

# THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN LEADERSHIP: DEFINING THE LEADER OF THE FUTURE

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The modern work environment is characterized by dynamic social and technological changes. In the face of these challenges, the importance of modern leadership models is growing. Leaders are now expected to have soft skills, such as empathy, openness, and support for diversity [1]. Research shows that inclusive leadership has a positive impact on the work environment in organizations, which leads to higher engagement and a stronger sense of belonging among employees [2]. This encourages reflection on the qualities of future leaders, especially from the perspective of people who are just entering the job market. The aim of this abstract is to analyse the opinions of Generation Z representatives about the desired traits of future leaders.

## 2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to understand which qualities of future leaders are seen as the most attractive by Generation Z. The research was quantitative and conducted through an online survey between February and March 2025. The sample consisted of 260 people aged 18 to 30. Respondents rated 10 leadership traits using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant “not important” and 5 meant “very important”. The traits were selected based on current leadership literature and included: empathy and trust, fairness, open communication, openness to diversity, accessibility, tolerance for mistakes, conflict resolution skills, proactiveness, professionalism and expert knowledge, innovation, and continuous development. The collected data were analyzed statistically using Excel. The study considered mean values, modes, and standard deviations for each trait. This allowed identification of which competencies are considered most important by Generation Z in the context of modern leadership.

## 3 RESULTS

The highest-rated trait was open communication ( $\bar{x} = 4.54$ ;  $Mo = 5$ ), clearly showing the importance of this skill in the view of Generation Z. A high mean score for empathy and trust ( $\bar{x} = 4.32$ ) also shows its significance. However, a slightly lower mode ( $Mo = 4$ ) may suggest more varied opinions about this trait. Conflict resolution skills ( $\bar{x} = 4.35$ ;  $Mo = 5$ ) and professionalism with expert knowledge ( $\bar{x} = 4.34$ ;  $Mo = 5$ ) were also rated highly. This confirms that young people also value hard skills in modern leadership. The analysis of differences between groups shows several patterns. The younger group of respondents (18–24 years old) was more likely to give the highest ratings to the listed leadership traits compared to older

participants (25–30 years old). For example, empathy and trust received a mean of 4.46 in the younger group, compared to 4.17 in the older group. A similar pattern was seen when analysing the impact of education. Respondents with higher education more often rated empathy, open communication, and professionalism as very important. Employment status also influenced the ratings – people who were not working gave lower importance to leadership traits than those who were professionally active. For instance, conflict resolution skills were rated highest by respondents who were both studying and working ( $\bar{x} = 4.63$ ). Similar trends were observed regarding work experience – people with less experience more often assigned high value to soft skills.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The collected data show that Generation Z values leaders who demonstrate strong soft skills. The highest-rated traits, such as trust, open communication, and fairness, match key elements of inclusive leadership [3]. The young generation wants leadership styles in organizations to be based on relationships and empathy. The behaviour of CEOs during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected a growing focus on emotional well-being and collective engagement with employees [4]. In practice, this means that organizations will need to adapt their culture to better fit the needs of the youngest employees. According to the research results, leaders who support diversity and fairness have a positive impact on team creativity and innovation. A learning culture can be an ideal environment for this, where employees are not afraid of making mistakes because they know it can lead to new and better solutions [5].

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