



# Leadership styles and effectiveness in the workplace: A perspective of the millennial generation



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**Background:** Millennial leaders are seen in the workplace as the leadership pipeline for the preceding generations, Generation X and baby boomers, particularly given that the older baby boomer generation are retiring. However, the correlation between leadership styles and leadership effectiveness and the consequences for leadership development have not been fully researched in the literature on millennial leaders.

**Aim:** The aim of this research was to test differences between leadership styles and leadership effectiveness as perceived by both millennial followers and millennial leaders.

**Setting:** This research was conducted in South Africa, in a variety of organisations, and through sampling of employees across generations.

**Methods:** Cross-sectional data were collected with instruments based on the Pearce typology of leadership styles, after which the data were segmented according to three generations. After confirming reliability and general factorial validity of the instruments, regression analysis was performed to determine the contribution of four leadership styles towards leadership effectiveness.

**Results:** Two of the leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational, were perceived by both millennial followers and leaders as being statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness, whilst the remaining two leadership styles, directive and transactional, did not have a statistically significant contribution towards leadership effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** The results support the alternative hypotheses aligned with the literature review that millennials prefer empowering and transformational leadership styles as they regard these styles as effective. However, important to note is that Generation X has very similar preferences. This knowledge will assist with improved development of millennial leaders in the workplace.

**Keywords:** generations; effective leadership; leadership styles; directive leadership; empowering leadership; transactional leadership; transformational leadership; millennial leaders.

## Introduction

There are limited research studies focusing on millennials in leadership roles and, more importantly, their leadership styles and how they are formed (Churchill 2018). As the millennial generation continues on the path of dominating the global workforce (Deloitte 2019), these individuals are also taking on leadership positions in which they may be leading older employees, whilst their own leadership traits and styles are still not fully understood (Gabriel, Alcantara & Alvarez 2020).

Organisations should therefore be supporting the millennial generation to explore their own leadership styles rather than role modelling the leadership practices of the older generations (Heyns, Eldermire & Howard 2019). This sentiment is shared by Alkan and Aydoğdu (2019) who report that organisations need to understand the millennials' perceptions and expectations of an effective leader and adopt an appropriate leadership style in the workplace.

## Literature review

In today's age, organisations need effective leaders who grasp the complexities of the changing global environment and influence followers to achieve desired goals (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy 2014). Effective leadership has become more important than ever before, considering the

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uncertain times we live in, particularly with the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic (Decuyper 2021).

This study focused on three generations in the workforce, starting with the oldest generation being the baby boomer generation (1946 and 1964), followed by Generation X (1965 and 1979), with the youngest generation being Generation Y, better known as the millennial generation (1980 and 2000) (Kaifi et al. 2012). Millennials are seen to be the generation that will define the future of leadership as we see it in the workplace, yet there are not many millennial role models for these emerging leaders to follow (Folarin 2021). Leaders may also become effective managers through suitable role models they compete with (Long 2017). Knowledge of the traits and characteristics of the millennial generation is needed to turn these employees in the workplace into future leaders (Folarin 2021).

## Effective leadership styles

Successful leaders should adopt leadership styles that suit the cultural expectations of their followers (Solomon & Steyn 2017a). The most effective leadership style may imply the use of a combination of styles in which one style can complement the other (Solaja & Ogunola 2016).

A review of the literature on elements that are considered by the millennial generation as indicative of good leadership in the workplace was integrated and is summarised in Table 1 as follows.

In this study we have adopted the leadership typology of Pearce et al. (2003) as a structure to discuss leadership styles. This typology supports the existence of four leadership styles, namely: directive leadership, empowering leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership. According to Pearce et al. (2003), these leadership styles can be defined as follows:

Directive leadership refers to behaviour of the leader who gives orders on how the work needs to be done.

**TABLE 1:** Millennials' view of elements of good leadership.

Elements	Authors
Orientated towards people rather than task-driven	Maier et al. (2015)
Have a close connection with their followers	Axten (2015)
Understanding and non-judgemental	Dols, Chargualaf and Martinez (2019)
Inclusive and collaborative	Maier et al. (2015); Paramarta (2018)
Accessible and reliable	Dols et al. (2019)
Guiding and empowering	Lamasan and Oducado (2018)
Committed and dedicated	Dols et al. (2019)
Immediate feedback and recognition	Axten (2015); Rony (2019)
Individual mentoring	Lamasan and Oducado (2018); Omilion-Hodges & Sugg (2019); Rony (2019)
Development and training	Alkan and Aydogdu (2019); Axten (2015)
Challenging, inspiring, and motivating	Alkan and Aydogdu (2019); Dols et al. (2019)
Good at resolving conflict	Omilion-Hodges and Sugg (2019)
Integrity, credible, consistent, and authentic	Axten (2015); Paramarta (2018); Rony (2019)
Good role model	Lamasan and Oducado (2018)

- Empowering leadership develops the followers so that they become effective and capable self-leaders.
- Transactional leadership refers to behaviour of one who establishes the parameters of the exchange relationship between the leader and the follower.
- Transformational leadership refers to behaviour that encourage vision, produce inspiration from their followers, and motivate change.

The literature on leadership styles further expands on the four different leadership styles. Directive leadership informs employees about exactly what they are supposed to do. The leader tells the employees about their task, what is expected, how it must be done, and provides the deadline for the completion of that task (Wachira, Tanui & Kalai 2016).

With empowered leadership, workers are allowed more independence and self-leadership, whilst managers provide support and encouragement, promote participative decision-making, and build trust (Liu 2015). Empowerment programmes in the workplace are generally intended to improve employees' motivation and creativity in their work roles (Amundsen & Martinsen 2015).

A transactional leadership style occurs in a leader-follower exchange relationship in which corrective actions are an exception and followers are rewarded when they have achieved specific goals (Holten & Brenner 2015). Transactional leaders, therefore, use praise, reward and promise to motivate employees. For corrective action they will make use of negative feedback, threats, or disciplinary action (Solaja & Ogunola 2016). Transactional leaders will not continually look at their staff's performance but only offer assistance when needed (Cheung, Yeung & Wu 2018). They will use contingent rewards to incentivise their employees to share knowledge that they own (Masa'deh, Obeidat & Tarhini 2016).

Transformational leaders are charismatic, influencing their followers towards a vision through their insistence on moral and ethical standards (Dartey-Baah 2015). By portraying these powerful visions they also promote creativity among their followers in the workplace (Banks et al. 2016; Jaiswal & Dhar 2015). Transformational leaders encourage and inspire their followers to achieve results that are higher than expectations (Jauhar et al. 2017), but also bring their followers into the decision-making process and allow them to develop as individuals (Solaja & Ogunola 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim 2016). Transformational leadership signifies four dimensions, namely idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualised consideration (Aga, Noorderhaven & Vallejo 2016).

## Millennials and leadership

Axten (2015:52) indicates that 'millennials are social creatures, due to coming of age when cell phones were available'. 'They have experienced constant interaction with their parents and will expect that connection with their workplace leaders' (Axten 2015:52).

Millennials prefer leaders who display a leadership style that shows care for their followers as opposed to meeting their own personal agendas (Long 2017). They prefer leaders who give personal attention to their employees, getting to know them by being more orientated towards people rather than tasks (Maier et al. 2015). Millennial leaders consider meaningful relationships as an important element of leadership (Medyanik 2016).

Millennials have started a new trend in leadership in which leaders do not command, but rather direct their followers and thereby strive towards inclusive leadership as opposed to authoritarian leadership (Folarin 2021). The millennial generation does not believe in the notion that hierarchy creates a good leader (Pratama, Nasution & Absah 2019). They prefer not to work under a leadership style with highly autocratic directives as they highly value empowerment and need the opportunity and encouragement to make their own decisions (Maier et al. 2015). They also adhere to professional ethics in the workplace, having a dynamic transparent leadership style (Akmalaputri, Yuniawan & Djastuti 2018).

Millennials see leaders as guiding and empowering personnel and also as role models (Lamasan & Oducado 2018). They expect leaders to be charismatic by providing their workers with a sense of purpose through encouragement (Grubbström & Lopez 2018). Millennials also expect leaders to provide their followers with challenging tasks that are still within their capabilities, thereby rewarding innovation and tolerating failures (Axten 2015). Millennials prefer leaders who are inclusive, collaborative and committed in their leadership approach (Maier et al. 2015). The millennial leaders want to contribute towards the organisation by using their skills and prefer to be trusted and empowered to lead (Sledge 2016).

Millennials have high expectations of their leaders, like immediate feedback, immediate training and immediate recognition (Axten 2015). As they do well in work environments that provide progressive career paths, they will need reaffirmation that they are moving in the right direction, requiring a leader who motivates with rewards, sets goals and mentors their employees (Bodenhausen & Curtis 2016).

The social learning theory was first explored by Bandura in the 1960's. According to the social learning theory, human behaviour is learned through observations of others' modelled behaviour so that the individual forms an idea of how the behaviours are performed and the consequences of such behaviour (Decker 1986). Employees in the workplace have different perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Baker 2015). Perceived effective leaders utilise different leadership styles in the workplace (Long 2017; Solaja & Ogunola 2016). There is thus a need to understand the millennial generation's perception of effective leaders in the workplace (Alkan & Aydogdu 2019; Seldon 2014).

The aim of the research was to investigate and examine the relationship between millennials' perceived leadership

styles, adopted in the workplace, and their perceived effectiveness in these leadership styles with the intention to better understand how to suitably develop millennial leaders.

From the literature review, we can infer that there are certain leadership styles which the millennial generation perceive as effective, such as empowering leadership (Lamasan & Oducado 2018; Maier et al. 2015; Medyanik 2016; Sledge 2016) and transformational leadership (Axten 2015; Bodenhausen & Curtis 2016; Grubbstrom & Lopez 2018). By applying the leadership typology of Pearce et al. (2003), we can test whether these differences really exist.

Two general null hypotheses were set. The first null hypothesis reads as follows:

**H1<sub>0</sub>:** Millennial followers, just as followers from any other generation, perceive all leadership styles as being equally effective.

The following alternative hypotheses were also set (see Box 1).

**BOX 1:** Alternative hypotheses to H1<sub>0</sub>.

H1 <sub>a1</sub> :	Millennials followers, unlike followers from other generations, perceive directive leadership as less effective than the remaining three leadership styles. This hypothesis is based on the literature of Folarin (2021), Maier et al. (2015) and Pratama, Nasution and Absah (2019), suggesting that millennials will not work well under highly autocratic directive leaders who command rather than direct, particularly where leaders have been created through hierarchy.
H1 <sub>a2</sub> :	Millennials followers, unlike followers from other generations, perceive empowering leadership as more effective than the remaining three leadership styles. This hypothesis is based on the literature of Lamasan and Oducado (2018), Maier et al. (2015), Medyanik (2016) and Sledge (2016), suggesting that millennials highly value trust and empowerment in leaders, while also having the opportunity and encouragement to make their own decisions and being a role model to their followers.
H1 <sub>a3</sub> :	Millennials followers, unlike followers from other generations, perceive transactional leadership as less effective than the remaining three leadership styles. This hypothesis is based on the literature of Axten (2015), Maier et al. (2015), and Medyanik (2016), suggesting that millennials as leaders will want to provide constant feedback and personal attention to their followers, being more orientated towards people and less orientated towards task, and while providing challenging tasks to their followers, will also tolerate failures.
H1 <sub>a4</sub> :	Millennials followers, unlike followers from other generations, perceive transformational leadership as more effective than the remaining three leadership styles. This hypothesis is based on the literature of Axten (2015), Bodenhausen and Curtis (2016) and Grubbström and Lopez (2018), suggesting that millennials prefer charismatic leaders in the workplace who provide a sense of purpose through encouragement whilst also motivating and providing their followers with challenging work and rewarding innovation.

The second null hypothesis reads as follows:

**H2<sub>0</sub>:** Millennial leaders, just as leaders from any other generations, are perceived to be effective, irrespective of the leadership style they apply.

The following alternative hypotheses were based on the literature provided when stating H1<sub>0</sub>, and are therefore not repeated here, as well as on the general principle of the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957), in which actors act in accordance with what is expected of them or according to the values to which they hold true.

The alternative hypotheses read as follows (see Box 2).

**BOX 2:** Alternative hypotheses to H2<sub>0</sub>.

H2 <sub>a1</sub> :	Followers perceive millennials leaders, applying directive leadership, to be less effective than when applying other leadership styles, if compared to leaders from other generations applying the same leadership style.
H2 <sub>a2</sub> :	Followers perceive millennials leaders, applying empowering leadership, to be more effective than when applying other leadership styles, if compared to leaders from other generations applying the same leadership style.
H2 <sub>a3</sub> :	Followers perceive millennials leaders, applying transactional leadership, to be less effective than when applying other leadership styles, if compared to leaders from other generations applying the same leadership style.
H2 <sub>a4</sub> :	Followers perceive millennials leaders, applying transformational leadership, to be more effective than when applying other leadership styles, if compared to leaders from other generations applying the same leadership style.

The approach according to which these hypotheses were tested is described below.

## Method

### Population and sampling

The target population was employees across generations. This research was conducted in a variety of organisations in South Africa (SA). The sample consisted of 1140 respondents across 19 South African organisations. Simple random samples of employees were drawn irrespective of their age or position in the organisation. These organisations included both private and public entities representing, among others, the telecommunication, financial services, media, manufacturing, and electronics industries.

Nineteen organisations were identified using the criterion of each having an employee who was a registered master's level student at the Graduate School of Business Leadership (GSBL) of the University of SA. Entrance to the organisations, and therefore access to the respondents, was achieved by leveraging the respective students as fellow researchers. Random samples of 60 employees were drawn in each organisation.

### Design

Cross-sectional data was collected with various instruments based on the leadership typology of Pearce et al. (2003), after which the data were segmented according to the three generations. The perceptions of followers and leaders about the effectiveness of the four leadership styles (leadership effectiveness) were the dependent variable.

### Measurement instruments

Demographic data were collected on followers, as well as leaders. Respondents were asked about their own age, sex and race. They were also requested to make an educated guess at the age of their leaders, and report on their leaders' gender and sex. Age data were transformed to create three generational groups of followers and three groups of leaders.

Data were also collected using a questionnaire incorporating various instruments selected, based on their ability to measure the four leadership styles: namely directive, empowering, transactional, and transformational, as well as

their ability to measure perceived leadership effectiveness. Approval for the use of the instruments was obtained from the respective authors.

*Empowering leadership* was measured using the 10-item instrument of Ahearne, Mathieu and Rapp (2005). The reliability of the items developed to measure empowering leadership is confirmed by Yoon (2012), reporting a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.93. *Directive leadership* was measured using six items developed by Pearce and Sims (2002) and four items from Hwang et al. (2015). The items developed by Pearce and Sims (2002) are confirmed as reliable (Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.88) (Hinrichs 2011), while Hwang et al. (2015) confirm the reliability of their items developed to measure directive leadership (Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.85).

*Both transactional leadership and transformational leadership* were measured with instruments developed by Pearce and Sims (2002). Reliability of these instruments was confirmed by Pearce and Sims (2002), with a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.87 for transactional leadership and 0.72 for transformational leadership.

Effective leadership was measured using the 4-item instrument of Cicero, Pierro and Van Knippenberg (2010), and reliability of the instrument was confirmed by Cicero et al. (2010) (Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.83). Examples include: 'My leader is very effective as a leader' and: 'My leader influences my level of commitment effectively'. The same instrument was used with success by Solomon and Steyn (2017b) reporting acceptable reliability (Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.95), as well as evidence of concurrent validity.

### Statistical analyses

The data analysis was done using the IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package. Data were inspected for normality and outliers before commencing with the analysis. Frequency analysis was performed to provide a descriptive view of both follower and leader demographics based on the size of group, sex and race. This collected data were compared to the population data.

Before considering the data from the scales, reliability and validity were assessed. For the reliability assessment of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. While reliability was deemed as satisfactory when the alpha scores were above 0.70 (DeVellis 2012), alpha scores above 0.80 were regarded as preferable (Pallant 2020).

Factorial validity was assessed using principal components analysis. To assess the factorability of the data, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was applied wherein  $p < 0.05$  is required for the factor analysis to be appropriate (Pallant 2020). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was also applied to determine a good factor analysis with 0.60 of the indexes ranging from 0 to 1, recommended as the minimum value (Tabachnick & Fidell 2013). The number of



factors retained was based on Kaiser's criterion, applying the 'eigenvalues greater than one' rule (Pallant 2020). To evaluate factor acceptability, item loadings of 0.30 to 0.40 are considered minimally acceptable and item loadings of 0.50 and above are considered favourable based on the guidelines of Hair et al. (2010) and Osborne and Costello (2009).

Regression analysis was used to determine the ability of the four leadership styles to predict leadership effectiveness. Leadership styles, in which the significance for beta values was below 0.001, were considered as having contributed distinctively and independently to the variance in leadership effectiveness (dependent variable).

## Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Graduate School of Business Leadership and ethics consent was received on 8 March 2016. The ethics approval number is 2016\_SBL\_003\_CA. The data were collected by Prof Renier Steyn, the co-author to this article, and the protocols set out in the ethics application were strictly followed.

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study. Written consent was not obtained on the basis that the selected respondents were advised that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous and those who agreed to participate were handed a hard copy of the questionnaire and requested to complete it at a meeting held.

## Results

### Demographic variables

Descriptive statistics were calculated for both the followers and the leaders. Table 2 depicts the size of both groups. Table 3 shows the sex composition of both groups and Table 4 shows the race composition of both groups.

Both the baby boomer generation followers (6.3%) and baby boomer generation leaders (13.1%) are shown to be the minority generation. The millennial generation dominates in size (62.7%) in the follower sample; however, in the leader sample this group is less well represented (37.4%) than the Generation X leaders (49.5%).

Table 3 represents the number of women followers (53.7%) exceeding the number of men followers (46.3%) in the millennial generation. Conversely, for Generation X, the number of male followers (54.3%) exceeded the number of female followers (45.7%). In the baby boomer generation, the number of men followers (69.0%) exceeded the number of women followers (31.0%) by a much larger difference. Contrary to the gender ratio shown in the follower sample, male leaders are shown as dominant in all three generations (millennials 56.5%, Generation X 62.5% and baby boomer 72.3%). The difference in size between male leaders and

**TABLE 2:** Count: Followers and leaders.

Generation	Followers		Leaders	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Millennials	708	62.7	423	37.4
Generation X	350	31.0	560	49.5
Baby boomers	71†	6.3	148	13.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1129</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1131</b>	<b>100.0</b>

†, The sample is relatively small for the statistical analysis using Regression stepwise analysis, however for the sake of completeness, the analysis was performed.

**TABLE 3:** Sex: Followers and leaders.

Generation	Sex	Follower		Leader	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Millennials	Men	328	46.3	239	56.5
	Women	380	53.7	184	43.5
	Total	708	100.0	423	100.0
Generation X	Men	190	54.3	350	62.5
	Women	160	45.7	210	37.5
	Total	350	100.00	560	100.0
Baby boomers	Men	49	69.0	107	72.3
	Women	22	31.0	41	27.7
	Total	71	100.0	148	100.0

**TABLE 4:** Race: Followers and leaders.

Generation	Race	Followers		Leaders	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Millennials	Black people	508	71.8	286	67.6
	White people	89	12.6	86	20.3
	Mixed race people	72	10.2	39	9.2
	Asian people	39	5.5	12	2.8
	Total	708	100.0	423	100.0
Generation X	Black people	213	60.9	281	50.2
	White people	85	24.3	217	38.8
	Mixed race people	37	10.6	34	6.1
	Asian people	15	4.3	28	5.0
	Total	350	100.0	560	100.0
Baby boomers	Black people	34	47.9	82	55.4
	White people	32	45.1	44	29.7
	Mixed race people	4	5.6	17	11.5
	Asian people	1	1.4	5	3.4
	Total	71	100.0	148	100.0

female leaders does decrease across the generations from baby boomer leaders to millennial leaders.

An interesting point to note from Table 4 is the representation of the race groups per generation in the follower sample, considering the increase in black employees across the generations (baby boomers 47.9%, Generation X 60.9% and millennials 71.8%) and the decline in white employees across the generations (baby boomers 45.1%, Generation X 24.3% and millennials 12.6%). The coloured and Asian respondents together continue to constitute the minority race group in the baby boomer generation (7%) and Generation X (14.9%). However, in the millennial generation together (12.7%), they are about equal in size compared to the white respondents (12.6%).

In the leader sample in Table 4, the black leaders were also the dominant size in all three generations; that is, millennials (67.6%), Generation X (50.2%) and baby boomers (55.4%). However, these percentages do not align with the same

**TABLE 5:** Reliability data ( $N = 1131$ ).

Leadership styles and effectiveness	Cronbach's alpha	N of items
Empowering leadership	0.93	10
Directive leadership	0.87	10
Transactional leadership	0.73	16
Transformational leadership	0.94	20
Leadership effectiveness	0.95	4

trend of increase as seen in the follower sample; in that, there were more black leaders in the baby boomer leader group than in the Generation X leader group.

## Reliability

In Table 5 below, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha values of all the factors exceeded 0.70 which is acceptable (DeVellis 2012) and four met the 0.80 criteria, which is preferable (Pallant 2020).

## Factorial validity

The validity of the instruments was assessed through factorial analysis.

When applying Kaiser's criterion of eigenvalues greater than one to the four leadership styles, the following number of factors, that exceed the 60% rule of thumb (Field 2018), were extracted:

- One factor on empowering leadership was extracted, explaining 62.1% of the variance in the data.
- Three factors on directive leadership were extracted, explaining 75.8% of the variance in the data. The items loaded on the factors were in line with Pearce and Sims (2002) and Hwang et al.'s (2015) instruments and the conceptualisation of the construct by Pearce and Sims (2002).
- Three factors on transactional leadership were extracted, explaining 62.43% of the variance in the data. The items loaded on the respective factors were in line with the Full-Range-Leadership-Model (Avolio & Bass 2001).
- Four factors on transformational leadership were extracted, explaining 68.01% of the variance in the data. The items loaded on the respective factors were in line with the Full-Range-Leadership-Model (Avolio & Bass 2001).

When applying the Varimax rotational approach and Kaiser Normalisation on the directive, transactional, and transformational leadership items, the results showed that all the measurement items loaded onto their respective factors had no significant cross-loadings. The results (not presented in table format here) show support for the factorial validity of the scales used.

When identifying the suitability of the data for factor analysis on leadership effectiveness, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was applied, and this showed the values to be significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating the factor analysis to be appropriate (Pallant 2020). The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy of

**TABLE 6:** Model summary, ANOVA, and coefficients for leadership styles predicting leader effectiveness, given the generation of the followers (the observers).

Regression analysis	Generation of the followers		
	Millennials ( $N = 708$ )	Generation X ( $N = 350$ )	Baby boomers ( $N = 71$ )
Model summary	$R = 0.842$	$R = 0.833$	$R = 0.681$
	$R^2 = 0.709$	$R^2 = 0.694$	$R^2 = 0.464$
	$R^2_{adj} = 0.708$	$R^2_{adj} = 0.690$	$R^2_{adj} = 0.431$
ANOVA	$F = 428.823$	$F = 195.460$	$F = 14.276$
	$df = 4 \text{ \& } 703$	$df = 4 \text{ \& } 345$	$df = 4 \text{ \& } 66$
	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.000***$
	428 823***	195 460***	14 276***
Regression coefficients			
Predictors			
Empowering LS	$B = 0.564$	$B = 0.376$	$B = 0.550$
	$SE = 0.038$	$SE = 0.057$	$SE = 0.125$
	$SB = 0.458$	$SB = 0.300$	$SB = 0.497$
	$t = 14.663$	$t = 6.643$	$t = 4.398$
Transactional LS	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.000***$
	$B = -0.151$	$B = -0.082$	$B = -0.195$
	$SE = 0.067$	$SE = 0.104$	$SE = 0.283$
	$SB = -0.048$	$SB = -0.025$	$SB = -0.066$
Transformational LS	$t = -2.269$	$t = -0.790$	$t = -0.688$
	$p = 0.024$	$p = 0.430$	$p = 0.494$
	$B = 0.931$	$B = 1.285$	$B = 0.669$
	$SE = 0.072$	$SE = 0.109$	$SE = 0.281$
Directive LS	$SB = 0.431$	$SB = 0.551$	$SB = 0.276$
	$t = 12.870$	$t = 11.809$	$t = 2.378$
	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.000***$	$p = 0.020$
	$B = 0.055$	$B = 0.149$	$B = -0.003$
	$SE = 0.057$	$SE = 0.069$	$SE = 0.174$
	$SB = 0.026$	$SB = 0.073$	$SB = -0.002$
	$t = 0.979$	$t = 2.139$	$t = -0.020$
	$p = 0.328$	$p = 0.033$	$p = 0.984$

$F$ ,  $F$  value;  $df$ , degrees of freedom;  $p$ ,  $p$ -value;  $B$ , Beta;  $SE$ , Standard Error;  $SB$ , Standard Beta;  $t$ ,  $t$ -value; ANOVA, Analysis of Variance; LS, Leadership style.

\*\*\*,  $< 0.001$ .

0.856 also met the criteria of a good factor analysis as it is higher than the minimum value of 0.60 (Tabachnick & Fidell 2013). Using Kaiser's criterion, only one component was retained, explaining 87.03% of the variance in the data. The component matrix showed that the four items of leadership effectiveness all loaded on the single component. In evaluating factor acceptability, all four item loadings were above 0.90 and therefore considered favourable (Hair et al. 2010; Osborne & Costello 2009). The solution could not be rotated, given that only one factor was extracted.

## Regression

Stepwise regression was undertaken to determine the effect of the leadership styles (predictors) on leadership effectiveness (dependent variable), considering the followers' generation as a form of categorisation (Table 6), and the leaders' generation as a form of categorisation (Table 7). In Table 6 leadership effectiveness is predicted, given the generation of the follower (observer), thus irrespective of the leader, whilst in Table 7 leadership effectiveness is predicted, given the generation of the leader and irrespective of the follower.

It can be observed from Table 6 that the leadership styles explained 70.9% of the variance in leadership effectiveness

**TABLE 7:** Model summary, ANOVA, and coefficients for leadership styles predicting leader effectiveness, given the generation of the leaders (the actors).

Regression analysis	Generation of the leaders		
	Millennials ( <i>N</i> = 423)	Generation X ( <i>N</i> = 560)	Baby boomers ( <i>N</i> = 148)
Model summary	<i>R</i> = 0.825	<i>R</i> = 0.842	<i>R</i> = 0.812
	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 0.680	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 0.710	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 0.660
	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> = 0.677	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> = 0.708	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> = 0.650
ANOVA	<i>F</i> = 222.481	<i>F</i> = 339.290	<i>F</i> = 69.333
	<i>df</i> = 4 & 418	<i>df</i> = 4 & 555	<i>df</i> = 4 & 143
	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***
<b>Regression Coefficients</b>			
Predictors			
Empowering LS	<i>B</i> = 0.589	<i>B</i> = 0.469	<i>B</i> = 0.411
	<i>SE</i> = 0.049	<i>SE</i> = 0.044	<i>SE</i> = 0.091
	<i>SB</i> = 0.475	<i>SB</i> = 0.379	<i>SB</i> = 0.333
	<i>t</i> = 12.016	<i>t</i> = 10.634	<i>t</i> = 4.494
	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***
Transactional LS	<i>B</i> = -0.075	<i>B</i> = -0.174	<i>B</i> = -0.230
	<i>SE</i> = 0.089	<i>SE</i> = 0.077	<i>SE</i> = 0.163
	<i>SB</i> = -0.024	<i>SB</i> = -0.053	<i>SB</i> = -0.077
	<i>t</i> = -0.833	<i>t</i> = -2.257	<i>t</i> = -1.412
	<i>p</i> = 0.405	<i>p</i> = 0.024	<i>p</i> = 0.160
Transformational LS	<i>B</i> = 0.950	<i>B</i> = 1.127	<i>B</i> = 0.843
	<i>SE</i> = 0.094	<i>SE</i> = 0.083	<i>SE</i> = 0.179
	<i>SB</i> = 0.430	<i>SB</i> = 0.500	<i>SB</i> = 0.392
	<i>t</i> = 10.092	<i>t</i> = 13.551	<i>t</i> = 4.700
	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***	<i>p</i> = 0.000***
Directive LS	<i>B</i> = -0.031	<i>B</i> = 0.076	<i>B</i> = 0.463
	<i>SE</i> = 0.073	<i>SE</i> = 0.058	<i>SE</i> = 0.115
	<i>SB</i> = -0.015	<i>SB</i> = 0.036	<i>SB</i> = 0.247
	<i>t</i> = -0.419	<i>t</i> = 1.318	<i>t</i> = 4.022
	<i>p</i> = 0.675	<i>p</i> = 0.188	<i>p</i> = 0.000***

*F*, *F* value; *df*, degrees of freedom; *p*, *p*-value; *B*, Beta; *SE*, Standard Error; *SB*, Standard Beta; *t*, *t*-value; ANOVA, Analysis of Variance; LS, Leadership style.

\*\*\*, < 0.001.

with millennials, 69.4% with Generation X, and 46.4% in the case of baby boomers. For the baby boomers, leadership styles were therefore not an important predictor of leader effectiveness.

To determine which of the leadership styles contributed to the prediction of leadership effectiveness, an analysis of the categorisation of the follower generation showed the following:

- Two of the leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational, were found to be statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness in the case of millennials.
- Two of the leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational, were found to be statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness with Generation X.
- One of the leadership styles, namely empowering, was found to be a statistically significant predictor of leadership effectiveness regarding the baby boomers.

Across the generations, empowering leadership seems to be the leadership style which is associated with leadership effectiveness. Although transformational leadership was also regarded as a statistically significant predictor of

leadership effectiveness with the millennial followers and Generation X followers, this was not the case with the baby boomer followers, which speaks to their lower regard of the importance of aspirational leadership.

Next, the generation of the leaders is considered, and how effective they are perceived to be.

The analysis of the categorisation of the generation of leaders showed:

- Two of the leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational, were found to be statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness in the case of both millennial leaders and Generation X leaders.
- Three of the leadership styles, namely empowering, transformational and directive, were found to be statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness with baby boomer leaders.

In all cases empowering or transformational leadership seem to be the leadership styles which are associated with leadership effectiveness, whilst for baby boomer leaders, directive leadership also seemed to be associated with leadership effectiveness.

## Discussion

Given that millennials are a unique group in the workplace and demanding to be led and lead in a particular manner, as suggested by the literature, it follows then that millennials will view a certain leadership style as effective when used on them compared to other leadership styles. As leaders it could also be expected that they will lead effectively when aligned to their unique values and differently from the ways leaders from other generations lead.

In the literature review a valiant effort was made to suggest that empowering and transformational leadership should be associated with leadership effectiveness amongst millennials, rather than transactional, and particularly, directive leadership. The statistical results support millennials perceiving empowering and transformational leadership styles as leading to more effective leadership

The sample could be deemed as representative of the working population in SA in as much as the gender distribution (in general), as well as the race composition of the total group reflected the numbers provided by Stats SA (given Statistics SA 2020 data). There were more black leaders in the millennial leader group than in the other generations, which testifies to the effects of affirmative action on the workplace in SA. Of interest to note, is that there were more black leaders in the baby boomer group than in the Generation X group, which may speak to struggle veterans being recognised in the corporate world in line with legislative Black Economic Empowering (BEE) policy.

Changes in the nature of the workforce over the years, as represented by the sample of followers and leaders, are

explainable. Baby boomers were the minority group in the sample, aligning with their retirement age (Brack & Kelly 2012), whilst millennials were the majority group in the sample of followers, aligning with this generation currently dominating the workforce in size as a productive age group (Pratama et al. 2019). Millennials were not the majority in the sample of leaders, aligning with this generation becoming the leadership pipeline to succeed the older generation leaders (Brack & Kelly 2012).

The instruments used showed acceptable psychometric characteristics and the Cronbach alphas were acceptable (0.73 to 0.94) for the leadership styles and preferable (.95) for leadership effectiveness. With regard to factorial validity, the instruments also showed acceptable results across all the instruments used.

The results pertaining to the effectiveness of leadership styles, per generation of observers (see Table 6), reveal large variations in the absolute amount of leadership effectiveness being explained by leadership styles, as reflected in the  $R^2$  numbers reported. In the millennial generation, 70.9% of effectiveness was explained by the leadership styles they were exposed to, followed by Generation X observers for whom 69.4% was explained, and for baby boomers a significantly lower effectiveness of 46.4%. With millennials then, and, also largely Generation X, the type of leader behaviour influences the effectiveness thereof to a large extent. For the baby boomers, leadership styles are only part of what leader effectiveness entails. Thus, for baby boomers a large portion ( $100\% - 46.4\% = 53.6\%$ ) of leader effectiveness is explained by factors other than leadership styles. Also, of interest to note, is that transformational leadership was not a statistically significant predictor for baby boomer followers, highlighting their low regard for aspirational leadership.

Considering the first null hypothesis, that all leadership styles are judged as equally effective, it was found with millennial followers that two of the leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational, were statistically significant predictors of leadership effectiveness. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Thus, the alternate hypothesis of empowering leadership being preferred may be accepted, which is aligned to the literature of Lamasan and Oducado (2018), Maier et al. (2015), Medyanik (2016) and Sledge (2016). The alternate hypothesis of transformational leadership being preferred, is aligned with the literature of Axten (2015), Bodenhausen and Curtis (2016) and Grubbström and Lopez (2018). The alternate hypothesis of transactional leadership being less preferred is aligned with the literature of Axten (2015), Maier et al. (2015) and Medyanik (2016). The non-significant relationship found with the directive leadership style is also aligned to the literature of Folarin (2021), Maier et al. (2015) and Pratama et al. (2019), which suggest that millennials will not prefer or associate effective leadership with directive behaviour.

The results discussed above confirm that millennial followers associate certain leadership styles with effectiveness, and this is well in line with the present literature on millennials. However, millennials do not really differ in the manner that Generation X associate leadership styles with leader effectiveness, and although millennials differ more than baby boomers on this matter, the similarities regarding empowering leadership outweigh the difference with respect to transformational leadership. Therefore, although millennials (62.7% of the follower sample) judge certain leadership styles as more effective than others, the next most populous group in the workplace, Generation X (31.0% of the follower sample), agrees with them, with only the baby boomers (6.3% of the follower sample) marginally disagreeing.

Considering the second null hypothesis, that millennial leaders are perceived to be effective irrespective of the leadership style that they apply, this was also rejected, because empowering and transformational styles were seen as more effective. The other leadership styles did not predict leader effectiveness in the sample of millennial leaders evaluated. The alternative hypotheses were then affirmed. However, as in the case of the first hypothesis, the results pertaining to Generation X were very similar, indicating that Generation X leaders, who displayed empowering leadership, as well as transformational leadership attributes, were also deemed as effective. For the baby boomer leaders some 'leniencies' were seemingly showed, in that they were judged as effective leaders, even when they displayed directive leadership.

## Conclusion

This study focused on how the millennial generation perceives the overlay between leadership styles and leadership effectiveness and how effective millennial leaders are regarded when applying different leadership styles. The expected conclusion is that millennial followers perceive those engaged in empowering leadership and transformational leadership as more effective (Hypothesis 1), and that millennial leaders who display empowering leadership and transformational leadership, are perceived to be effective leaders (Hypothesis 2). However, most followers, millennials included, perceive those individuals engaged in empowering leadership and transformational leadership as more effective, and most leaders, millennials included, who display empowering leadership and transformational leadership, are perceived to be effective leaders.

The conclusion which should rather be made is that empowering leadership and transformational leadership are the leadership styles associated with leader effectiveness, and that this finding is largely independent of generational perceptions. Also, transactional leadership and directive leadership are not, in general, associated with leader effectiveness, and should be avoided.

Does this conclusion provide any foundation for the development of millennial leaders? Yes, definitely! Leadership development should focus on the development



of empowering leadership, as well as transformational leadership. Also, millennial leadership training should not be exclusive to any group, as it seems that the current era of the fourth Industrial Revolution requires a certain type of leader, irrespective of the age of the leader. The concern of some, with regard to who is leading who, may therefore be inappropriate. The focus should rather be, as suggested in this research, on what type of leadership is required.

## Limitations and recommendations

The authors used a convenient sampling method to select the organisations and randomly selected employees (respondents) in each organisation. It should be noted, however, that the demographics of the respondents seemed to closely reflect the demographics of the country as a whole. Future researchers are urged to use random sampling of both organisations and respondents. A further limitation of the study is that the respondents were requested to make an educated guess at the age of their leaders and report on their leaders' gender and sex.

The study is also limited in being an example of single-source (tapping on the perceptions of followers about their leaders) and single-method (using surveys) research. Future researchers are advised to gain information on self-reports from leaders themselves, additionally, as well as to use techniques beyond surveys – for example, observations from qualified assessors. Data management was also not treated appropriately in the study. No tables explaining drop-outs were discussed, nor detailed discussions of cleaning the data from outliers. The study also contrasted the different generations in the analysis rather than providing a more detailed discussion from the literature on the two generations, Generation X and Baby Boomer generation.

The primary finding of this research is that millennials perceive certain leadership styles as more effective, and that when they apply these styles, they are deemed as effective. As the same applies to Generation X, and also somewhat to the declining numbers of baby boomers, it is recommended that the concern with generational differences be set aside, and that the current workplace rather be evaluated to find appropriate leadership styles. All employees deem the same leadership styles as being effective, and all leaders who apply them, are deemed effective.

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### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

C.E. contributed towards the article through conceptualisation of the research problem, methodology, and formal analysis. Carolyn was also the writer of the original draft of this article.

R.S. contributed towards the article by being the supervisor in reviewing the article and also provided the data and software validation.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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