

Generation Z and Adapting Leadership Styles to Meet Emerging Workforce Expectations: A Literature Review*

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* Presented at the 45th IBIMA International Conference, 25-26 June 2025, Cordoba, Spain

Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigates how leadership practices must adapt to effectively engage and manage Generation Z in the workplace. It addresses a gap in the literature regarding the unique preferences, values, and expectations of Generation Z employees and how traditional leadership styles may need to evolve.

Aims: The primary aim is to explore the leadership styles that align best with Generation Z's characteristics. Secondary aims include identifying key motivational drivers of Gen Z and examining the role of digital communication, transparency, and work-life integration in leadership effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach: A theoretical literature review was conducted, synthesizing findings from empirical studies published between 2015 and 2024. Sources were selected from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Pubmed using keywords 'Generation Z,' 'leadership,' 'digital natives,' and 'workplace expectations.' A total of 15 peer-reviewed articles were analyzed.

Findings: Generation Z employees value authenticity, transparency, digital fluency, and purpose-driven work. Transformational and servant leadership styles, emphasizing empowerment and ethical guidance, are better suited to meet these expectations. Top-down, authoritative styles are generally less effective.

Limitations of the study: The review relies on emerging data, with limited longitudinal studies available. Future research should include empirical investigations across various industries and regions to generalize findings.

Practical implications: Leaders should adopt flexible, tech-savvy approaches and foster inclusive environments that allow for autonomy and growth. Investment in leadership training tailored to Gen Z's values can enhance employee engagement and retention.

Originality/value: This review offers a comprehensive synthesis of current knowledge on leading Gen Z, filling a critical research gap and providing practical insights for managers, HR professionals, and organizational developers.

Keywords: Generation Z, leadership styles, transformational leadership, digital natives, workplace expectation, employee engagement

JEL Classification: M12, J24