, political landscape, experiences, and historical events (Magano et al., 2020). When a significant event occurs—for example, the

Vietnam War—it impacts each generation differently based on what stage of life they are in at the time (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The assumption of generational theory is that one can generalize about generations to better understand individuals within each generation (Goh & Lee, 2018). Twenge et al. (2010) contended that every generation is shaped by a variety of forces, such as media, popular culture, economic events, and peers, which then help to create value systems. Because each generation experiences different forces at specific times, their values are distinct. However, as Lanier (2017) noted, “No generation is a monolith” (p. 288). Stillman and Stillman (2017) cautioned that birth years are a helpful starting place to understanding generations, but to truly get to know a generation, one must be willing to look at more than age and delve deeper into shared history. Many trends, expectations, and preferences exist, but people within the same generational cohort still retain individuality.

There are several ways of measuring and understanding generations (Carfagno, 2019). One way is to measure them as a cross-section and use a specific span of years to delineate generations. The other way is to study cross-temporally and to measure individuals from different birth year ranges at a similar stage of life (Twenge et al., 2015). Twenge (2017), one of the foremost researchers on current generations, conducted her research by doing longitudinal studies based on data from four databases. Twenge (2017) stated, “By comparing one generation to another at the same age, we can observe the views of young people about themselves, rather than relying on older people’s reflections on a time gone by” (p. 9). This approach provides clarity on the generational differences that occur from cultural change and not age.

In examining generational theory, one must acknowledge that people change over time and that there are multiple ways populations can change. Twenge et al. (2015) articulated the

three primary ways populations change as “time period (a cultural change that affects people of all ages), birth cohort/generation (a cultural change primarily affecting young people that is retained with age), and age” (p. 380). All these factors shape the way generations are formed and continue developing throughout their lives. The members of each generation share elements of identity that may feel more salient than what they have in common with members of their own family who are from different generations (Zemke et al., 2022). “Generational commonalities cut across racial, ethnic, and economic differences. As unique as people’s individual experiences may be...they all share with their generation what was in the air around them—news events, music, national catastrophes, heroes, and heroic efforts” (Zemke et al., 2022, p. 15). These factors help form generational values, beliefs, and attitudes. While individuals bring their own values to the workplace, those values are often shaped by the existing social, political, and economic forces of their generation (Dwivedula et al., 2019). Dittman (2005) described how events such as the civil rights movement or the Great Depression influenced a generation and why it stands to reason that identification with a generational cohort would impact how people approach work. Relationships among members of different generations in the workplace can be fraught with conflict.

### ***Mead’s Generation Gap***

Mead gave a series of lectures at The American Museum of Natural History in 1969 that were published the following year. She discussed the past, present, and future and how culture appeared to be changing in new ways. Mead (1970) made distinctions between different types of cultures, which she described as “*postfigurative*, in which children learn primarily from their forebears, *cofigurative*, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and *prefigurative*, in which adults learn also from their children” (p. 1). According to Mead (1970),

primitive societies were largely postfigurative and focused on the past for sources of authority. Larger civilizations that depended on the ability to change and adapt have been more commonly known as being cofigurative, where learning comes from multiple sources, and while elders in society still have a dominant role, there is more freedom for the young to learn from one another (Mead, 1970; Sellar, 2013). Mead then identified a new time in history in which youth have new levels of authority. Each type of culture arises simultaneously with rates of change, with postfigurative having the slowest rate of change and prefigurative having the most rapid rate of change. Mead (1970) acknowledged that a young person could tell an elder, “You have never been young in the world I am young in, and you never can be” (p. 49). She contended that the cultural shifts happening were unprecedented, planetary, and universal. The generation gap Mead observed was global because for the first time, a world community emerged due to shared knowledge from the media and a sense of shared danger from the Cold War.

There was a unique breaking point between generations because two groups that were closely related in age were extremely different, resulting in a sense of loneliness and isolation. Mead (1970) used the term “generation gap” to explain the difference in beliefs and attitudes between Baby Boomers and the Traditionalists before them (Duxbury & Higgins, 2005; Sellar, 2013). Mead (1970) stated, “This is the problem of the two generations. Once the fact of a deep, new, unprecedented world-wide generation gap is firmly established, in the minds of both the young and the old, communication can be established again” (p. 63). Both generations must be willing to engage and learn each other’s language and culture so they can communicate and work together. This theory provides a helpful framework for why the study of generations is so important: the reality of the gap between generations can cause conflict, lack of understanding, and the breakdown of communication.



### ***Mannheim's Theory of Generations***

Mannheim's essay, "The Problem of Generations," is considered by generational researchers to be the seminal work on generational theory (Abate et al, 2018; Aguas, 2019; Cassell, 2017; Codrington, 2008; Corsten, 1999; Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Joshi et al., 2010; Leslie et al., 2021; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Lyons et al., 2019; McGaha, 2018; Opermann & Kalmus, 2019; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Pilcher, 1994; Popescu, 2019; Scholz, 2019; Seamon, 2022; Spiegel, 2013; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generational scholars, particularly in Western contexts, agree that Mannheim's work is foundational to understanding current generational cohorts (Caballero & Baigorri, 2019). Timonen and Conlon (2015) stated, "Any attempt to progress and clarify the concept of generation has to make extensive reference to the original introduction of this concept to sociological vocabulary, namely Karl Mannheim" (p. 2). Popescu (2019) said, "Karl Mannheim...is considered by sociologists to be the main pillar that has contributed to the development of the sociology of generations as a distinct field of research" (p. 16). Opermann and Kalmus (2019) stated, "The theoretical lens of Karl Mannheim's sociology of generations has been widely acknowledged in conceptualizing generational consciousness and/or identity" (p. 232).

Mannheim was a German sociologist who wrote and defended several essays in the 1920s and 1930s as he sought to describe the patterns he observed in younger generations (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Pilcher, 1994). Codrington (2008) said, "He [Mannheim] outlined the idea that young generations are imperfectly socialized because of a gap between the ideals they have learned from older generations and the realities they experience" (p. 3). Mannheim (1952) argued there were practical implications to the problem of generations, which emerged when one was trying to understand social change. Mannheim described generations as being part of a

social category similar to sharing socioeconomic status and used the term “generation” in the way that “cohort” could be used to describe the sociological structure he observed (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Pilcher, 1994). According to Pilcher, cohort is more commonly used to describe a group of people who share a similar experience within the same timeframe.

Mannheim (1952) posited that generations were not a concrete group, meaning that not all individuals in the same generational cohort needed to know each other to have a sense of identity. Generational location is bound by time, lifespan, and a shared common place in history, which could limit one’s experience and make them more likely to have specific thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes (Abate et al., 2018; Mannheim, 1952; Scholz, 2019; Spiegel, 2013). Mannheim described social location as a limiting factor, saying that individuals born at a specific time were bound by certain socio-historical experiences. Although multiple generations may live together at the same time, the importance they place on significant events of that time may differ (Joshi et al., 2010).

### ***Global Generations***

When Mannheim was writing in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, generations were being shaped by direct experience with an event or their cultural context (Cassell, 2017). Mannheim’s (1952) theory was limited by the notion of generational identity being formed only through direct experience, and he described how young people of the same generation born in China and in Prussia would not share common generation location across national borders because their experiences were so different. Edmunds and Turner (2005) identified the tendency for generational literature to focus on national generations because of the national focus of Mannheim’s influential work. However, theorists who came after Mannheim considered the role of mediated experiences where people could learn about an event through the media. In the

1960s, the news media began to share global issues more broadly, and people in many countries were being shaped by the same news and activism, thus creating the first global generation (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). It was during this same time that Mead (1970) identified the profound and global generation gap between Baby Boomers and the Traditionalists who preceded them.

Sachs (2020) described ages of globalization and said, “In each age, human beings have become more aware of the wider world” (p. 2). Sachs went on to explain how technological and demographic changes have expanded the need for global cooperation and interdependence. Edmunds and Turner (2005) stated that “globalization cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the impact of active global generations” (p. 572). Espinoza and Ukleja (2016) contended that if Mannheim were currently writing, he may focus more on globalization and how technology is influencing worldviews to a greater extent than geography. Edmunds and Turner argued that global communication and media have allowed events to be broadcast more widely, thus creating a shared experience and shared cultural trauma. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 created a new global generation because people around the world watched as events unfolded in real time, with many experiencing collective trauma regardless of what country they were in. In the same way that the 9/11 attacks created a new global generation, it is reasonable to argue that the COVID-19 pandemic could also create a new global generation.

### ***Generational Identity***

The process of creating generational consciousness is rooted in Mannheim’s (1952) tenets (Lyons et al., 2019; Opermann & Kalmus, 2019). Individuals begin to form generational identity through their lived experiences as well as what they observe in others. This identity formation is solidified as they discuss memories of historic events that have shaped them in a

similar phase in life. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) explained that worldview is shaped by what happens in formational years, and as a result, generations have a specific personality. Strauss and Howe (1991) referred to Dilthey's (1911/1957) concept of "Weltanschauung," which Strauss and Howe describe as "a web of beliefs and attitudes about ultimate questions that each generation carries with it from rising adulthood through old age" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 66).

Some individuals within a generation may not feel a sense of generational identity with their fellow cohort (Larson, 2014). However, each person within a generation carries their own unique identity, and they have a sense of collective identity for the group as well. As individuals within groups make sense of their shared experiences, they move from individual perception to group knowledge (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). Individual emotional states influence other members of the group through emotional contagion. Corsten (1999) explored the notion of cognitive background in understanding generational identity and how the convergence of biographical, generational, and historical time influence identity. Even those who fall outside the group generational norm are aware of the ways they do not fit (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Lyons et al. (2019) distinguished between generational identity and age-based identity. They proposed that generational identity—specifically how it plays out in the workplace—is swayed by the workgroup, the organization, the extra-organizational environment, and society. Joshi et al. (2010) assumed that multiple generations exist in organizations and that multiple generational identities exist in organizations. This is a helpful distinction in understanding generations in the workplace.

### ***Social Learning Theory***

Another theory that helps frame generational theory is social learning theory, which was developed by Bandura (1977) to describe the importance of observation, modeling, and imitating

others. Bandura's theory focused on how cognitive and environmental factors work together to affect behavior (Driscoll, 2014) and how self-control helps to regulate behavior (Knowles et al., 2015). Bandura explored the roles of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation in helping individuals adapt to their environment. Social learning theory frames how people interact with one another in the workplace, both in how social dynamics impact behavior and in how a supervisor can promote certain behaviors by giving approval or recognition to an employee (Knowles et al., 2015). Social learning theory is also an element in forming generational identity as people look to their peers to determine what behaviors are normative. When discussing generational cohorts, Dobewall et al. (2017) explained how a sense of belonging shapes how individuals develop their values. They are socially located within a historical context during formative years. Pletka (2007) discussed how people acquire knowledge through interacting with their senses and reflecting on experiences. Those shared experiences and reflection form the foundation of the environment that shapes their overall collective identity.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

Joshi et al. (2010) explored social identity theory and how generational cohort identity plays into a larger sense of collective identity. As members of the same generational cohort share similar experiences in the workplace, they will have an even stronger collective identity. Social identity plays a significant role in generational identity (Lyons et al., 2019). According to Lyons et al. (2019), social identity is characterized by a sense of belonging to a group, as well as the importance of membership within that group. Social comparison determines the in-group or out-group. Each generation has its own "sense of social community" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 65). Kleissner and Jahn (2020) observed the tendency for in-group favoritism among different

generations, noticing the frequency with which one age group will view itself more positively than they view other age groups. Ultimately, people desire to have a positive social identity.

Avolio et al. (2004) explored the work of Tajfel (1972) about social identity theory, which describes how individuals find a sense of collective identity with a group. In that case, people are proud to belong to the group and see group membership as important to them. Tajfel described a sense of belonging and the type of emotional investment people have in that belonging (Avolio et al., 2004). Social identity theorists posit that social and personal identities are factors in workplace engagement and motivation (Holmes & Howard, 2022). Individual choices can help moderate behavior.

### ***Critique of Generational Theory***

Current social dynamics indicate that most people in the United States have a general sense of generations, which often reveals itself in the way individuals describe those outside their generation. Codrington (2008) acknowledged that generational theory can be contentious, particularly because of how generational labels have been applied without a deep understanding of what makes a generation. Popescu (2019) acknowledged a critique of Mannheim's (1952) theory in saying "the definition he [Mannheim] gives to the concept of generation has created confusion, failing to provide a clear distinction between the terms cohort and generation" (p. 20). While there is hype in popular culture around generational differences in the workplace, Macky et al. (2008) recommended that leaders expend more effort on understanding employee differences based on their maturity and career stage than on their generational differences. Lyons and Kuron (2013) offered a strong critique of generational cohort theory in saying that many studies on the topic are fractured, contradictory, and filled with methodological inconsistencies.

They went on to describe how most generational research focused on birth cohorts without an emphasis on social forces and how they interact with birth cohorts over time.

Mass media suggest there are inherent differences between generations and that as a result leaders need to adapt and manage individual employees accordingly (Murray et al., 2011). Murray et al. challenged this perspective in saying that evidence of generational differences is mostly anecdotal and not rooted in rigorous research. Their research findings do not support the concept of generational cohorts who are shaped by large scale events such as the Vietnam War and the Great Depression. They concluded that generational cohorts have the issue of limited relevance in the workplace and often exacerbate stereotypes about older and younger coworkers. Parry and Urwin (2011) said that generational cohorts have not yet reached the threshold of consideration for a diversity factor in the workplace. They claim that academic research has shown limited differences in work values among generations because most research does not distinguish between age and generation when discussing values. Parry and Urwin also described how the theory of generations has often been used by advertisers to capitalize on popular culture or nostalgia to make sales. Berge and Berge (2019) observed there is a lack of empirical evidence about generational differences in the workplace and posited that leaders should focus more on the similar ways employees learn rather than on how they differ. Data indicate that maturity and workplace experience may have more to do with workplace expectations than generational cohort (Moore et al., 2015).

Future research should include generational analysis of subgroups within cohorts (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This concept was echoed by Leslie et al. (2021) who posited that there should be further exploration of generation units or subgroups. McGaha (2018) cautioned people to explore the difference between perceived and actual generational differences, which underscored

the need for rigorous research in this area. Strauss and Howe (1991) did extensive research on generations and acknowledged their own shortcomings in the limited focus they have given to women and minorities. They recognize that at times they had less access to information or exemplars outside of the more commonly known White male individuals who typified a generation.

### **Modern Generations**

This literature review is focused on modern generations in the United States after the industrial age. Modern generations (Table 1), born between 1925 and present, have been given different names and ranges of birth years depending on the theorist discussing them. Strauss and Howe (1991) provided a comprehensive exploration of the history of America and its generations beginning in 1584. They observed that in the United States since the 1920s, each new cohort group has been named in some way. Countries outside the United States have different labels for generations based on their own historical and culture events. For example, in China, Chen and Lian (2015) discussed the Cultural Revolution generation (born 1949-1966), the Transitional generation (born 1967-1978), and the Millennial generation (born 1979-1990), all of which have been influenced by significant cultural events. In Spain, Caballero and Baigorri (2019) identified Spanish generations in their so-called Silent Generation born 1914–1928 and Francoist Generation born 1929–1943, all of which were influenced by civil war and dictatorial rule. Currently, as the world is globally interconnected, there is more and more overlap among global generations.



**Table 1***Modern Generations in the United States (1920–2022)*

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Birth Years</b>	<b>Defining Events</b>	<b>Defining Characteristics</b>
<b>Traditionalists</b> <i>Greatest Generation, Veterans, Seniors, Loyalists, GI Joes/GI Janes, Schwarzkopf Generation</i>	1925–1945	The Great Depression, World War II	Doing what is right, supporting institutions, loyalty, chain of command
<b>Baby Boomers</b> <i>Cold War Generation, Growth Economy Generation, Woodstock Generation, Young Boomers</i>	1946–1964	Vietnam War; Cold War, Woodstock, Civil Rights, 1960s Cultural Revolution	Optimism, competition, change of command
<b>Generation X</b> <i>Baby Bust, 13ers, Latchkey Kids</i>	1965–1979	Technological advances of cable, VCRs, video games	Independent, skeptical, parental absence, distrust of institutions, self-sufficient, resourceful
<b>Millennials</b> <i>Generation Y, Generation Next, Nexters, Net Generation</i>	1980-1995	Columbine school shooting, Terrorist attacks of 9/11	Collaboration, fairness, diversity, realistic, transparency, digital immigrants, optimistic, multitaskers
<b>Generation Z</b> <i>Gen Z, iGen</i>	1996–2010	COVID-19 pandemic, iPhone, internet access	Digital natives, diversity, equity individualism, corporate social responsibility, pragmatic, loyalty

*Note.* Adapted from Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin & Tulgan, 2006; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Tapscott, 2009; Twenge, 2017; Zemke et al., 2022.

### ***Cuspers***

Strauss and Howe (1991) said, “Generations can be imprecise at the boundaries” (p. 59) and acknowledge those on the edge may fall into both categories or more strongly identify with one generation over the other. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) created the label “cuspers” to describe people who were born on the edges of generations and who find themselves caught between two different generations. Arsenault (2004) used the term “tweeners” to describe the same social category. Zemke et al. (2022) intentionally overlap the beginning and end years of

each generation and said, “If we wouldn’t utterly confuse everyone, we would overlap them by three or four years” (p. 4) because they recognize the natural blurring of lines between generations. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) identified three groups of cuspers. First are the Traditionalist/Baby Boomer cuspers born between 1940–1945. Next are the Baby Boomer/Gen Xer Cuspers born between 1960–1965, and last are the Gen Xer/Millennial Cuspers born between 1975–1980. Cuspers can mediate and translate between different generations (Codrington, 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and are able to identify with more than one generation.

### ***Traditionalists***

Lancaster and Stillman (2002) identified Traditionalists as those born between 1900–1945. Other generational researchers use a narrower span of years. Strauss and Howe (1991) describe the generation born in the United States between 1925–1942 as the Silent Generation. Dimock (2019) also calls them the Silent Generation and uses 1928–1945. Other generational researchers in the United States give birth years of 1934–1945 and call this generation Traditionalists (Zemke et al., 2022). Tom Brokaw referred to them as the “Greatest Generation” while others call them Veterans, Seniors, Loyalists, and GI Joes/GI Janes. Martin and Tulgan (2006) used the term Schwarzkopf Generation because they believe General Schwarzkopf typified what this generation stands for. Traditionalists were shaped by the imperatives of doing what is right and taking command of difficult situations. They tended to be focused on others and can appreciate the values, flaws, and mindsets of the generations preceding and following them (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Traditionalists are focused on the past and value consistency (Zemke et al., 2022).

Traditionalists came of age during world wars and the Great Depression and often learned how

to do without (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They bring an important work ethic to the workplace due to their consistency, loyalty, and willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done (Zemke et al., 2022). Traditionalists had to put aside individual preferences to support their families and work with larger institutions. They continue to have faith in institutions and are very patriotic (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Due to the higher number of Traditionalists who served in world wars, their leadership approach was focused on chain of command. Traditionalists accept that leaders lead, and troops obey. While few Traditionalists remain in the current workforce, those who do add an unprecedented fifth generation to the generational mix.

### ***Baby Boomers***

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Tapscott, 2009; Twenge, 2017). These years are closely echoed by Strauss and Howe (1991) and Zemke et al. (2022) who identified Baby Boomers as being born between 1943–1960. They could also be called the “Cold War Generation” or the “Growth Economy Generation” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 11). Francis and Hoefel (2018) used an even larger birth year range of 1940–1959. Due to the wide span of years and differences between older and younger Boomers, Martin and Tulgan (2006) posited that Baby Boomers should be divided into two distinct groups: the Woodstock Generation (born 1946–1953) and the Young Boomers (born 1954–1964).

Baby Boomers were named after the dramatic increase in birth rates after World War II. The boom was the largest in the United States, Canada, and Australia, but it was not ubiquitous. The Baby Boomer generation was significantly impacted by two different wars: what their parents experienced during World War II (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) and what they experienced during the Vietnam War (Zemke et al., 2022). When describing the Vietnam War, Zemke et al. (2022) said, “There is no simple way to talk about what Vietnam meant—and means—to this

generation. What we can say is that its effect has been profound and divisive” (p. 67). Vietnam was a defining moment for Boomers, and they came of age in a contentious time and rebelled against the institutions of previous generations (Codrington, 2008).

Baby Boomers came of age during the era of television, and the shows they watched helped form their generational personality (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Boomers tend to be aware of the uniqueness of their generation and how they differ from Traditionalists (Strauss & Howe, 1991). While Traditionalists were focused on the global world at war, Baby Boomers turned back to their own nation and wanted to fix America’s problems (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They were optimistic and competitive and had opportunities to pursue their dreams. Their personal identities have been profoundly shaped by the type of work they did, but many of them realized over time that they were more loyal to their workplace than their workplace was to them (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Boomers clashed with Traditionalists over leadership style in the workplace and desired a change in command (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They pushed back against traditional systems and institutions. Baby Boomers have had more years of work experience than younger generations and will remind younger generations that doing things quickly is not always the most effective. They appreciate the strategy of taking time to think through options rather than acting immediately. Boomers have worked hard to get where they are and desire to be respected and valued for what they have done (Zemke et al., 2022).

### ***Generation X***

After the baby boom came a sharp decline in birth rates, which resulted in the “Baby Bust,” a name that never gained popularity (Tapscott, 2009, p. 14). The generation was instead named Gen X based on the title of a book by Douglas Copeland where the X referred to a group who felt marginalized from society and entered the workforce and discovered that the desirable

jobs were already taken. Gen X was born between 1965–1979 (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Twenge, 2017). Strauss and Howe (1991) named this generation “13ers” for the 13th generation in the United States and identified birth years of 1961–1981. Zemke et al. (2022) and Francis and Hoefel (2018) said Gen X began in 1960. Unfortunately, Gen X has “been perceived negatively almost from birth” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 12). Lancaster and Stillman (2002) referred to Gen X as the most misunderstood generation.

Gen Xers had to grow up quickly in an era of parental absence. While their Boomer parents were immersed in the cultural revolution of the 1960s, these children were often left alone and unsupervised. The once achievable American dream was perceived to be out of reach, and Gen X was simply trying to survive (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). Their childhood pushed them to be independent and skeptical, characteristics that were reinforced by scandals that embroiled such institutions as the presidency, corporate America, and organized religion (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Several disparaging terms have been used to refer to Gen X, including latchkeys, boomerangs, and throwaways (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Zemke et al. (2022) observed the impact of parental absence in the lives of Gen Xers from divorce and from both parents working. The divorce rate in the United States tripled while Gen X was growing up (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), which caused a natural distrust of personal relationships and institutions. Gen X has experienced many economic challenges from the Enron scandal to the financial crisis of 2008 which have underscored their need to take care of themselves and not depend on their company to care for them (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They are self-sufficient survivors because they have had to be (Zemke et al., 2022). Gen X was shaped by the technological advances of cable television, VCRs, video games, pagers, and personal computers

(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They had access to information in myriad ways, which contributed to their independence.

In the workplace, members of Gen X wanted to lead themselves and often conflicted with the *chain* of command style of Traditionalists and the *change* of command style of Baby Boomers (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Gen X is resourceful and has a high degree of confidence in their ability to get things done. These different leadership approaches can contribute to intergenerational conflict in the workplace. Martin and Tulgan (2006) recommended a few key strategies for working with Gen X such as providing flexible work options, access to decision makers and mentors, and many opportunities for professional development. Gen X wants to contribute and be appreciated and recognized for their unique contributions.

### ***Millennials***

Millennials are generally understood to be born between 1980–1995 (Twenge, 2017) or 1981–1996 (Dimock, 2019). While the dates of birth vary slightly depending on the researcher and source, it is commonly agreed that Millennials were born in the 1980s and early 1990s (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Tapscott (2009) declared this generation the Net Generation with the birth year range from 1977–1997, but this generational name did not stick. Zemke et al. (2022) called them Generation Next or Nexters. Some called them Generation Y or the Echo Boom (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Twenge and Campbell (2008) referred to Generation Y as Generation Me. Ultimately, Millennials named themselves in 1997 when Peter Jennings interviewed them online for ABC News (Zemke et al., 2022).

The Millennial generation benefited from the popularity of having and raising children. Clothing stores started having new lines of children's clothing, parents were very present in their

children's lives, and movies were made specifically for children (Zemke et al., 2022). Parents of Millennials pushed them and coached them to be skilled and capable so they would have resumes that would set them up for success (Martin & Tulgan, 2006; Spiegel, 2013). Parents sought to protect their Millennial children from the social ills of the 1970s (Strauss & Howe, 1991) and wanted to create a healthy and safe environment in which they could grow. With a consistent message to follow their passion, many Millennials have traveled extensively and pursued educational opportunities to achieve this goal (Spiegel, 2013).

Although raised to believe they could be anything they wanted to be, violence and fear have shaped the Millennial generation. The oldest Millennials were in high school when the Columbine school shooting occurred in 1999 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Two years later, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 became a defining moment for Millennials in the United States (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). The Millennial worldview shifted as they realized the world was a dangerous place. The aftermath of such incredible violence shaped their generation as they began to see violence "as a call for civic engagement and collective action" (Zemke et al., 2022, p. 126).

Millennials believe that Gen X and Baby Boomers are standing in the way of progress when it comes to racial and ethnic diversity (Deloitte, 2021). Because they have been exposed to diversity through travel and technology, they expect their workplaces to reflect the diversity they have experienced (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). "The idea of fairness and fair play in the workplace has a high valence for Nexters [Millennials]. Seeing peers treated better—or worse—than they themselves are treated put them on edge" (Zemke et al., 2022, p. 262). Over half of Millennials observe systemic racism as widespread in society (Deloitte, 2021). They also have a high level of concern about the way wealth is unequally distributed. Millennials are wary of large institutions such as the government.

Millennials have been shaped by the generations who preceded them. They have the loyalty influence of Traditionalists, the optimism of Boomers, and some skepticism from Gen X, which have combined to make Millennials realistic (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Millennials' preferred leadership style is far more focused on collaboration than command. Martin and Tulgan (2006) observed the realistic approach and ownership that Millennials feel toward their own development. As Millennials entered the workforce, they had less loyalty to their workplaces than previous generations did (Moore et al., 2015). Millennials are stereotyped as lazy or uncommitted, but a more appropriate response would be to identify the logical social changes that are happening in the workplace. Over time, organizations have reduced job security, so it is understandable that younger employees would not remain loyal to organizations that are not loyal to them (Valcour, 2013). Millennials do not expect to stay in the same job for years and years; instead, they look for opportunities to enhance their skills and become more valuable for future workplaces.

Transparency is a high value for Millennials. Leaders will engender trust if they get to know their Millennials employees as individuals, treat them as colleagues, and give them frequent constructive feedback (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). They can create a high trust environment by being transparent, communicating openly, and holding people accountable (Spiegel, 2013). Spiegel (2013) said, "Trust is a currency that Millennials value highly. Once trust is broken, the currency's value drops significantly" (p. 38). Millennials care about following through on commitments and being honest (Tapscott, 2009).

Somewhat paradoxically, Twenge and Campbell (2008) determined that Millennials had higher levels of self-esteem, narcissism, anxiety, and depression than previous generations. As a result, leaders in the workplace should anticipate that Millennials will have extremely high



expectations for work and a significant need for affirmation while simultaneously struggling to receive critical feedback. Lyons and Kuron (2013) also observed the trend of Millennials being more self-focused and high in self-esteem while suffering from anxiety and depression. Mental health is an important issue for Millennials, and according to a Deloitte (2021) global survey of Millennials, about one-third reported taking time off work because of the anxiety and stress they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Millennials place a high value on flexibility and adaptability and believe those characteristics will be necessary for the future success of organizations (Deloitte, 2021). Work-life balance is a priority as is promoting physical and mental health. Millennials want choices about how and when they communicate and do not want the time or location to impede their freedom (Pletka, 2007). They work to live and appreciate doing meaningful and challenging work (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). They are particularly drawn to nonprofit work but are concerned about the feasibility of remaining in the nonprofit sector due to low pay (McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2016).

### ***Generation Z***

Twenge (2017) coined the term “iGen” to refer to the generation born in 1995 and later. From Twenge’s perspective, the “i” in iGen refers to the internet, which became broadly accessible in 1995. The “i” could also refer to the individualism that defines this generation. Twenge asserted that Gen Z would never stick as a name for the emerging generation. However, the name Gen Z appears to fit this generation, and Parker and Igielnik (2020) found that Gen Z has become the most popular name for them. Stillman and Stillman (2017) believed that Gen Z should be a name and not a label, particularly because people in that generation do not want to be labeled. Brenner et al. (2021) referred to this group as Zoomers. Due to global connectivity and internet access, it would stand to reason that Gen Z would be the same worldwide, but Scholz

(2019) cautioned that Gen Z is not a monolith. Scholz described that from a European perspective, there are differences among various countries and while “Z” logically follows after X and Y, it could also stand for *zeitgeist*. According to Popescu (2019):

The meaning of *zeitgeist* was assigned to the concept of generation by European sociologists who tried to study the field of generational theories at the beginning of the 20th century, considering that this domain represents a mix of explanatory principle and measurement unit of social change. (p. 23)

Twenge (2017) discovered a surprising trend when conducting generational research in recent decades. Historically, while generational characteristics tended to change gradually, when doing longitudinal generational studies, Twenge observed a rapid change in the behavior and mental health of Gen Z. The emerging generation thinks and behaves differently from previous generations (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). One of the biggest reasons Gen Z is different is due to the advancement of technology. It is worth noting the words of Mead (1970) in referring to the generation gap between Traditionalists and Baby Boomers when she observed, “Today’s children have grown up in a world their elders never knew” (p. 50). There is a parallel between the profound generational shifts Mead observed in the late 1960s and the even more pronounced shift between Millennials and Gen Z.

**Impact of Technology.** Technology has changed how people parent their children. Parents suddenly have access to an overwhelming amount of information and advice on how to best raise their kids, which has brought protectiveness to new heights (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). Stillman and Stillman (2017) used the term “phigital” to describe Gen Z, combining physical and digital because now there is no longer a separation between the two; Gen Z lives simultaneously in a physical and virtual world (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Technology has also

created what author Tapscott (2009) called a generation lap, meaning that Gen Z has access to knowledge on important things, and rather than having a gap with previous generations, they are lapping and surpassing previous generations (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). Businesses can pay attention to the example of Gen Z and think strategically about how they integrate technology and remove barriers between the physical and digital world. Older generations may question the technological expectations of Gen Z because they are such a profound shift from their own experience (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Gen Z has been unfairly derided for having such high expectations, but “Gen Z just has *different* expectations based on what they’ve *always* known and are accustomed to experiencing” (Dorsey & Villa, 2020, p. 57). The gap between Millennials and Gen Z is the most profound generation gap in recent history (Hardin, 2020).

**Digital Natives.** Gen Z is the first generation to be digital natives, and they have never known life without access to a smartphone or the internet (Chillakuri, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020; Lanier, 2017; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). In an article about the changing tide of education, Prensky (2001) coined the term “digital native” to refer to youth who grow up with constant access to technology. Prensky described the cultural shift as a singularity, indicating the ways Gen Z changed the educational system to such a degree there was no way to go back (Evans & Robertson, 2020). Gen Z has been significantly shaped by the proliferation of the smartphone. Stillman and Stillman (2017) said, “Technology is not something separate, but rather integrated into everything we [Generation Z] do. It’s an extension of our brain. It’s who we are” (p. 70). Gen Z consumes information more quickly than any other previous generation (Lanier, 2017), and as a result they can place a higher value on speed than accuracy (Desai & Lele, 2017). This poses a challenge because while Gen Z has easy access to information, they do not always discern credible sources (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). This is an important distinction

between Millennials and Gen Z. Unlike previous generations, social media is at the center of Gen Z's social world (Marron, 2015), and they bring a level of sophistication to the way they use technology (Singh & Dangmei, 2016).

Instant global connectivity and access to technology have created a faster pace of life for members of Gen Z (Masso et al., 2018; Vitelar, 2019). There are benefits from technology, but a study by Hunt et al. (2018) showed the causal relationship between social media use and increased mental health challenges. By limiting social media use, Gen Zers have enhanced wellbeing over time and decreased levels of depression and loneliness (Hunt et al., 2018). Stahl and Literat (2022) conducted an analysis of TikTok videos tagged #GenZ and found that Gen Zers express themselves in a contradictory way: they are simultaneously powerful and confident while also being vulnerable and somewhat damaged. Consistent access to technology has resulted in multitasking and lower levels of focused attention (Turner, 2015a). Gen Zers struggle to think beyond the question and apply what they have learned to new situations (Ransdell et al., 2011). Turkle (2011) observed that members of Gen Z need to develop their deep thinking and reflection skills. The term "absent presence" can describe being physically present in one space while communication and social engagement are in a separate location (Turner, 2015b). The impact of technology and social media on Gen Z are yet to be fully understood and are worthy of future research.

**Digital Immigrants.** Kurt et al. (2013) described digital immigrants as people who are not digital natives but who have needed to adapt to use technology to keep up with the times. Older generations are digital immigrants because while they did not grow up with access to digital technology, it is a significant part of their lives (Prensky, 2001). Digital immigrants can be teachers who adapt what they do in the classroom to meet the needs of their tech-savvy

students or parents who want to communicate effectively with their children. While digital immigrants were not born into the digital world, they have learned how to use technology to make their lives better (Evans & Robertson, 2020; Kurt et al., 2013). Prensky (2001) acknowledged that digital immigrants can adapt to new technology but will always retain at least a trace of their “native accent.” Digital immigrants can become extremely proficient with technology use because of their propensity for learning to apply new information and their willingness to rely on other people to help them learn (Evans & Robertson, 2020). Baby Boomers (Ransdell et al., 2011) are more skilled at applying knowledge and thinking deeply about the questions that have been asked than younger generations. Baby Boomers should be encouraged to grow in confidence about their abilities and contributions.

A digital divide is expanding among generations. Twenge (2017) said that Gen Z was radically different from those who are just a few years older. Mead (1970) said that young people “can see that their elders are groping, that they are managing clumsily and often unsuccessfully the tasks imposed on them by the new conditions” (p. 59). Although these words were not written about the internet or a smartphone, the notion of older generations struggling to adapt to new changes remains true.

### ***Generation Z Formative Events***

As has been mentioned, Gen Z, born after 1995, has been raised in an environment where their country has consistently been involved in wars overseas (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Terrorism, climate crises, and the financial crisis all contributed to the pragmatism of Gen Z (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). School shootings will continue to have a significant impact on Gen Z as gun violence and fear have become normalized (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Thus, members of Gen Z have experienced the world as scary or unsafe but may also have a broader perspective

of global citizenship (Turner, 2015a). Gen Z in the United States is more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). According to Parker and Igielnik (2020), 22% of Gen Z have at least one parent who is an immigrant, and around 6% of Gen Zers were born outside the United States. Members of Gen Z grew up in a culture of safety within the family, where overprotective parenting inadvertently took away their opportunity to learn life skills (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). They tend to be the least patriotic generation and no longer believe in the American dream (Grow & Yang, 2015; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Gen Z has watched their parents struggle through an economic recession and are likely financially pragmatic as a result (Fратиčová & Kirchmayer, 2018).

Schroth (2019) identified formative events that have shaped Gen Z as students and future employees. Access to smart phones, exposure to social media, watching social justice movements, and being raised in a culture of safety within the family have all contributed to how Gen Z will approach work. Research has shown Gen Z to be more inclusive of and passionate about diversity (generational, racial, and sexual) and more willing to challenge traditional gender roles than Millennials (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Marron, 2015). According to research by Brenner et al. (2021) and Twenge (2017), Gen Z is growing up and maturing about three years more slowly than previous generations and have less work experience. These realities provide unique opportunities for mentoring and job training as Gen Z enters the workforce (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

**Generation Z and Education.** Gen Zers highly value education. They are more likely to have at least one college-educated parent than previous generations. According to Parker and Igielnik (2020), 44% of Gen Zers in 2019 lived with a parent with at least a bachelor's degree. Members of Gen Z believe that education is vital to personal success and that a society that is

educated is better than one that is not (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, they also observe that the quality of education is declining and access to good education is lacking. Members of Gen Z articulate fear that traditional education has failed to prepare them to deal with real challenges. As a result, they will be drawn to workplace environments that foster professional development, learning, growth, and mentoring to help bridge the gaps left by their traditional education (Singh & Dangmei, 2016).

Seemiller et al. (2019) conducted research on how Gen Z college students prefer to learn and found that social motivation and environmental factors motivate Gen Z to meet their goals. Teachers need to understand how Gen Z is different from Millennials so they can use the most meaningful pedagogy to promote learning (Shatto, 2017). Gen Z enjoys social connection but are less likely than Millennials to enjoy group projects (Schlee et al., 2020). Some of the dislike of group projects may come from Gen Z's desire for accountability and their commitment to ensuring every team member has made an equitable contribution. Barhate and Dirani (2022) made a similar observation about the struggles of Gen Z when required to work on teams that are ineffective. Gen Z appears to want independence and self-reliance while simultaneously valuing social connection with coworkers.

In a study conducted by Seemiller et al. (2019), Gen Z students in the United States and Brazil were asked to identify their personal characteristics. Only a third of students described themselves as inspiring or visionary which has implications for their future at work. The World Economic Forum (2016) identified creativity as an essential career skill, but many Gen Zers do not view themselves as being creative or innovative (as cited in Seemiller et al., 2019). Gen Z will need developmental opportunities to expand their creativity or perception of it. High school teachers have noticed that Gen Z is very serious and is so focused on the future they can miss

what is happening in the moment (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). Teachers said that Gen Z high school students worry about things that were not on the radar of previous generations. Gen Z is known for having high levels of stress and anxiety. According to a global survey, almost half describe themselves as being stressed all or most of the time (Deloitte, 2022). Many members of Gen Z do not feel adequately prepared to be successful at work, despite their high levels of education (Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019).

### ***Generation Z in the Workplace***

While there are preliminary indications of what Gen Z may be like in the workplace, much of the research about Gen Z is based on studies of Gen Z high school students projecting their future expectations for the workplace. There are gaps in the research about members of Gen Z who have had previous employment. Employees in the youngest generation view work differently from previous generations (Grow & Yang, 2018). While older generations held work as central to their lives, Gen Z sees work as an aspect of their lives but not the most vital element (Anderson et al., 2017).

Moore et al. (2015) defined workplace expectations as “the beliefs one holds regarding what he or she thinks the company will provide in terms of areas such as pay, benefits, career development, training, and job security” (p. 348). Gen Z has idealistic expectations for work. Therefore, managing these expectations will be vital for the success of organizations and Gen Zers (Schroth, 2019). Gen Z tends to assume their work will be meaningful and that managers will consistently be open to hearing their feedback. Managers who are unable to manage these expectations may observe higher levels of turnover among Gen Z employees, as well as lower levels of commitment to the organization.



**Flexibility at Work.** Organizations must be ready to adapt to their newest workforce. Early research indicates a considerable gap between the expectations of Gen Z in entering the workforce and what is delivered (Chillakuri, 2020). Leaders should expect Gen Z to be a different type of professional than previous generations (Wiedmer, 2015). Gen Z will likely eschew a 40-hour work week and will instead seek flexibility to become subject matter experts, freelance contractors, and problem solvers (Wiedmer, 2015). According to Valcour (2013), flexibility is rooted in having autonomy over one's working conditions and having the respect of one's supervisor. Research by Dorsey and Villa (2020) prior to COVID-19 indicated that Gen Z was more excited about a flexible work schedule than pay. COVID-19 presented new challenges and realities for the workforce, including an increasing number of individuals working from home. Gen Z expects employers to allow for flexibility to have agency in when and how and where they work (Chillakuri, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Gen Z desires flexibility at work, and many expect to work in a country outside their country of origin at some point in their career (Goh & Lee, 2018).

**Diversity at Work.** Gen Z is bringing new cultural norms to the workplace, specifically regarding diversity and digital access (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Jancourt (2020) highlighted the need for psychological safety, choice, and inclusive environments within the workplace. Gen Z is very passionate about social change and seeks purpose in work (Grow & Yang, 2015). Gen Z is highly motivated by not letting others down and by advocating for causes they believe in (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They feel a strong sense of ownership over causes that are important to them.

**Professional Development at Work.** Gen Z views work as one of their primary ways to make the world a better place (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). As workplace leaders learn more

about Gen Z, they will be better prepared to help their employees flourish. Gen Z wants opportunities for advancement and professional development. At the same time, leaders should be prepared to address the high levels of anxiety Gen Z has around workforce performance and expectations (Wilkie, 2019; Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019). The reputation of their company matters to Gen Z. Gen Z will work hard and believe they should advance quickly at work (Desai & Lele, 2017; Goh & Lee, 2018). Dorsey and Villa (2020) found that “what worked to attract, keep, and motivate Millennials as employees and customers does not work as well—if at all—with Gen Z” (p. 21). For example, Gen Z wants a quick job application process that they can complete from their phone, and their perception of how long an application will take to complete will help or hinder the likelihood of applying for a job (Dorsey & Villa, 2020).

If Gen Z understands why they are being asked to perform certain tasks, there is an increasing likelihood their motivation will also increase (Schroth, 2019). Gen Z has a particular interest in seeing the results of their labor (Maloni et al., 2019). Leaders have a responsibility to motivate their followers and to communicate the significance of the roles their followers fulfill (Pradham & Jena, 2019). When employees see their work as important and part of a bigger picture, they are more likely to be innovative and engage in meaningful work. Leaders can be more successful if they find ways to connect their corporate goals with the individual and personal goals of their newest workforce (Panwar & Mehta, 2019). Fratičová and Kirchmayer (2018) argued for the need for research to understand Gen Z’s barriers to workplace motivation. Early research that made projections about the future of work indicated that happiness was important to Gen Z, and they expected their workplace to make them feel happy and help their dreams come true (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Gen Z desires meaningful work and expects to have fulfilling jobs where they can integrate work and passion so that their workplace aligns with their

personal life mission (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Workplace engagement is an element of meaningful work that goes beyond motivation and values; it deals with the ability of an individual to bring one's full self to work (Schullery, 2013). For leaders to maximize employee engagement, they need to understand what increases or diminishes engagement. Gen Z will easily quit a job if they do not enjoy it. This is in alignment with research by Bohdziewicz (2016), which indicated that lifestyle is a significant career anchor for Gen Z because they place a high value on work-life balance.

Relationships are a driving force for Gen Z (Hope, 2016). Three quarters of Gen Z want to make a difference in the life of another person and would not want to let people down. They are likely to advocate for the things they believe in (Hope, 2016). Mahmoud et al. (2021) explored workplace motivation and concluded that intrinsic motivation is more important to Gen Z's approach to work than it is for Gen X or Millennials. "When you show employees you care about them, they will, in turn, care more about the company, coworkers, and even their boss" (Dorsey & Villa, 2020, p. 194). Leslie et al. (2021) identified subgroups within Gen Z to better understand their perceptions of a positive workplace environment, and the results showed three distinct groups: chill worker bees, social investors, and go getters. Chill worker bees prioritized comfortable environments at work; social investors sought healthy work-life balance; and go getters strongly desired to advance their careers (Leslie et al., 2021). While the stereotype may exist that Gen Z is less engaged at work than prior generations, that is not true for all Gen Zers. Grow and Yang (2018) highlighted Gen Z's value on soft skills and their desire to be supervised by leaders who have strong soft skills. Soft skills are defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "abilities which enable effective communication and social interaction with other people"

(n.d.-b). Iorgulescu (2016) and Magano et al. (2020) identified Gen Z's commitment to teamwork and developing soft skills in the workplace.

**Ethical Leadership.** Gen Z values equal opportunity in the workplace and expects their supervisors to be ethical, transparent, and wise (Magano et al., 2020). They expect their supervisors to be honest and demonstrate integrity (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022) and to care about them as people and not judge them (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). Stillman and Stillman (2017) stated, "Gen Z will want real proof that you can stand behind any claim you make...over the top mission statements probably won't sell a potential Gen Z employee on joining your company" (p. 160). Gen Z wants to know what an organization does and why it matters. They seek companies that are principled and that contribute to the greater good (Dorsey & Villa, 2020).

Research indicates that Gen Z is particularly drawn to organizations that are socially conscious and involved in bettering the world (Chillakuri, 2020; Leslie et al., 2021). Gen Z desires to understand the goals and values of an organization to ensure there is ethical alignment between what is espoused and lived out (Chillakuri, 2020). Gen Zers are more likely to remain loyal to an organization if the people in the organization behave ethically (Andino, 2019). Parry and Urwin (2011) explored the history of work values and discussed Weber's (1958) research on the Protestant work ethic (PWE). "The PWE arose from the belief that hard work and perseverance would lead to wealth which was, in turn, a sign that one was graced by God" (Parry & Urwin, 2011, p. 84). Interest in the PWE has declined, and the American dream now feels out of reach to Gen Z. The younger workforce is more concerned with addressing systems of privilege, equity, and access.

**Entrepreneurship.** According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an entrepreneur is someone who "owns and manages a business, bearing the financial risks of the enterprise" (n.d.-

a) While many similarities exist between Millennials and Gen Z, Gen Z is unique in their tendency to be more entrepreneurial due to their desire to have their own identity and flexibility (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Lanier, 2017). Gen Z is drawn to work environments that push them to be entrepreneurial (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Leaders would do well to pay attention to Gen Z's entrepreneurial desires and give them space to work independently and innovatively. Gen Z has come of age observing companies like Uber, Airbnb, and Craigslist, all of which allow individuals to be their own entrepreneurs (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Over half of Gen Zers surveyed in a global study expressed a desire to start their own company and be their own boss (Dill, 2015).

**Mentoring/Coaching.** Consistent dependence on technology to facilitate social interaction has left Gen Z underdeveloped in face-to-face relationship skills (Marron, 2015; Turner, 2015); they have not had the same opportunities to practice the skills of effective interpersonal interactions (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). A study by Becker (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that many Gen Zers described a sense of isolation and therefore in-person interactions would become even more important. Gen Z would benefit from mentoring in the workplace. Research on Gen Z conducted by Fodor and Jaeckel (2018) showed that many members of Gen Z would value having a mentor who could help prepare them for the workplace. Learning from experts in the field would provide a unique opportunity for Gen Z to receive practical advice on how to be successful. Iorgulescu (2016) highlighted the need for Gen Z to be mentored and given consistent feedback and training. Millennials also value coaching and mentoring. Espinoza and Ukleja (2016) asserted that mentoring can be an antidote to intergenerational conflict. Bennis and Thomas (2007) observed that transferring knowledge from generation to generation is a core component of mentoring. There could be unique opportunities

for intergenerational mentoring where a member of Gen Z helps a Baby Boomer use technology, and a Baby Boomer helps a Gen Zer understand the social structure of the workplace (Marron, 2015). As mentor and mentee enter conversations with each other, they can break down barriers.

### ***Work Values***

Dobewall et al. (2017) defined values as “beliefs that guide and justify people’s actions while also reflecting cultural ideals and a shared understanding of what is right or wrong and good or bad in a given society” (p. 264). Zemke et al. (2022) used a slightly different definition; “Values are our deeply held beliefs about how things should be—our beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on what is good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, important or trivial” (p. 154). Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) made a distinction between intrinsic work values, extrinsic work values, and social work values. Intrinsic work values deal with intellectual stimulation and interesting and challenging work. Extrinsic work values focus on compensation and benefits at work. Social work values focus on the relationships with supervisors and coworkers as well as the overall desire to better the world.

Cresnar and Nedelko (2020) highlighted the need for leaders to understand the specific values of their workforce because the youngest members of the workforce are their future leaders. Hillman’s (2014) research examined the connection between generational cohorts and generational work values and concluded there is a significant relationship between the two. Espinoza and Ukleja (2016) identified six primary influences that shape generational values: family, peers, culture, education, morality, and spirituality. As new generations enter the workforce, different workplace values enter with them. When Millennials began working, they had values different from Gen Xers and Baby Boomers (Schullery, 2013). Evidence has shown that younger employees are less loyal to the organizations for which they work and have unique

expectations about work-life balance (Bohdziewicz, 2016; Dill, 2015; Sessa et al., 2007). As leaders tap into values, they will gain more engagement from employees (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2009).

Gen Z specifically has different beliefs about the centrality of work (Anderson et al., 2017). It is becoming increasingly difficult for organizations to retain good employees (Cassell, 2017). Cassel observed that academic research in Western nations has shown that organizational loyalty, a hallmark of the Baby Boomer generation, is no longer a priority among younger generations. Generational cohorts tend to have their own perspective on the role of leadership, worldview, beliefs, and values. Over time, the default respect toward leaders has diminished (Sessa et al., 2007). One reason for this shift is that Millennials were the first generation who did not need to rely on an older authority to access information (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). In fact, an authority figure may likely be the last place for a Millennial to go with questions. This change has profoundly upended preexisting power dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has focused on leadership theory and the role of transformational leadership and authentic leadership in the workplace. An overview of diversity in the workplace and the challenges of a multigenerational workforce were also explored. The frameworks that underpin generational cohort theory beginning with the work of Mannheim (1952) and the work of current generational researchers were described. An overview of modern generations since 1920 and their characteristics and approach to work has also been explained to provide context for the current workplace. Specific issues such as intergenerational conflict and knowledge transfer have been described with a special emphasis on the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of Gen Z as they enter the workforce.

This literature review has highlighted much of the existing quantitative data about Gen Z (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Deloitte, 2021, 2022; Dimock, 2019; Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019). The current gap in the research is around qualitative phenomenological information about Gen Z. Researchers have recommended further study on how Gen Z is different from previous generations, what expectations Gen Z has for the workplace, and how they approach work (Cresnar & Nedelko, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; McGraw & Stewart, 2020; Sessa et al., 2007). This research study sought to explore the impact of COVID-19 on members of Gen Z who are currently studying in higher education and preparing to enter the workforce. COVID-19 has impacted everyone, but it has become the defining moment for Gen Z (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2022; Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Hirsch, 2021) and will impact their worldview (Becker, 2022). Much is yet unknown about how the pandemic will continue to shape Gen Z and their expectations for the workplace.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations for Gen Z individuals about work and about leadership in the workplace and how those expectations have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study placed a particular focus on Gen Zers from the United States, Western Canada, and Eastern Europe to allow for a global perspective on Gen Z.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: When Generation Z anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?
- RQ2: What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?
- RQ3: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace?
- RQ4: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?

#### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative approach to address the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described qualitative research as a way to discover deeper meaning about social or human issues. According to van Manen (2014), there is value in exploring the experiences of everyday life; indeed, "Human experience is the main epistemological basis for qualitative research" (p. 39). This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach, which is most often attributed to Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014). Phenomenology is rooted in the

philosophy of Heidegger (1962) who was one of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century (as cited in van Manen, 2014). Heidegger's (1962) philosophical work influenced many disciplines including human sciences and social theory and has provided a framework for phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) said, "Phenomenology is the first method of knowledge because it begins with 'things themselves'...[it] attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment...not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science" (p. 41).

The philosophical work of Husserl (1970) helped to shift phenomenology away from addressing only deeply philosophical scholarly questions into the realm of responding to everyday issues (as cited in van Manen, 2014). As a result, phenomenology can be especially relevant in exploring professional fields. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative phenomenology is focused on finding the common meaning among individuals' lived experiences or a specific phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that "phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 75). In phenomenology, the investigator "focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). Phenomenology acknowledges the relationship between external and internal perceptions.

"Phenomenology is about wonder, words, and world" (van Manen, 2014, p. 13).

Phenomenology generally involves conducting interviews to hear the words people use to describe their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the case of this study, the common experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic was explored, with a specific intention of understanding how the pandemic may have influenced Gen Z and their expectations for the

workplace. The goal was to discover the universal essence of a lived experience, and in this case, was focused on expectations pertaining to the workplace and perceptions of leaders in the workplace.

### ***Statement of Personal Bias***

Qualitative research is interpretive so the researcher must identify biases, values, and backgrounds that may impact how they interpret data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Richards & Morse, 2013). Moustakas (1994) stated that “in a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon” (p. 59). In the context of this study, I identify as a White female Millennial who is on the cusp between Gen X and Millennials. While I am adept at using technology, I am a digital immigrant, not a digital native. The topic for this research project was determined based on my personal experience working with members of Gen Z. For over 15 years, I have lived on undergraduate college campuses and worked closely with undergraduate college students. I have first-hand experience in observing the cultural shift between Millennial undergraduate college students and Gen Z students.

I have witnessed the tension points among members of different generations, particularly in the hierarchical structure of higher education. I have observed differences in values, preferences, communication styles, use of technology, commitment to transparency, and ethical leadership. For this reason, I needed to be mindful about the influence of previous anecdotal observations about Gen Z. This mindfulness guided the type of inquiry during interviews as I sought to bracket my own experiences and not assume I already knew the answer or outcome (Richards & Morse, 2013). I also lived through the COVID-19 pandemic and have my own observations about leadership in the workplace. For this study, I did not conduct research on

students from my own institution to avoid unduly influencing the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To best bracket my experience, I used epoché. Epoché was used by Husserl (1931) to describe the process of bracketing the researcher's previous assumptions or experiences (as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described epoché as "a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (p. 32) and observed the human tendency to hold knowledge with judgment. The challenge for me was that "in the epoché, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). Using epoché allowed me to remain open to whatever the results of the research questions indicated.

### **Sources of Data**

The target population for this study was members of Gen Z in higher education and preparing to enter the workforce. The target population required participants to be at least 20 years of age with some type of prior work experience, whether an internship or part-time job. I used purposeful sampling "in which the investigator selects participants because of their characteristics" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 221) and because of access to specific institutions. The sites were chosen deliberately. Purposeful sampling ensured that all research participants met the criteria and had experienced the same phenomenon. The study used convenience sampling based on what was available. In this case, I used Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Pepperdine University to get permission from two Consortium of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions in the Midwest to conduct research with members of the undergraduate student population. I also sought to recruit additional English-speaking

participants who lived outside the United States and who attended a CCCU school in Eastern Europe and a CCCU school in Western Canada.

The sampling design was clustered where I found specific institutions and then obtained permission from stakeholders at each institution who would send the recruiting email to a small group of eligible students on my behalf. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described an estimated number of participants in qualitative research while also acknowledging the importance of reaching saturation. For phenomenological research, Creswell and Creswell recommended a sample size between three and 10. For this specific study, it would be ideal to have a sample size with at least five from within the United States and at least five members of Gen Z from countries outside the United States. The sampling method was recruitment through email after receiving permission from the identified institutions.

### **Data Collection Strategies and Procedures**

For this study, data were collected via individual interviews. “Phenomenological research begins with wonder at what gives itself and how something gives itself. It can only be pursued while surrendering to a state of wonder” (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). I approached the interview with a sense of wonder rather than assumption. I conducted individual interviews with participants using predetermined questions. The interview had open-ended questions to provide space for the participants to share their opinions and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the advantages of interviews as allowing the researcher to lead and control the questioning. Interviews also allow the participants to share their perspectives and provide additional context where the interviewer can ask follow-up or clarifying questions. There are also limitations to interviews that can come from the presence of

the interviewer, which can bias participants' responses. Creswell and Poth (2018) acknowledged the power dynamic between researcher and interviewee. Sometimes participants have a difficult time articulating their responses. Interviewing can be a complex process, so the researcher must be careful and thorough in following the protocol (Butin, 2010).

### **Tools/Instruments Used**

This study used a new interview protocol. It was a structured interview with specific and structured questions directly related to the research questions. Based on the interview protocol identified by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I followed a specific protocol. I had a printed copy of the protocol at each interview to ensure it was carefully followed. Before I began the interview, I shared information about the interview process and discussed the purpose of the interview. I also ensured the participant had completed the digital informed consent form. I asked each participant if they had any questions about the process and let them know they were free to stop answering questions at any time.

I then began the interview with a warm-up question to help the interviewee feel comfortable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The goal of the opening question was not to ask an invasive question but to allow the interviewee to introduce themselves. Next, I asked the specific research subquestion for the study (Table 2). I was mindful of phrasing the questions in a way that was open ended and could be easily understood. Throughout the interview, I followed up with helpful probes to ensure that participants had the opportunity to elaborate and clarify their responses as necessary. At the end, I asked a question to inquire whether the participant had anything else they wanted to share. I then concluded the interview by thanking the interviewee and asking for consent to follow up if additional information was needed. Richards and Morse

(2013) cautioned the researcher to listen carefully to the interviewee by being responsive and interested without interrupting.

**Table 2**

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Items*

Research Questions (RQ)	Interview Items (II)
<b>RQ1</b> When Gen anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?	<b>II1</b> How would you describe the characteristics of a positive workplace environment?  <b>II2</b> How would you describe the characteristics of a negative workplace environment?
<b>RQ2</b> What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?	<b>II3</b> When you think about your ideal future supervisor, what would they be like?  <b>II4</b> When you think about a difficult supervisor in the workplace, how would you describe that person?
<b>RQ3</b> To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace?	<b>II5</b> How would you describe your experience during COVID-19?  <b>II6</b> What challenges did you experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?
<b>RQ4</b> To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?	<b>II7</b> How would you describe your interactions with people from a different generation during COVID-19?  <b>II8</b> As a result of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, how, if at all, has your perception of leadership changed?

I conducted all interviews through Zoom and made an audio recording of each interview using Trint software. I made a backup audio recording of each interview that was deleted as soon

as the Trint transcription was completed. I received informed consent from the participants prior to beginning each interview with express permission to audio record the interviews for the purpose of transcription. I also took some hand-written notes about specific words and phrases the participants used and also made written observations about the interview.

### **Human Subject Consideration**

It is vital to identify ethical issues that may arise in qualitative research because the protection of human subjects is foundational to conducting ethical research (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) make recommendations for appropriately addressing ethical issues, beginning with seeking university approval. For this study, to protect all human subjects, I received IRB approval from Pepperdine University. I sought a gatekeeper at each institution where I conducted research to have someone on the ground who could help in the approval process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I had also successfully completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program training for the Pepperdine Graduate School of Education and Psychology (GSEP) Education Division in Social-Behavioral-Educational research.

Another ethical consideration is disclosing the purpose of the study to all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants must feel free to sign or decline from signing a consent form. Those who chose to participate signed an informed consent to acknowledge their rights, risks, and expectations. For this qualitative phenomenological study, the risks to the participant were minimal, although some questions could be considered uncomfortable when asked about lived experiences that may have been difficult. However, participants had the option to choose not to answer or to stop the interview at any time. In this study, participants were asked to describe some of their lived experiences during the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is possible



that COVID-19 was a difficult time for the participant or that the participants may have lost a family member or close friend.

I knew which interview results were connected to each participant, but results were anonymized, and individual responses have been stripped of identifying information. Copies of recordings and transcriptions are being held on a secured password-protected computer with two-factor authentication and will be kept for three years. The findings will be reported both as aggregated data and as anonymized data.

### **Proposed Analysis**

The data analysis process began with preparing the data using the multistep process described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The systematic procedure helped summarize what members of Gen Z have experienced during COVID, how they experienced it, and what meaning they made out of it. The purpose of the interview was to gather stories and provide space for reflection (van Manen, 1994). During the interview, I wrote memos to help create codes for analyzing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the case of interviews, transcription using Trint software was the first step in the process. Next, I read through the transcripts to edit them for clarity and made notes. This process required extensive reading of the interview transcripts. I utilized NVivo, a coding software, to assist with data analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined coding as “the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category” (p. 193). Next, I determined themes or categories. Finally, I found a way to represent and describe the overarching themes, so they included textural description and structural description. After determining themes, I created a composite description of the phenomenon. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the goal is “analyzing data for significant

statements, meaning units, textual and structural descriptions, and description of the ‘essence’” (p. 105).

Themes around expectations toward leadership were explored to determine a composite description, which is the essence of what is being studied. Moustakas (1994) said:

Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences. In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience. (p. 84)

Phenomenological research allows participants to describe their lived experiences in their own words. The researcher can then use those words to describe the essence of their lived experiences.

### **Means to Ensure Validity**

As has been previously mentioned, I practiced bracketing to fully acknowledge my own personal biases, assumptions, and perspectives. I approached the interviews with openness. “In the reduction one needs to overcome one’s subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience” (van Manen, 1994, p. 224). One of the first elements to ensure validity comes from my use of reduction. I needed to be disciplined in acknowledging and protecting against my own biases. Threats to the validity of the study were mitigated through a consistent interview process and skillful and careful coding. The accuracy of the methods comes from how interviews are conducted and the ethical commitment of data collection. Transcription must be accurate, and analysis must be appropriate so there is rich description.

Triangulation is one way to add validity to a qualitative study. Richards and Morse (2013) defined triangulation as “the gaining of multiple perspectives through completed studies that have been conducted on the same topic and directly address one another’s findings” (p. 103). A study can be considered triangulated if the results meet previous studies to challenge, illuminate, or verify the other’s findings. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed “the triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility” (p. 256) and encouraged the use of thick description. Another aspect of validity in qualitative research comes from how the study is rooted in literature (van Manen, 2014). The research study has been buttressed by the literature review and the exploration of leadership theory, generational theory, and descriptions of modern generations. Mannheim’s (1952) theory of generations identifies the phenomenon of modern generations and how their experiences are unique. The issue of validity in phenomenological research was raised by van Manen (2014) when discussing the etymological root in the Latin word *Validus*, which means strength. The strength of a phenomenological study comes from the suspension of bias, the new insight gleaned, and its scholarship. Various research methodologies use external sources of validation, but Van Manen cautioned researchers to recognize many external sources for validation apply more directly to other types of methodologies but may not be appropriate for phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) observed validation comes through careful coding and rich textural descriptions.

### **Plan for Reporting Findings**

Chapter 4 discusses the human experience of the participants and contributes to new knowledge in the field of generational theory. Since research on Gen Z is in its nascent stage, and the impact of COVID-19 is still being explored, this study contributes to the overall body of

research. A rich, textural description of the interviews is provided along with specific anecdotes and quotes from interviewees.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study with specific attention focused on the implications and outcomes of the study. Chapter 5 restates the research questions and identifies whether the research questions were answered through the study. There is a description of how the study findings relate to the literature review and what similarities or differences exist (Moustakas, 1994). Generational theories and leadership theories are revisited to see what theories applied or did not apply to Gen Z after conducting the research. The conclusions and themes that emerge from the research are discussed, as well as the limitations. The final chapter of the study also identifies areas for future research while outlining possible paths for study.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about work and toward leadership in the workplace and how those expectations may have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic for members of Gen Z. In this chapter, the results of participant interviews were synthesized to identify the most common themes that emerged in response to the interview questions. The research was conducted by interviewing 15 graduating seniors at institutions from the CCCU. To be eligible to participate in the study, participants needed to be between the ages of 20–26 and graduating in 2023. Participants were required to be English speakers with some type of previous work or internship experience.

Participants were drawn from four CCCU institutions, two of which were in the United States, one in Canada, and one in Lithuania. The participants came from six different countries: the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Lithuania, Georgia, and Ukraine. Of the 15 participants, six self-identified as men, and nine self-identified as women. Five of the 15 participants identified as first-generation college students. Fourteen of the 15 participants identified as White/Caucasian, and one identified as Asian (Table 3). All the participants began their first year of undergraduate study during the 2019–2020 school year. They shared the phenomenon of being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 when their academic classes switched to online, and they were sent home from their college campuses to be with their families. One participant who was an international student was permitted to stay on campus at their institution because they were unable to safely travel home.

**Table 3***Participant Demographic Information*

<b>Alias</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Region of CCCU Institution</b>	<b>Region Student Is From</b>	<b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b>
Student 1	Female	White	Western Canada	Western Canada	English
Student 2	Male	White	Western Canada	Western Canada	English
Student 3	Female	White	Western Canada	Western Canada	English
Student 4	Female	White	Western Canada	United States (West Coast)	English
Student 5	Female	White	Western Canada	Western Canada	English
Student 6	Female	White	Western Canada	United States (West Coast)	English
Student 7	Female	White	Western Canada	United States (Midwest)	English
Student 8	Female	White	Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe	Lithuanian
Student 9	Female	White	Eastern Europe	Georgia	Georgian
Student 10	Male	White	Eastern Europe	Ukraine	Ukrainian & English
Student 11	Male	White	Eastern Europe	Georgia	Georgian
Student 12	Female	White	U.S. Midwest	United States (Midwest)	English
Student 13	Male	White	U.S. Midwest	United States (East Coast)	English
Student 14	Male	White	U.S. Midwest	United States (Midwest)	English
Student 15	Male	Asian	U.S. Midwest	Korea/ Philippines	Korean

## **Data Collection**

To recruit participants for this phenomenological study, I contacted university staff at five CCCU institutions to ask whether they would be willing to assist in recruiting senior students for the study. Those who agreed were sent a recruiting email, which was shared with 10 graduating seniors at their institution to invite them to participate in the study. Participants who agreed to participate signed up for an interview appointment time with me. Prior to the interview, each participant digitally signed an informed consent form.

Interviews took place over Zoom and were audio-recorded using Trint software. To ensure the protection of human subjects, the Zoom sessions were not recorded. The data collection took place in early March 2023 over a two-week period. Once the interviews were completed and audio-recorded using Trint, each interview was automatically transcribed. I listened to and read through each transcript multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the automatic transcription. During the transcription process, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

## **Data Analysis**

All interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo data analysis software to allow me to perform qualitative coding for each interview. I worked with a qualitative researcher to learn how to code using NVivo. After coding the interviews, I met with the qualitative researcher to ensure the accuracy of the coding procedure. The use of NVivo data analysis software allowed me to carefully code each interview, begin to identify larger categories, and then identify emergent themes. The process was iterative to ensure that the lived experience of each participant was accurately represented.

## **Study Findings**

This study addressed four research questions (RQ). Each research question had two corresponding interview items (II). Participants were not given a time limit to answer each question, thus allowing them to fully describe their experiences and their expectations for the future workplace. As a follow-up, I used prompts to glean more information from the responses the participants provided.

### **Themes From RQ1**

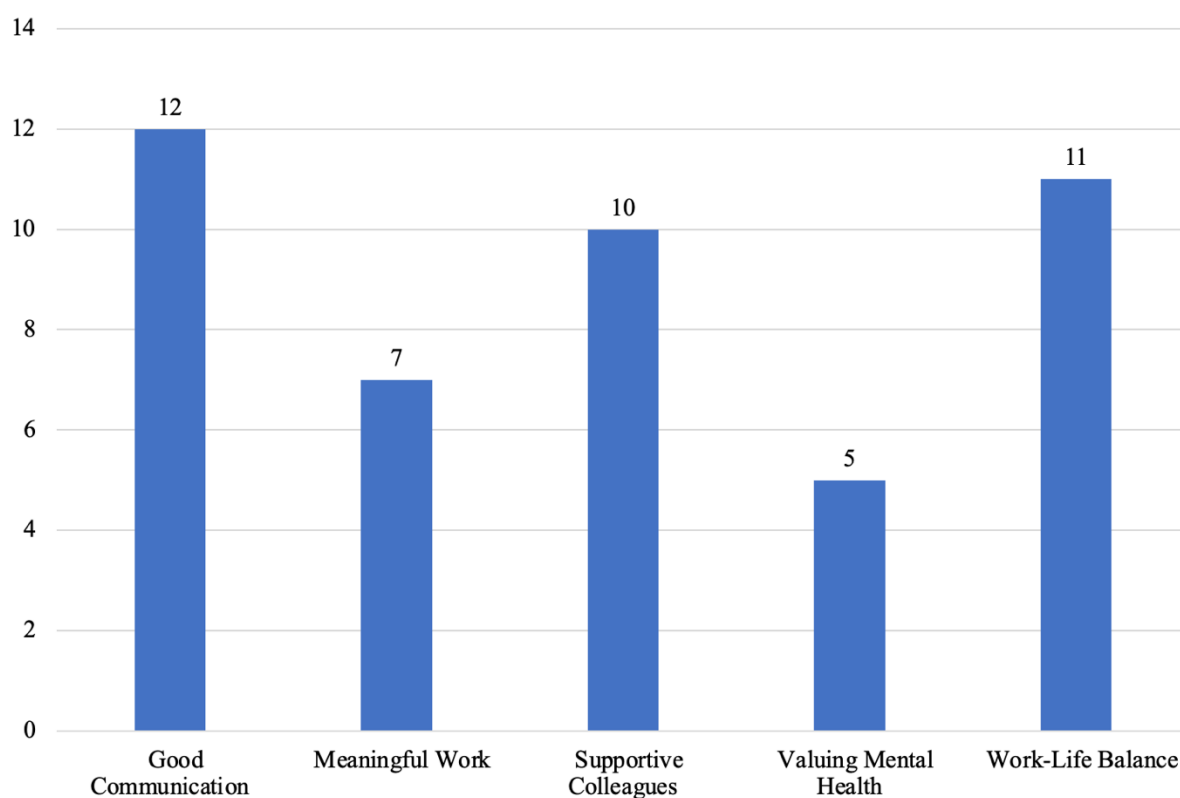
RQ1 was, When Gen Z anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like? II1 was, How would you describe the characteristics of a positive workplace environment? II2 was, How would you describe the characteristics of a negative workplace environment? Their interview responses and descriptions of workplace characteristics were then categorized by several codes. Positive responses provided by the participants included good communication, meaningful work, supportive colleagues, work/life balance, and valuing mental health (Figure 1), which were then grouped into codes. Negative responses provided by the participants included poor boundaries, poor communication, toxic environment, and stress, which were then grouped into codes. Those codes were then developed into broader categories. Categories were determined by how frequently certain codes were mentioned, how participants mentioned the code, and what degree of emphasis participants placed on that code. Through analyzing the data and categories, two high-level emergent themes were identified to capture the essence of the ideal workplace: (a) being treated like a person worthy of dignity and (b) being respected as a whole person with a life outside of work. Participants frequently shared both the positive and negative aspects of the same characteristic, such as discussing good communication as a mark of a positive workplace and poor



communication as a mark of a negative workplace, thus demonstrating the high value Gen Z places on good communication in the workplace.

**Figure 1**

*Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of an Ideal Workplace*



*Note.*  $n = 15$

### ***Being Treated as Worthy of Dignity***

The theme of being treated as worthy of dignity emerged due to the way participants described their ideal workplace. Throughout interviews, participants described characteristics of a positive workplace. In those descriptions, the codes of meaningful work, good communication, and supportive colleagues were all identified. When participants were asked to describe characteristics of a negative workplace that negatively impacted their sense of self, participants discussed the concepts of poor communication and a toxic workplace environment.

**Meaningful Work.** Participants who provided codes around the theme of meaningful work used words such as motivation, values, and purpose to describe their hopes for the workplace. Student 15 identified the importance of individual motivation saying, “I would love my supervisor and me to have...an honest conversation about that.” Student 4 said:

A big thing for me is, like, building relationships and seeing interaction between people and, like, working with people. So, I think it's really important to me that my job is not just like making money, come home—it's make an impact of some kind.

When Student 5 described her ideal workplace, she used the following description:

I think ideally, like off the bat, it's a job that I am excited about and it's something that I feel called to do or that it's like providing meaningful work, like the impact that I'm making is meaningful. It's not just a way or a means to get money. So, at the basic level, it's something that I'm motivated by and encouraged to go to daily, but then getting into like the nitty gritty of different things that would be like happening at work or whatnot, I'm really motivated by like an encouragement type of attitude and a place where I know that there is potential for growth and my professional development.

Participants highlighted their desire to make some type of impact through their work and to be motivated by more than money. Herzberg (2003) found that people are motivated intrinsically “by interesting work, challenge, and increasing responsibility” (p. 2). Herzberg discussed how human needs are addressed through basic biological nature as well as the desire to achieve and grow. In the case of this study, participants mentioned their interest in growth, learning, and contributing to the overall good of society.

**Good Communication.** Many participants who provided responses around the theme of good communication used similar language to describe their expectations for good

communication in the workplace. Twelve of the 15 participants identified good communication as a characteristic of an ideal workplace and mentioned their expectation for communication between leaders and their direct reports. Student 10 described his desire for clear communication about how people are doing and how people are feeling whether it be good or bad. He hoped that “the management is in an open conversation with their employees and everyone is on track with what's happening...I think that's important also for establishing relationships.” This concept was echoed by Student 11 who said he expected that “people are very straightforward; they tell you things as they are.” Student 9 explained the relationship between motivation and communication in saying, “What motivates me would be...more communication with people.” Student 6 said “I'm a communication major, so the communication is kind of a big deal for me. I want someone who is open and honest about things, and I can take criticism and feedback well.” Participants expect clear and effective communication in the workplace.

**Supportive Colleagues.** The concept of a supportive and collegial environment was identified by many participants. There was an expressed desire for collegiality in the workplace but with the understanding that social relationships would not be required or forced. Participants identified their preference to engage socially when it was comfortable for them, while also taking time to work individually and have that choice be respected by their leaders and colleagues.

Student 1, who is planning to be a teacher, described the following:

I think that [experience as an education major] has made me want, like, a work environment where you talk to people and, you know, bounce off, like, lesson ideas from each other and kind of like have people that are in the same boat so they kind of can, like, lean on each other in times of need... I would hope that I would step into a workplace

where they know that I'm a first-year teacher, so they, there's a bit of grace and a bit of, like, support instead of just like kind of throwing you in.

Student 10 described an ideal workplace by saying, "I think, first of all, I'm thinking of supportive colleagues. It's a very, it would be a very peaceful environment where everyone is valued equally, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age." Student 13 described himself as an introverted person and said:

I think I recognize that I need, like, time and space just isolated sometimes in order to work more efficiently. But at the same time, I do enjoy being around people and working with people, and I recognize the benefits of, like, how in some cases helps work more efficiently as well.

Student 4 said:

For me, a positive workplace environment definitely is one where I feel like I can feel comfortable and I can get to know people and have fun relationships as well as work relationships...where we can be like open and honest.

Student 5 explained, "Just having people around that are encouraging would be huge for me and that the work culture was yes, like, excellent and professional, but also provided a sense of community and like unity within that." Student 7 said:

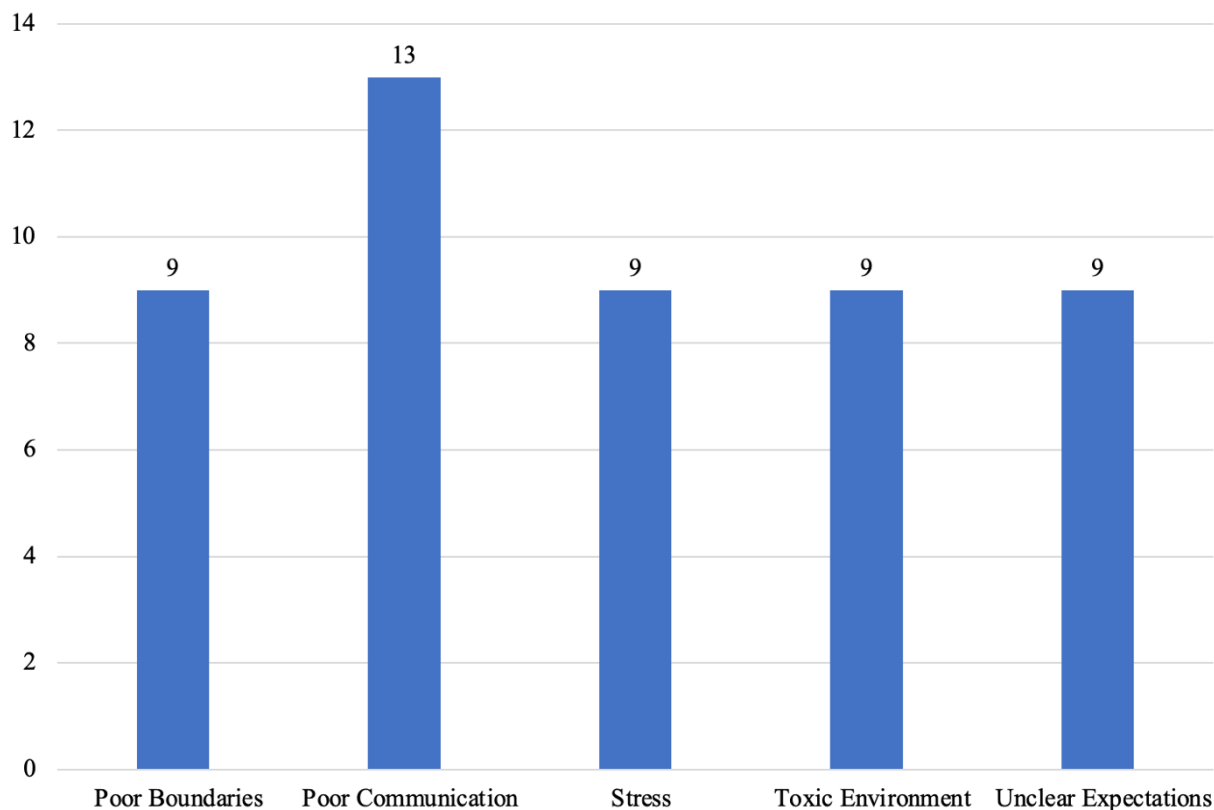
This year especially, I have learned significantly about what I value and stuff because I have worked with groups of people and I'm discovering that I do love teams and I love working together with people... I like personal connection, so I know it's sometimes, it's hard for me to keep professional separate from personal. Personally, that's hard for me, but I really enjoy getting to know people one-on-one and sharing their ideas and being able to bounce my ideas back and like get feedback and criticism and stuff like that.

Participants discussed their desire to work alongside others and have relationships with them, and many described relationships as a motivational factor in doing meaningful work.

**Poor Communication.** One barrier to healthy relationships in the workplace comes from poor communication. Thirteen of 15 participants articulated their frustration with poor communication in the workplace (Figure 2). They described a desire for clear and direct communication, even when the situation is challenging.

**Figure 2**

*Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of a Challenging Workplace*



*Note.*  $n = 15$

When describing the characteristics of a negative workplace, Student 5 said, “I think, one that, yeah, lacks communication overall, even if it's negative communication...I like to talk and, like, just have an understanding of, like, what's going on generally.” Student 10 said, “I don't imagine

working in a place where there is no space for talking to your colleagues...you have no idea what people work at the company and what they're like and what they're about.” Student 11 highlighted the frustration of poor communication in the workplace when he said, “It's, you know, it's like everyone is trying to mansplain to you something there. Unsolicited, passing on advice everywhere and they don't care about you.” When describing a negative workplace, Student 1 said:

I would probably, like, say [a leader] that you couldn't communicate with well. You're like trying to get help or trying to...get advice or permission and...[it's] hard to reach them or just like they're not communicating well. So, you're not really getting answers that you're looking for.

Gen Zers expressed a desire to work for organizations that clearly communicate expectations for their role. When describing a negative workplace, Student 1 said, “I think maybe this would be like you aren't aware of, like, your expectations and then you are told otherwise or like, you know, you're just kind of blindsided.” Student 5 described her experience of being hired for a role but then not permitted to do her role: “One discouraging thing I found was that I was not like trusted within my job to kind of do what I was hired to do.” She expressed frustration that her job expectations had not been clearly outlined for her so when she was hired, she was not able to perform the duties she was assigned to do.

**Toxic Environment.** The concept of a toxic environment was identified by nine of the 15 participants. Each participant had their own interpretation and description of what constitutes a toxic work environment. Student 10 said, “I am not a fan of toxicity in the workplace, so this is something that is definitely a, like, a red flag for me.” Student 5 described:

If the work culture was like toxic or hyper competitive...I think toxic could also look like just an imbalance of power...or certain people are getting more privileges than others, like unwarranted... I think toxic is also, like, if they were really unprofessional, if like [the] workplace got too casual or too like, you know, we're all buddy buddies, but we're all just making jokes, but we're not actually getting anything done. I think that would also be toxic in a different way.

Student 8 echoed the concept of overly competitive work environments being toxic and said, “So maybe the toxicity between the coworkers and the leadership would be a big disadvantage. Also, maybe unwanted competition, but in the bad way people compete and it's not like healthy; it creates stress. And it burns out people.” Student 2 described the role of harassment in creating a toxic environment and said, “It just made for a really terrible environment where harassment was like pretty normal for employees, especially female employees that were on site.”

Multiple participants talked about sexism, racism, and harassment as toxic behaviors in the workplace and asserted they would not be willing to work in an environment where those behaviors were happening. Sull, Sull, Cipolli, et al. (2022) found that toxic workplace culture is characterized by unethical behavior, disrespect, and lack of valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Toxic leaders are another aspect of toxic workplaces. Lipman-Blumen (2010) defined toxic leaders as “those individuals, who by dint of their *destructive behaviors* and *dysfunctional personal qualities* generate a serious and enduring poisonous effect on the individuals, organization, communities, and even entire societies they lead” (p. 2). Lipman-Blumen found that toxic leaders have a profoundly negative impact on those they lead. Gandolfi and Stone (2022) found that toxic leaders “place extreme mental, emotional, and sometimes physical

pressure” (p. 22) on their followers. Their research cautions leaders to be mindful of the impact of toxic leadership on the mental health of employees.

### ***Being Treated as a Whole Person With a Life Outside of Work***

Throughout interviews, participants identified specific characteristics of an ideal workplace that would make them feel as if they are viewed and treated like a whole person who had a life outside of the workplace. The concept of being treated like a human and not a machine was discussed by multiple participants. The importance of acknowledging the impact of mental health on wellbeing was also mentioned. These characteristics were listed as participants described a challenging workplace and provided responses within the codes of bad boundaries or stress/burnout.

**Work-Life Balance.** Work-life balance was a category that emerged through the interview questions. Eleven of 15 participants described their desire to work for an organization that valued work-life balance, and several said they would not continue to work for an organization that did not respect that balance. Student 5 said:

If I'm working with people who really like, live to work and not just like work to live, I think I'd find that, um, just in like a conflict of priorities of life. I definitely think work hard, play hard is awesome, and I do it all the time. But I, and I don't know where this fits into your research, but I'm the child of two Italian immigrants, and so I've seen what it looks like to just work. And although I am extremely grateful for that because I'm reaping the benefits of their hard work, I don't desire to work till I die, you know. Like there is a sense of like, okay, let's live well and like, live good, and that does require money, but I don't want to, like, lose myself at work.



This theme was echoed by multiple participants who described how important it was to them to have a meaningful life outside of work. They talked about boundaries and the desire for their work not to be a 24/7 experience where supervisors expected them to be available at all hours, especially when they were not being compensated for that work. Student 6 explained:

I would love something that has clear boundaries moving forward. I also would love something that has less hours, I guess, or is just more respectful of, like, a 40-hour work week. I know. I tell people that and they're like, well, just get ready for like 60 hours unofficially. And it's like, I don't want to give up my whole life to working.

The priority that participants place on employment is high but does not comprise their whole identity. Student 15 talked about vocation as a way to describe life's calling and purpose but expressed that employment may not be the only way to fulfill one's life calling.

**Valuing Mental Health.** When describing their ideal workplace, multiple participants identified the importance of a workplace that valued the mental health of their employees. Throughout the interview process, several participants described their personal experiences with depression and anxiety and communicated mindfulness of the role work can play in mental health. Student 11 said, "They [the company] should take your mental health and employee mental wellbeing very seriously." Student 6 shared her own experience by saying:

I know right now, especially coming out of COVID, I would love somewhere that's very understanding of mental health and work-life boundaries. I think even in school, how much it encroaches on your mental health and your personal life... I've seen things where there are some companies that have like mental health days in addition to sick days, and I think that's really cool just because it's like there are some days that you like can't really do anything. And so, it would be nice to have just like your company be aware that

there's a difference between being physically sick and being mentally sick. And so, I think that would be a lovely thing going into the workforce.

Student 6 went on to describe workplaces that have resources and benefits related to employee wellbeing and mental health. Student 8 described her personal mental health challenges due to living in a country where there is not much sun in the winter. She said:

We have, our winter times, are quite depressing for a lot of people and me, myself, I suffer from depression. So that's really important that the coworkers, but also the leaders keep in mind that people have things going on inside themselves that you can't always see.

Participants expect leaders in their future workplaces to respect that they may have mental health challenges and to be understanding of how that may impact work and overall wellbeing.

**Bad Boundaries.** The theme of boundaries emerged as being essential among Gen Z participants. Nine of the 15 participants identified poor boundaries as characteristic of a negative workplace. They discussed wanting their supervisors to respect their time outside of work and to acknowledge that they are whole people. They are interested in working hard, but they do not want to be taken advantage of. Student 11 underscored this perspective when he said:

It's not like I'm unfriendly and away from the people, but there must be certain boundaries that need to be in place to protect ourselves from each other, you know? At the end of the day, it's a business. It's a business transaction that we are all doing.

Companies are not your family—that's the worst thing someone can say that companies are your family, because you know, families don't play off each other, families don't fire you because you're underperforming.

Participants also said they would not tolerate working for an organization that expected them to be available 24/7 if they were not being compensated for working outside of their designated hours. Student 6 described some of her concerns about entering a workplace that didn't respect boundaries and said:

I think where like, I have, like, Slack and Teams was on my phone and I'm getting messages at all hours of the day about, like, things that I need to do. There's no boundary there from my, like, supervisors about respecting my personal time and the time that I'm not really getting paid to be doing my job...if I come in the next day and they're like—hey, how come you didn't see my messages and you didn't do these tasks at like 7 p.m. that I asked you to do? It's like—well, I'm not on the clock at that time. I'm not working at that time. So, it's like, if they can't respect that, it then becomes, I'm working all hours of the day. I'm not getting paid for that.

Student 8 described the challenge of moving to remote work during COVID-19 and how working from home blurred the lines between work and personal life:

In my workspace, I moved from working in an office to working from home, and that created stress because when I even wasn't working, I was thinking about work because I thought that I should be working even though it was part time. I did my four hours; I should be done. But I'm getting Slack messages and, oh no, I should log in and answer that. When I was in the office, it was a boundary, it was four hours and goodbye.

Participants voiced mixed feelings about the flexibility of working from home because of their concerns for a lack of boundaries if they do not physically go to an office each day.

**Stress or Burnout.** Many participants talked about the role of stress and burnout in challenging work environments. When discussing competition in the workplace, Student 8 said,

“It's not, like, healthy. It creates stress. And it burns out people.” Student 8 mentioned a desire for a healthy workplace that does not cause unnecessary stress. Student 9 highlighted the importance of supervisors checking in to ensure employees are doing okay and said “[checking in to see] how actually we do, if we're not getting burned out throughout the week or something like that.” When discussing a former job, Student 2 said, “[Harassment] just made for a really terrible environment...it was, in my opinion, like a mental burden to bear to have to show up and be in that environment.” When describing the experience of working during COVID-19, Student 4 said the following:

I had really nothing to give at that point, but I was like, forcing myself to try to give. It's like these high expectations and then not being able to meet them and then just being really frustrated. And so, it felt like this kind of impossible cycle... I'm not doing the best I can. I think I'm doing better, but this is as much as I can give right now. I think that that was hard to like balance like personal struggles and the needs of the people that I was serving.

Student 6 who is interested in marketing as a career said the following about the toll that social media marketing takes on an individual:

We all kind of see that like social media marketing, you have to always be on like Instagram or TikTok. You're always responding to comments and DMs [direct messages] and it's like, as fun as that job is, there's no work/life boundaries there. And so that is just like really hard for your mental health.

Participants are cautious about workplaces that may burn out employees due to unclear expectations and interpersonal challenges.

## **Themes From RQ2**

RQ2 was, What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace? The corresponding interview items asked the following. II3 was, When you think about your ideal future supervisor, what would they be like? II4 was, When you think about a difficult supervisor in the workplace, how would you describe that person? Participants' responses were coded and then those codes were developed into higher level categories. Categories were determined by how frequently certain codes were mentioned, how participants mentioned the code, and what degree of emphasis participants placed on that code. Through analyzing the data and categories, two high-level emergent themes were identified to capture the essence of the ideal supervisor. Due to the iterative process of analyzing data, a similar theme emerged between expectations for an ideal workplace and expectations for an ideal supervisor. Through analyzing the data and categories, two high-level emergent themes were identified to capture the essence of the ideal supervisor. The first theme is focused on how the supervisor treats the employee, and the second theme is focused on the essence of the supervisor themselves. Participants provided responses for codes that fell into the following themes: (a) leader treats employee like a person worthy of dignity and (b) leader exhibits humble leadership. Participants frequently shared both the positive and negative aspect of the same characteristic, such as discussing their understanding of respectful as a mark of an ideal supervisor and disrespectful as a mark of a challenging supervisor, underscoring the expectation Gen Z has for being respected by their supervisors.

### ***Leader Treats Employee Like a Person Worthy of Dignity***

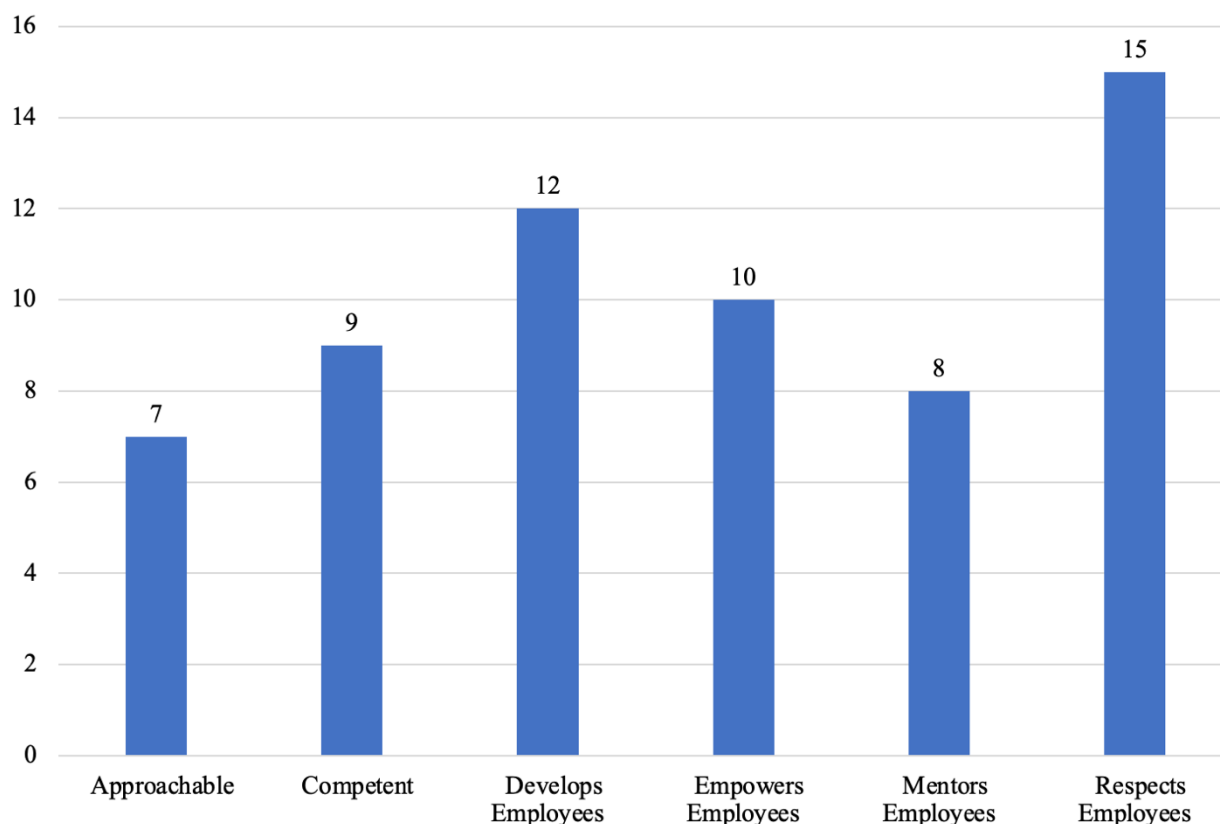
Participants' responses indicated a desire to be treated honorably by supervisors. When participants were asked to describe their ideal supervisor, they provided responses within the

codes of respecting employees, developing employees, and empowering employees (Figure 3).

When participants were asked to describe a challenging supervisor, they discussed the concept of feedback style, micromanagement, and disrespect toward the employee.

### Figure 3

*Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of an Ideal Supervisor*



*Note.*  $n = 15$

**Respects Employees.** All 15 participants described their ideal supervisor as someone who would display respect for all employees. Student 8 said, “A lot of workplaces here, people are a value more in regards to their education or their experience, but I think it’s also really important to value and respect their employee just as a human being.” Student 10 said, “Everyone is valued equally, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and

age.” Student 12 said, “[Leaders] not treating or like not acting like they're superior to us, more like they are one of us. So, like, equaling the playing field, I guess.” Student 4 said:

I feel like that relationship [with a supervisor] would be very open and honest and also very like trusting. Like I could honestly go to them with some confidential information like, hey, this is happening or I'm experiencing this, or I feel like this and would be taken seriously and it would be considered seriously.

Student 6 said, “I also would love, like clear expectations for grace and if you don't meet a deadline, what that would look like just because it happens sometimes.” Participants said they wanted to know they could make mistakes and would still be supported and respected by leaders.

**Develops Employees.** This concept emerged as participants talked about their desire to be empowered and developed professionally by their supervisor. Gen Zers seek opportunities to grow professionally in their roles and to have their supervisors invest in them. Student 11 described an ideal supervisor:

[Someone] who could train me in what I'm doing and who would try to, who would try to support me in my journey of getting from the bottom to the top, who would advocate for me, you know. And in day-to-day relationships, people very simply checking in. How is it going? Do you need anything from me?

When describing a former supervisor, Student 2 said, “What really stood out to me about his leadership is that every encounter he had with people left other individuals feeling more empowered to do their roles, happier about who they were and more energized to get things done.” Student 3 described an ideal supervisor as “someone who is able to balance being in power...who knows that they're in a higher position but also is okay with, like, letting other people do tasks and...empowering other people to do their own work independently.” Student 5

highlighted the importance of professional development and of a supervisor modeling personal development when she said:

I think someone who also is motivated more towards professional development and someone I see who's actively, like, achieving or, like, aspiring to be better and bettering themselves. Um, someone who also, like, shares their life—I want to get to know my boss beyond their, you know, their role as my supervisor. Um, someone who is good at teaching. I want to learn from them, and I want them to, like, be better than me at things so I learn from them. Someone who is probably like, well networked and like, invites me into like meeting people or like can see strength in their workers and then like match them with other things.

Student 7 said, “I also think it's important to have personal relationships with people in addition to professional. I know that can get messy or whatever, but yeah, I think only having strictly work, like, with some people would make it hard.” Student 9 described the ideal supervisor as someone “that values your existence in their team...[and] sees potential in me and wants to develop my skills farther to kind of complement the team and also who sees the value in all the decisions that I make.” Student 15 highlighted the importance of leaders knowing their employees and said, “I think as a leader, your job would be to kind of grasp what each employee wants to get out of the workforce...they maybe want a leadership opportunity.” Student 2 expounded on this concept when he said:

Leadership development is not just teaching somebody how to do the tasks, but also how to do their job in a work environment that enables them to—and I'm using this word kind of specifically in—we talk at my institution a lot about being able to be in a community that enables you to flourish as a person in and outside of your job.

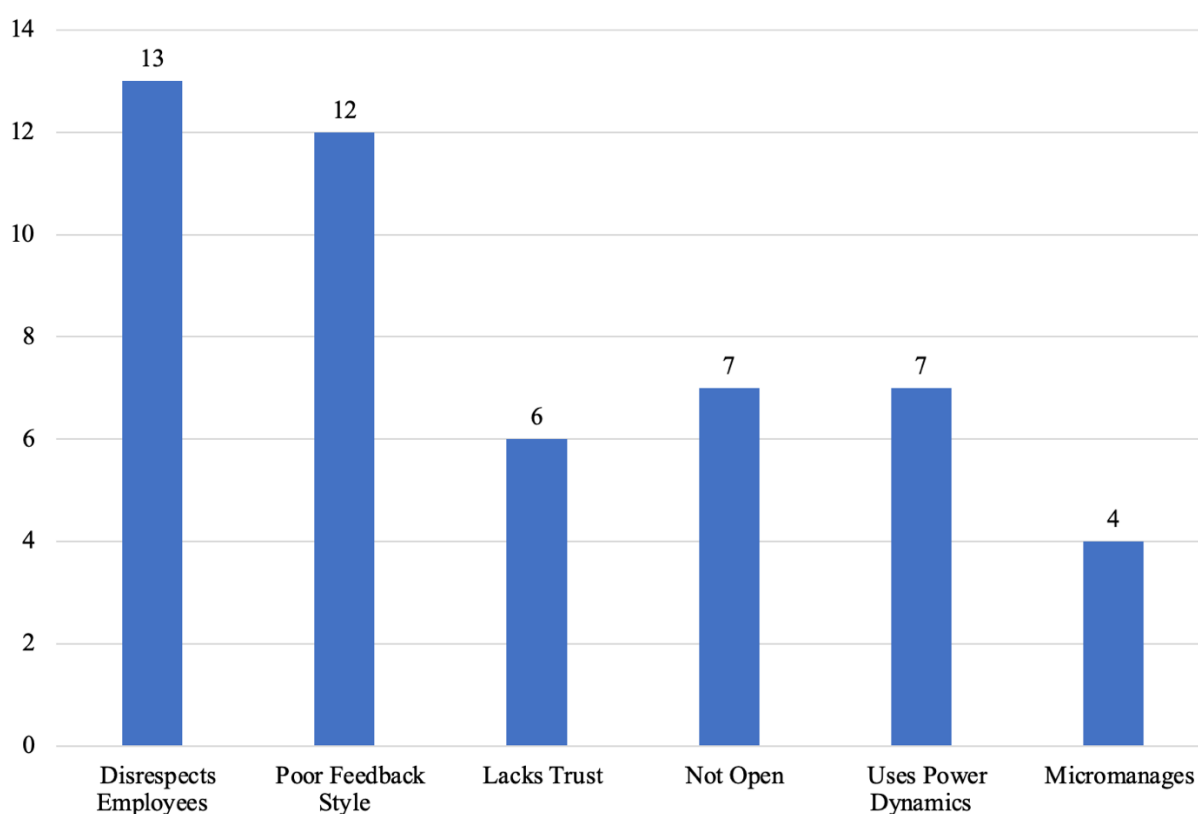


Gen Zers expressed their interest in being developed by their leaders so they can grow as people and professionals.

**Disrespect for Employees.** When describing the characteristics of a challenging supervisor, 13 of the 15 participants provided responses within the theme of disrespecting employees (Figure 4). Participants identified concepts such as egotistical supervisors or

**Figure 4**

*Number of Participants Listing Each Characteristic of a Challenging Supervisor*



*Note.*  $n = 15$

supervisors who treated employees as if they were less valuable. One participant talked about how difficult it would be to work with a supervisor whose behavior was unprofessional. Another discussed how dehumanizing it would feel if her supervisor did not view her as person with a life outside of work. One participant identified the challenge of working in an environment where

colleagues and supervisors gossiped about employees. Student 10 said, “Direct communication is present [in the workplace], but it's rude. I mean, the simple etiquette is not present.” Student 11 captured the theme of disrespect in saying:

I can't work with the person who is, let's say, racist or who is homophobic or say who is, I don't know, who is sexist obviously, you know. Our perception of the world is so different that it would be extremely hard for me to work with this person and to...take in the comments that they would throw at me or at someone else.

Another participant described her experience working for a supervisor who was sarcastic. She felt that it was disrespectful and uncomfortable. Student 4 said a challenging supervisor would be “a person who seems like they don't really want to ever give me their full attention, or actually, like, listen to me or sit down and give me one-on-one time to talk through something or get my perspective.”

**Poor Feedback Style.** Twelve of the 15 participants identified disappointment with the way supervisors give feedback. They discussed their desire for supervisors to be clear and direct in their communication. Multiple participants described their lived experiences with former supervisors. One participant said she would prefer that her supervisor not sugarcoat feedback but rather share feedback honestly and respectfully. Another participant described her former supervisor who was cynical in the way she gave feedback, which left the participant unsure of whether or not she was meeting her job expectations. Student 13 described:

There was a lot of focus on, like, this isn't getting done quick enough, this isn't getting done correctly instead of communicating...why isn't this getting done? Why isn't this getting done correctly? So, it is more...you guys just fix this rather than, like, what's wrong and how can we help?

Student 2 discussed his experience with a former supervisor's feedback style:

What really made it difficult is that throughout my entire time on the job, the only time I talked to my supervisor is when they had something negative to say about my work. And so, like as an individual, I know about myself that I'm a I'm someone who thrives on positive affirmation when a good job is done. And so, I'll work really hard to get that affirmation. And it was crushing that, you know, the day-to-day check-ins were just to tell me what I wasn't doing well enough. And it was, it was so frustrating.

Student 3 said it would be difficult to work for a supervisor if:

There's not, like, an environment of learning and if you make mistakes, not that you're not held accountable, because I think that is very important, but you're judged pretty severely for making mistakes due to like a lack of knowledge or just not really knowing how to do stuff yet.

Participants expressed their hope to receive meaningful feedback from their supervisors, so they have space to learn and grow in their roles as young professionals.

### ***Leader Exhibits Humble Leadership***

The word humility comes from the Latin root *humilitas* meaning grounded or from the earth (Kelemen et al., 2022). Kelemen et al. showed that the field of humble leadership has grown over the last 15 years. The concept of humble leadership is characterized by self-awareness, teachability, and valuing others. For this study, participants were asked to describe their ideal supervisor, and they shared responses around the theme of a supervisor providing mentorship for them and demonstrating a willingness to do the work. When participants were asked to describe a challenging supervisor, participants provided responses that were then coded as egotistical, focused on power dynamics, and not open to new ideas or feedback from

employees. The positive characteristics identified by participants are connected to humble leadership, and the negative characteristics identified by participants are indicative of a lack of humble leadership.

**Mentoring Employees.** Gen Zers expressed their interest in having a mentoring relationship with their supervisor. They acknowledged that they will be new to full-time work and eager to learn. Student 15 said, “I think skills development and mentoring is a very essential part of [leadership], but I think there is a difference between just pushing to get the job done versus actually coaching so that I can do the job.” Student 10 stated:

I feel like also a supervisor or a mentor cannot fully help you if they don't understand what you are as a...person, if they don't know what you're like in other situations and what you're going through possibly, and how that might affect your work and how you behave with other people and on your own.

Student 5 echoed this perspective in saying the following:

[The ideal leader] would definitely, like, have mentorship qualities or like, be a mentor just period and not in the way of like, oh, I'm just mentoring you so like you're doing well in the workplace, but like actually checking in on various aspects of your life. So yeah, that to me is important that like a supervisor is invested in you as a whole person, not just you as a worker.

Student 12 described a very positive relationship with her former supervisor and how gender played a role in how she felt supported. She said, “Everything that she [my former supervisor] embodies is a very, like, really good leader, like being kind, being approachable, being relatable.” Student 3 shared her aspirations for being mentored in the workplace:

You learn stuff by being mentored by people, and so I would say for me it's like a workplace that is willing to, like, meet me where I am and provide me with mentorship opportunities... I think probably like a more experienced person wherever I am, who...knows that I'm young and I don't know anything and who's willing to help me understand what it means to be a professional.

Participants discussed their hope to be in a mentoring relationship with their supervisor.

**Willingness to Do the Work.** Multiple participants identified expectations that supervisors would be competent in their roles. Participants hoped that a leader would be confident in their role without being egotistical. When describing an ideal supervisor, Student 12 said, "They're not afraid to, I guess, get their hands dirty and...work with the people that are under them." Student 14 said, "The ideal supervisor would be very competent in what they're doing and know a lot about their position, but also feeling approachable and friendly and not averse to me or other employees asking questions." Student 5 identified her expectation that her ideal supervisor be competent and humble:

I think the supervisor would be an expert in their field, or at least some expertise in some areas, but have the humility to also say like, I need the team... Someone who doesn't put in the work themselves, if they were lazy or if they were not working and it only felt like they were just delegating to others, I think that would just not make me want to follow them. Because if you're not, you're not doing anything and you're not like bought into the mission and vision of this, how am I supposed to be?

In their previous work experience, participants have been observing their supervisors and could recognize which supervisors were competent in their role. Participants identified the ways in which it was easier to respect a supervisor who was willing to do the work with them.

**Uses Power Dynamics.** While participants acknowledged they will be new to full-time jobs in the workplace, each participant has had previous experience in the workplace from which to draw as they described characteristics of a challenging supervisor. Gen Zers in this study were highly interested in having direct access to leaders and the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas. Student 11 captured a perspective shared by many Gen Zers, “I don't like a hierarchical approach to organizations or to...people.” Student 11 said the following:

I dislike people who have big egos and who think that they can do everything because they are in a higher position...I think the worst thing is when your manager has a huge ego because that's when the micromanagement comes in, that's when they don't trust you, that's when they need to check, and that's when, you know, they go behind your back and, you know, they are scared of you.

While many Gen Zers described power dynamics in the workplace, Student 11 also identified the potential for supervisors to be intimidated by new employees and seek to control them using micromanagement. Student 3 described her experience with a challenging supervisor and said, “She was insecure...and so as a result of that, it felt like she constantly had to assert that she was our boss, that she... made more money than us. And I really didn't appreciate that.” Student 9 articulated her fear of being micromanaged when she said, “I'll be considering a place, a healthy place, where there is no or less micromanagement and a place which always kind of fills you with opportunities.”

Student 14 discussed the importance of having direct access to supervisors and described how challenging it would be to have a distant supervisor:

It feels like if you ever have to go and talk to them, it's this whole ordeal of I'm going to this whole separate location to talk to my boss. It's kind of intimidating. And that can

even happen if their office is nearby and if they're always closed in or not, yeah, not out working with the other employees or anything like that. That can also make it, make it, feel distant.

Student 2 expressed her frustration at working with a supervisor who wasn't open to dialogue:

I took a role as a media and marketing manager, and this person had really, really, really specific ways they wanted the job done. And I didn't always agree and felt as though, yeah, you know, in some cases, well, in most cases there is just no leverage to do the job in different ways. It was a very, very one-sided relationship where there was an expectation and there was no room for dialogue and there was no way to kind of talk about anything else.

When Student 8 was asked to describe a challenging supervisor, she said:

Not open to different opinions, not open to different ways of doing things, because I think our generation can bring a lot of change, good change, but you need to be open to looking at certain problems in a different light.

Gen Z participants are hopeful for the future and desire to be given opportunities to try new things and bring about positive change. They believe they have innovative ideas, and they want to be heard.

### **Themes From RQ3**

RQ3 was, To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace? II5 was, How would you describe your experience during COVID-19? II6 was, What challenges did you experience during the COVID-19 pandemic? As participants described challenges, many identified difficult interactions with people in different generations (which was asked in II7), so those challenges are reported together due to the overlap

in participants' responses. Several participants identified new opportunities they had during COVID, such as working remotely or being given more responsibility in a job, but the majority of participants provided responses that indicated challenges, which were categorized into various codes. Those categories were then distilled into two major themes: (a) personal challenges and (b) interpersonal challenges. These themes were determined by how participants described their specific experiences and the impact that the challenge had on each participant's lived experience.

### ***Personal Challenges***

All participants in the study were in their first year of college in March 2020. In recounting their experiences during COVID, every participant discussed what it was like to suddenly be required to lock down. Fourteen of the 15 participants were sent home, and one international student was permitted to stay on campus because it was impossible for him to safely travel to his home country. Participants described how they are continuing to manage the struggles that emerged or were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly around mental health and relationship dynamics with their immediate families.

**Loneliness.** Twelve of the 15 participants talked about loneliness as a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Student 8 stated, "It [COVID] was quite isolating." Student 13 said, "All my free time was just spent doing nothing, um, it was overall, unfortunately, pretty miserable because I didn't really feel like I had any support of people around me." Student 11 said, "It was hard to stay home all the time. It was hard not to be able to see people I wanted to see or at the frequency that I wanted to see them." Student 9 shared a similar sentiment when he said, "It was really hard because maybe I lost some communication with my friends." Multiple students discussed their experience of being required to quarantine in their dorm room for 14 days throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and how isolating that experience felt.



**Mental Health.** When talking about COVID-19, 11 of 15 participants identified mental health struggles in the form of anxiety, depression, and a general sense of fear. Student 11 said, “I was scared of dying of COVID, especially at the beginning.” Student 14 said:

I think everyone kind of had a heightened fear during that time being sent home from school or everybody being sent home from work, not really knowing what's happening. So, there was a general sense of fear during that time or uncertainty is probably a better way to put it.

Student 12 said that while she was able to maintain friendships during COVID, her mental health was not okay, and she struggled significantly. Student 4 disclosed, “It [COVID] was really hard. I definitely experienced a lot of mental health struggles. That was really big for me.” Student 15 described the challenge of having family members in three countries and monitoring COVID’s spread around the world:

So, there was an element of a prolonged anxiety, if that makes sense, since I was always worried about someone for a longer period of time. So, our family, I think as a whole had to go through that a little bit. Just monitoring the news of all three countries, trying to figure out when COVID's going to hit and stuff like that.

Student 6 said:

Obviously mental health I think for everyone, that year was really bad. I know me and a lot of my friends struggled with really bad depression just because it's like there's nothing you can do besides be in your dorm room.

**Digital Fatigue.** The majority of participants described their experiences with digital fatigue and zoning out during Zoom classes. Student 5 said, “It was hard and online school sucks.” Student 1 said:

I wasn't getting a lot out of my courses. I would just kind of like zone out as I'm watching them or just like kind of go on my phone at the same time because it was just so hard with the screen, especially like you just got tired easier because of staring at it all day.

Student 4 shared her experience with online school when she said:

School stinks when it's online. I just realized that's not the format for me. I don't pay attention, I don't care. I don't want to do any of the homework. I don't want to sit in class. Like everything becomes not fun and not exciting when it's online. So, moving online was really hard for me.

Student 8 talked about the stress of not having consistent internet access during COVID when cases were moved online:

I go to class, but now it's like, oh, no, wait, is this, is it 5 minutes away? Do I have to log in? What if my internet goes down? What if I can't log in? So it was very stressful for me in that way.

Student 5 said, "I just felt dumb online and I felt like I couldn't keep or like I could keep up, but it was just felt so meaningless. And so, there were moments where it just felt overwhelming."

While participants acknowledged they had the skill to quickly adapt to online learning, they did not enjoy the experience. None of the participants said they preferred online learning to in-person instruction. The fatigue they experienced due the number of hours they spent on Zoom also impacted their openness to engage with friends and family through digital means.

### ***Interpersonal Challenges***

Gen Z participants identified challenges within family dynamics, vividly describing the difficulty of moving back home after they had started college and separated from their families. Many said their families did not know how to respond to them being back at home, and they

believed they were being treated like children. Multiple participants talked about familial disagreements over COVID regulations. Participants also expressed frustration with the way older generations who are digital immigrants struggled to adapt to new technology.

**Family Dynamics/Losing Independence.** Twelve of the 15 participants described the difficulty of being home with their families after going to college and expressed a sense of sadness over their lost independence. Several talked about being stuck at home with their families during COVID. Student 3 talked about what it was like to have a taste of freedom at her first year of college and then to lose it:

But yeah, it was tough especially that was my first year of university, so it really felt like things had just completely come to a halt. And all of this, like, amazing, this amazing new world I came into was like really put on pause, especially with like online classes and online learning. I just felt kind of stuck, I would say.

Student 4 shared a similar sentiment:

I had to move back home after like eight months of, like freedom. And that was really hard for me. I think I realized that I don't agree with my parents as much as I thought I did and I need that space and time to breathe, and so it was pretty negative.

Student 10 said the following about moving back home during COVID:

Living together with your family after not living with them for two years was kind of harsh, because when you come back home as a kid, I constantly felt like every time I'd come back home, I embrace that identity of being a kid again. And I'm being treated like a child and not an independent individual. And that's where it was a bit difficult for me like to establish those boundaries again, which, like the family doesn't understand. Like, where did those come from all of a sudden?

Participants identified how challenging it was to leave their first year of college abruptly and then go home to live with their families.

**Interactions With Different Generations.** Thirteen of the 15 participants discussed their frustration with the way other generations did not comply with COVID regulations. Another source of frustration was how difficult it was for older generations to adapt quickly to new technology. Student 11 discussed his interactions with grandparents during COVID in this way:

I think they wouldn't understand the challenges that I faced. They kind of undermined it in a way because I come from a world where, you know, wars happen for multiple times and my grandparents were, I don't know, standing in line to get a piece of bread. So, you know, they were like, yeah whatever COVID was nothing, you're in your comfort zone staying home, meanwhile we were fighting in wars. So, I think that was definitely something that they wouldn't understand.

Student 8 described how her immediate family was following the regulations and expressed frustration with her grandparents who were not following regulations, “We're doing all these things to protect you, but you're not protecting yourself.” Participants expressed feeling dismissed by older generations who did not follow rules or take COVID seriously. Student 12 made the following observation:

COVID got very political very quickly. And like the far-right side of the spectrum being like, COVID's not real. Basically, the mantra of my hometown's beliefs during that time, um, my parents were very like into that, even eventually ending up with COVID ourselves, and still not fully believing in it.

Student 2 captured the differences between how Gen Z adapted to technological changes during COVID and how older generations adapted:

Students that were just showing up to university were freely, easily adapting to an online, young, media-heavy, technology-heavy world. Whereas there are some professors, I would quite honestly say most professors, had a really tough time coming to terms with changing the way that they've done things for a long time. And so, I think I mean, maybe we're looking at job expectations for, you know, a senior professor and, you know, the ability or, you know, being willing to innovate or not, but with the people that I have had personal experiences with, you know, they were able to adapt eventually, but they needed a lot of help. They needed training. They needed people to come alongside them and help them.

Participants observed the digital divide among generations in a more profound way during COVID as they watched older generations struggle to adapt. This was particularly true as many generations began using Zoom, as confirmed by Mead's (1970) previous research on the generation gap when she said young people "can see that their elders are groping, that they are managing clumsily and often unsuccessfully the tasks imposed on them by the new conditions" (p. 59). These prescient words could have been written about older generations, especially professors, trying to learn how to transition to online platforms during COVID-19.

#### **Theme From RQ4**

RQ4 was, To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace? II7 was, How would you describe your interactions with people from a different generation during COVID-19? II8 was, As a result of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, how, if at all, has your perception of leadership changed? There was significant overlap in the responses for the sixth and seventh interview questions when participants were asked to describe challenges during COVID. Many participants

described challenges with different generations as they answered that question, so those responses were included in the discussion of challenges during COVID with RQ3. Participants were asked to expound on their observations about leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and reflect on what they had observed. Several codes were identified, which were then further categorized. Those categories were captured under one emergent theme for perceptions of leadership: leader demonstrates vulnerable leadership.

### ***Leader Demonstrates Vulnerable Leadership***

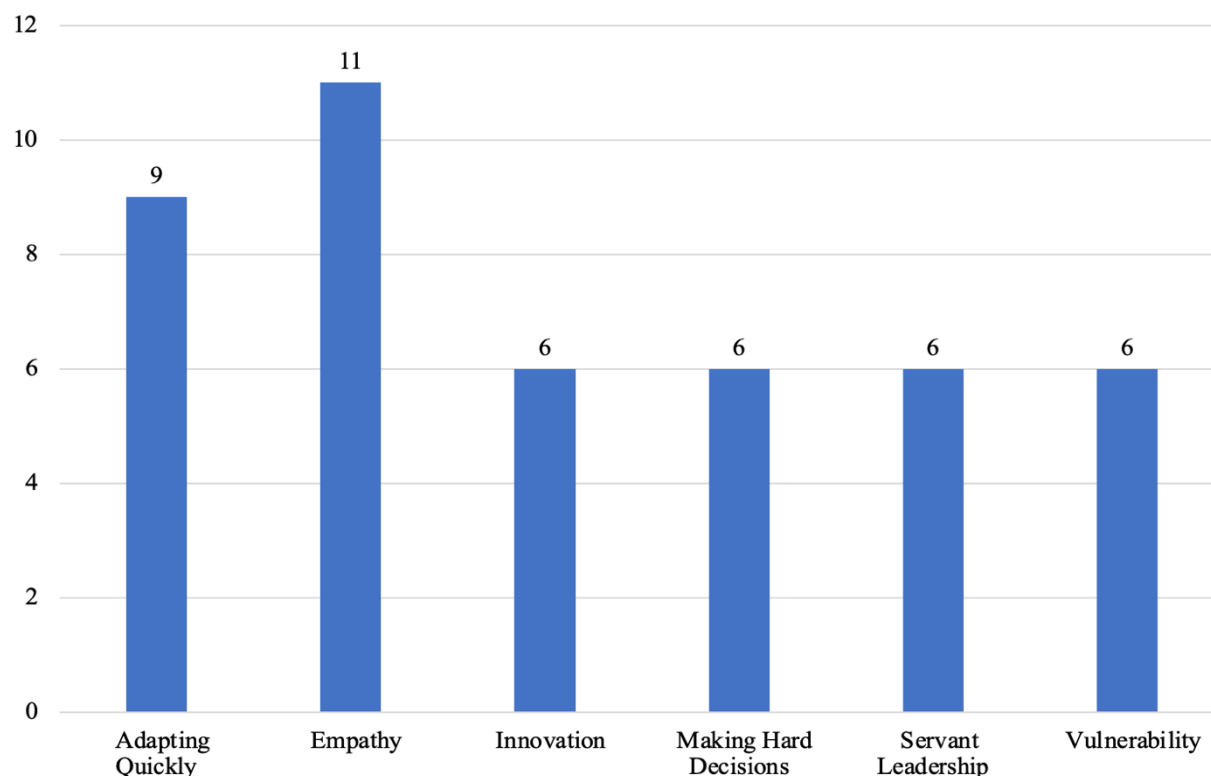
During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants had the opportunity to observe leaders during an unprecedented situation. When reflecting on her experience during COVID, Student 5 said, “I got like a front row seat to a lot of amazing leaders during COVID, and for that I'm grateful.” Participants discussed watching leaders adapt amidst uncertainty. When describing what they observed, they used words that developed into codes such as adapting quickly, empathy, innovation, vulnerability, and making hard decisions (Figure 5). There were parallels to the description of an ideal leader from responses to RQ2, indicating that participants may have been reflecting on what they observed among leaders during the COVID pandemic as they described their ideal supervisor. Student 5 explicitly stated, “Humility in a leader I think is huge for me.”

**Servant Leadership.** Servant leadership was identified by six out of 15 participants when discussing their perception of leadership. Student 13 said, “[COVID] just kind of changed my perspective a lot from seeing leadership as just simply authority, to...servant leadership. So, I'm working alongside people rather than working above them.” Student 2 talked about a leader who exemplified humility when he said, “He displayed a level of servant leadership that was really admirable. Like, he was in a position of power. But you never felt as though you were

subordinate when you were talking to him.” Student 3 acknowledged that one can lead without

### Figure 5

*Number of Participants Listing Characteristics of Their Perception of Leadership*



*Note.*  $n = 15$

being in an official leadership capacity and said, “Leadership isn’t only if you’re appointed into a position, like, it’s really, like, it’s something that you can take on every day and, like, going out of your way to just be kind and open-hearted to people.” Student 4 stated, “I don’t know if I work the best with like a very top-down leadership style, maybe a little bit more like a servant leadership in very Biblical terms.” Student 6 described a servant leader as “someone who is wholeheartedly trying to help and not just doing it to maintain power.” Student 11 said, “During COVID, what I understood is that if you’re not managing yourself or if you’re not a leader of

yourself, let's say, you cannot lead other people.” Participants said they hope future leaders will be self-aware and committed to growth if they want to be effective in leading others.

**Empathy.** Empathy was a concept that was mentioned multiple times throughout interviews. Student 10 said, “The quality that I found to be very important and that I started valuing a lot is exactly that of empathy and being understanding towards the situations of other people.” Student 13 described his observations of institutional leaders during COVID and said, “I think I saw at my institution a lot of people who used their position of leadership to show people empathy and to show patience a lot whether that be professors or the administration.” Student 15 shared his observations of leaders during COVID and how they did not show empathy, “It was obvious that they have never dealt with this [COVID] before, but at the same time, I don't think they wanted to admit that or they thought it was appropriate to show their emotion.” He went on to describe how the lack of empathy led to confusion among students. Student 5 captured the value of empathy in the following:

They [leaders] held both sides of the, the grief, like you were either grieving that you couldn't go out or grieving or like whatever you were grieving. It's not even just a spectrum of thought, but just they were able to hold people's opinions and their comfort levels and acknowledge that, but still have their own thoughts and their own convictions.

Student 9 said, “My kind of leadership perspective shifted direction to more kind of vulnerability and more kind of like considering other people’s perspectives...caring about all these people who are maybe affected.” Student 5 talked about the power of watching her leaders be vulnerable:

I've seen leaders like break down, over COVID...and like not break down fully where they're no longer in leadership, but just have moments of like, hey, I'm a person, too—



this is really hard. And so, showing their weakness or showing where, you know, this is a moment where I just need someone else to carry me or what I really thought was really healthy, I think to see your leaders not feel on top of the world all the time, especially when the world around you did feel yucky.

Participants described how it was easier for them to respect leaders who showed empathy and were willing to be vulnerable.

**Making Hard Decisions.** Student 10 acknowledged that sometimes leaders need to make hard decisions to be ethical. He used the example of the war in Ukraine and the ethical actions of businesses who do not cut ties with Russia. He went on to say that it would be difficult to work for a company where leaders are not willing to make the hard yet ethical decisions. Student 14 made this observation about leaders during COVID:

When I look at leaders now, I definitely have more of an understanding of they're just doing what they have to do or doing their job. In a lot of cases now, not in every case, but I definitely have more of a respect and a, like, I understand what they're doing is difficult and they may not even want to be doing it.

Student 7 said the following:

I think leadership needs to become very real, that as a leader post-COVID...you need to make some really tough decisions. Yeah, like presidents of universities trying to decide if they should have classes again with COVID or really big decisions that are for the better of the school and you might look bad and not everyone's gonna agree with you because of so many different opinions. But it's a responsibility to make tough decisions when you are a leader.

The responses of participants suggest that their observations of leaders during COVID expanded their perception of what it means to lead.

**Innovation.** Multiple participants expressed how COVID provided an opportunity to be innovative and creative. Student 5 observed, “I think being creative was a whole different realm [during COVID].” Student 2 said:

Post pandemic, my perception of a good leader has the qualities of being able to adapt and being able to, to implement or to look for innovation in their roles, to continuously improve whatever they're doing, but also to be ready for disruption. I think that previously I would have been content with being a good leader is able to do what they've done before really well.

Student 8 said, “I always think that leaders should be able to act quickly, so that didn't really change. [COVID] just showed what leaders were adapting quickly and which ones weren't.”

Student 12 shared the following:

Leadership felt different during COVID and it felt different after COVID. I don't know if I really had a good grasp on leadership like before COVID, but during COVID, it was like, it felt very up in the air like you don't really like, again, we don't know what's going on. But like it was people figuring out how to lead in the moment more. Like after a little bit, it was more like, I guess like confident leadership.

Student 5 discussed her work experience during COVID and said, “There was a lot of creativity and leadership and like making calls very quickly and then just running with it. And I felt really lucky to be on a team that could do that and was really cohesive.” Throughout interviews, participants expressed their hope that leaders will continue to be innovative in the future.

**Leadership Theory.** Participants' responses indicated a preference for leaders who demonstrate humble leadership and authentic leadership. As was mentioned, research by Kelemen et al. (2022) found that humble leaders are self-aware and can see themselves as they truly are. They are also open to getting feedback from their followers and have a genuine appreciation for other people. Humble leadership has an emphasis on modeling teachability so followers can learn from their leader. Maldonado et al. (2021) discussed how humble leadership creates an environment for innovation to flourish.

Servant leadership was identified by multiple participants as an effective leadership style. The concept of servant leadership was developed by Greenleaf (2002) and is embodied by focusing on service rather than leadership. Servant leaders seek to put the needs and interests of their followers above their own interests. This is confirmed by Kelemen et al. (2022), who discussed the purpose of servant leadership. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) compared the work of Greenleaf with the model of Jesus Christ in the Bible and highlighted the way Jesus modeled servant leadership in the way he put others first. Sendjaya and Sarros emphasized the motivation of servant leadership as distinct from other leadership styles. While authentic leadership is connected to humble leadership and servant leadership, Kelemen et al. (2022) offered a critique to authentic leadership because while authentic leaders are committed to being true to themselves, they may not be humble.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

After completing the research project, the responses of individual interviews were synthesized to describe the essence of their lived experiences. The data were gathered from interviews conducted over Zoom with members of Gen Z. The purpose of this qualitative

phenomenological study was to explore the workplace expectations of Gen Z amidst COVID-19.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: When Generation Z anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?
- RQ2: What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?
- RQ3: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace?
- RQ4: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?

For RQ1, the major themes identified in describing the ideal workplace were distilled into the following: (a) being treated as worthy of human dignity and (b) being treated as a whole person with a life outside of work. For RQ2, the essential themes in describing the ideal supervisor in the workplace were (a) a supervisor who treats employees as worthy of human dignity and (b) a supervisor who exhibits humble leadership. In response to RQ3, the significant themes that emerged were (a) personal challenges and (b) interpersonal challenges, and those themes were explored and connected to the future workplace. To answer RQ4, the major theme identified was demonstrates vulnerable leadership. The themes are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4***Summary of Research Questions and Emergent Themes*

Research Questions (RQ)	Emergent Themes (ET)
<b>RQ1</b> When Gen anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?	<b>ET1</b> Leader treats each employee as worthy of human dignity <b>ET2</b> Leader treats each employee as a whole person with a life outside of work
<b>RQ2</b> What expectations do members of Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?	<b>ET3</b> Leader treats each employee as worthy of dignity in work <b>ET4</b> Leader exhibits humble leadership
<b>RQ3</b> To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for the workplace?	<b>ET5</b> Gen Z identifies personal challenges <b>ET6</b> Gen Z identifies interpersonal challenges
<b>RQ4</b> To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?	<b>ET7</b> Leader demonstrates vulnerable leadership

**Conclusion**

The research findings were fully described in Chapter 4 by identifying characteristics, codes, and overarching themes from the interviews. The data were analyzed through an iterative process that required multiple rounds of analysis to ensure the rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences were fully captured and that the research questions were answered. The conclusions and themes that emerged from the research will be more fully explored in Chapter 5, and major findings will be connected to the literature.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about work and toward leadership in the workplace and how those expectations may have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic for Gen Z individuals. This study placed a particular focus on Gen Zers who will graduate in 2023 from colleges in the United States, Canada, and Eastern Europe to allow for a more global perspective on Gen Z.

### **Need for Study**

For the first time in modern history, there have been up to five distinct generations working side by side in the same organizations (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Fratičová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Haeger & Lingham, 2013; Hillman, 2014; Jirí, 2016; Kiiru-Weatherly, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015; Zemke et al., 2022). The newest generation to enter the workforce, Gen Z, was profoundly different from previous generations (Dorsey & Villa, 2020; Grow & Yang, 2018; Twenge, 2017). Previous research has found that Gen Z has their own unique attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and expectations (Anderson et al., 2017; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Maloni et al., 2019; McGaha, 2018; Schroth, 2019). This research study is significant because it used qualitative phenomenology to explore the essence of the experiences of members of Gen Z who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Gap in the Literature**

While there is a growing body of quantitative research about the workplace expectations of Gen Z, there is limited qualitative research about their experiences and expectations. Most existing quantitative data about Gen Z is focused on the United States or other western nations. This research began to fill the gap of qualitative data and brought a more global focus to

generational differences and their implications for the global workplace. Participants in this study were drawn from six countries and three continents.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research was based on several theoretical frameworks as described in the literature review. This research was rooted in social science theory and explored the concepts of leadership theory as well as how generations are defined and formed and how they interact with one another. Leadership theory provided a foundation for how supervisors and employees typically interact in the workplace. In recent decades, transformational leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978) and authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) have emerged as effective leadership styles in the workplace. Both have a higher emphasis on relationships, authenticity, and ethical behavior than other leadership theories and tend to be favored by Millennials and Gen Z employees. These leadership theories will be more fully connected to the study findings later in the chapter.

Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations provided an overall framework for the study of generations. Mead's (1970) concept of the generation gap was explored to describe the differences among modern generations and how the gaps were indicative of cultural shifts and new generational identities. Generational theory provided a framework for the studies conducted by modern generational researchers (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and an application of social identity theory (Avolio et al., 2004) were used to underpin how generations form identity. Finally, phenomenology was used to answer the research questions in the study.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: When Generation Z anticipates entering the workforce full-time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like?
- RQ2: What expectations do Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace?
- RQ3: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for work?
- RQ4: To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace?

### **Methodology and Design**

This research study used qualitative methodology to answer the research questions. Qualitative phenomenology described the shared experiences of the participants—in this case, the experience of being a college student amidst the COVID-19 pandemic—to discover the essence of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Richards & Morse, 2013). For this study, qualitative phenomenology allowed me to learn about everyday issues and explore them more deeply (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014) while focusing on what the participants have in common as they experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I used purposeful selection to recruit volunteer students from CCCU institutions to participate in the study. Each participant signed informed consent forms indicating their willingness to participate voluntarily. The criteria for inclusion for this study were that each participant be graduating from a CCCU institution in 2023, speak English fluently, be age 20 to 26, and have some type of previous work or internship experience.



## **Organization of Chapter**

This chapter outlines the key findings of each research question and then connects those findings with the existing body of literature. Each section outlines which research findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend the literature. Each section includes an analysis and interpretation of the findings, and conclusions are drawn. Some implications of the research findings are explored. Limitations from the research are identified and discussed. The chapter also includes recommendations for practitioners and suggestions for future research.

### **Key Findings for RQ1**

RQ1 was, When Generation Z anticipates entering the workforce full time, what expectations do they have or not have for what the workplace will be like? For this question, participants described the characteristics of their ideal workplace environment and then described the characteristics of a negative workplace environment. Participants' responses included the concepts of work-life balance, meaningful work, valuing mental health, and toxic workplace culture. The emergent themes from RQ1 were (a) being treated as worthy of dignity in work and (b) being treated as a whole person with a life outside of work. In this section, responses from Gen Z participants are connected to the existing literature. The conclusions and findings of the research for RQ1 are identified as to where they support, negate, or extend previous research.

#### ***Work-Life Balance***

The findings of this study are consistent with findings by Anderson et al. (2017)—that Gen Z has different beliefs from previous generations about the centrality of work in their lives. Research findings indicate that Gen Zers will not continue working for an organization that does not respect work-life balance. Previous research by DeMarino Watts (2018) found that differing

expectations about work-life balance can be a source of conflict among different generations. The research findings suggest that Gen Zers will have a learning curve when they enter the workplace, particularly if they are hired for roles in which they are salaried and are expected to be available outside of traditional work hours. One implication for this is that Gen Zers who want to have a life outside of work will need to advocate for their boundaries to be respected. It is likely that supervisors will need to have clear communication with the newest members of the workforce to ensure everyone understands job expectations.

Findings from this study confirmed existing research about Gen Z's expectation to have flexibility in work. Participants described their interest in having flexibility in when, how, and where they work, but there was little interest in fully remote options. Recent research by Nishizaki and DellaNeve (2023) confirmed Gen Z's interest in flexibility at work and suggested that most Gen Zers are not interested in fully remote work but prefer to have a hybrid option where they can spend some time in an office and some time working remotely. This also confirms research by Dorsey and Villa (2020) which indicated that Gen Z was more motivated by flexible work than compensation.

### ***Meaningful Work***

The findings of this study indicate that meaningful work is a priority for Gen Z. Multiple participants said that having purpose in work was more important to them than their salary. Weeks and Schaffert (2019) suggested that organizations have an ethical responsibility to provide meaningful work for their employees. To effectively provide meaningful work, leaders must know how their employees define meaningful work and how it is connected to personal values, motivation, and purpose. Gen Z is not a monolith, and different employees will have their own definitions of what constitutes meaningful work. The concept of meaningful work is worthy

of further research. There exists an opportunity for leaders to cultivate an understanding of meaningful work and to develop tools for direct conversations with their employees about what types of work they find meaningful.

### ***Mental Health Concerns***

The findings of this study show that Gen Z is interested in workplaces that have a high value on the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. These findings are in alignment with the Deloitte (2022) Global Gen Z Survey, which indicated one of the primary reasons people left jobs since the start of COVID was due to the negative impact of work on mental health. The issue of mental health in the workplace was already a concern for businesses prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID exacerbated existing issues with mental health, and many participants in this study shared their own experiences with anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The future of the workplace will be deeply impacted by the mental health of employees. In the context of this study, the participants were all undergraduate college students during COVID. Most undergraduate students currently have access to a free counseling center at their institution and are legally entitled to academic accommodations for mental health if they qualify. As Gen Zers graduate from their supportive undergraduate environments and enter the workplace, they will not have the same accommodations. Leaders will have opportunities to help Gen Z employees get the mental health support they need. Gen Zers will need to find ways to successfully complete the jobs they have been hired to do while also learning how to manage their mental health concerns in a productive way. There exists the opportunity to explore mental health more deeply in the workplace and how a supportive work environment could address mental health challenges.

### ***Toxic Culture***

Findings from this study identified Gen Z's concern about toxic workplaces. Each participant who discussed a toxic workplace environment had their own interpretation of what constituted toxic. Some alluded to competition or lack of professionalism, while other participants discussed harassment, sexism, and racism. The research findings are supported by Sull, Sull, Cipolli, et al. (2022) who found the following markers of toxic culture: (a) failure to value diversity, equity, and inclusion; (b) disrespect toward employees; and (c) unethical behavior on the part of leaders. Toxic culture is a major predictor of worker turnover, so leaders need to pay attention to these issues if they want to retain top talent. The research findings confirm previous research by Hirsch (2021), who found that Gen Z is demanding human dignity across all spheres of life.

### **Key Findings for RQ2**

RQ2 was, What expectations do Gen Z have or not have for a future supervisor in the workplace? Participants were asked to describe the characteristics of an ideal supervisor and the characteristics of a challenging supervisor. Participants' responses included the concepts of respect in the workplace, mentoring, leadership style, and feedback style. Emergent themes were (a) treats employee like a person worthy of dignity and (b) exhibits humble leadership. In this section, responses from Gen Z participants are connected to the existing literature. The conclusions and findings of the research for RQ2 are identified in where they support, negate, or extend previous research.

### ***Respect in the Workplace***

The findings of this study are confirmed by Hirsch's (2021) and Parker and Menasce Horowitz's (2022) research since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which indicate that Gen

Zers expect to be respected in the workplace and will leave jobs if they feel disrespected at work. These findings are also confirmed in a recent survey by the Workforce Institute at Kronos (2019) when Gen Z identified the top leadership traits they want in a leader as trustworthy, supportive, and caring. Gen Z expects their supervisors to be honest, to demonstrate integrity (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022), and to care about them as people and not judge them (Dorsey & Villa, 2020). These research findings confirmed that study participants will not continue in a job where they feel disrespected or devalued. The concept of respect has implications for the workplace because there can be a difference between being respected and feeling respected. When Gen Zers enter the workplace, they may find a discrepancy between perception and reality regarding respect.

### ***Mentoring***

The value of mentorship in this study's findings is congruent with previous research. Many study participants mentioned their hope for a mentoring relationship with their supervisor. Gen Zers who are preparing to enter the workforce full-time are aware they are new and have much to learn. While Gen Z is tech savvy, previous research by Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) indicated that Gen Zers are lacking face-to-face social skills and would benefit from opportunities to develop those skills. Fodor and Jaeckel (2018) suggested that Gen Z would be able to develop social skills through mentoring. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Becker (2022) found that many Gen Zers described a sense of isolation, and therefore in-person interactions would become even more important. Research by Nishizaki and DellaNeve (2023) during the COVID-19 pandemic found that Gen Zers want their leader to be a mentoring coach. Mentoring will play a key role as Gen Z continues to enter the workplace, so there is opportunity for leaders to develop their mentoring skills. The findings of this research underscored the importance of

relationships and community. Mentoring may help address these issues and could promote a sense of belonging in the workplace. There is a need for further research on how leaders in the workplace can foster more inclusive environments that allow employees to feel like they belong.

### ***Leadership Style***

The research findings from this study indicate that Gen Zers want to work for humble leaders, and this desire is consistent with previous literature on authentic leadership. Avolio et al. (2004) found that authentic leaders seek to serve and empower their followers. Gardner et al. (2011) said that authentic leaders have a moral compass and that their behavior matches their values. Seamon (2022) indicated that transformational leadership demonstrated by authentic leaders can create a supportive environment in the workplace. A leadership style that is focused on the wellbeing and development of employees will continue to be essential in working with Gen Z. Servant leadership, as described by Greenleaf (2002), is essential in promoting the dignity and wellbeing of followers. Servant leadership focuses on supporting followers and helping them grow. A recent study by Aguas (2019) revealed that Gen Z describes effective leadership as characterized by servant-heartedness and influence, is focused on teams' needs, and is committed to transparency. Leadership style will prove to be a key factor in working effectively with Gen Z.

### ***Feedback Style***

The research findings indicated that Gen Zers want their supervisors to be clear and direct when giving feedback while also being honest and respectful. Gen Zers in this study expressed a fear that their supervisors will judge them. These findings are confirmed by previous research by Wilkie (2019) and Workforce Institute at Kronos (2019), which found that leaders will need to be prepared to address the high levels of anxiety Gen Z has around workplace performance and

expectations. There is likely to be a large gap between how leaders give feedback and how employees prefer to receive feedback. The research findings indicated Gen Zers want regular access to and frequent feedback from their supervisor so they can be encouraged and challenged to continue in their own growth.

### **Key Findings for RQ3**

RQ3 was, To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's expectations for work? In response to this question, participants discussed their experience with COVID-19, digital fatigue, and intergenerational conflict. Emergent themes were (a) personal challenges and (b) interpersonal challenges. In this section, responses from Gen Z participants are connected to the existing literature. The conclusions and findings of the research for RQ3 are identified in where they support, negate, or extend previous research.

### ***COVID-19 Pandemic***

This research focused on the lived experiences of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant was in their first year of college when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Research findings are consistent with previous findings by the Center for Generational Kinetics (2022), Dorsey and Villa (2020), and Hirsch (2021) that indicated how COVID-19 became the defining moment of Gen Z. More specifically, COVID had a unique effect on Gen Z due to their age and developmental stage. Research findings show that the majority of participants experienced loneliness, insecurity, and fear amidst COVID, which is in alignment with previous research by Dorsey and Villa. Research findings also indicated that Gen Zers experienced loss and disappointment during COVID, which was confirmed by Becker (2022). Existing mental health challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Adapting to Technology***

For this study, the research findings showed that one of the biggest challenges between Gen Z and older generations during COVID was in adapting to technology. Findings were supported by previous research that Gen Z is the first generation to be digital natives (Chillakuri, 2020; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Hassan & Kodwani, 2020; Lanier, 2017; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Participants described their ease in transitioning to online school over Zoom. They did not prefer online school and experienced Zoom fatigue, but their technical acumen allowed them to adapt quickly. COVID-19 shed light on previous research that a digital divide is expanding between Gen Z and older generations. This was particularly true in adapting to using Zoom. These findings are confirmed by existing literature by Prensky (2001) and Evans and Robertson (2020), who suggested that digital immigrants could become proficient with new technology but may need training and support to be effective.

### ***Intergenerational Conflict***

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research by Zemke et al. (2022) and Perilus (2020) about intergenerational conflict where people in different generations disagree with each other due to their unique values, preferences, and ways of thinking. Kiiru-Weatherly (2017) found that people in different generations may disagree with one another due to competing needs and being in different life stages. During COVID-19, almost all study participants left their college campuses and returned home to be with their families. Several described the uncomfortable realization that they did not agree with their parents as much as they had previously thought. One mentioned how he felt when his parents reverted to treating him like a young child instead of an adult. Others expressed how challenging it was to maintain boundaries with their parents amidst differing opinions. Research findings suggest some of the most significant challenges for participants came from their interactions with their grandparents



who were in a very different stage of life and who did not want to follow COVID regulations. This was particularly true for those whose grandparents had lived through war and viewed COVID as a mild inconvenience.

### **Key Findings for RQ4**

RQ4 was, To what extent, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust in the workplace? Participants' responses included the concepts of humble leadership, ethical behavior, and trust. The emergent theme for RQ4 was vulnerable leadership. In this section, responses from Gen Z participants are connected to the existing literature. The conclusions and findings of the research for RQ4 are identified in where they support, negate, or extend previous research.

### ***Servant Leadership***

Servant leadership was first documented through the life of Jesus Christ (New International Version Bible, 2006). Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (New International Version Bible, 2006, Mark 10:43). Jesus then described how he had come not to be served but to serve others. Greenleaf (2002) developed a model of servant leadership based on four concepts: (a) putting others ahead of self-interest, (b) listening to others, (c) engendering trust by being a trustworthy person, and (d) helping followers be healthy and whole. Research findings from this study support previous findings on leadership style. Panwar and Mehta (2019) found that leaders need to be willing to adapt and change if they want to stay relevant. Anderson et al. (2017) concluded that leaders must be prepared to use multiple leadership styles to meet the needs of employees. Cable (2018) stated that top-down leadership is outdated and counterproductive. Cable found that leaders who have the humility of a servant leader seek to help their followers grow and suggested that showing respect to employees and

giving them space to share their ideas will improve the entire organization. The findings of this study showed that participants were especially impressed with humble leaders who displayed servant leadership qualities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Ethical Behavior***

The findings of this study are consistent with research by Chillakuri (2020) and Leslie et al. (2021) who found that Gen Z is drawn to organizations that are focused on bettering the world. Previous research indicated that Gen Z expected and demanded transparency and highly ethical behavior (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Chillakuri, 2020; Magano et al., 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The findings of this study show that Gen Zers expect their leaders to behave ethically and to be willing to make hard decisions. One participant used the example of expecting a leader to cut ties with businesses that were operating in Russia given the war in Ukraine.

### ***Trust***

In this study, trust was not explicitly mentioned in participants' responses to RQ4 but was mentioned throughout other responses. Research findings indicate that Gen Zers are less hierarchical than previous generations and may have different views about trust. This finding is in alignment with previous research by Lazányi and Bilan (2017), who found that respect and trust in leaders in the workplace are no longer automatic and must be earned. In this study, participant responses indicated that they were satisfied with the way their leaders responded to COVID. RQ4 hypothesized that Gen Z's perceptions of leadership and trust may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but in this study trust or lack of trust was not specifically identified as a response to RQ4.

### **Revisiting Theoretical Frameworks**

In this section, the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research study are revisited. Research findings are connected to Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations, Mead's (1970) concept of the generation gap, generation theory (Twenge et al., 2010), and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. The conclusions and findings of the study either support, negate, or extend previous theoretical frameworks.

### ***Mannheim's Theory of Generations***

Mannheim's (1952) theory posits that generations have their own identity, similar to social class, based on time and shared place in history. Mannheim's work is considered the foundation for generational theory (Abate et al., 2018; Aguas, 2019; Cassell, 2017; Codrington, 2008; Corsten, 1999; Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Joshi et al., 2010; Leslie et al., 2021; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Lyons et al., 2019; McGaha, 2018; Opermann & Kalmus, 2019; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Pilcher, 1994; Popescu, 2019; Scholz, 2019; Seamon, 2022; Spiegel, 2013; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Caballero and Baigorri (2019) credit Mannheim's work as the foundation for understanding current generational cohorts. Mannheim's theory was focused on geographic location and time and was limited by national borders. The research in this study drew participants from six countries. There was significant overlap in their responses, indicating they have a strong sense of global generational identity, particularly due to their shared experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and access to social media. The findings of this research study confirm that Mannheim's theory could be extended into the concept of global generations as discussed by Edmunds and Turner (2005). Edmunds and Turner's research found that globalization and media have formed shared experiences among members of the same generation, thereby creating a global generation.

### ***Generational Theory***

The findings of this study confirm existing generational research by Goh and Lee (2018), Twenge et al. (2010), and McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009). Twenge et al. showed that every generation is shaped by media, popular culture, economic events, and peers. These researchers posited that one can generalize about an entire generation in order to better understand individuals. Magano et al. (2020) discussed how generations are shaped by historical events and experiences. Strauss and Howe (1991) found that each generation is impacted differently by significant events based on their life stage at the time. The findings of this study confirm Strauss and Howe's research, particularly due to the impact of COVID-19 on participants who were all undergraduate college students when COVID began. Many participants shared common experiences and used similar words to describe their expectations for the future workplace and leaders in the workplace, demonstrating a shared sense of generational identity.

### ***Mead's Generation Gap***

The findings of this study confirm Mead's (1970) concept of the generation gap. Mead's concept provided a framework for the study of generations; gaps between generations can cause conflict and a lack of understanding. The application of this concept was most evident when research participants discussed their experiences during COVID-19 and their frustration with the difficulty older generations had adapting to Zoom and other online platforms. The research findings for this study confirm Mead's conclusion that when there is a generation gap, each generation must be willing to learn each other's language so they can work more effectively together.

### ***Social Identity Theory and Social Learning Theory***

Research findings show that Gen Zers are interested in working in a supportive and collegial environment, yet participants identified their preference to engage socially only as is

comfortable for them without being forced. This desire is consistent with previous literature on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory plays a role in how people interact in the workplace and how individuals assess which behaviors in the workplace are normative. As Gen Zers observe the value of collegiality, they are likely to be more engaged at work (Knowles et al., 2015). Gen Zers described their sense of belonging among their generation and identified a preference to work with other Gen Zers who understood them. This confirms previous literature on Lyons et al.'s (2019) social identity theory, which posits that each generation has a sense of belonging in their generation. This also confirms research by Strauss and Howe (1991), who illustrated that different generations have their own sense of community.

### **Limitations of Study**

The research was limited by the number of participants and the number of questions I could reasonably ask during a 45-minute interview. Some participants were reluctant to respond to challenging or personal questions, particularly around their experiences during COVID-19. Throughout communication and interviews with participants, I adopted an empathetic and open posture. During the interviews, I listened carefully to each participant and maintained eye contact over Zoom as much as possible in order to help participants feel heard and valued as they shared their experience with the phenomenon.

Another limitation of the study could be from the reality of time constraints when conducting doctoral research and needing to meet specific deadlines to graduate. It is possible I missed significant things while analyzing the data. Further limitations include the small sample size and focus on participants who were English speakers. It is likely a more racially and ethnically diverse group of American students could have garnered different results.

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

Each interview was audio-recorded to ensure clarity and reliability of participant responses. Each audio recording was automatically transcribed and then checked for accuracy. The credibility of the study was underscored by my careful transcription and representation of each individual participant's responses to interview questions. The interview protocol had eight primary interview questions, and I followed up with prompts to allow the participant to expound on their responses. Moustakas (1994) observed that validation of qualitative research comes through careful coding and rich textural descriptions. This study is related to the broader population of Gen Z who are preparing to enter the workforce. The research was dependable due to the sample population and ensuring that each participant met the criteria for inclusion.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation was one way to add validity to this qualitative study. A study can be considered triangulated if the results meet previous studies to challenge, illuminate, or verify the others' findings (Richards & Morse, 2013). Triangulation can also be achieved using multiple data sources and investigators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was rooted in literature and was triangulated with existing quantitative data about Gen Z. For additional triangulation, the study results were confirmed by a subject matter expert on Gen Z in the workplace and by a fellow doctoral cohort member. Any discrepancies in the results were discussed.

### ***Role of Researcher***

Qualitative research is interpretive, so I identified biases, values, and background that may impact how I interpreted data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Richards & Morse, 2013). I also practiced epoché to bracket my previous assumptions and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The protection of human subjects was foundational to conducting ethical research (Moustakas, 1994).

I know which interview is connected to each participant, but the results were anonymized, and individual responses were stripped of identifying information.

Reflexivity was an important aspect of this research. Prior to beginning the study, I identified my role and my similarities and differences from the interviewees. My professional work puts me in close contact with undergraduate members of Gen Z. I have had many previous personal experiences with the group because I work with them daily. I have made observations about their characteristics and approach to work. For this study, I chose not to interview any students at the institution at which I work to avoid bias.

### **Analysis and Implications of Findings**

The findings of this research study have several implications for the workplace and leaders in the workplace. First, the majority of findings were consistent with emergent research about Gen Z, but the qualitative nature of the research allowed participants to explain their responses in rich detail and contextualize their experiences. The emergent themes from the research pertaining to expectations for leadership and the workplace were (a) being treated as worthy of dignity in work, (b) being treated as a whole person with a life outside of work, (c) leaders exhibiting humble leadership, and (d) leaders demonstrating vulnerable leadership. The emergent themes from the research pertaining to COVID-19 focused on (a) personal challenges and (b) interpersonal challenges.

When analyzing the emergent themes from the research, it is evident that people of all generations share similar desires for work: being treated as worthy of dignity and having leaders who exhibit humble and vulnerable leadership. There is a shared desire among generations to be viewed as whole people with a life outside of work. However, what is unique about Gen Z is that these shared desires are significantly amplified. Gen Z expects and demands to be treated with

dignity in their work immediately upon entering the workplace. They also expect their leaders to be kind, ethical, humble, and caring. The research findings suggest that although Gen Z may have the same aspirations for work as previous generations, the motivations, expectations, and reasons are unique. As Lanier (2017) noted, “No generation is a monolith” (p. 288), so there are variations within each individual’s expectations.

Throughout this study, it was evident that participants used the same popular terms as other members of Gen Z to describe the future workplace or future supervisor, but they had different definitions for those terms. Multiple participants indicated they would not work at a toxic workplace, but their definitions of what constituted a toxic workplace varied greatly. The word “respect” was mentioned frequently by participants in the study, but each individual had a different understanding of what being respected meant to them. Leaders will also need to be curious and ask questions when they hear employees talk about their expectations so they can ensure they are talking about the same thing.

Although Gen Zers in this study strongly expressed that they are not interested in multiple levels of hierarchy, it is likely many of them will ultimately work in organizations or institutions with a hierarchical structure. There will be a learning curve in how Gen Zers choose to engage with organizational structures that are not their preference. Those who lead Gen Z in the workplace would benefit from having open and honest conversations with their employees about organizational structure. There are implications for how leaders can model servant leadership even in hierarchical organizations. It is likely that even if the organization is strictly hierarchical, a leader who embodies servant leadership will be more effective in leading Gen Z employees; leaders will need to be in touch with their own humanity and develop it. In a time



when artificial intelligence is gaining traction around the world, skills that are uniquely human such as emotional intelligence will only become more important in the workplace.

The research findings suggested that participants were more interested in meaningful work than salary. Because the sample of participants was drawn from faith-based institutions, it is possible the personal faith of participants influenced how they perceive the purpose of work. It is interesting to note that very few participants even mentioned salary as a priority when they enter the workforce. It is possible that my role as the researcher and how the question was posed and framed influenced how participants responded. I asked participants to describe their ideal workplace, which likely influenced participants to consider the interpersonal environment in which they wanted to work. Had I asked participants what they wanted to get out of work or what benefits they were excited about, it is likely compensation would have been mentioned with higher frequency.

Previous research by Stahl and Literat (2022) showed that Gen Zers express themselves in a contradictory way: they are simultaneously powerful and confident while also being vulnerable and somewhat damaged. The theme of contradiction among Gen Zers was confirmed by this research study. They are hopeful but also depressed. Gen Z is entrepreneurial and wants to work for themselves, but they also want to be mentored. Gen Z wants frequent feedback from supervisors and yet the autonomy to make their own decisions. They value clear communication but can struggle in their own verbal communication. Their overuse of filler words such as “like” and “you know” can be a distraction in conversation. Gen Z’s verbal communication may make them appear less intelligent than they are, and they will benefit from opportunities to grow in their articulation. Gen Z wants things on their own terms. Leaders in the workplace will benefit

by learning to hold these contradictions in tension and by helping their Gen Z employees learn about the nuances of complex issues.

There are significant implications for how the mental health of employees will impact the workplace. Prior to COVID-19, mental health was a substantial concern among members of Gen Z. Previous research by Hunt et al. (2018) demonstrated the causal link between social media use and increased mental health issues. Global research by Deloitte (2021, 2022) found that stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout are increasing among members of Gen Z. Mental health challenges can cause people to leave their jobs and will only continue to be more pervasive in the future as Gen Zers embrace digital lives. Leaders in the workplace will need to be aware of the mental health challenges of their workforce and find strategic and innovative solutions to support their employees. Leaders will also have a unique opportunity to coach employees on how to invest in their own mental health.

The research findings indicate that Gen Z has high expectations for leaders in the workplace. Gen Z seeks to be empowered and mentored by humble and authentic leaders. Yet, leaders are not the only ones who have a responsibility to shape the workplace; Gen Zers have an important role in contributing to the positive workplace environment they desire. Gen Zers have a responsibility to humble themselves, learn from those who have more experience than they do, and adapt to new systems and structures. If Gen Zers approach the workplace with curiosity and openness, they will be better equipped to be effective in the workplace. Ultimately, Gen Zers need to treat their leaders and coworkers with the same dignity with which they aspire to be treated.

### **Recommendations for Future Scholarly Research**

The findings of this study have several implications for future research. To promote future research on Gen Z in the workplace, it would be prudent to extend the research to members of Gen Z who have entered the workforce full-time and have gained several years of professional experience. It would also be helpful to extend this research to Gen Zers who did not attend college and may be working in different industries to learn more about their lived experiences. The sample population for this study came from faith-based institutions, so including students who do not come from faith-based institutions in further research would be beneficial. Another way to extend this research would be to conduct a similar study among a more racially and ethnically diverse group in the United States.

The concept of global generations is worthy of further research. By extending this research to include participants from Asia, Africa, and South America, researchers will be able to explore the concept of global generational identity. It would be helpful to include both quantitative and qualitative research in the exploration of global generations. Extending this research more globally would also allow for further comparison among countries.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about work and toward leadership in the workplace and how those expectations may have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic for Gen Z individuals. The research findings showed that Gen Z had been deeply impacted by COVID-19 and that they had a front row seat to watch leaders amidst the pandemic—they were observing and learning and shaping their expectations.

As George Orwell famously said, “Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it” (1968, p. 51). This fatalistic statement provides a caution and an opportunity for those who will lead Gen Z in the workplace. Humble and vulnerable leaders will be open and willing to learn from a generation that has come of age amidst a global pandemic. Leaders will need to rise to the challenge of adapting to a new and innovative workforce. During an interview, one of the participants said, “Workplaces beware, Gen Zs are coming for you! You won't survive us!” His words capture the passion and energy Gen Z will bring to the workforce. They are ready to engage, but they will need support and mentoring along the way.

Ultimately, Gen Z wants what we all want: to be treated as people worthy of dignity. They are passionate, capable, justice-oriented, and ready to take on the world to make it a better and more inclusive place. If we as older generations are willing to be humble, there is much we could learn from this hopeful generation.

## REFERENCES

- Abate, J. J., Schaefer, T., & Pavone, T. (2018). Understanding generational identity, job burnout, job satisfaction, job tenure, and turnover intention. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 22(1), 1–12.  
<https://www.abacademies.org/articles/understanding-generational-identity-job-burnout-job-satisfaction-job-tenure-and-turnover-intention-7013.html>
- Abercrombie, B. A. (2014). *Multigenerational workforce satisfaction: Relationship between generational cohorts and employee engagement* (Publication No. 3641276) [Doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Aggarwal, A., Sadhna, P., Gupta, S., Mittal, A., & Rastogi, S. (2020). Gen Z entering the workforce: Restructuring HR policies and practices for fostering the task performance and organizational commitment. *Journal of Public Affairs*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2535>
- Aguas, J. (2019). Millennial and Generation Z's perspectives on leadership effectiveness. *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 13(1). <https://www.regent.edu/journal/emerging-leadership-journeys/gen-z-generation-z-leadership/>
- Anderson, H., Baur, J., Griffith, J., & Buckley, M. R. (2017). What works for you may not work for (Gen)Me: Limitations of present leadership theories for the new generation. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(1), 245–260.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.08.001>
- Andino, I. (2019). *Turnover intentions of Generation Z employees in organizations* (Publication No. 22589132) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Phoenix]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

- Arsenault, P. (2004). Validating generational differences: A legitimate diversity and leadership issue. *Leadership & Organization Development*, 25(2), 124–141.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730410521813>
- Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Walumbwa, F. O., Luthans, F., & May, D. R. (2004). Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors. *Leadership Quarterly*, 15(6), 801–823.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.09.003>
- Avolio, B. J., Wernsing, T., & Gardner, W. L. (2018). Revisiting the development and validation of the authentic leadership questionnaire: Analytical clarifications. *Journal of Management*, 44(2), 399–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317739960>
- Aylward, A. (2022, November 10). How Gen Z held off the red wave. *Time*.  
<https://time.com/6232272/generation-z-voters-midterm-elections/>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Barhate, B., & Dirani, K. M. (2022). Career aspirations of generation Z: A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Training & Development*, 46(1/2), 139–157.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-07-2020-0124>
- Bass, B., & Avolio, B. (1993). *Transformational leadership: A response to critiques*. In M. M. Chemers & R. Ayman (Eds.), *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions*. Academic Press.
- Bass, B., & Bass, R. (2008). *The Bass handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial application* (4th ed.). Free Press.

- Becker, K. L. (2022). We want connection and we do not mean wi-fi: Examining the impacts of Covid-19 on Gen Z's work and employment outcomes. *Management Research Review, 45*(5), 684–699. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-01-2021-0052>
- Bencsik, A., Horváth-Csikós, G., & Juhász, T. (2016). Y and Z generations at workplaces. *Journal of Competitiveness, 8*(3), 90–106. <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.03.06>
- Benítez-Márquez, M. D., Sánchez-Teba, E. M., Bermúdez-González, G., & Núñez-Rydman, E. S. (2022). Generation Z within the workforce and in the workplace: A bibliometric analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology, (2022)12*. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736820>
- Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. (2007). *Leading for a lifetime*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Berge, Z. L., & Berge, M. B. (2019). The economic ABCs of educating and training Generations X, Y, and Z. *Performance Improvement, 58*(5), 44–53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21864>
- Bishop, C. F. (2004). *Generational cohorts and cultural diversity as factors affecting leadership transition in organizations* (Publication No. 3115817) [Doctoral dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Bohdziewicz, P. (2016). Career anchors of representatives of Generation Z: Some conclusions for managing the younger generation of employees. *Human Resource Management, 6*(113), 57–74.
- Bornman, D. A. J. (2019). Gender-based leadership perceptions and preferences of Generation Z as future business leaders in South Africa. *Acta Commercii, 19*(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ac.v19i1.708>

- Brenner, G., DellaNeve, J., & Nishizaki, S. (2021, July 26). Gen Z and workplace bullying, ghosting, and cancel culture. *Psychology Today*.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/experimentations/202107/gen-z-and-workplace-bullying-ghosting-and-cancel-culture>
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Open Road Integrated Media.
- Butin, D. (2010). *The education dissertation: A guide for practitioner scholars*. Corwin.
- Caballero, M., & Baigorri, A. (2019). Glocalising the theory of generations: The case of Spain. *Time & Society*, 28(1), 333–357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X18783374>
- Cable, D. (2018, April 23). *How humble leadership really works*. Harvard Business Review.  
<https://hbr.org/2018/04/how-humble-leadership-really-works>
- Carfagno, R. (2019). *Value based leadership: The impact of preferred leadership preferences across generational cohorts* (Publication No. 13899540) [Doctoral dissertation, Eastern University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Cassell, S. K. (2017). HRM solutions for retaining Millennials in western societies. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(5), 141-149.  
<https://www.doi.org/10.1515/mjss-2017-0032>
- Center for Generational Kinetics. (2022). *The state of Gen Z 2021-2022: Gen Z as employees and workforce trendsetters*. <https://genhq.com/generation-z-workforce-research-2021-2022/>
- Chen J., & Lian, R. (2015). Generational differences in work values in China. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 43(4), 567–578. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.4.567>



- Chery, S. (2022, November 11). Gen Z announces itself in midterms with Democratic boost, historic wins. *The Washington Post*.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/11/11/gen-z-midterms-2022-voting/>
- Chillakuri, B. (2020). Understanding Generation Z expectations for effective onboarding. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 33(7), 1277–1296.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-02-2020-0058>
- Chillakuri, B., & Mahanandia, R. (2018). Generation Z entering the workforce: The need for sustainable strategies in maximizing their talent. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 26(4), 34–38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-01-2018-0006>
- Codrington, G. (2008, July). *Detailed introduction to generational theory*. Tomorrow Today.  
<https://tomorrowtodayglobal.com/>
- Cohen, A. (2021, May 10). *How to quit your job in the great post-pandemic resignation boom*. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-10/quit-your-job-how-to-resign-after-covid-pandemic?leadSource=uverify%20wall>
- Corsten, M. (1999). The time of generations. *Time & Society*, 8(2), 249–272.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X99008002003>
- Cresnar, R., & Nedelko, Z. (2020). Understanding future leaders: How are personal values of generations Y and Z tailored to leadership in industry 4.0? *Sustainability*, 12(11) 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114417>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Debusmann, B., Jr., & Sherman, N. (2022, November 10). *US midterms: Why a Republican 'wave' never happened*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-63569850>

Deloitte. (2021). *A call for accountability and action: The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey*.  
<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/2021-deloitte-global-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

Deloitte. (2022). *Striving for balance, advocating for change: The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey*.  
<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/deloitte-2022-genz-millennial-survey.pdf>

DeMarino Watts, M. (2018). *How do organizations create and sustain vitality in a multigenerational workforce* (Publication No. 10936989) [Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Desai, S. P., & Lele, V. (2017). Correlating internet, social networks and workplace: A case of Generation Z students. *Journal of Commerce & Management Thought*, 8(4), 802–815.  
<https://doi.org/10.5958/0976-478X.2017.00050.7>

Dill, K. (2015, November 6). 7 things employers should know about the Gen Z workforce. *Forbes Magazine*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2015/11/06/7-things-employers-should-know-about-the-gen-z-workforce/?sh=4b6ca92cfad7>

Dilthey, W. (1957) *Philosophy of existence*. In W. Kluback & M. Weinbaum (Trans.) *Types of worldview and their development in metaphysical systems*. Bookman Associates.  
(Original work published 1911)

- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
- Dittmann, M. (2005). Generational differences at work. *Monitor on Psychology*, 36(6), 54-55.
- Dobewall, H., Tormos, R., & Vauclair, C.-M. (2017). Normative value change across the human life cycle: Similarities and differences across Europe. *Journal of Adult Development*, 24(4), 263–276. <http://www.doi.org/10.1007/s10804-017-9264-y>
- Dorsey, J. R., & Villa, D. (2020). *Zconomy: How Gen A will change the future of business and what to do about it*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Driscoll, M. (2014). *Psychology of learning for instruction* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- Duncan, P., Green, M., Gergen, E., & Ecung, W. (2017). Authentic leadership: Is it more than emotional intelligence? *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, 7(2), 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.5929/2017.7.2.2>
- Duxbury, L., & Higgins, C. (2005). An empirical assessment of generational differences in work-related values [Paper Presentation]. Administrative Sciences Association of Canada (ASAC) Human Resources Management Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada.
- Dwivedula, R., Singh, P., & Azaran, M. (2019). Gen Z: Where are we now, and future pathways. *Journal of HRM*, 22(2), 28–40. <https://www.jhrm.eu>
- Edmunds, J., & Turner, B. S. (2005). Global generations: Social change in the twentieth century. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56(4), 559–577. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00083.x>
- Espinoza, C., & Ukleja, M. (2016). *Managing the Millennials*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Evans, C., & Robertson, W. (2020). The four phases of the digital natives debate. *Human Behavior & Emerging Technologies*, 2(3), 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.196>
- Ferrazi, K., & Clementi, M. (2022, June 22). *The great resignation stems from a great exploration*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/06/the-great-resignation-stems-from-a-great-exploration>
- Fodor, M., & Jaeckel, K. (2018). What does it take to have a successful career through the eyes of Generation Z – Based on the results of a primary qualitative research. *International Journal of Lifelong Education and Leadership*, 4(1), 1–7.
- Francis, D., & Hoefel, F. (2018, November 12). "True Gen:" Generation Z and its implications for companies. McKinsey Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies#>
- Fraňčová, J., & Kirchmayer, Z. (2018). Barriers to work motivation of Generation Z. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(2), 28-39. <https://www.jhrm.eu/>
- Fusco, T., O’Riordan, S., & Palmer, S. (2015). Authentic leaders are... conscious, competent, confident, and congruent: A grounded theory of group coaching and authentic leadership development. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 10(2), 131–148.
- Gabrielova, K., & Buchko, A. A. (2021). Here comes Generation Z: Millennials as managers. *Business Horizons*, 64(4), 489–499. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.013>
- Gandolfi, F. & Stone, S. (2022). Toxic leadership: Behaviors, characteristics, and consequences. *Journal of Management Research*, (22)1, 19-27. <https://www.indianjournals.com/ijor.aspx?target=ijor:jmr&type=home>

- Gardner, W. L., Cogliser, C. C., Davis, K. M., & Dickens, M. P. (2011). Authentic leadership: A review of the literature and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(6), 1120–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.09.007>
- Gardner, W. L., Karam, E. P., Alvesson, M., & Einola, K. (2021). Authentic leadership theory: The case for and against. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101495>
- Gillespie, C. A. (2019). *Generation Z in the workplace* (Publication No. 22583562) [Master's Thesis, Pepperdine University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Glass, A. (2007). Understanding generational differences for competitive success. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 39(2), 98–103. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00197850710732424>
- Goh, E., & Lee, C. (2018). A workforce to be reckoned with: The emerging pivotal Generation Z hospitality workforce. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 73, 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.01.016>
- Greenleaf, R. (2002). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness* (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.). Paulist Press. (Original work published 1977).
- Grow, J. M., & Yang, S. (2018). Generation-Z enters the advertising workplace: Expectations through a gendered lens. *Journal of Advertising Education*, 22(1), 7–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098048218768595>
- Haeger, D. L., & Lingham, T. (2013). Intergenerational collisions and leadership in the 21st century. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 11(3), 286–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2013.810525>

- Hardin, R. M. (2020). *Generation Z: Motivational needs of the newest workforce* (Publication No. 28001975) [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University School of Business]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Hassan, Y., & Kodwani, A. D. (2020). Assessing the influence of spirituality and religiosity in choosing a socially responsible employer: The case of Generation Z. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 27(3), 79–110. <https://sajm-amdisa.org/>
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (J. MacQuarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Harper and Row.
- Herzberg, F. (2003). One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2003/01/one-more-time-how-do-you-motivate-employees>
- Hillman, D. R. (2014). Understanding multigenerational work-value conflict resolution. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 29(3), 240–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2014.933961>
- Hirsch, P. B. (2021). The great discontent. *Journal of Business Strategy*, (42)6, 439–442. <http://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-08-2021-0141>
- Hoff, M. (2022, June 12). *How Gen Z is winning the great resignation, from pay increases to better work-life balance*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-winning-great-resignation-changing-job-market-2022-6>
- Holmes, P. E., & Howard, M. C. (2022). The duplicitous effect of organizational identification: Applying social identity theory to identify joint relations with workplace social courage and unethical pro-organizational behaviors. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 17(5), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199>

- The Holy Bible, New International Version.* (2006). Zondervan. (Original work published 1973).
- Hope, J. (2016). Get your campus ready for Generation Z. *Student Affairs Today*, 19(7), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/say.30253>
- Hsieh, P. Y. (2018). *Exploring Generation Z's work values: Implications for future work* [Master's thesis, Purdue University]. Open Access Theses. [https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_theses/1395/](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_theses/1395/)
- Hunt, M., Marx, R., Lipson, C., & Young, J. (2018). No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37(10), 751–768.
- Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas* (W. R. Boyce Gibson, Trans.). Allen & Unwin.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenology* (D. Carr, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
- Iorgulescu, M. C. (2016). Generation Z and its perception of work. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 18(1), 47–54.
- Jain, U. (2020). *Integration workplace practices for Generation Z: An e-Delphi study* (Publication No. 27997989) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Jancourt, M. (2020). Gen Z and the workplace: Can we all get along? *Corporate Real Estate Journal*, 10(1), 41–50. <https://www.henrystewartpublications.com/crej>
- Jiří, B. (2016). The employees of Baby Boomers Generation, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z in selected Czech corporations as conceivers of development and

competitiveness in their corporation. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 8(4), 105–123.

<https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.04.07>

Joshi, A., Dencker, J., Franz, G., & Martocchio, J. (2010). Unpacking generational identities in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(3), 392–414.

<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.3.zok392>

Kelemen, T., Matthews, S., Matthews, M., & Henry, S. (2022). Humble leadership: A review and synthesis of leader expressed humility. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, (44),

202-224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2608>

Kick, A. L., Contacos-Sawyer, J., & Thomas, B. (2015). How Generation Z's reliance on digital communication can affect future workplace relationships. *Competition*

*Forum*, 13(2), 214–222.

Kiiru-Weatherly, P. (2017). *Multigenerational workforce: Relationship between generational cohorts and employee engagement* (Publication No. 10254108) [Doctoral dissertation, Wilmington University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Kleissner, V., & Jahn, G. (2020). Dimensions of work-related age stereotypes and in-group favoritism. *Research on Aging*, 42(3/4), 126–136.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027519896189>

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Kurt, A. A., Günüç, S., & Ersoy, M. (2013). The current state of digitalization: Digital native, digital immigrant and digital settler. *Journal of Faculty of Educational Sciences*, 46(1),

1–22. [https://doi.org/10.1501/Egifak\\_0000001271](https://doi.org/10.1501/Egifak_0000001271)

Lancaster, L., & Stillman, D. (2002). *When generations collide*. HarperBusiness.



- Lanier, K. (2017). 5 things HR professionals need to know about Generation Z: Thought leaders share their views on the HR profession and its direction for the future. *Strategic HR Review*, 16(6), 228-290. <http://www.doi.org/10.1108/SHR-08-2017-0051>
- Larson, S. (2014). *Path-goal leadership, organizational commitment, and turnover intention among generational cohorts* (Publication No. 3645520) [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Lazányi, K., & Bilan, Y. (2017). Generation Z on the labour market: Do they trust others within their workplace? *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 16(1), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2017.16.1.07>
- Lee, C. C., Aravamudhan, V., Roback, T., Lim, H. S., & Ruane, S. G. (2021). Factors impacting work engagement of Gen Z employees: A regression analysis. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability & Ethics*, 18(3), 147–159. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jlae.v18i3.4414>
- Leslie, B., Anderson, C., Bickham, C., Horman, J., Overly, A., Gentry, C., Callahan, C., & King, J. (2021). Generation Z perceptions of a positive workplace environment. *Employee Responsibilities & Rights Journal*, 33(3), 171–187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09366-2>
- Lipman-Blumen, J. (2010). Toxic Leadership: A Conceptual Framework. In F. Bournois, J. Duval-Hamel, S. Roussillon, JL. Scaringella (Eds.), *Handbook of Top Management Teams*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305335\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305335_23)
- Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind*. Penguin Books.

- Lyons, S., & Kuron, L. (2013). Generational differences in the workplace: A review of the evidence and directions for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 35*, 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1913>
- Lyons, S. T., Schweitzer, L., Urick, M. J., & Kuron, L. (2019). A dynamic social-ecological model of generational identity in the workplace. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 17*(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2018.1500332>
- Macky, K., Gardner, D., & Forsyth, S. (2008). Generational differences at work: Introduction and overview. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23*(8), 857–861.
- Magano, J., Silva, C., Figueiredo, C., Vitória, A., Nogueira, T., & Pimenta Dinis, M. A. (2020). Generation Z: Fitting project management soft skills competencies—A mixed-method approach. *Education Sciences, 10*(7), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10070187>
- Mahmoud, A. B., Fuxman, L., Mohr, I., Reisel, W. D., & Grigoriou, N. (2021). “We aren’t your reincarnation!” workplace motivation across X, Y and Z generations. *International Journal of Manpower, 42*(1), 193–209. <http://www.doi.org/10.1108/IJM-09-2019-0448>
- Maldonado, T., Carden, L., Brace, C., & Myers, M. (2021). Fostering innovation through humble leadership and humble organizational culture. *Journal of Business Strategies, (38)*, 73-94. <http://doi.org/10.54155/jbs.38.2.73-94>
- Maloni, M., Hiatt, M. S., & Campbell, S. (2019). Understanding the work values of Gen Z business students. *The International Journal of Management Education, 17*(3), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2019.100320>

- Mann, M. (2022). *No more stereotypes: Exploring the work value priorities of Generation Z* (Publication No. 29209763) [Doctoral dissertation, Campbellsville University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Mannheim, K. (1952). The problem of generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Essays on the sociology of knowledge* (pp. 276–322). Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1927/1928)
- Marron, M. (2015). New generations require change beyond the digital. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 70(2), 123-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695815588912>
- Martin, C., & Tulgan, B. (2006). *Managing the generation mix: From urgency to opportunity* (2nd ed.). HRD Press.
- Masso, A., Silm, S., & Ahas, R. (2018). Generational differences in spatial mobility: A study with mobile phone data. *Population, Space and Place*, 25(2), 2210–2225. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/psp.2210>
- Maxwell, J. (2019). *Leader shift: The 11 essential changes every leader must embrace*. HarperCollins Leadership.
- McCrinkle, M., & Wolfinger, E. (2009). *The ABC of XYZ*. UNSW Press.
- McGaha, K. K. (2018). *An interpretive phenomenological study of America's emerging workforce: Exploring Generation Z's leadership preferences* (Order No. 10974750) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Phoenix]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

- McGinnis Johnson, J., & Ng, E. S. (2016). Money talks or Millennials walk: The effect of compensation on non-profit Millennial workers sector-switching intentions. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 36(3), 283–305.  
<https://www.doi.org/10.1177/0734371X15587980>
- McGraw, L., & Stewart, C. (2020). Recruiting and retaining the genius generation for virtual teams from a Generation Z perspective. *International Journal of Business Research & Information Technology (IJBRIT)*, 7(1), 41–72.  
<https://www.iabpad.com/category/ijbrit-v7-n1-2020/>
- Mead, M. (1970). *Culture and commitment: A study of the generation gap*. The Natural History Press.
- Mehra, P., & Nickerson, C. (2019). Organizational communication and job satisfaction: What role do generational differences play? *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 27(3), 524–547. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-12-2017-1297>
- Meister, J. (2020, January 15). Top 10 HR trends that matter most in the 2020 workplace. *Forbes Magazine*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2020/01/15/top-10-hr-trends-that-matter-most-in-the-2020-workplace/?sh=666bb2697dfc>
- Moore, S., Grunberg, L., & Krause, A. (2015). Generational differences in workplace expectations: A comparison of production and professional workers. *Current Psychology*, 34(2), 346–362. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-014-9261-2>
- Mordechay, K., Gándara, P., & Orfield, G. (2019). Embracing the effects of demographic change. *Educational Leadership*, 76(7), 34–40.  
<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/embracing-the-effects-of-demographic-change>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.

- Murray, K., Toulson, P., & Legg, S. (2011). Generational cohorts' expectations in the workplace: A study of New Zealanders. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(4), 476–493. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038411111423188>
- Northouse, P. (2019). *Leadership theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage.
- Nishizaki, S. & DellaNeve, J. (2023). *Working with Gen Z: A handbook to recruit, retain, and reimagine the future workforce after COVID-19*. Amplify Publishing.
- Olmeda, N. (2022). *Leadership in transition: A quantitative study of leadership dimension preferences across generational cohorts* (Publication No. 29166139) [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Orwell, G. (1968). *A coat of many colours: Occasional essays by Herbert Read*. In S. Orwell & I. Angus (Eds.), *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell: In front of your nose 1945-1950* (Vol. 4, pp. 48–52). Secker & Warburg.
- Opermann, S., & Kalmus, V. (2019). Operationalising Mannheim: Empirical building blocks of generational identity. *Generations, Time, and Media*, 2019(2), 232–246. [http://doi.org/10.26350/001200\\_000061](http://doi.org/10.26350/001200_000061)
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. (n.d.-a). Entrepreneur. Oxford University Press. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62991?redirectedFrom=entrepreneur#eid>
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. (n.d.-b). Soft skills. Oxford University Press. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/183898?redirectedFrom=soft+skills#eid1199266090>

- Ozkan, M., & Solmaz, B. (2015). The changing face of the employees – generation Z and their perceptions of work [A study applied to university students]. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 26, 476-483. [https://www.doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00876-X](https://www.doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00876-X)
- Panwar, S., & Mehta, A. (2019). Fostering leadership in Generation Z: Onus on whom? *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 13(3), 65–70.
- Parker, K., & Igielnik, R. (2020, May 14). *On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about Gen Z so far*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>
- Parker, K., & Menasce Horowitz, J. (2022, March 9). *Majority of workers who quit a job in 2021 cite low pay, no opportunities for advancement, feeling disrespected*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>
- Parry, E., & Urwin, P. (2011). Generational differences in work values: A review of theory and evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13, 79-96. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00285.x>
- Perilus, B. (2020). *Engaging four generations in the workplace: A single case study* (Publication No. 28027345) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Phoenix]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Pilcher, J. (1994). Mannheim's sociology of generations: An undervalued legacy. *British Journal of Sociology*, 45(3), 481–494. <https://doi.org/10.2307/591659>
- Pletka, B. (2007). *Educating the net generation*. Santa Monica Press.

- Popescu, A. (2019). The brief history of generation—defining the concept of generation [An analysis of literature review]. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, *10*(2), 15–30.
- Pradhan, S., & Jena, L. K. (2019). Does meaningful work explains the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behaviour? *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers*, *44*(1), 30–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090919832434>
- Prensky, M. (2001, October). *Digital natives, digital immigrants*. On the Horizon. <https://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>
- Ransdell, S., Kent, B., Gaillard-Kenney, S., & Long, J. (2011). Digital immigrants fare better than digital natives due to social reliance. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *42*(6), 931–938. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2010.01137.x>
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Rost, J. C. (1993). *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. Praeger.
- Sachs, J. (2020). *The ages of globalization: Geography, technology, and institutions*. Columbia University Press.
- Schlee, R. P., Eveland, V. B., & Harich, K. R. (2020). From Millennials to Gen Z: Changes in student attitudes about group projects. *Journal of Education for Business*, *95*(3), 139–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2019.1622501>
- Scholz, C. (2019). The Generations Z in Europe – An introduction. In C. Scholz & A. Rennig (Eds.), *The changing context of managing people* (pp. 3–31). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781789734911>

- Schroth, H. (2019). Are you ready for Gen Z in the workplace? *California Management Review*, 61(3), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619841006>
- Schullery, N. M. (2013). Workplace engagement and generational differences in values. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 76(2), 252–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569913476543>
- Seamon, L. V. (2022). *Generation Z's perception of leadership effectiveness* (Publication No. 28966886) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2016). *Generation Z goes to college*. Jossey-Bass.
- Seemiller, C., Grace, M., dal Bó Campagnolo, P., Mara da Rosa Alves, I., & Severo de Borba, G. (2019). How Generation Z college students prefer to learn: A comparison of U.S. and Brazil students. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 9(1), 349–368. <http://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2019.09.1.25>
- Sellar, S. (2013). Hoping for the best in education: Globalisation, social imaginaries and young people. *Social Alternatives*, 32(2), 31–38.
- Sendjaya, S. & Sarros, J. (2002). Servant leadership: Its origin, development, and application in organizations. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 57–64. <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jlo>
- Sessa, V. I., Kabacoff, R. I., Deal, J., & Brown, H. (2007). Generational differences in leader values and leadership behaviors. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 10(1), 47–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10887150709336612>
- Shatto, B. (2017). Teaching Millennials and Generation Z: Bridging the generational divide. *Creative Nursing*, 23(1), 24–28. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1078-4535.23.1.24>



Singh, A. P., & Dangmei, J. (2016). Understanding the generation Z: The future workforce.

*South-Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(3), 1–5.

Spiegel, D. (2013). *The Gen Y handbook*. SelectBooks.

Stahl, C. C., & Literat, I. (2022). #GenZ on TikTok: The collective online self-portrait of the social media generation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1–22.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2053671>

Stewart, J. (2006). Transformational leadership: An evolving concept examined through the works of Burns, Bass, Avolio, and Leithwood. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (54), 1–29.

<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/issue/view/2936>

Stillman, D., & Stillman, J. (2017). *Gen Z @ work*. HarperCollins.

Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations: The history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*. William Morrow.

Sull, D., Sull, C., & Zweig, B. (2022, January 11). Toxic culture is driving the great resignation. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toxic-culture-is-driving-the-great-resignation/>

Sull, D., Sull, C., Cipolli, W., & Brighenti, C. (2022, March 16). Why every leader needs to worry about toxic culture. *MIT Sloan Management Review*.

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/why-every-leader-needs-to-worry-about-toxic-culture/>

Tajfel, H. (1972). *Social categorization*. English manuscript of “La catégorisation sociale.” In S. Moscovici (Ed.), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale*, (Vol. 1). Larousse.

- Tapscott, D. (2009). *Grown up digital: How the net generation is changing your world*. McGraw Hill.
- Timonen, V., & Conlon, C. (2015). Beyond Mannheim: Conceptualising how people "talk" and "do" generations in contemporary society. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 24(2015), 1–9. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2015.03.001>
- Tulgan, B. (2016). *Not everyone gets a trophy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books.
- Turner, A. (2015a). Generation Z: Technology and social interest. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 71(2), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021>
- Turner, A. J. (2015b). *Generational cohort experiences with training and development: A phenomenological study* (Publication No. 3721114) [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Twenge, J. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood*. Atria Paperback.
- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, S. M. (2008). Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 862–877. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810904367>
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., Hoffman, B. J., & Lance, C. E. (2010). Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing. *Journal of Management*, 36(5), 1117–1142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309352246>

- Twenge, J. M., Carter, N. T., & Campbell, W. K. (2015). Time period, generational, and age differences in tolerance for controversial beliefs and lifestyles in the United States, 1972–2012. *Social Forces*, 94(1), 379–399. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov050>
- Twenge, J. M., Freeman, E. C., & Campbell, W. K. (2012). Generational differences in young adults' life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation, 1966–2009. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(5), 1045–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027408>
- Urlick, M. (2020). Generational differences and COVID-19: Positive interactions in virtual workplaces. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 18(4), 379–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2020.1818662>
- Valcour, M. (2013, May 27). Hitting the intergenerational sweet spot. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2013/05/hitting-the-intergenerational>
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice*. Routledge.
- Vitelar, A. (2019). Like me: Generation Z and the use of social media for personal branding. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 7(2), 257–268. <https://doi.org/10.25019/MDKE/7.2.07>
- Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., & Peterson, S. J. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 89–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913>
- Weber, M. (1958). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Allen & Unwin.
- Weeks, K. P., & Schaffert, C. (2019). Generational differences in definitions of meaningful work: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(4), 1045–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3621-4>

- Wiedmer, T. (2015). Generations do differ: Best practices in leading Traditionalists, Boomers, and Generations X, Y, and Z. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 82(1), 51–58.
- Wilkie, D. (2019, June 11). *Generation Z says they work the hardest, but only when they want to*. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/gen-z-worries-about-work-skills.aspx>
- Workforce Institute at Kronos. (2019, June). *Meet Gen Z*. Kronos Incorporated. <https://workforceinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Meet-Gen-Z-Hopeful-Anxious-Hardworking-and-Searching-for-Inspiration.pdf>
- World Economic Forum. (2016, January). *The future of jobs*. Global Challenge Insight Report. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf)
- Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filipczak, B. (2022). *Generations at work: Managing the clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in your workplace* (2nd ed.). HarperCollins Leadership.

## APPENDIX A

## IRB Approval Notice

Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Date: February 15, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Liz Robertson

Protocol #: 22-12-2045

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Project Title: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THE WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z AMIDST COVID-19

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Liz Robertson:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,  
Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

**Pepperdine University 24255 Pacific Coast Highway Malibu, CA 90263 TEL: 310-506-4000**

## APPENDIX B

## Recruitment Script



Dear Participant,

My name is Liz Robertson, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study in which I will be interviewing members of Generation Z to learn more about their expectations for their future workplace and leaders within the workplace and how those expectations may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am seeking volunteer study participants for an interview over Zoom. Your interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes and is anticipated to take no more than one hour.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity as a participant will be protected before, during, and after the time that the study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place during and after the study.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the study, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your participation,

Liz Robertson  
Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology  
Doctoral Candidate  
[liz.robertson@pepperdine.edu](mailto:liz.robertson@pepperdine.edu)

## APPENDIX C

## Informed Consent



**IRB #:** 12-22-2045

**Participant Study Title:** A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THE WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z AMIDST COVID-19

**Formal Study Title:** A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THE WORKPALCE EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z AMIDST COVID-19

**Authorized Study Personnel**

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Liz Robertson, M.A.	805.570.4567
<b>Secondary Investigator:</b>	H. Eric Schockman, Ph.D.	818.314.3307

**Invitation**

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are student at a Consortium of Christian College and Universities (CCCU) school who will be graduating by the end of 2023. You must be 20-26 years of age to participate and have had some type of previous part-time or full-time work experience or internship experience.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

This research is designed to (1) better understand the workplace expectations of Generation Z, (2) explore how the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted workplace expectations and (3) to understand what members of Generation Z hope for in future workplace leaders.

**What will be done during this research study?**

You will be asked to complete 1 interview with the researcher using Zoom. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete and will be scheduled in advance at a date and time that are convenient for the participant and the researcher.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

This research presents no greater than minimal risk to the participant. The probability and magnitude of harms or discomforts anticipated in the research protocol are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**What are possible benefits to you?**

You are not expected to get any direct benefit from being in this study.

**What are possible benefits to other people?**

The benefits to society may include better understanding of Generation Z and their expectations for work. This may allow leaders in organizations to adapt leadership practices to better suit their workforce.

**What will being in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to you for being a participant in this research study.

**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?**

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

Your welfare is a major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 3 years after the study is complete. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pepperdine University, and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as a group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**What are your rights as a research subject?**



You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: [gspirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gspirb@pepperdine.edu)

### **What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can decide to stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

### **Documentation of informed consent**

You are voluntarily making a decision about whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

### **Participant Feedback Survey**

To meet Pepperdine University’s ongoing accreditation efforts and to meet the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) standards, an online feedback survey is included below:

<https://forms.gle/nnRgRwLgajYzBq5t7>

### **Participant Name:**

---

Name of Participant: Please Print

### **Participant Signature:**

---

Signature of Research Participant

---

Date

## APPENDIX D

## Dates of Participant Interviews

<b>Alias</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>First Generation College Student</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Student 1	F	White	No	March 1, 2023
Student 2	M	White	Yes	March 3, 2023
Student 3	F	White	No	March 5, 2023
Student 4	F	White	No	March 6, 2023
Student 5	F	White	Yes	March 6, 2023
Student 6	F	White	No	March 6, 2023
Student 7	F	White	No	March 6, 2023
Student 8	F	White	No	March 7, 2023
Student 9	F	White	No	March 8, 2023
Student 10	M	White	Yes	March 8, 2023
Student 11	M	White	Yes	March 9, 2023
Student 12	W	White	No	March 10, 2023
Student 13	M	White	Yes	March 10, 2023
Student 14	M	White	No	March 10, 2023
Student 15	M	Asian	No	March 3, 2023