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Article

Millennial Leaders' Preferences for Leadership Development: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: Currently the largest workforce in the workplace, the millennial generation is perceived as being different to the preceding generations in the workplace, namely, baby boomers and generation X. Millennials are also seen as the leadership pipeline, yet leadership development that meets the needs of this generation appears to be absent. The objective of this study was to explore what millennial leaders are looking for concerning leadership development and training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 millennial leaders employed in one large financial services organisation in South Africa. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected, and coded themes were generated. The participants' responses favoured more specific leadership development, such as structured mentorship programmes, experiential learning or on-the-job training, soft skills training, and digital online training with remote access. These findings, coupled with a close affinity shown for the more modern empowering and transformational leadership styles, closely align with the literature and affirm the need for a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy for millennial leaders. Organisations should take heed of what millennial leaders are looking for to become effective leaders in filling the leadership pipeline for the workplace. This research largely affirms international research trends that specify millennials as a unique group and the importance of revising traditional leadership development programmes for this generation as leaders.

Keywords: generations; leadership styles; millennial leaders; leadership behaviours; leadership training; leadership development



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1. Introduction

The current multi-generational workplace has four generations, with the newest generation being identified in the literature as post-millennials (2000+) or generation Z (Jones et al., 2018). Prior to generation Z entering the workplace, the workplace was categorised by three generations, namely, the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964), generation X (born between 1965 and 1979), and generation Y, also known as millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) (Kaifi et al., 2012). For the purposes of this study, generation Z has been excluded. This is because this generation does not as yet have a significant representation in the workforce (Jones et al., 2018). The events and social conditions in the life of a specific generational cohort shape their values and behaviours (Noonan et al., 2019). In the workplace, the context that explains each generation's characteristics has an impact on work-related differences between generations (Magano et al., 2020).

When considering the millennial generation, it is also important to note that when acknowledging the complexity and varied contexts surrounding generational theory, definitions of millennials and other broad sociological groupings can vary widely, influenced

by diverse cultural, economic, and historical factors (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2022; Schewe et al., 2013). When considering leadership in the workplace, generational differences are further highlighted with the millennial generation, who have a different view of the relationship between leaders and followers than the previous generations did (Ben-Hur & Ringwood, 2017; Medyanik, 2016), having been brought up by parents who took a great deal of interest in protecting and guiding them through direct supervision, care, and nurturing (Sledge, 2016). Seen as the largest workforce, compared to previous generations in the workplace (Putri et al., 2020), it is, therefore, valuable to understand millennials and, more importantly, millennial leaders, given that a shortage of leadership talent has emerged following the baby boomer generation retiring from the workforce and also due to the smaller numbers of generation X'ers (1965–1980) holding management and leadership positions (Pistrui et al., 2020).

The importance of this research is highlighted by the leadership gap in the workforce created by the declining baby boomer leaders and not enough generation X leaders to fill this leadership pipeline. The workplace is turning to the millennial generation as the new dominant leadership cadre, yet this generation is seen as being different to the previous generations. This uniqueness may have an impact on how millennial leaders want to lead and their preferences for being developed as leaders and, in turn, points to whether the workplace has suitable leadership development and training programs in place to meet these needs.

In determining what millennial leaders want from leadership development and training, the following aspects were explored with millennial leaders:

- What their leadership journey has been like.
- Their past leadership development and training, including future preferences.
- Current leadership behaviours they display and the leadership behaviours they view as effective.
- Specific leadership styles to guide how they lead and want to be led.

The results will contribute to a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy that meets the needs of millennial leaders.

2. Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is embedded in certain theories, as follows.

The literature shows that the millennial generation is different from other generations in the workplace by the values they hold. The study assumes that as leaders, millennials will also lead differently and lead others in the manner in which they themselves want to be led and according to their own values. This assumption is based on Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which says that there is consistency not only in an individual's opinions and attitudes but also between what a person knows and believes and what that person does. In further understanding which effective leadership styles millennial leaders prefer, and in line with their values, a further assumption is made aligned with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which says that human behaviour is learned before it is performed by observing a model of the desired behaviour through competent models that show how the required activities are conducted. The comprehensive leadership framework of Pearce et al. (2003) was then used to explore these preferred effective leadership styles of millennial leaders.

The above two assumptions or theories of Festinger and Bandura support the study in exploring and understanding how to suitably develop millennial leaders in the workplace. Millennial leaders will strive to align their behaviours with their values and will not endorse leadership styles for which they have no affection and that are not in line with their values. Millennial leaders will have a certain perception of effective leaders in the workplace and will be more inclined to adopt these effective leadership styles. A clear link between the

millennial generation being different and wanting to lead differently as leaders in the workplace and the impact of this on how they want to be developed and trained as leaders then bounds the study theoretically.

The below literature review focuses on leadership development preferences of millennial leaders supported by the leadership behaviours and styles they prefer, aligned with the [Pearce et al. \(2003\)](#) leadership framework.

According to research undertaken by [Hawkins \(2017\)](#) in which CEOs, HR directors, as well as millennial future leaders were interviewed, he concluded that over 90% of current leadership development is not deemed suitable for today's leaders. Large changes in the values and attitudes of employees in today's age contribute towards current traditional leadership theories becoming less appropriate for 21st century leaders ([Anderson et al., 2017](#)). The millennial generation has redefined the concept of leadership, creating a need for researchers to continue identifying and analysing the predominant leadership paradigm for this generation, given that generations enter the workplace with an understanding and expectation of leadership roles and processes based on their own experiences and major events that occurred during their upbringing ([Andert et al., 2019](#)). Leadership development for millennials, therefore, needs to be tailored to suit their needs ([Kosterlitz & Lewis, 2017](#)).

Millennials are seeking out leadership opportunities more than their generational predecessors, generation X and baby boomers ([Faller & Gogek, 2019](#)), with the more ambitious millennials already taking on leadership roles within the workplace, looking for a clearly defined career path with immediate gratification and success ([Wheeler, 2017](#)). Although millennials are seen to be the generation that will define the future of leadership in the workplace, young and ambitious millennial individuals may lack the required leadership skills necessary for the success of the organisation ([Nye, 2017](#)). There may also not be many millennial role models for these emerging leaders to follow ([Folarin, 2021](#)). In addition, the workplace is faced with the reality that millennials' promotion into leadership roles, as well as their leadership development journey, has mostly been an informal process ([Arellano, 2018](#)). On a positive note, organisations should take heed that although millennials on the talent leadership bench may lack the experience of their older generational leaders, they compensate through their energy and enthusiasm ([Kosterlitz & Lewis, 2017](#)) and their ability to adapt well to change in the current fast-changing environment and work climate ([Bittner, 2019](#)).

The millennial generation is not comfortable with traditional managerial practices ([Darby & Morrell, 2019](#)), resulting in a "leadership challenge" in the workplace, where traditional managerial practices and leadership methods are becoming less effective ([Kornelsen, 2019](#)). The literature has many articles on generational differences, however, current leadership training programmes still teach millennials to lead in the same way that previously existed in the organisation ([Heyns et al., 2019](#)).

The literature on millennial leaders' preferences for leadership development suggests that they prefer fewer formal interventions. Companies should be creating new leadership development for millennial leaders that includes mentorship and on-the-job training ([Nye, 2017](#)), combined with experiential learning and learning by doing, to improve the competence of these leaders ([Rony, 2019](#)). Leadership guidelines for new millennial leaders should not only include having a personal experienced mentor, but must ideally also build on these individuals' interpersonal soft skills, such as empathy, listening, transparency, and fairness ([Bushardt et al., 2018](#)), as well as emotional intelligence ([Tanasyah et al., 2022](#)). Since millennials grew up with the internet, they are used to interactive and audiovisual technologies for engaging learning content ([Spencer, 2020](#)). They also prefer to create their own personalised learning plans, relying on a combination of computer simulation, micro-learning, video-based learning ([Happ, 2017](#)), gamification ([Harvard Business Publishing,](#)

2018), as well as other learning technologies, such as mobile and social media platforms, for which digital learning tools can be made available online together with remote access to provide millennials with the work flexibility that they prefer (Elayan, 2022).

The true ability of millennials to lead, including their leadership traits and styles, has not been fully explored, resulting in a knowledge gap concerning the behaviour of millennial leaders (Bargavi et al., 2017; Bushardt et al., 2018; Medyanik, 2016). What the literature does suggest is that millennial leaders are authentic, democratic, and transparent as a result of technology becoming a regular feature of this generation's upbringing and bringing people closer (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018). They consider teamwork as the most important leadership trait, followed by communication, respect, vision, and influence (Graybill, 2014), with meaningful relationships also considered a valuable element of their leadership (Medyanik, 2016). They adhere to professional ethics in the workplace and adopt a dynamic and transparent leadership style (Akmalaputri et al., 2018), preferring to lead by example and looking for opportunities to provide feedback to and recognise their subordinates (Medyanik, 2016).

Knowledge of millennial leaders' preferred leadership traits will allow organisations to provide training methods that place millennials in positions where they can succeed (Darby & Morrell, 2019). The literature suggests that the approach of millennials as leaders, or their leadership traits, encompasses their own characteristics and values (Casey, 2015; Medyanik, 2016). This means that millennial leaders may have a different workplace leadership style compared to previous generations (Bako, 2018). In the case of this study, the leadership typology of Pearce et al. (2003) was adopted when looking to explore the leadership styles of millennial leaders and included four leadership styles, namely, empowering, directive, transactional, and transformational leadership. According to Pearce et al. (2003), empowering leadership entrusts the followers to do what they think is correct whilst also promoting participative decision-making and building trust. Directive leadership refers to the behaviour of the leader who issues orders to followers on how the work needs to be done and is very much task-driven. Transactional leadership establishes the parameters of the exchange relationship between the leader and the follower in which the leader rewards his or her followers for achieving specific goals, and takes corrective action when performance is substandard. Transformational leadership refers to leadership behaviour that is charismatic and visionary, generating inspiration from the followers to achieve greater results, whilst also motivating creativity and participation.

From the literature, it seems that millennial leaders prefer an empowering leadership style (Lamasan & Oducado, 2019; Maier et al., 2015; Medyanik, 2016; Sledge, 2016), as they highly value trust and empowerment in leaders, whilst also having the opportunity and encouragement to make their own decisions and be a role model to their followers. They also agree with a transformational leadership style (Axten, 2015; Bodenhansen & Curtis, 2016; Grubbström & Lopez, 2018), wanting to be charismatic leaders who provide a sense of purpose through encouragement while also motivating their followers with challenging work and rewarding innovation. However, there are two leadership styles that are disliked by millennial leaders. The first one is directive leadership, as millennial leaders do not work well with highly autocratic directive leaders, particularly where leaders have been created through a hierarchy (Maier et al., 2015; Pratama et al., 2019). Transactional leadership is also disliked by millennial leaders, as they prefer being leaders who are more orientated towards people and less towards tasks, thereby focusing on providing constant feedback and personal attention to their subordinates so that where failures happen, they are tolerated and learnt from (Axten, 2015; Maier et al., 2015; Medyanik, 2016).

In closing, the literature suggests that millennial leaders, through their uniqueness, require specialised and tailor-made leadership development that speaks to their needs.

Given that millennial leaders predominantly prefer transformational and empowering leadership styles, leadership development and training programs should focus on enhancing these styles by incorporating experiential learning, mentorship, coaching, and soft skills training, which align with their preference for charismatic and inspirational leadership and the fostering of creativity and innovation.

Most of the research reported above stems from research conducted in the global north, thereby pointing to the need for this research study. The literature is filled with diverse perceptions and this study aims to determine which of these are realised in practice in South Africa. It is clear that although theories and models exist, what millennials truly seek in terms of their personal leadership development remains unknown. This has not been captured in non-WEIRD contexts, in the post-COVID-19 era, or in South Africa. An even more compelling argument is to present data produced post-COVID-19, as the popularisation of artificial intelligence technologies is changing the world of work quite drastically.

3. Materials and Methods

The methodology section outlines the research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis of the study.

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore and understand what millennial leaders are looking for concerning leadership development and training in the workplace. Cross-sectional data were collected by way of conducting semi-structured interviews with millennial leaders employed in one organisation. As is customary in interviews, the participants answered most of the questions through simple conversation, generating text for analysis. However, in a few cases, the participants were asked to assign numerical values to statements, thereby quantifying the strength of their conviction on specific issues and providing for a comparative analysis of how they differed in their opinions. Essentially, this research was qualitative with a small degree of quantification to enrich the interpretation of the findings.

3.2. Sampling and Research Participants

The research was conducted in a large financial services organisation in South Africa, with the target population being millennial leaders (born between 1980 and 2000). Non-probability sampling (De Vos et al., 2011) was used in the study. The researcher sent emails to leaders in branch manager roles inviting them to participate in the study, stating the age criteria required. From this population (35 managers were invited), 12 participants were interviewed, which met Guest et al.'s (2006) guidelines of the ideal sample size in a group of relatively homogenous individuals. The "yes" response rate was 89 percent. However, some of these leaders had to be excluded, as they did not meet the age criteria. The relatively high response rate indicates a willingness on the part of the leaders to participate in the interviews.

3.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 12 participants. Demographic data were collected on the participants regarding their age, gender, race, and tenure in current leadership roles. The interviews were conducted online using a virtual platform, namely, MS Teams, and were recorded using MS Teams' audio-recording functionality on the researcher's laptop. A detailed interview guide was compiled by the researcher and used to guide both the researcher, as the interviewer, and the participants during the interview process and included pre-determined questions relating to the participant's leadership journey, leadership development/training, leadership behaviours, and styles. A total of 23 questions were posed to the participants. The first exploratory question read as

follows: “Tell me about your leadership journey so far”. Most of the other questions posed to the participants are presented in Section 4 of this article, and the full interview guide is presented in the Appendix A.

Four questions (Questions 10 to 13) generating quantitative data were posed and presented on a 10-point rating scale, with number 1 being least important and number 10 most important. Question 10, the first quantitative question, read as follows: “How necessary is it for you that the training be available via online and mobile audiovisual platforms, including video-based learning?” The other questions are cited in Section 4. The last four questions in the interview guide also generated quantitative data. Participants were asked to choose one leadership style from a selection of four styles (Questions 20 to 22). The last question (Question 23) required a yes/no response about certain leadership styles.

3.4. Strategies to Ensure Data Integrity

Trustworthiness was assured through meeting the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility was achieved through iterative questioning (probing) by the researcher and peer debriefing reviews with the researcher’s supervisor. The researcher and supervisor looked at the text separately to further improve the credibility of the research. Full disclosure was made of the location, context, and participants in the study (transferability). Consideration of any power relationship was made by excluding the researcher’s direct and indirect reports from the interviews (dependability) since the researcher was employed at the same organisation where the research took place. Confirmability was met through peer review debriefs with the researcher’s supervisor and by including the limitations of the research in the study report. Authenticity was achieved through having appropriately selected participants as millennial leaders by identifying their age and work role.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Demographic Data

Age, gender, race, and leadership role tenure were presented in frequencies, as per Table 1 below, and applicable mean scores were calculated. The primary concern was that the participants fell within the target population.

Table 1. Demographic data of millennial leaders (ML).

Participant	Year Born	Age (Years)	Gender	Race	Leadership Role Tenure (Years)	Branch Manager Tenure (Years)
ML1	1981	42	Male	African	14	10
ML2	1985	38	Female	African	8	6
ML3	1985	38	Female	African	7	5
ML4	1986	37	Female	African	9	7
ML5	1980	43	Male	African	16	7
ML6	1984	39	Female	African	6	5
ML7	1981	42	Female	Coloured	17	8
ML8	1981	42	Male	African	2	2
ML9	1988	35	Female	Coloured	3	1
ML10	1985	38	Female	African	0.42	0.42
ML11	1981	42	Female	African	7	5
ML12	1982	41	Female	African	15	8
Mean	-	39.75	-	-	8.70	5.37

3.5.2. Quantitative Analysis

The four rated leadership training questions were analysed by looking at the mean, median, and mode scores, as presented in Table 2. This allowed for a quantifiable answer to trends identified in previous studies.

Table 2. Ratings given on four leadership training questions.

Participant	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
ML1	10	9	10	10
ML2	9	9	8	10
ML3	10	10	8	10
ML4	9	5	6	10
ML5	10	9	10	5
ML6	8	8	10	10
ML7	10	10	6	10
ML8	10	10	10	10
ML9	9	8	5	10
ML10	6	7	9	10
ML11	9	8	10	10
ML12	10	10	5	10
Mean	9.17	8.58	8.08	9.58
Median	9.5	9	8.5	10
Mode	10	10	10	10

Frequency analysis was used in the case of these four questions (Questions 20 to 23) to record the number of selected responses to the chosen leadership styles, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Leadership styles.

Questions	Leadership Styles (Number of Responses)			
	Empowering	Directive	Transactional	Transformational
(Q20) How would you describe your leadership style if you had to look at these leadership styles?	3	0	0	9
(Q21) How would you like to be led when looking at these leadership styles?	2	0	0	10
(Q22) How are you currently led when looking at these leadership styles?	2	1	5	4
Empowering and transformational v/s Directive and transactional				
(Q23) Millennial leaders display more empowering and transformational leadership behaviour and less directive and transactional leadership behaviour. Would you agree with this when looking at yourself as a millennial leader?	Yes = 12 No = 0			

3.5.3. Qualitative Analysis

Content analysis was applied to the interview data, whereby the analysis subjectively interprets meaning from the content of text data through coding and identifying themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A combination of conventional and directed content analysis was applied to 15 open-ended questions posed to the participants. Conventional content analysis comprises of using coding categories derived directly from the text data given limited research literature on the phenomenon being studied. Directed conventional data analysis commences with theory as guidance for the initial codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coding software ATLAS.ti 23 was used to extract quotations and code the responses from the interview questions posed. Coding is a cyclical procedure, as further attempts may be required (Saldaña, 2013), and in this study the researcher conducted numerous attempts to ensure the elimination of duplicated codes, thereby deriving the salient features of the data collected. Topics were assigned to the questions asked and sub-themes were generated as the codes provided to the answers. The initial coding process focused on extracting the sub-themes provided in the answers by the participants, and the process was then adjusted by removing duplicated sub-themes. The researcher also read through the transcript data to get a better understanding and overview of what the participant was saying in response to the questions asked. A synthesis of these sub-themes then allowed for themes to be developed from the data.

4. Findings

4.1. Demographic Data

The data in Table 1 showed the youngest millennial leader interviewed in this study to be 37 years of age and the oldest 43 years, representing the cusp of the millennial generation life span (mean = 39.75). The female gender represented the majority gender of the sample interviewed (75%), and the African race group represented the majority race group of the sample (83%). There were 4 participants who had a leadership role tenure of longer than 10 years and there were 3 participants occupying leadership roles for less than 5 years. One of these participants had been in a leadership role for only five months (mean = 8.70). When looking at their current leadership roles as branch managers, the mean reduced to 5.37, with 6 of the 12 participants having a tenure of more than 5 years.

Noticeable from Table 1 was the dominance of women in the group, and the absence of white respondents. A more balanced group of participants could have been preferred, but this was the outcome of the recruiting process, which is defensible, and above that, it is reflective of the staff population of the organisation targeted.

4.2. Quantitative Data

Four quantitative questions were posed to the participants to quantify how their attitudes/preferences aligned with the present literature. These were Q10—how necessary is it for you that the training be available via online and mobile audiovisual platforms, including video-based learning? Q11—Is gamification and/or computer simulation a preferred way of learning for you? Q12—How necessary is it for you that the training be done on a micro-learning (small-bite learning) basis? And lastly, Q13—how necessary is it for you that you have remote access to the training? Answers to these questions were given on a 10-point scale, and presented in Table 2 are the mean, median, and mode scores for the participant responses to these four leadership training rating questions.

It is interesting to note that some of the participants gave lower ratings of below 7 to certain questions posed (highlighted in bold in Table 2). This does not necessarily indicate a rejection of what the literature is saying regarding millennial leaders' preferred content and delivery mode of leadership training. The overall trend in the scores did indicate an

alignment with the literature, as seen by the mean, median, and mode scores. The most favourable rated question was Question 13, which spoke to the training having remote access, and the least favourable rated was Question 12, which pertained to training being conducted on a micro-learning (small bite size) basis. However, considering the mean score, median, and the mode, it is clear that millennials concurred with trends in millennium leadership training and development. The mode scores reflected that most respondents provided a 10 rating, namely, “most important”, on all dimensions. The mean values were also high, with the median in all cases being higher, indicating that the scores were slanted to the higher scores. All in all, it should be concluded that, apart from a small number of variations, these millennial leaders confidently confirmed their alliance with the present views on their generation’s training and development preferences. Important to note, however, is that some millennials did not strongly agree with the general behaviour attributed to millennial individuals, therefore emphasizing the point that millennials are not necessarily a uniform group of leaders.

A further four quantitative questions were posed to the participants to quantify their preference for specific leadership styles. Under these four questions, the researcher explored the millennial leaders’ affiliation towards traditional and more contemporary leadership styles. Four leadership styles from the leadership typology of [Pearce et al. \(2003\)](#), namely, empowering, directive, transactional, and transformational, were presented to the participants. The results are presented in Table 3, where the participants were asked which leadership style they would adopt as a leader, the leadership style by which they would like to be led, and the leadership style by which they are currently managed. Under Questions 20 to 22, participants were asked to choose one leadership style from the selection of four leadership styles. The last question posed to the participants (Question 23) required a yes/no response as agreement/disagreement to a statement made pertaining to two leadership styles that are perceived as preferred options by millennial leaders.

The majority of the participants chose a combination of two or three leadership styles, saying that it was dependent on the context you found yourself in as a leader. The researcher probed for the most dominant leadership style under all three questions. Pertaining to Question 20, the responses were predominantly transformational (9), with the remaining 3 responses related to empowerment. Similar responses resulted from Question 21, with the outcome being transformational (10) and empowerment (2). Under Question 22, the responses were a mixture of all four leadership styles, namely, empowerment (2), directive (1), transactional (5), and transformational (4). When compared to the leadership styles selected by the participants under Questions 20 and 21 (predominantly transformational and some empowering), the leadership choices selected in the case of Question 22 were predominantly transactional and included one directive option. These results could be concerning, given the literature that suggests that millennial leaders generally prefer empowering and transformational leadership styles. With regard to Question 23, all 12 participants agreed with the statement that “millennial leaders display more empowering and transformational leadership behaviour and less directive and transactional leadership behaviour”, thereby supporting the literature of how millennial leaders wish to lead and be led.

4.3. Qualitative Data

The aim of collecting qualitative data was to attain a detailed and nuanced description of the millennial leaders’ perceptions in the post-COVID-19 and AI-embraced South African workspace. The qualitative data are presented under three subheadings, referring to topics. Within these topics, specific interview questions were posed, which directly related to the topics and were in line with the aim of the study. The sub-themes were derived from the

coded responses of the participants. A synthesis of these sub-themes allowed for themes to be developed from the data.

The first topic was on the leadership journey of the participants to explore the nature of their journey.

Topic 1. Leadership journey—the findings are represented in Table 4. Four questions were posed to address this topic, and these are presented in the first column together with the themes generated from the sub-themes for the first question.

Table 4. Topic 1: Leadership journey.

Question and Themes (T)	Sub-Theme (ST)	Direct Responses (X Is the Employer)
Tell me about your leadership journey so far? Themes: (1) Continuous learning and growth (2) Interest and engagement (3) Excitement and enthusiasm (4) Fulfilment and impact (5) Challenges and obstacles (6) Accountability and responsibility	(1) Challenging	"...when I started because I was new in a leadership role, it's like you don't know how you are going to lead people" (ML5/T5/ST1). "...a bit challenging, I would say because it was something new" (ML7/T5/ST1).
	(2) Not easy	"...when I became a team leader sales in the same branch where I was a banker fulltime, it was not easy because you are used to your staff that were your colleagues and they were your friends" (ML3/T5/ST2)
	(3) Learnings	"...the main thing that helped me was going through the development that 'X' put me through" (ML5/T1/ST3)). "...it's been quite a learning for me, it has exposed me to interacting with more people" (ML6/T1/ST3).
	(4) Responsibility	"...it's a different world on its own...It's basically I am more responsible..." (ML10/T6/ST4)). "...that has been one of the highlights within my career journey to say...the courage to take up more responsibility as well" (ML12/T6/ST4).
	(5) Interesting	"...what became interesting for me to see how dynamic the role has become..." (ML8/T2/ST5).
	(6) Exciting	"...it's exciting, but tough as well. ...you need to be to be able to sort of manage. ...you know that people think differently, people act differently" (ML11/T3/ST6).
	(7) Fulfilling	"...the entire leadership journey for me was... How do I influence and make their lives better" (ML7/T4/ST7).
What shaped you most as a leader? Themes: (1) Passion (2) People skills (3) Structured learning (4) Adaptability	(1) Ability to adapt	"For me it is all about being agile taking something and embracing the new and the change" (ML7/T4/ST1).
	(2) Ability to listen and learn	"...my ability to listen... learning from those who have done the thing I am doing" (ML1/T2/ST2).
	(3) Empathy	"...you put yourself in the shoes of the staff... you empathise with them before you take any judgement" (ML5/T2/ST3).
	(4) Being diligent	"...you have to show up... positively in a courageous way that they look up to you..." (ML8/T2/ST4).
	(5) Being passionate	"I think it is the passion. I am able to speak to people... just doing what I like" (ML2/T1/ST5).
	(6) Approachable and fun	"...I think that element of being friendly or approachable or fun has really shaped me as a leader" (ML6/T2/ST6).
	(7) Motivation and recognition	"...the more people getting recognised and being motivated... they start taking ownership" (ML8/T2/ST7).
	(8) Discipline and rigour	"The self-discipline... as well as the disciplines that I put in place... has shaped most of how I operate" (ML9/T3/ST8).
	(9) Developing staff	"...developing people, seeing them grow... as to how they can also become great leaders" (ML11/T3/ST9).

Table 4. *Cont.*

Question and Themes (T)	Sub-Theme (ST)	Direct Responses (X Is the Employer)
	(10) Managing diversity	"I think what shaped me most was being sensitive to different cultures and different people..." (ML3/T2/ST10).
	(11) Mentored and coached	"...what has...shaped me is the mentoring and coaching that I received from those that have been ahead of me" (ML1/T3/ST11).
	(12) People	"...the people's part of the leader...the influence because people's mindsets as well they differ" (ML8/T2/ST12). "...working with people with different characteristics and different backgrounds..." (ML12/T2/ST12).
	(13) Education and experience	"I did a Bachelor of Economics... a lot of my learnings... And the experience along the years" (ML10/T3/ST13).
Did you attend any training which influenced your style of leading?	No	"Yes and no. I attended a lot of training, being assertive and that 'X' offers free of charge. Mostly in other things I had to learn it the hard way by being wrong there" (ML3). "Specific training for the style of leading, no..." (ML9).
What did this/they teach you? Themes: (1) Nurturing talent (2) Interpersonal dynamics	(1) Attracting/retaining talent	"Are you hiring the right talent, is the attitude right" (ML1/T1/ST1)
	(2) People skills	"I take some of the things and apply it here at work, ...because it also helps me dealing with people" (ML2/T2/ST2).
	(3) Coaching skills	"...when we coach as a leader, we coach the person to be a better person..." (ML7/T1/ST3). "...the performance coaching for me it was one of the attributes that made my leadership journey quite successful..." (ML12/T1/ST3).
	(4) Developing staff	"You also have to develop your staff... When staff is developed, it makes things easier for you to manage them" (ML5/T1/ST4).
	(5) Soft skills	"...building and leading teams, managing diversity, conflict...giving and receiving feedback..." (ML1/T2/ST5).
And was the training in the form of mentorship or coaching?	No	"... to have a mentor or coach specifically on leadership I have never had it" (ML8). "I have not been formally mentored by anyone, not yet" (ML9).

Under the first question, "Tell me about your leadership journey so far", it can be seen from the outset that the leadership journey has not been smooth sailing for some of the participants. ML5/T5/ST1 said "It's up and down a lot", and ML9/T5/ST1 stated "I've had quite the roller coaster of a journey, to be honest". There were two participants who mentioned that it was not easy to lead staff members who were previously your peers (ML3/T5/ST2 and ML12/T5/ST2). One participant (ML8/T5/ST1) mentioned that there was no manager training or induction available when taking up the leadership role of branch manager: "A lot of what I am doing I learned by doing...". The themes emerging from the sub-themes, as indicated in Table 4 under the first question, tie in with the limited literature available on the leadership journey of millennial leaders, which tends to suggest that the trajectory of this generation's leaders is generally lacking when it comes to upskilling, thereby placing these individuals at a disadvantage compared to their generational peers. However, they are able to compensate through their energy, enthusiasm, and ability to adapt to the changing work environment.

Under the second question, "What shaped you most as a leader", the participants shared the skills they had learned that are aligned with leadership skills required in the workplace, such as listening, empathy, agility, and passion. The varied responses from the participants on this question highlight the multifaceted nature of leadership development and the diverse qualities that shape leaders to be effective. This was echoed by one participant (ML12), who said that "leadership is not for the faint-hearted". When aligning with the literature, two participants (ML1/T3/ST11 and ML4/T3/ST11) mentioned the

value of the mentoring and coaching they received in shaping them as leaders, highlighting the importance of mentorship to millennial leaders as part of their leadership development. Motivation and recognition, as shared by participant ML8/T2/ST7, also aligned with the literature, which suggests that millennial leaders look for opportunities to provide feedback to and recognise their subordinates.

Under the third and fourth questions, “Did you attend any training which influenced your style of leading” and “What did this/they teach you and was the training in the form of mentorship or coaching”, there were eight participants who attended such training, which mainly referred to management studies, such as business management, junior and middle management, and management excellence. However, as can be seen in Table 4, the remaining four leaders did not receive such training, having “to learn it the hard way by being wrong there” (ML3). The responses of those participants who did receive training to the question regarding the content of their training indicated that the training positively influenced their style of leading by providing them with management and leadership skills. One participant (ML1/T2/ST5) mentioned being taught soft skills. It was clear from 10 of the 12 participants that being mentored and coached had not formed part of their leadership journey and, if it did happen, “it was not a formal thing” (ML3). Considering the participant responses overall on these two questions posed, it could be concluded that the training the majority of the leaders received had provided them with certain skills, such as coaching and people skills. However, it was not predominantly in the form of mentorship or coaching. Aligned with the available literature, it could be suggested that these millennial leaders’ expectations for mentorship as part of their leadership development had not been met.

In summary, the participants indicated that their leadership journey had not been an easy journey. However, the researcher was able to align their feedback with the literature on millennial leaders’ preferences on leadership development and training, such as the importance of mentorship and coaching.

The second topic related to the participants’ leadership development and training that they received.

Topic 2. Leadership development/training—the findings are presented in Table 5 below, and three questions were posed to address this topic, presented in the first column, together with the themes generated from the sub-themes.

Under the first question “Please can you specify or explain what part your employer has played in your leadership journey”, the responses were positive, with most participants sharing that their employer had played “a huge role, part” (ML2, ML5, ML7, ML9, and ML12) “a big part” (ML4), as well as “. . .they do care for their leaders” . . . “X was there for me” (ML3) and “. . .they’ve given me an opportunity to enhance my leadership” (ML6). There was, however, one participant (ML8/ST7) who shared the opposite, as there was a lack of leadership learning in this individual’s journey. The themes generated from the sub-themes, as shown in Table 5, for Question 1 indicated that given the “huge” role played by the participants’ employer, the training opportunities can be seen as a valuable contribution to the leadership journey of these millennial leaders.

Under the second question “What aspects, if any, of your leadership development or training provided by your employer have been satisfactory”, the responses were also positive, except for ML8 “. . .I had to learn on the job, learn by myself, practice and all that. . .there was no guidance in terms of here is the study guide. . .” In general, except for ML8 who had not experienced satisfactory leadership development and training, the remaining participants were happy with the leadership development and training provided by their employer. One of the new themes arising from the sub-themes on this question, which was not directly aligned with specific leadership skills, was “digital learning and development”, with ML4/T2/ST1 sharing “Digital provides you a space to learn”. Another

new theme was the “practical training offered”, in that the training provided had a practical aspect to it, “. . .so you are able to relate” (ML6/T3/ST5). Both new themes could be aligned with the literature, supporting a digital component to millennial leaders’ training as well as experiential learning, which millennial leaders prefer.

Table 5. Topic 2: Leadership development/training.

Question and Themes (T)	Sub-Theme (ST)	Direct Responses (X Is the Employer)
Please can you specify or explain what part your employer has played in your leadership journey? Themes: (1) Training and development initiatives (2) Support and guidance (3) Fostering purpose and engagement (4) Tailored development opportunities	(1) Job shadowing	“I would say ‘X’ has played a part in one allowing me to be the 2IC” (ML10/T4/ST1). “. . .my branch manager. . .giving me that opportunity to run the branch even if he is there. . .” (ML11/T4/ST1).
	(2) Upskilling	“. . .it is actually helping me to be a better leader. . .they have done a lot, and they continue to do so” (ML2T1/ST2)
	(3) Purpose	“That there is purpose, I do this for a reason, I am clearer in my assignment in life. . .” (ML1/T3/ST3)
	(4) Managers handbook	“. . .that helped me a lot because they guided me on what needs to be done. . .” (ML3T1/ST4)
	(5) Development courses	“. . . ‘X’ does not ever shy away from bringing programs that will help us develop ourselves” (ML4/T4/ST5).
	(6) Support	“. . .something that has helped in building me as a leader because there is an open-door policy. . .” (ML8/T2/ST6).
	(7) No leadership courses	“. . .from the learning point of view, there is a definite lack in terms of that” (ML8/ST7).
What aspects, if any, of your leadership development or training provided by your employer have been satisfactory? Themes: (1) Leadership skills (2) Digital learning (3) Practical training offerings	(1) Digital learning	“. . .You learn if you want to learn. That’s what digital provides you” (ML4/T2/ST1). “We connected to LinkedIn. . .I go to courses like that, how to lead people that are older than me. . .” (ML9/T2/ST1).
	(2) Coaching skills	“. . . We had to move out from being a manager to being a leader/coach” (ML5/T1/ST2).
	(3) Development	“I think what I liked most is that there is continuous development training. . .” (ML11/T3/ST3).
	(4) Experience	“. . .that even gave me a lot of experience and it’s something that nobody can take away from me, so I have gained” (ML7/T3/ST4). “. . .everything is happening in form of on the job. . .” (ML8/T3/ST4).
	(5) Practical training	“. . .the practicality of the training that’s provided has made it more real. . . So, you are able to relate” (ML6/T3/ST5).
	(6) People skills	“. . .the main aspect ‘X’ has really helped me, it is around. . .dealing with people” (ML1/T1/ST6).
	(7) Managing performance	“. . .I will stick with performance management. . . you can be able to get results through others. . .” (ML12/T1/ST7).
What would you like included in your leadership development or training by your employer? Themes: (1) Practical skills (2) Structured growth (3) Resilience training (4) Inclusive leadership	(1) Job shadowing	“. . .just for me to learn and see what it is that they are doing. . .” (ML2/T1/ST1). “. . .then you get prepared for that 2IC which will be your in training. . .” (ML10/T1/ST1).
	(2) Entrepreneurial mindset	“. . .you know the entrepreneurial mindset. I think we need to diversify it more from how we do business” (ML1/T1/ST2).
	(3) Coping skills	“I think what they could add is how we should cope as leaders as well” (ML11/T3/ST3).
	(4) Formal qualifications	“We have a lot of us that require to have more formal education” (ML4/T2/ST4). “. . .it would be great if it would be a formal qualification . . .something that the business can also benefit from the person” (ML10/T2/ST4).
	(5) Induction course	“. . .I would really appreciate if ‘X’ has let’s say an induction program for leaders. . .” (ML8/T2/ST5).
	(6) Mentorship	“. . .they need to put it to say its mandatory that you must have a mentor in this program. . .” (ML5/T2/ST6). “. . .If it was a perfect world, and I could make it happen. It would be a mentorship with one of my leaders” (ML7/T2/ST6).
	(7) Ongoing development	“. . .some. . . follow-up. . .so we have given you these skills. . .we’ve asked you to apply them. Has it worked?” (ML6/T2/ST7).
	(8) Inclusiveness	“If ‘X’ can make sure that they include the management. . .with every single decision that they make. . .” (ML3/T4/ST8)

Under the third question, “What would you like included in your leadership development or training by your employer”, the sub themes generated, as shown in Table 5, for the third question, if included as elements of leadership development initiatives for the millennial generation, could together enable these leaders to succeed in today’s dynamic and diverse business landscape. These findings also aligned with and strengthened the existing literature on preferred leadership development and training by this generation.

In summary, for topic 2, the participants indicated that their employers played a satisfactory role in providing them with leadership development and training; however, there were certain aspects that could be improved on, which were the sub themes generated from Question 3, thereby providing elements for specialised leadership development and training for millennial leaders.

The third topic explored the leadership behaviours of the participants in better understanding how they want to lead.

Topic 3. Leadership behaviours—the findings are presented in Tables 6 and 7. Three questions were posed in Table 6 below to explore the participants’ current leadership behaviours (1), the leadership behaviours they viewed as effective (2), and the leadership behaviours they could display to improve as leaders (3). Themes were also included in the ‘Question’ column for the first question.

The following participant quotes aligned with two of the themes included in Table 6 for the first question. One participant (ML8/T2/ST5) explained the support leadership behaviour as “they will go to war with you”.

Another participant’s (ML9/T2/ST7) comment, “Leading from the forefront in terms of basically I walk the walk and I talk the talk”, aligns with the behaviour of role modelling.

In looking at the remaining two questions in Table 6, “Which leadership behaviour do you think makes you effective as a leader” and “Which leadership behaviour do you think you should display to be a better leader”, the responses from the participants showed common sub themes arising from the answers to these two questions, as well as from the responses to the first question in Table 6, namely, “support”, “open-mindedness”, and “role modelling”. These common leadership behaviours indicate that where the millennial leaders may not necessarily always be displaying these behaviours, they nevertheless acknowledge and aspire to these standards in order to become effective leaders.

In summary, the feedback from the participants indicated that although some of the leaders lacked certain effective and desired behaviours that were shared, there was some similarity with their current leadership behaviours and, more importantly, the participants were aware of what leadership behaviours are needed to be effective leaders in the workplace.

Table 7 below presents two further questions posed to address the topic of leadership behaviours relating to those behaviours they see being displayed by the older generation leaders and those behaviours the participants’ subordinates view as effective.

Under the fourth question on the topic of leadership behaviours, the participants were asked to consider the leadership behaviours they perceived as being displayed by older leaders (generation X and baby boomers). One positive sub theme that emerged was that of “nurturing and tolerant leadership” being displayed by the older individuals. The other, less positive, sub themes that emerged were those of “analytical leadership”, “autocratic leadership”, and “close-minded or rigid leadership”, meaning that older leaders may display a methodical mindset to decisions, that they may expect strict adherence to established rules, and that they may also adhere closely to traditional practices with no room for innovation. These behaviours are not aligned with those of millennial leaders, as suggested by existing literature and the responses in Table 6. The participants shared the following about the older generation leaders: “...it was just black and white with them...” (ML3/ST4), and “...they want to do things by the book” (ML6/ST4), with a variant of “go by the book” being common among five of the participants.

Table 6. Topic 3: Leadership behaviours (part 1).

Question and Themes (T)	Sub-Theme (ST)	Direct Responses (X Is the Employer)
What behaviours do you display as a leader? Themes: (1) Values-driven (2) Empowering leadership (3) Adaptable leadership	(1) Honesty / integrity	"Because if you are not honest and you don't lead with integrity, it affects the trust issue" (ML12/T1/ST1).
	(2) Influence	"...displaying the key to influencing people rather than deject them when there is no buy-in" (ML8/T2/ST2).
	(3) Inspire	"...I am very good at motivating. I would say rather inspiring" (ML7/T2/ST3).
	(4) Resilience	"To never give up..." (ML3/T3/ST4).
	(5) Support	"...I try by all means to be there for my team taking them through everything they get stuck with" (ML2/T2/ST5). "What is that we could do to better than that..." (ML10/T2/ST5).
	(6) Open minded	"I am very open for anything...I actually give it a thought..." (ML1/T3/ST6). "I am a very open leader" (ML2/T3/ST6).
	(7) Role model	"...I need to be the first one to do it before it is done by the staff" (ML5/T2/ST7). "...if you see me doing that, which I feel as a leader, that's what I want you to do..." (ML9/T2/ST7).
	(8) Coach	"I like staff to be independent..." (ML4/T2/ST8). "I'm also a teacher in a way or a coach" (ML11/T2/ST8).
Which leadership behaviour do you think makes you effective as a leader? Themes: (1) Adaptive leadership (2) Ethical conduct (3) Employee empowerment (4) Continuous support	(1) Open minded	"...that someone can come and say something" (ML6/T1/ST1). "...could probably have gotten more out of your people as opposed to, this is the only way of doing it" (ML7/T1/ST1).
	(2) Communicate	"Communication is always effective..." (ML4/T4/ST2).
	(3) Delegate	"...I allow people to be exposed...have that feeling of making a decision...accountable for their roles" (ML10/T3/ST3).
	(4) Respect and honesty	"...respect goes both ways...I'm honest...and...factual...by doing that you also raise strong leaders..." (ML12/T2/ST4)
	(5) Role model	"...I believe they need to follow what happened, in my footsteps" (ML5/T3/ST5).
	(6) Influence	"...I had to constantly look at how do I influence these things...to benefit the staff" (ML8/T4/ST6).
	(7) Focused	"...knowing what matters most" (ML1/T1/ST7).
	(8) Support	"...I would hold my staff by their hand and take them through new things..." (ML2/T4/ST8). "...they can know that whatever happens, you are supporting them as well" (ML11/T4/ST8).
	(9) Observe	"...when you are observing, that's when you know that no, this person is struggling here" (ML3/T4/ST9).
Which leadership behaviour do you think you should display to be a better leader? Themes: (1) Self-improvement (2) Emotional intelligence (3) Adaptability (4) Structure	(1) Assertive	"...I am not a critical manager...I don't know how to go to that person and say, this is not supposed to be done" (ML5/T1/ST1). "You need to know when to draw the line...sometimes it takes me a while to do that" (ML9/T1/ST1).
	(2) Listen	"...I should listen more...you missed this important or vital information that you could have got from the staff member..." (ML10/T2/ST2). "I think very fast like and most of the time it affects my listening skills" (ML12/T2/ST2).
	(3) Role model	"...leading by example...I should be really better at that" (ML1/T1/ST3).
	(4) Care	"...I care, but I don't think I give it all the best...You don't get time to...sit with the individual team members..." (ML11/T2/ST4).
	(5) Open minded	"...be willing to receive feedback, criticism...that will actually help you in being a better leader" (ML2/T3/ST5). "I think I should be giving my people more rope to do their business their way...because we've got diverse teams..." (ML7/T3/ST5).
	(6) Structured	"...maybe to be more organised...I like to work with structure" (ML4/T4/ST6).
	(7) Reflect	"...grow more...Make sure that I reflect on a daily basis on how the day went and everything" (ML3/T1/ST7).
	(8) Support	"...they see that you are there for them. You want the best for them" (ML8/T4/ST8).

Table 7. Topic 3: Leadership behaviours (part 2).

Question	Sub-Theme (ST)	Direct Responses (X Is the Employer)
What type of leadership behaviour do you think is displayed by older leaders, leaders from earlier generations? Theme: (1) Flexibility and supportiveness versus rigidity and strict control	(1) Nurturing and tolerant	"I am just thinking of leaders who are ahead of me...they are more nurturing; they are more tolerant" (ML1). "Generation X...they still believe in giving a chance, someone can improve" (ML5).
	(2) Laid back	"...they take time to understand certain concepts to grasp things" (ML2).
	(3) Analytical	"I believe the baby boomers are analytical too much, they analyse a lot" (ML5).
	(4) Autocratic, close minded, rigid	"...do it this way, there is no other way...it is basically to tell..." (ML7). "...they were not open to trying new things...it can only be done this way..." (ML3). "...they find a struggle when they are supposed to apply flexibility" (ML6).
Which leadership behaviour do you think your subordinates view as effective? Themes: (1) Supportiveness (2) Ethical behaviour (3) Engagement (4) Emotional intelligence.	(1) Support	"...if you direct them to the correct path they follow" (ML2/T1/ST1). "...give them support and direction and be very patient with them" (ML11/T1/ST1).
	(2) Role model	"The role model one" (ML5/T1/ST2). "...they want that somebody that they can look up to and believe in..." (ML10/T1/ST2)
	(3) Inclusive	"They want to be heard...Staff do not like to be out of the loop" (ML4/T3/ST3). "...they want to get involved" (ML6/T3/ST3).
	(4) Listen	"...my team likes to say Boss you need to listen" (ML1/T4/ST4).
	(5) Respect	"I treat my staff the way I expect to be treated myself..." (ML3/T2/ST5).
	(6) Care	"...they...just want someone who shows that they care about them...they then grow closer...to you as a leader..." (ML8/T1/ST6).

The fifth question, "How valuable is such behaviour in motivating employees such as yourself", was not documented in Table 7, as the researcher was only noting positive and negative responses. Six of the participants did not perceive the older generation leadership behaviours (laid back, autocratic, close-minded, and rigid) as motivating. The participants who mentioned nurturing and tolerant facets (ML1/ST1 and ML5/ST1) did find these behaviours motivating, however, ML5/ST3 did not perceive the analytical leadership behaviour as motivating, saying "I don't like that". Of interest were four participants who saw the value in learning from the older generation leaders, with ML12 sharing "...by us learning from them we could avoid the mistakes that they have made", ML11 saying "...I'm where I am now because of the learnings I got from them", ML9 stating "...there is still a learning out of everything", and lastly, ML8 saying "...try to tap into their world and see how can you learn something". In general, although the respondents as millennial leaders did not associate themselves with the leadership behaviours of the older generations, they acknowledged that they could learn from these older leaders, thereby justifying the importance of mentorship by older leaders for millennial leaders, as suggested by the literature.

Pertaining to the last question in Table 7, "Which leadership behaviour do you think your subordinates view as effective", the researcher was mindful that the subordinates of these millennial leaders could be a mixture of both old and young generations. However, the leadership behaviours (sub themes) of "support", "role modelling", "listening", "respect", and "care" shown under this question were also leadership behaviours identified by the participants under the first three questions in Table 6, indicating the importance of these leadership behaviours for millennial leaders to achieve effective and improved leadership levels.

5. Discussion

The main aim of the study was to explore what millennial leaders want from leadership development and training, thereby contributing to a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy that meets the needs of this unique generation of leaders. Per the sample interviewed, 12 millennial leaders in branch manager roles were asked 23 questions

falling into 4 categories (leadership journey, leadership development/training, leadership behaviours, and leadership styles). The questions were intended to be exploratory in nature (Tables 4–7 under qualitative data analysis), except for two parts in the interview guide where the participants were asked to rate four questions relating to preferred delivery and content of learning (Table 2 under quantitative data analysis), and later, where they were asked to select from four leadership styles adopted from [Pearce et al. \(2003\)](#) (Table 3 under quantitative data analysis).

From the quantitative data findings in Table 2, regarding the preferred learning mode of millennial leaders, it became evident from the mean and mode scores that millennial leaders did prefer a certain content and delivery mode of learning aligned with existing literature. Organisations should pay attention to this element when tailoring leadership development for the millennial generation.

From the quantitative data findings in Table 3 on leadership styles, the respondents' selection of empowering and mainly transformational leadership as leadership styles that they practice was aligned with the literature, which suggests that millennial leaders want to be charismatic, inspirational leaders, providing a sense of purpose through challenging work and encouraging creativity and innovation ([Axten, 2015](#); [Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016](#); [Grubbström & Lopez, 2018](#)). Of some concern is the perceived predominantly transactional leadership style followed by the respondents' leaders. One participant (ML3) said "he does have the transactional leadership; he is a rewarding person. . .he does need to punish where he needs to punish. . .we just need him to come to number 4 more (transformational). . ." This is a leadership style that millennial leaders are not inclined towards, as they are more people orientated and less task-driven as leaders ([Axten, 2015](#); [Maier et al., 2015](#); [Medyanik, 2016](#)). The literature was supported by all 12 participants agreeing with the statement that millennial leaders display more empowering and transformational leadership behaviour and a less directive style ([Maier et al., 2015](#); [Pratama et al., 2019](#)) or transactional behaviour.

Under the qualitative findings in the study on the first topic, the leadership journey, we are aware that the literature suggests that millennials who have moved into leadership roles may lack the required leadership skills ([Nye, 2017](#)) and yet their leadership development also lacks a formalised process to equip them to be effective leaders ([Arellano, 2018](#)). The qualitative findings from the study under the leadership journey topic did point to these millennial leaders having a challenging informal leadership journey, having to learn how to lead as they go about their daily branch manager roles. However, as millennials, these leaders possess positive qualities, such as enthusiasm, excitement, and adaptability, that enable them to cope with the learning curve ([Bittner, 2019](#); [Kosterlitz & Lewis, 2017](#)).

When further exploring the second topic, being their leadership development and training, the findings suggested that mentorship did appear to be the participants' preference for leadership development ([Bushardt et al., 2018](#); [Nye, 2017](#)), yet this element was seemingly absent in their leadership journey, with only two participants having received formal mentorship and coaching. The majority of these millennial leaders (eight participants) did, however, receive formal training through courses or programmes that equipped them with management leadership skills, yet the remaining four millennial leaders had to learn leadership the "hard" way. What was also noticeably absent from the management studies some attended was training on soft skills—a facet identified by the literature as important for this generation ([Bushardt et al., 2018](#); [Tanasyah et al., 2022](#)). On a positive note, the majority of the participants did indicate that their employer had played a "huge" role in their leadership development as millennial leaders.

When asked what they would like included in their leadership development and training, some of the responses did indicate that on-the-job training (experiential learning) was preferable. This aligned with the literature on millennial leaders' preferences for lead-

ership development (Nye, 2017; Rony, 2019). Other important elements were mentorship, as previously discussed, certain soft skills (Bushman et al., 2018; Tanasyah et al., 2022), induction courses, and ongoing development opportunities.

The common leadership behaviours (third topic) under the qualitative findings in the study were honesty, influence, support, open-mindedness, and role modelling. These leadership behaviours aligned with the literature, which suggests that millennial leaders hold teamwork and meaningful relationships in high regard (Graybill, 2014; Medyanik, 2016). Effective leadership is achieved through leading by example (Medyanik, 2016), by being authentic, democratic, and transparent (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018), as well as by being influential (Graybill, 2014). When further exploring the participants' perceptions of leadership behaviours displayed by older generations (generation X and baby boomers), the participants mainly shared leadership behaviours that were different to their own and not motivational, such as autocratic, closed-minded, and rigid styles. However, there were participants who felt that they had much to learn from the experience of the older generations, thereby supporting the importance of formal mentorship programmes in their leadership development.

In summary, the findings of the study, when compared to previous research, did align with the literature concerning the absence of a formal structured leadership journey for millennial leaders, which includes their preferred leadership styles and their preferences for leadership development and training. Of importance are the elements (themes) generated in the study, which together can contribute to a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy for millennial leaders in the workplace, as shown in the Conclusion Section below.

A limitation of the study was that the participants interviewed fell into the upper age group of the millennial generation. Given that this generation spans a 20-year period, it would have been valuable to explore the views of younger millennial leaders to provide further insights to meet the objectives of the study. The research only took place in one organisation. It is recommended that further research be conducted in additional organisations to provide for more insights into what millennials are looking for in leadership development and training. A further limitation of the study relates to the demographics of the participants interviewed, in that the race group was Black only; however, this is reflective of the current worker population in South Africa. The paper made mention that millennials may not necessarily be a uniform group of leaders when interpreting the results of their preferred leadership content and delivery mode of training against what the literature says. This could be a suggestion for future research to better understand the possible absence of uniformity in this group of leaders. The paper also assumed a geographical implication in that the research problem may extend globally, however, further research is needed to verify this. It is also recommended that further research be conducted to test and validate the elements of a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy from the findings of this study for millennial leaders.

6. Conclusions

There is a clear need for organisations to focus on the leadership development of their younger leaders, being the millennial generation, given that this generation currently constitutes the largest part of the workforce, and that they act differently from the older generations in the way they want to lead. As one participant shared, "We feel unheard, we feel that our opinions don't matter. We feel that we are misunderstood. Our older generations and ourselves should be able to meet each other halfway, coming together. This will make the world a better place, and I don't think that is only happening in South Africa. It's a worldly challenge" (ML12).

The findings from this study aligned with the existing literature on millennial leaders' preferences for leadership development and training and the way they wish to lead and be led. The implication for organisations with a multi-generational workforce is an urgency to move away from traditional methods and implement a specialised and tailor-made leadership development strategy that can speak to the following existing themes in the literature as well as new emerging themes from the study findings:

- Structured mentorship programmes,
- On-the-job training and experiential learning opportunities,
- Soft skills training,
- Comprehensive induction courses,
- Formal qualifications and accreditation,
- Ongoing development opportunities with an entrepreneurial mindset,
- Interactive digital audiovisual- and video-based learning, including gamification and simulation,
- Online remote access to learning.

Given that the millennial leaders also preferred certain leadership styles (empowering and transformational), which aligned with the literature, organisations should encourage a leadership culture that revolves around these leadership styles so that leaders in the workplace could lead in the same way.

A core takeaway of the study was that millennials are desiring a certain way of being developed and trained as leaders, and organisations should take heed of this so that they are better equipped to generate effective leaders to fill their leading pipeline.

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Informed Consent Statement: Participants were checked by the researcher to confirm that their participation was indeed voluntary, and the researcher obtained participants' permission to audio-record the interviews. The participants were informed that their identity and the confidentiality of their responses would be protected through the use of numbers allocated to each participant to record responses, e.g., millennial leader participant 1 was denoted as ML1.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Interview Guide.

Introduction

I am Carolyn Easton. You responded to my invite, and I am very appreciative that you volunteered to talk to me. I am currently doing research on millennial leaders and their leadership development needs and you are well suited to assist me on this. Thank you again.

I would like to record your views on millennial leaders. Your responses would be anonymous, and if you now feel too uncomfortable to talk to me, you are free not to participate. Also, should you at a later stage wish to abandon the interview, you are also free to do so.

The interview will take about 45 to 60 min and I have 23 questions to pose to you.

Any questions before we start?

Demographics of respondent

Firstly, we need to check if you fall within the Millennial age group.

Were you born before 1980?

[If respondent answers yes, terminate the interview in a friendly manner].

[Observe the gender and the race of the respondent and document it].

[If it is difficult to determine the gender and race, ask the following questions].

To what race group, if any, would you say you belong to?

What is your gender identification?

Study questions

Topic—your leadership journey

Q1: How long have you been in a leadership role?

Q2: Tell me about your leadership journey so far.

[This could lead to a chronological reflection. Follow this up with a question on definitive moments in the respondent's leadership journey].

Q3: What shaped you most as a leader?

[Probe further on this question and ask the following question]

Q4: Did you attend any training which influenced your style of leading?

Q5: What did this this/they teach you and was the training in the form of mentorship or coaching?

Topic—Leadership development and training

Q6: Please can you specify or explain what part your employer has played in your leadership journey.

Q7: What aspects, if any, of your leadership development or training provided by your employer been satisfactory?

Q8: Why is this?

Q9: What would you like included in your leadership development or training by your employer?

[For Q10 to Q13, the researcher to display template to participant of below rating scales]

Q10: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least important and 10 being most important, how necessary is it for you that the training be available via online and mobile audiovisual platforms, including video-based learning?

Q11: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least important and 10 being most important, is gamification and/or computer simulation a preferred way of learning for you?

Q12: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least important and 10 being most important, how necessary is it for you that the training be done on a micro-learning (small bite learning) basis?

Q13: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least important and 10 being most important, how necessary is it for you that you have remote access to the training?

Topic—Leadership behaviours

Q14: What behaviours do you display as a leader?

Q15: Which leadership behaviour do you think makes you effective as a leader?

Q16: Which leadership behaviour do you think you should display to be a better leader?

In my study, we refer to the multi-generational workforce as comprising of three generations, namely, millennials (born between 1980 and 1999), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979), and the oldest generation, baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). [Share your screen with the participant]

Q17: What type of leadership behaviour do you think is displayed by older leaders, leaders from earlier generations?

Q18: How valuable is such behaviour in motivating employees such as yourself?

Q19: Which leadership behaviour do you think your subordinates view as effective?

Topic—Leadership styles

In my study, we looked at four different leadership styles (LS) or leadership behaviours, characteristics, and traits shown by leaders:

[provide participant with card showing the below definition of LS and numbering the LS]

- LS number 1—Empowerment leadership is typified by a leader entrusting their followers to do what they think is correct whilst also promoting participative decision-making and building trust.
- LS number 2—Directive leadership is typified by a leader giving orders to his followers on how the work needs to be done and is very much task-driven.
- LS number 3—Transactional leadership is typified by leaders rewarding their followers for achieving specific goals, however also taking corrective action when performance is substandard.
- LS number 4—Transformational leadership is typified by leaders who are charismatic and visionary, who inspires their followers to achieve greater results, whilst also motivating creativity and participation.

Q20: How would you describe your leadership style if you had to look at these leadership styles that I have described?

Q21: How would you like to be led when looking at these leadership styles?

Q22: How are you currently led when looking at these leadership styles?

I would like to now share with you what I found in the first part of my study. That research showed that millennial leaders display more empowering and transformational leadership behaviour and less directive and transactional leadership behaviour.

Q23: Would you agree with this when looking at yourself as a millennial leader?

Thank you for your time, I have no further questions.

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