

# Differences Between Senior Human Resources Managers and Young Millennials Leaders on the Perceived Required Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century

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**Abstract:** As millennials take over the workforce, there is a growing concern that generational differences will require adaptations in leadership requirements to ensure organization success. Nevertheless, emerging observations question the validity of generational differences in leadership. This qualitative paper uses semi-structured interviews with senior HR managers and young leaders to explore differences in their perceptions of the required leadership competencies for the 21st century. This paper shows that there are more similarities than differences between young leaders and senior HR managers. The research does not provide evidence to support published claims of generational differences. The research limitations of this paper lie in its reliance on the accounts of senior HR managers and young leaders working in profit-based organizations in developed countries. This paper will be helpful in designing leadership training and development programs, tailoring integration programs for new employees, and recruiting potential future leaders. It will also facilitate workshops for collaboration and team performance between younger and more experienced professionals. The study contributes additional knowledge to the field of leadership by providing a unique comparison between the views of young millennial leaders and senior HR managers on leadership competencies for the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Leadership, 21st Century, Human Resource, Generations, Millennials

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## 1. Introduction

The start of the 21st century, also called the knowledge era [1], has been characterized by significant changes, including societal shifts, increased internationalization of the economy, and technological developments. Important changes in the environment have always forced organizations to reconsider required leadership competencies in order to adapt to the new context [2].

Among the changes that are taking place today, the underlying demographic shift in the workplace plays an influential role. Millennials will dominate the workforce in the near future. This important trend has led several scholars to argue that new leadership competencies should be considered to effectively manage and adapt to millennials' expectations [3]. The assumption for this argument is that

millennials, as a generation, have a different perspective on leadership than older generations [4]. Thus, practitioners who are unable to accept millennials' leadership requirements will witness an increase of inter-generational conflicts in their organizations, and experience serious difficulties to recruit, develop, and retain talent [5, 6]. However, much has been written about the leadership competencies for the 21st century generating more confusion because of a lack of consensus. Furthermore, not much work on the 21st century leadership competencies was done through the perspective of senior human resources practitioners, who are coping on a daily basis with the challenge of recruiting and developing talents, nor through the perspective of millennials. In addition, when millennials'

opinions are considered, it is often through the limited lens such as leadership styles or behaviors. In addition, the literature on leadership will benefit from more work that compares millennials' perspectives to that of senior human resources professionals. For this study all the components of a competence as described by Mc Clelland [7] will be considered, which includes: set of knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, self-concepts, traits, and motives. This research intends to assess to what extent senior human resources managers and young millennial leaders differ on their perception of the required leadership competencies for the 21st century.

## 2. Defining Generation

A generation is defined as a group of people within the same age range that share similar life experiences [8]. There are currently up to 5 generations in the workforce: The traditionalists (1928-1945), the baby boomers (1946-1960), the generation X (1961-1979), the generation Y, also known as the millennials, (1980-2000) and the generation Z (after 2000). It is commonly argued that each generation's values, attitudes, beliefs, and aspiration are influenced by their common shared life experience [9]. Therefore, each generation has its own perspective on leadership, and that of younger generations greatly differs from older generations [10].

## 3. Millennials View of Leadership

It is generally agreed in the literature that millennials, having experienced a life with globalization and the development of information communication technologies, have a view on leadership that is different than that of older generations [11]. Scholars argue that most of the writing on leadership published up to now does not fit the perspective of younger generations and that more research focusing on the view of millennials should be conducted [12]. New studies addressing the millennials' view provide interesting insights. In terms of leadership style, it is often argued that millennials prefer a collaborative leadership style applied within a flat hierarchy framework and in a team setting [5]. In terms of work value, it is commonly argued that millennials expect to have meaningful work. Also, they need to work in a flexible environment in which work-life balance is respected [13]. Furthermore, research stresses the importance of interpersonal skills as millennials are in search of meaningful relationships with their leaders [14]. However, despite all these agreements, the research on millennials' perspective lacks homogeneity [10]. Available studies define millennials using different age ranges and different social-contexts, some studies using a shorter age range from 1981 to 1990 [10] and others extended the age range from 1980 to 2000 [15]. The sample used varies from study to study. Some publications are based on accounts from millennials still in high schools or in graduate school [16], while some others from millennials just entering the workforce or already in managerial positions [17].

## 4. Older Generations and Practitioners' View on Leadership

This body of leadership literature is often referred to as "adult people" leadership theories by scholars, as it relies on the opinion of executives and senior practitioners [10-18]. Older generations' view on leadership has always evolved to meet the leadership requirements brought by changes of context over centuries. The first writing on leadership can be traced back to the trait theory, which asserts that leadership requires exceptional inborn qualities to bring social changes. A major shift occurred with the emergence of behavioral leadership theories in the middle of the 20th century, with a new focus on the idea that leadership is learnt and that different leadership style should be used depending on the situation [19]. By the 1980s, the transactional theory presented the idea that leaders and followers engage in a mutually dependent relationship [20]. Leaders provide subordinates with something of value to them and, in return, they receive something they want from their subordinates [21]. Transformational leadership theorists distinguish themselves by advocating for positive reciprocal influence between followers and leaders as a contribution to the general good. Transformational scholars believe that leaders should try to influence followers by inspiring them, adhering to high moral values, and sharing a meaningful purpose [22].

As we enter the 21st century, characterized by significant changes including societal shifts, globalization, and technological developments, scholars have discussed new leadership competencies in order to adapt to the new context [23, 24]. Dinh et al., [25] in the review of the emerging leadership theories, identified relevant and significant new competencies in the area of strategic leadership, team and shared leadership, complexity leadership, authentic leadership, global leadership, e-leadership and servant leadership. Recently, the growing importance of digital transformation, sustainability, financialization of the economy, and the regular occurrence of crisis situations, lead practitioners to consider additional necessary leadership competencies [26].

## 5. Generational Differences and Leadership

Up to now, the main stream of literature on generational difference in leadership tends to argue that there are significant differences between millennials and older generations on the expectation and approach to leadership [27]. Differences are due to a divergence on work values, work attitude, and psychological traits [28] shaped by differences in life experience. Aside from the main body of literature, a growing school of thought is emerging and claims that there are more similarities than differences among generations [29]. Most of the existing publications on generational difference look at leadership from different angles. Some look at the preferred leadership style [30], others at how work values should be considered to provide a leadership approach that

would positively impact the productivity of a multi-generational workforce [31]. A few scholars address the differences of perception on required leadership skills [3]. However, not many are considering the full scope of leadership competencies which would include: knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, self-concepts, traits and motives [32]. Furthermore, not enough empirical studies have tried to compare young millennial leaders' perspective and senior human resources practitioners' view on leadership competencies.

## 6. Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century

Scholars in the science of leadership agree that there is a need to identify new leadership competencies to meet the requirements of the 21st century [33]. However, there is a lack

of consensus on what these leadership competencies should be, on the terminology used to describe them, and on the number of required competencies [26]. In his review of the body of leadership literature ranging from 1869 to 2020, Ngayo Fotso [26] managed to provide a comprehensive list of the 18 required leadership competencies for the 21st century. The literature review on the required leadership competencies also show there is a lack of studies that investigate the perception of senior human resources practitioners and young millennial leaders on the required leadership competencies for the 21st century.

The objective of this paper is to assess to what extent senior human resources practitioners and young millennial leaders differ in their perception of the required leadership competencies for the 21st century. To do so, the extensive list of the required leadership competencies suggested in Ngayo Fotso's review [26] is being used.

*Table 1. The required leadership competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century [26].*

Leadership Competencies	Description
Adaptability and Flexibility	Being able to constantly adapt and to rapidly change the course of actions.
Values	Lead by demonstrating adherence to key values such as: curiosity, authenticity, optimism, and moral virtue.
Cognitive Skills	Able to effectively deal with a high amount of information, formulate strategies and demonstrate an entrepreneurial mindset.
Transformational Ability	Able to initiate and implement change. Inspire others and have some charisma
Self-awareness	Able to show self-reflection, self-regulation, a high tolerance to stress, have a purpose and be motivated.
Social Skills	Able to connect and feel at ease with everyone. Showing interpersonal skills and being close to people
Communication Skills	Able to clearly communicate regularly also by using new digital tools and social medias.
Human Orientation	Consideration for people and their well-being should be a priority.
Organizational Skills	Providing structure to people and to teams in the digital and non-digital world and by also using digital tools.
Ability to Handle Complexity	Able to cope with complexity and to navigate networks and systems.
Knowledge	Show expertise in his field. Able to capture analyze and disseminate information. Value continuous learning.
Global Leadership	Being able to handle international assignments. Able to adapt to different cultures and people.
Collaborative Leadership Style	Make collaborative leadership the main leadership style. Being open and embrace contribution from all team members.
Customer Centric Skills	Able to focus on customers satisfaction and on interaction with them.
Digital Competence	Being able to integrate digital technologies in business problem solving, strategy formulation and execution and in business models.
Competence for Financialization	Being able to maximize profit through financial strategies. Able to apply a top-down centralized approach and to make unpopular decisions.
Sustainability Competence	Able to implement the triple bottom line approach in decision making and to integrate sustainability in business models.
Crisis management Competence	Able to handle crisis and understand the 5 stages of crisis management. Being flexible, transparent and able to rely on collaboration.

Source: Ngayo Fotso [26].

## 7. Methodology

### 7.1. Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

For this study, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to achieve the objective of gathering in-depth, detailed information about the informants' perceptions of the required leadership competencies for the 21st century.

To recruit participants, I relied on the heads of student association offices in several graduate school institutions. They provided lists and contact details of past and current presidents of their student associations. In addition, I recruited participants through professional networks such as LinkedIn and Thunderbird (The American Graduate School of Management), as well as business networks and alumni. Personal acquaintances were also helpful in recruiting participants, as they could often recommend

potential participants to contact.

The young leaders selected for the study had to have practical leadership experience, but not in a professional setting. This ensured that they had not yet adapted their leadership perspective to the requirements of a specific organization. Leadership experiences in non-profit, cultural, sport, or social associations, including student government, were considered. The senior human resources managers who participated in the study were leading transformative leadership projects in their organizations. These projects were aimed at changing the leadership culture, identifying a new set of leadership competencies, and recruiting new leaders to ensure their organizations were adapting to the requirements of today's fast changing world.

A sample size of 31 participants was used for the study. To reach saturation for both groups, it was necessary to interview

22 young leaders (12 women and 10 men) and 9 senior HR managers (5 women and 4 men).

*Table 2. Study Sample Population.*

Sample population (N=31)	Senior HR managers (N=9)	Young Millennial leaders (N=22)
Female (N=17)	5	12
Male (N=14)	4	10

## 7.2. Interview Procedures and Data Collection

Initial contact with potential participants was done by phone in order to explain the study and invite them to participate. Upon their agreement to participate, an email was sent, providing more information about the study, as well as a request to read, sign, and send back the attached information, the invitation letter, and a consent form. Upon receiving the signed documents, interviews were scheduled.

Participants were interviewed face-to-face, through Skype, or over the phone at a scheduled time, date, and location of their choice. At the beginning of the interview, participants were reminded of the study's objective, as well as the fact that they were freely participating, that the answers they provided would be confidential and anonymous, and that they had the right not to answer any questions and withdraw from the interview process without any consequence.

Interviews were conducted and recorded with an electronic voice recording device. The audio files were transferred onto a computer in MP3 format. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim. I sent back the transcript of the interview to each participant to be validated for accuracy and in order to give the participant the opportunity to provide additional information or changes, if required. All transcripts were saved on a computer and labeled in a manner to ensure anonymity.

## 7.3. Data Analysis

Upon validation of the transcriptions, all files were imported into MAXQDA 2018, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. For this research, I used both deductive and inductive approaches to develop the codebook based on Ngayo Fotso's [26] findings on the 18 required leadership competences for the 21st century. Upon saturation in the coding work, it was possible to start the in-depth-analysis.

Quotations in the findings are derived from the transcription of participants' interviews and are for illustration purposes. Quotes are identified by an anonymous number of the participant (1, 2, 3, etc.), seniority level (s: senior, y: young) and position (hrm: human resources manager, gl: graduate leader).

# 8. Findings

## 8.1. Similarities in the Number and Type of Required Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century

From the content analysis, it appears that both the senior HR managers and young millennial leaders have similar views on the number and on the type of required leadership

competencies for the 21st century. The two groups mentioned 15 of the leadership competencies available from the list developed by Ngayo Fotso [26]. Both groups also did not mention 3 others competencies present in the list: customer centric skills, competence for financialization and crisis management competence. The two groups highly insisted on 1 new competence we could add to Ngayo Fotso's list [26]: the ability to create an enjoyable work environment.

*Table 3. Senior HR managers and young leaders agree on 16 perceived required leadership competencies for the 21st century.*

1. Adaptability and Flexibility	9. Organizational Skills
2. Values	10. Ability to Handle Complexity
3. Cognitive Skills	11. Knowledge
4. Transformational Ability	12. Global Leadership
5. Self-awareness	13. Collaborative Leadership Style
6. Social Skills	14. Digital Competence
7. Communication Skills	15. Sustainability
8. Human Orientation	16. Ability to Create an Enjoyable Work Environment

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

## 8.2. Similarities in the Description of 9 of the Required Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century

The two groups have an identical view on 9 of the identified required leadership competencies. They share similar opinion on: adaptability and flexibility, communication skills, ability to handle complexity, knowledge, collaborative leadership style, digital competence, sustainability competence, ability to create an enjoyable work environment.

### 8.2.1. Adaptability and Flexibility

Almost all the respondents in both groups expect leaders to demonstrate an ability to adapt to different situations. From the participants' view, a leader should be ready to change the course of action when the context requires it. They should also adapt depending on various criteria: the people they interact with, their level of experience, how they feel, their different working habits, values, and culture. Moreover, there is an expectation for leaders to adapt their leadership style when required. The two groups of participants believe that one leadership style cannot fit all situations. Their leadership experience has taught them that collaboration does not always work, and that sometimes a more directive leadership style produces better results.

"When I was president of the media association in my graduate school, I had 20 people to manage, so 20 different behaviors, so you need to adapt to each of them. They don't have the same level of motivation. When they don't show up in meeting or don't do the job you need to be tougher on them." (ygl 3).

"There is a need to adapt and to be flexible as a decision maker. The leaders of tomorrow in comparison to today would make a difference by showing this ability." (ygl 2).

### 8.2.2. Communication Skills

Senior HR managers and young leaders agree that oral and written communication, in addition to listening skills, are very important for leadership in the future. They also expect leaders

to be able to engage in a dialogue, rather than just one-way communication, which requires strong listening skills. Communication skills should also be shown by a mastery of new media technologies, including social media.

“Clearly, some people that are leaders today cannot be leaders tomorrow because they still don’t know how to use social medias, they don’t understand the codes of communication in social medias.” (shrm 8).

### **8.2.3. Organizational Skills**

As in previous times, future leaders should still provide structure to their subordinates. For example, they should provide direction, a plan, clear objectives, define roles and responsibilities, and provide follow-up and feedback.

“So, employees must know what they can expect from their boss, and this won’t change, this I think will be the same in the future, so you always need to know what your vision is, what your targets are, what you are willing to do so people know what they should do, so they are not surprised.” (shrm 1).

### **8.2.4. Ability to Handle Complexity**

Organizations are increasingly adaptive to complex structures, which requires management of different stakeholders with sometimes conflicting objectives and expectations. Accordingly, both groups believe 21st century leaders should be good at navigating within systems. Furthermore, they should be able to deal with constantly changing environments that cause disruptions and uncertainty.

“To be able to navigate not only in ambiguous situations but also in difficult and complex environments which is often the case with multi-nationals where you have matrix organizations.” (shrm 5).

### **8.2.5. Knowledge**

The two groups believe that leaders in the future will be required to have both expertise and some degree of experience. Furthermore, the ability to keep learning is perceived by the two groups as essential.

“From leaders it will be required that they have a broad spectrum in the area of course management.” (shrm 5).

“The capability to reeducate oneself and keep learning.” (ygl 14).

### **8.2.6. Collaborative and Shared Leadership Styles**

Although the two groups expressed that leaders in the future should be able to adapt their leadership style to the situation, they also strongly believe that the collaborative leadership style should be applied. Both groups of participants talked about the importance of working in a collaborative mode and in team settings. The team setting should encourage everyone to express their opinions freely and to share ideas.

“We needed a culture that... is agile and works across functions, very much collaboratively. So those two main things are the things we are trying to drive in our organization, and we need to change the behaviors of our leaders to drive that.” (shrm 9).

### **8.2.7. Digital Competence**

Technology is another area of agreement among senior HR

managers and young leaders. They believe that technological changes are forcing leaders to improve their proficiency so as to maintain their role as leaders. Future leaders are expected to show their technological expertise by understanding the impact of new technologies on their everyday work. They should not only demonstrate programming skills – perceived as valuable for data retrieval and analysis – but also an ability to be at ease with social media.

“You know, for example, we have a lot of systems that analyze financial transactions and then have results and you must understand what these machines do and why they make problems that way. So, I think it will be quite a skill to understand what’s behind these algorithms because you know Google is just you type something in and it gives results.” (shrm 1).

### **8.2.8. Sustainability Competence**

Senior HR managers and young leaders agree that leaders in the 21st century will have to take the sustainability agenda seriously and focus on ensuring they do good for the environment and for society.

“There are some needs and thirst of doing the right thing for people, for environment, for the sustainability” (shrm 9).

### **8.2.9. Able to Create an Enjoyable Work Environment**

Senior HR managers and young leaders assert that a leader in the 21st century should be a person people like, one who can set up and maintain an enjoyable work environment.

“Trying to facilitate enjoyment at work, is something that leaders are going to become more and more responsible for – and helping to facilitate that type of environment.” (ygl 5).

## **8.3. Differences in Perceptions Between Senior HR Managers and Young Leaders on 7 Required Leadership Competencies**

Senior human resources managers and young leaders tend to differ on some aspects of the following 7 required leadership competencies: values, cognitive skills, transformational ability, self-awareness, social skills, human orientation, and global leadership.

### **8.3.1. Value Driven**

Both senior HR managers and young leaders believe that values and motives are important for leadership in the 21st century. Some values – being results driven, being humble, being trustworthy, being socially responsible, having a genuine interest in the well-being of others, being transparent and authentic – are fully shared by the two groups. However, there are also some points of divergence. Senior HR managers added being accountable, a factor that was not present in any interview with the young leaders. This difference could be explained by the fact that young leaders do not experience the daily pressure of results those professionals at a certain level in organizations do. For young leaders, values such as curiosity, hardworking, being active and dynamic, were perceived as very important. It could be inferred that young leaders value these qualities because this is what they live and demonstrate on a daily basis by being intensively involved in

voluntary work, managing major associations in their universities, all while pursuing success in their studies.

"I have learned to manage stress, because I was working between 40 to 60 hours a week for the organization while taking classes at the same time. I could not really prepare my classes as much as I wanted due to a lack of time. I had to work very hard at the end of the semester to be ready for the exams. I was impressed by my achievement because with two weeks of full time studying, I have managed to catch up on a full semester of lecturing and managed to validate 30 credits." (ygl 13).

### **8.3.2. Cognitive Skills**

Young leaders and senior HR managers perceive intelligence, strategic thinking, entrepreneurial mindset, analytical and synthetization abilities to be relevant for leadership in the 21st century. A difference that emerged in the interviews, however, is that young leaders additionally stressed the level of education and general knowledge. This emphasis is probably because they are still very much connected to student life, where they have access to education on a daily basis and where cognitive brilliance is valued. The importance of the level and the quality of the education of a leader from the young leaders' perspective is well summarized in Olga's comment:

"They should be open minded, well-educated." (ygl 16).

### **8.3.3. Transformation Ability**

Both groups share the opinion that inspiring others is essential for leadership in the future, stressing the ability to motivate, stimulate action, and push others to a high-performing level. They also assert that inspiration could be demonstrated by showing a higher sense of purpose, which helps make sense of actions and decisions. The two groups share the perception that charisma is important for 21st century leadership, as it helps generate positive emotions and excitement. They envision the charismatic leader of the future as someone with visionary abilities who is able to guide the way. However, a close reading of the transcripts reveals that the two groups see charisma somewhat differently. Whereas senior HR managers believe that charisma can be displayed through strong communication abilities, the young leaders tend to associate charisma with a heroic image.

"They must be a kind of Superman or Superwoman." (ygl 3).

### **8.3.4. Self-Awareness**

Senior HR managers and young leaders share a perspective on self-awareness for self-reflection. They agree that 21st century leaders must know their own limits to avoid overload and burn-out. Knowing one's purpose and inner motives, as well as one's needs and expectations, is seen as important for leadership in the 21st century by both groups. The difference lies in the fact that senior HR managers specified a series of additional aspects not mentioned by the young leaders. They added that leaders must maintain their mental health, in the sense of relaxation, peace of mind, meditation, and staying physically fit through sport, yoga or other activities.

"I would say that the aspect of healthiness is important. I think a leader must see that they remain healthy in a physical

way, it is more important than before, because the leadership situation will become more demanding, more challenging and you need to be fit for that and also not just physically but mentally, so I think you need to balance that right, for yourself and the people that work with you. Yoga is an idea, Tai chi. Managers will take more and more opportunities of balancing this, take time off." (shrm 1).

Other aspects that senior HR managers stressed in contrast to interviews with young leaders include the capacity for self-assessment.

"So, he must be able to listen well and to reflect on what he hears about himself, what he recognizes about his performance, what his errors, his short comings are." (shrm 3).

### **8.3.5. Social Skills**

Senior HR managers and young leaders do not agree on how social skills should be demonstrated in the future. Senior HR managers focus mostly on the need for future leaders to display more empathy with their co-workers, showing consideration and respect without losing sight of performance. Young leaders expect more engagement from future leaders in their relationship with subordinates. They would like the relationship to approach some kind of friendship, as well as to have future leaders show emotional intelligence skills. The two statements below illustrate their different perspectives.

"The most important quality is a very attempted communicator who can communicate to a lot of people, giving them individual attention, making them feel respected and still get a lot of work done." (shrm 3).

"A 21st century leader must really know his public and maybe even know their names/aims, focus on people's emotions, lives, be friends with them and get closer to people." (ygl 15).

### **8.3.6. Human Orientation**

Senior HR managers and young leaders believe 21st century leaders will have to show more consideration for people and their well-being by taking care of them, ensuring they have a work-life balance, and that they feel good in both the workplace and their private life. Participants in the two groups also said that human-centered leaders in the 21st century are expected to focus on people's development by providing more individual coaching and regular feedback. While the respondents in both groups shared these general points, there is one noteworthy difference. In contrast to senior HR managers, young leaders expect leaders to be more part of the team and, share the same working space. Furthermore, they expect future leaders to be emotionally close to their team members, knowing them well personally.

"He was able to be close to people, everyone felt like he was a friend, and at the same time and I don't know how to explain this, anyone could tell he was the president of the association. He was very much respected as a president even if we were also his friends." (ygl 22).

### **8.3.7. Global Competence**

Senior HR managers and young leaders both believe that the 21st century requires leaders to have a global mindset,

some international experience, and a strong cross-cultural awareness. However, each group emphasized somewhat different aspects. Whereas senior HR managers stressed the ability to take on international assignments, young leaders focused on the need to develop foreign language skills. Several young leaders still did not have significant work experience, and therefore did not stress international assignment as much. In contrast, senior HR managers talked frequently about international exposure throughout a career.

“I think the ability to scale it up and say OK, this is how it’s going to run in America, but this is how it’s going to run in Europe and for Asia I’m going to do that. I would say working on the scalability issues it is about understanding different multi-cultural environments and business environments as well.” (shrm 8).

## 9. Discussion and Conclusion

Surprisingly, the research shows that young millennial leaders and senior HR managers have much more in common than expected when it comes to their perception of the required leadership competencies for the 21st century [27]. The study also contradicts the idea that millennials want and expect different things from their professional lives than previous generations [34]. They have similar arguments on 9 of the identified 18 required future leadership competencies and they only have a divergence on a few aspects of 7 of them. This finding contradicts the idea developed by researchers of millennial leadership and of the generational difference which suggests there are significant differences between millennials and older generations on what is expected of leadership [29]. The result of the research shows that everyone is affected by the change we see in the world today and everyone should adapt how leadership is done accordingly [35]. Therefore, there is no such thing as millennials’ leadership but instead leadership adapted to a changing world.

The differences identified between the senior human resources managers and the young leaders are often based on the level of work experience or integration of the world of work. Indeed, young leaders, on some competencies, tend to have an idealistic view such as expecting a leader to act like a hero and their friend, or to rely on the level of education as a prerequisite for leadership. It comes as a surprise to see senior HR managers claiming that the ability to stimulate an enjoyable work environment is a required competence for the future. It is worth mentioning that this argument is largely discussed by millennials’ leadership literature [10-17] and not so much in older generations’ literature.

The results of the research calls into question the principle of approaching leadership from a generational perspective by displaying that there may not be such a thing as generational differences in leadership [36].

Surprisingly, neither the young leaders nor the senior HR managers mentioned any competence related to embracing the triple bottom line and the sustainable business model as suggested by Roome and Louche [35] as part of the sustainability competence. Also, none of the two groups of

participants discussed the financialization competence nor the ability to deal with digital transformation nor the need to be customer centric. This shows that there is still a gap between the speed of research development and the ability for practitioners to incorporate new learnings.

## 10. Research Contribution and Limitations

### 10.1. Contribution to the Field of Leadership

The current study provides additional knowledge in the field of leadership by showing there is no significant generational difference in the perceived required leadership competencies between younger millennials and older generations [37]. Therefore, a generational approach is not sufficient to discuss leadership and new approaches should be found for further research on generational differences [37]. By using qualitative research methods, I have provided an in-depth analysis of young leaders and senior HR managers on these required leadership competencies which is adding to the body of knowledge on leadership. Until now, most studies on the topic have used quantitative research methods [16].

This research adds to the current literature on leadership competencies for the 21st century by providing and comparing the perceptions of young leaders and senior HR managers.

### 10.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this research will be helpful for any organizations designing a leadership development training program for new hires or focusing on areas where young leaders may need additional training or experience to perform in the job. In addition, the research outcomes can help design and tailor new employee integration programs to ease the transition of young leaders into the new professional world. The study results are also promising for recruiting purposes. Recruiters in organizations can use the results to better target employees who may have already developed competencies required for leadership in the future. For instance, past leadership experience in cultural associations, sport clubs, or any other voluntary organizations provides the skills targeted by recruiters. Recruiters can accelerate stage development tailoring hires and providing more challenging jobs. This research will be helpful in conducting joint workshops with young people as well as with more experienced professionals, ensuring that each group becomes steadily more aware of the needs, wants, and leadership expectations of the other. Ultimately, this will lead to an understanding of how they can work better together based on their similarities, and reduce generational conflicts [38].

### 10.3. Limitations

There are three possible sources of limitation in this study. The first limitation is that it relies on the experiences and the perspectives of 9 senior HR managers working for large, profit-oriented companies, in various developed countries and

in various industries. The findings may not apply to senior HR managers working in emerging or developing countries, in non-profit organizations, or in small to medium size companies. The second limitation is that the research also relies on the accounts of 22 young leaders with different levels of work and leading associations of various sizes and importance. Findings could be influenced by all these elements. Choosing participants with more specific requirements may be necessary. Another limitation is that the study does not look at future leadership competencies from the perspective of followers, or subordinates.

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