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***The Managers' Perspective:***

*A Case Study on Key Leadership Characteristics  
for Today's Multigenerational Workforce*

*By*

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## I. Abstract

<b>Title</b>	<b>The Managers' Perspective: A Case Study on Key Leadership Characteristics for Today's Multigenerational Workforce</b>
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<b>Purpose</b>	Our study aims to address the research gap pertaining to the identification of leadership characteristics that managers consider essential in a multigenerational team within contemporary organizations. Additionally, the study examines the impact of stereotypical thinking on leadership effectiveness.
<b>Methodology</b>	This research is a single case study of qualitative character, employing interpretative and abductive research methods. The empirical data is derived from eleven semi-structured interviews and observations.
<b>Theoretical Perspectives</b>	Leadership is a central theoretical perspective in our study. The study focuses on the capacity of leaders to critically reflect on their own behaviors and beliefs when leading multigenerational teams.
<b>Empirical Findings</b>	Managers emphasized the evolving expectations of leadership, highlighting the need of humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity to lead multigenerational teams effectively. In addition, we found a notable gap between the expressed ideal characteristics and observed leadership behaviors. This discrepancy is assumed to stem from stereotypical perceptions and limited reflectivity.
<b>Keywords</b>	Multigenerational Workforce, Generational Diversity, Leadership Characteristics, Reflectivity, Stereotypical and Prejudiced Thinking

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## 1. Introduction

In the dynamic, evolving landscape of contemporary work environments, the demographic composition of the workforce has undergone significant transformations, challenging traditional leadership paradigms.

A pronounced demographic diversity exists in the contemporary labor landscape, wherein four distinct generational cohorts are concurrently involved in the workforce. (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). With each generation having distinct values, expectations, and working styles, the phenomenon of a multigenerational workforce has increased complexity while decreasing predictability, necessitating a reevaluation of known organizational and leadership approaches (Steiner, 2023). The expanding generational diversity in the workforce can be attributed to demographic shifts, primarily driven by an extended average lifespan among individuals. This demographic change has led to a significant portion of the population remaining in the workforce beyond the previously known retirement age, as highlighted by Lewis and Wescott (2017). In addition, societal norms and fields, such as consultancy roles after officially leaving the workforce, add to contemporary workplaces seeing more individuals extending their careers beyond the traditional retirement age (Smith & Garriety, 2020). The consequence of this demographic change and societal trends is a multigenerational workforce consisting of four generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the emerging Generation Z (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Disparities between generations and intergenerational dynamics are not just a matter of fact but present opportunities for organizational effectiveness (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). However, they also pose managerial challenges, making a multigenerational workforce akin to a double-edged sword (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The potential for positive and negative impacts on team and organizational performance underscores the critical role of leadership in this context of multigenerational teams, which is defined as a dynamic process that unites individuals toward shared objectives through influence (Northouse, 2021). According to Waddock and McIntosh (2009), generational differences will continue to challenge organizations until intergenerational gaps are bridged, highlighting the importance of understanding the complexity of intergenerational interactions and the inherent challenges these differences pose to effectively manage and support the workforce (Lapoint & Liprie, 2017). Effective leadership is essential to prevent stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings often associated with

generational diversity. Strong leadership is crucial in mitigating the risks of discrimination and unfair treatment and promoting mutual respect, fairness, and inclusivity within age-diverse groups (Andert, Alexakis, & Preziosi, 2019). However, realizing effective leadership in a multigenerational context necessitates continuous investigation into changing leadership demands because traditional leadership approaches are becoming increasingly inadequate for today's complex and age-diverse workforce (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019)

Our chosen topic resonates with the contemporary spirit of leadership imperative in today's dynamic organizational landscapes. The prolonged presence of multiple generations in the workforce necessitates critically evaluating leadership practices to manage diverse teams effectively. To provide relevant insights, this research investigates what leadership characteristics are seen as essential for effectively managing multigenerational teams, making it more than just an academic thesis but a pragmatic response to the evolving nature of work and leadership, underscoring its relevance.

### **1.1. Purpose and Research Gap**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and identify leadership characteristics that managers consider essential for effective leadership in multigenerational teams within contemporary organizations. The exploration is conducted by contrasting articulated ideals with expressed examples and observed behaviors to contextualize their feasibility and effectiveness. By comparing the idealized notions of leadership with the observed in managerial practices, this research sheds light on the disjunction between conceptual expectations and actual implementations within the organizational setting.

Despite the increasing versatility of the available literature on generational diversity, there remains a gap regarding the in-depth exploration of the managers' perspective on the matter. By focusing on managers' perspectives, which have received comparatively less attention in existing leadership discourse, this thesis provides a nuanced perspective to the discourse on leadership. This underrepresented viewpoint contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership within multigenerational team contexts.

At the heart of this thesis are two key research questions. The main research question, "What leadership characteristics do managers find essential for leading a multigenerational team?"

guides all thesis sections. This study further endeavors to research a secondary yet interlinked sub-question, “Is leadership affected by stereotypical thinking, and if so, how?”

## **1.2. Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is structured into several key sections, each designed to explore these issues comprehensively. Subsequently, to the introduction, we critically examine existing research on multigenerational teams, contemporary leadership styles and characteristics, and the challenges of leading multigenerational teams in the literature review. This review sets the theoretical groundwork for the study and identifies gaps in current research that the thesis aims to address. Following the literature review, the methodology outlines the qualitative research approach and methods employed, including details on the semi-structured interviews, observations, and data analysis. Afterward, the empirical findings and analysis section presents the data collected from these interviews, detailing leaders' perceptions and experiences with multigenerational teams. The findings section analyzes what leadership characteristics are perceived as essential for leading a multigenerational team. Later, the empirical findings are contextualized in the discussion section by analyzing them in the context of theoretical insights from the literature review. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings, discusses their implications for theory and practice, and suggests considerations for future research.



## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review synthesizes existing research on the multigenerational workforce, the evolving nature of work and leadership, and the critical role of leadership in managing multigenerational teams. By critically engaging with these concepts, this review sets the theoretical foundation for the research.

### **2.1. The Multigenerational Workforce**

This first section of the literature review explores the questions of how, where, and with whom work in contemporary settings is done. The contemporary workplace has been characterized by a dynamic interplay of various generational cohorts, each with distinct characteristics and contributions (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2013). Hershatter and Epstein (2010) elaborated that nowadays, organizations are witnessing a previously unmatched convergence of four distinct generations in the workforce, which has significantly shaped the contemporary workplace. In other words, the contemporary workforce is a multigenerational workforce, which is defined as personnel comprised of people from several generations (Srinivasan, 2012). One possible definition of generations is that they “represent a unique type of social location based on the dynamic interplay between being born in a particular year and the socio-political events that occur throughout the life course of the birth cohort, particularly while the cohort comes of age“ (McMullin, Comeau & Jovic, 2007, p. 303). Palese, Pantali, and Saiani (2006) provided a second exploration of the term and defined generational categorization as the clustering of individuals based on shared age groups, history, and cultural contexts. Though inherently fluid, generational distinctions typically encompass 15 to 20 years (Weingarten, 2009). In the contemporary labor force, this categorization confirms the presence of the following four generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the emerging Generation Z (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

While the co-existence of several generations is not necessarily a new phenomenon in itself, the generational diversity in today's labor force, referring to the co-existence of multiple generations within a single workplace, is unmatched (Sobrino-De Toro, Labrador-Fernández & De Nicolás, 2019). Lewis and Wescott (2017) confirmed this and stated that the current generational diversity in the workforce is unprecedented. This growing generational diversity is traced back to the demographic change of an increased average lifespan for humans, which resulted in most individuals having a prolonged time in the workforce, past the typical

retirement age (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). Smith and Garriety (2020) added that influenced by examples of Warren Buffett, Joe Biden, and Bernie Sanders, there is a growing trend of older employees remaining longer in crucial leadership roles or re-engaging in the workforce in second careers as consultants, for example.

This convergence of multiple generations, four in number, marks a significant paradigm shift in the modern labor landscape (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). The resulting intergenerational dynamics are not just a matter of fact but present opportunities and challenges (Hershatler & Epstein, 2010). Peter Drucker (1998) continued that demographic shifts carry far-reaching implications that correlate to a shift in traditional workplace hierarchies of a traditional top-down structure and conventional managerial paradigms. The effect of changing demographics is evidenced by the increasing prevalence of older employees reporting to younger managers, signaling a restructuring of hierarchical structures (Collins, Hair, & Rocco, 2009). The study by Collins, Hair, and Rocco (2009) estimated that one in every third employee reports to someone younger than oneself, underscoring the significant change to the managerial position distribution of just a few years prior.

### **2.1.1. Contemporary Work**

Beyond the increasing generational diversity, literature also indicated other significant shifts, fundamentally changing how work is conducted in the contemporary workplace. Firstly, Assbeihat's article (2016) acknowledged the transition from individual work to teamwork and collaboration as one of the most significant changes in recent times. He contended that the knowledge-centric nature and complexity of the work nowadays necessitate collaboration and input from different people to be successful (Assbeihat, 2016). Echoing this, Mattessich and Johnson (2018) elaborated that contemporary work is marked by an escalating interdependence and complexity, in which collaboration is an effective tool for bringing together and harmonizing diverse groups and perspectives. This is claimed to help navigate the increasing complexity amidst globalization, technological advancements, and increasing diversity (Wilson, 2000, as cited in Mattessich & Johnson).

Secondly, besides increasingly collaborative work practices, digitalization and technological advancements have profoundly reshaped contemporary work. Cascio and Montealegre (2016) underlined the transformative role of technology in how businesses create and capture value,

where and how employees work, and how they interact and communicate. This severe shift has revolutionized traditional work modalities (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Digitalization has facilitated the rise of remote work, marking a significant departure from conventional office-based work (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Abdullah et al. (2020) research findings showed that most people agree that remote work has more advantages than disadvantages. However, one effect is that daily work has become increasingly more dependent on employees' use of various types of digital technologies (König & Seifert, 2022). Based on this, other studies, contradicting Abdullat et al. (2020), highlighted that this shift in contemporary work can cause generational conflicts due to varying familiarity with technological applications and diverging preferences regarding collaboration and communication methods (Waldman, 2023).

### **2.1.2. The Four Generations**

The forthcoming section introduces the generations constituting the contemporary workforce within organizational settings. While there are differences among researchers regarding the exact birth years that define the generations, some consensus has emerged concerning the overall clustering. As previously outlined, contemporary multigenerational workforces comprise four distinct generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, spanning the birth years from 1946 to 1965; Generation X, encompassing individuals born between 1965 and 1980; Millennials or Generation Y, born between 1981 and 1996; and the in the workforce currently emergent Generation Z, comprising individuals born from 1996 onwards (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Generational research has ascribed certain values and behaviors to each generation, which are presented in the following, However, we want to highlight beforehand that while most scholars agree on overall generalized descriptions, the extent to which generational disparities manifest within teams and organizations and their consequential impact is a topic of pervading academic discourse, presented in section 2.2.3. of the literature review.

Boomers are a generation that grew up in economic prosperity and significant social and economic shifts, leading to many researchers claiming that they believe in lifetime employment, company loyalty, and paying dues to gain respect and seniority (Benson & Brown, 2011). Most academic discourse associated this generation with loyalty, discipline, and a strong work ethic (Benson & Brown, 2011). This generation is also assumed to have been

pivotal in developing the traditional corporate culture and hierarchical structures (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013).

Generation X grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, when individualism dominated collectivism, leading to the perception that Generation X places less value on company loyalty (Benson & Brown, 2011). Smith and Garriety (2020) added that this generation grew up in an increasingly global context, thereby associating the generation with the ability to work successfully across various work styles and norms. Other characterizations framed Generation X as more independent and pragmatic, highlighted their relationship to the concept of work-life balance, and ascribed them a leading role in the transition towards more flexible work (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Millennials comprise the largest generation in the workforce (Smith & Garriety, 2020). They grew up during rapid technological advancements, in times of internet expansion, the ubiquity of mobile devices, and globalization, resulting in the image of this generation understanding the immense change the future can bring. As Howe and Strauss (2000) stated, this is the first tech-savvy generation, often associated with inclusivity, a desire for meaningful work, and an emphasis on collaboration. They are ascribed to being much more connected and seeking engagement in conversation in the workplace (Smith & Garriety, 2020).

Lastly, Generation Z grew up in times of social media and the great recession in many locations, leading to the perception of insecurity within this age cohort. Characterized as a generation comprised of digital natives, technological proficiency is often attributed (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Furthermore, many studies have correlated a preference for diverse and inclusive workplaces (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Most literature agreed that varying work attributes, behaviors, and preferences in inter-generational teams are often associated with varying leadership preferences (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Notably, research showed that the differences between the older generations (Boomers and Generation X) and the younger ones (Millennials and Generation Z) show the biggest discrepancies between the generational groups (Berkup, 2014). However, as mentioned before, the discourse surrounding the impact of these generational differences on workforce dynamics has sparked considerable debate, as presented in the following section.

### **2.1.3. Do differences exist?**

On the one hand, some argue that inter-generational differences are often exaggerated and blown out of proportion (Benson & Brown, 2011). Studies representing that stance argued that some observable distinctions between generations exist. However, these were found not necessarily to translate into significant conflicts or barriers within the workplace (Benson & Brown, 2011). Gourville (2006) further challenged the notion that generational differences inevitably lead to conflict, suggesting that focusing too heavily on these differences may distract from more pressing organizational culture and leadership effectiveness issues.

On the contrary, McMullin, Comeau & Jovic (2007) suggested that generational differences in people's attitudes and values result from significant economic, political, and social events that they experience in their formative childhood years, emphasizing that differences exist. Lapoint and Liprie (2017) further claimed that generational disparities must be recognized and understood in order to lead diverse teams effectively. According to them, acknowledging the impact of generational differences is seen as a prerequisite to understanding the needs of the diverse workforce. As Lapoint and Liprie (2017) argued, validating generational differences as insignificant overlooks the potential benefits of leveraging each generation's unique strengths and perspectives. Steiner (2023) supported this, underscoring the importance of harnessing the advantages of a multigenerational workforce for organizations and appreciating and accommodating the diverse preferences, habits, and behaviors of different generational cohorts. He continued that ignoring generational disparities can result in missed opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

While some asserted these disparities are exaggerated, others argue for acknowledging generational diversity. Regardless of which perspective is adopted, both stances advocate for a nuanced understanding that acknowledges individual differences within generational cohorts rather than relying on broad stereotypes (Waldman, 2023).

### **2.1.4. Challenges associated with a Multigenerational Team**

#### ***The Challenge of Generational Conflict***

Associated with a multigenerational team is also the notion of conflict, whether inter-generational or intra-generational. Addressing these generational conflicts is of critical

importance, emphasized by Joshi, Dencker & Franz (2011), warning of the potential consequences such as reduced productivity, heightened turnover rates, and employee dissatisfaction. Many scholars underscored the significance of understanding underlying factors fueling potential conflict. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) elaborated on one underlying factor and underscored that the convergence of four distinct generations in the workforce has increased the complexities of contemporary workplace diversity due to the differences in values, aspirations, perspectives, and demographic shifts which resulted in the necessity to have a nuanced understanding of underlying tensions and conflicts. Feeri-Reed (2013) confirmed that generational cohort variances can stem from variations in value systems, attitudes, behavioral norms, and beliefs across different generations and that accumulation can have beneficial or harmful effects on an organization. While differences don't mean conflict per se, Lapoint and Liprie (2017) explained that tension or conflict is a result of individuals incorporating their values, behavioral norms, attitudes, etc., into the workplace, where they clash with pre-established organizational values and expectations, which can result in conflict.

### ***The Challenge of Stereotypical and Prejudice Thinking***

Stereotypes and prejudices are a societal phenomenon often manifested in various contexts, including leadership (Hogg, 2015). Stereotypes are generalized beliefs or assumptions about individuals or groups based on characteristics such as age (Tresh et al., 2019). Prejudices are negative attitudes or feelings directed toward individuals or groups based on these stereotypes (Tresh et al., 2019). Tresh et al. (2019) highlighted that stereotypes can develop into prejudice if not reflected upon, underlining the importance of self-reflection and awareness of own biases. Kuhlmann et al. (2016) found that many age-based stereotypes are often encountered in multigenerational teams. They further presented an example of stereotypes: Older employees are often stereotyped as technologically inept or resistant to change, and younger employees are inexperienced or lacking in dedication (Kuhlmann et al., 2016). Stereotypes and prejudices pose severe challenges for a multigenerational team as they can lead to misunderstandings among team members, unfair treatment, and hinder effective communication and collaboration (Tresh et al., 2019). Moreover, they can undermine trust, negatively affecting teamwork, productivity, and organizational culture (Hogg, 2015).

Kuhlmann et al. (2016) emphasized the crucial role of leaders in addressing and challenging stereotypes and prejudices. According to them, managers are not just bystanders but are

responsible for actively promoting mutual respect among colleagues. Hogg (2015) underscored this and emphasized the dangerous influence of stereotypes and prejudices when harbored by individuals in leading positions. Individuals occupying positions of power and authority may be unable to critically reflect on their own biases, leading to discriminatory behavior and abuse of power toward their subordinates (McCarthy, Heraty & Bamberg, 2019). Whether intentional or unintentional, these biases can manifest in hiring practices, promotion decisions, and day-to-day interactions, perpetuating inequality and hindering the potential of those affected (Hogg, 2015). The severity of the implications it can have when leaders or other people in power are guided by prejudiced thinking can lead to severe problems and only erode trust and morale. Hogg (2015) added that leaders' prejudices toward subordinates are a potential source of workplace conflicts. In association, the need for leaders to vigilantly examine their own beliefs and behaviors to foster an inclusive environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive based on merit, not preconceived notions, was underscored (Kuhlmann et al., 2016).

## **2.2. Leadership**

Literature offered diverse definitions of leadership. One definition of leadership was provided by Northouse (2021), defining leadership as a dynamic process that unites individuals toward shared objectives through influence. Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) provided another definition, describing leadership as an asymmetric relationship wherein leaders shape followers' perceptions of reality willingly embraced. Burns (2012) echoed this and said that leadership shapes perceptions, desires, and aspirations, influencing desirable behavior. Associated qualities include visionary and communication competencies, integrity, and self-assurance (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). Blanchard and Miller (2007) further emphasized the importance of leadership practices that envision the future and value relationships.

Aligning with the evolving business landscape, leadership is a field of constantly developing research (Elliot & McCusker, 2010). Recent history alone already demonstrated the gravity of changing demands placed on leadership (Porath, 2023). Within a few decades, we transitioned from the information age to the age of globalization and knowledge economy to the current evolution stage of remote work and digitalization (Porath, 2023). Porath (2023) continued that each phase is associated with changes in the workforce composition and cultural shifts, necessitating the evolution of leadership styles. This was echoed by Moldoveanu and Narayandas (2019), who disclosed that contemporary leadership necessitates fresh approaches

and stated that conventional methods no longer adequately address the evolving needs of organizations and individuals. This underscored the ever-evolving nature of leadership needs and demands. The distinction between traditional and contemporary leadership discourses further indicates the ever-evolving nature of this field, and Elliot and McCusker (2010) highlighted the imperative for constant leadership development, particularly given the complexities posed by multigenerational workforces and rapid changes.

### **2.2.1. Misalignment of Leadership Perceptions**

Awareness of potential misalignments in perceptions is relevant when analyzing dynamics with various stakeholders in leadership. With various stakeholders involved in leadership, there can be a heightened risk of misalignment between leadership expectations and reality, potentially driven by cognitive biases, lack of shared meanings, and the overburdening of managers (Toegel, Kilduff & Anand, 2013).

As discussed by Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), misalignment refers to a lack of shared meanings within organizational settings, leading to divergent interpretations of the same situation or event. This can occur in leadership contexts when leaders perceive themselves in a way that is not mirrored by the observer or subordinates. Understanding these perceptual gaps was also highlighted by Jones and Nisbett (1972), who stated that discrepancies between leadership expectations and reality pose a multifaceted issue in organizational contexts, often rooted in perceptual biases and misalignment of shared meanings. The actor-observer bias hypothesis described by Jones and Nisbett (1972) can be a critical factor in this discrepancy. It illustrates that leaders (actors) tend to attribute their behaviors to situational factors, while subordinates (observers) attribute the same behaviors to the leaders' inherent traits (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The model highlights that there can be notable differences in how leaders perceive their roles and how others perceive them, and Jones and Nisbett (1972) explained that this divergence is due to the actors' greater awareness of contextual influences and the observers' focus on the actors' salient characteristics.

Toegel, Kilduff, and Anand (2013) provided additional insights into the sources of misalignment, stating that discrepancies can arise from varying communication styles, expectations, and cultural backgrounds. This can be further associated with the actor-observer bias hypothesis, adding to leadership style or decisions being misinterpreted (Jones & Nisbett,



1972). Toegel, Kilduff, and Anand (2013), further elaborate that the issue of misalignment can be compounded by the overburdening of managers who struggle to meet the high expectations placed upon them. Associated risk factors are dissatisfaction among team members, significant stress, and a sense of failure for leaders (Toegel, Kilduff & Anand, 2013).

### **2.3. Leadership in Multigenerational Teams**

As mentioned above, the contemporary workplace presents a complex combination of individuals from four distinct generational cohorts, each bringing their values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations into organizations (Lapoint & Liprie, 2017). This collaboration of various generations increases the complexity of the contemporary workplace. Research indicated that leadership within multigenerational teams is indispensable for mitigating conflicts and promoting fairness and inclusivity, and underscored that without solid leadership, generational diversity can lead to biases, stereotypes, and misunderstandings (Andert, Alexakis & Preziosi, 2019). It became evident that effective leadership is essential for fostering harmonious collaboration and productivity and mitigating the risks of discrimination and unfair treatment within age-diverse groups (Andert, Alexakis & Preziosi, 2019). Cogin (2012) added that promoting inclusivity is paramount for effective leadership across generations.

In the literature, we found a response to the changing leadership demands deriving from the complexities of a multigenerational collaboration: A trend toward more human-centric leadership that prioritizes the well-being and empowerment of employees (Nahavandi, 2019). Moreover, organizations recognize the importance of empathy, inclusivity, and diversity in fostering a supportive and collaborative environment (Lee, 2011). This trend reflects a growing recognition of the intrinsic value of human capital and its pivotal role in driving organizational success (Nahavandi, 2019). Organizations increasingly recognize the value of investing in their workforce for tangible benefits, resulting in the promotion of initiatives such as work culture, work-life balance, and professional growth (Kurki & Wilenius, 2016). Kurki and Wilenius (2016) added that, ultimately, the human-centric approach is not just a trend but reflects a fundamental shift in understanding people's pivotal role in driving organizational success in today's rapidly evolving business landscape.

However, to realize the positive impact of leadership mentioned above and implement human-centric approaches, it necessitates the needed degree of self-reflection, awareness, and

understanding (Branson, 2007). Lyon and Kuron (2013) emphasized recognizing and understanding generations' diverse needs, values, and communication styles for effective leadership in a multigenerational workforce. Arsenault (2004) echoed this and confirmed that it is imperative to understand the above-mentioned unique attributes of each generation to shape effective leadership approaches and organizational success. Moreover, various external factors, including economic conditions, technological advancements, and social changes, shape each generation's outlook and working environment (Williams & Page, 2011). Arsenault (2004) explained the urgency of addressing these generational differences in the current century with the rise of horizontal structures, globalization, and technological advancements, and highlighted the need for leaders to adopt adaptive strategies. Consequently, Williams and Page (2011) argued that leaders must effectively familiarize themselves with these influences to lead diverse generational cohorts.

### **2.3.1. Characteristics for Leadership in Multigenerational Teams**

In the academic discourse, we found that the contemporary workforce necessitates leaders to possess distinctive attributes, characteristics, and qualities for navigating the complexities of a multigenerational team, presented in the forthcoming.

When looking specifically at contemporary leadership discourse, much revolved around the need for contemporary leadership to transcend task-focused directives and instead acknowledge their humanity must contribute to individuals' emotional well-being (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) underscored the significance of personality traits conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability for effective leadership. These traits align with the Big Five Personality Traits, which refer to extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (neuroticism) as critical leadership traits, each exerting distinct influences on leadership styles and efficacy (Fiske, 1949 cited in Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Extraversion is commonly linked with leaders' emergence and effectiveness due to its association with assertiveness and sociability (Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Similarly, openness in leadership was found to entail actively soliciting input from diverse team members, fostering an inclusive and collaborative environment (Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Moreover, Burton et al. (2019) strongly emphasized the role of flexibility and adaptability in leadership approaches, highlighting their importance in catering to the diverse expectations and motivations across generational cohorts.

Referring back to the potential conflicts in a multigenerational team arising from varied work values, conflict management skills are also deemed essential (Burton et al., 2019). Addressing conflicts requires proactive measures from managers to address underlying tensions and manage disparities in value systems (Ferri-Reed, 2013).

Moreover, reflection was consistently brought up as a critical leadership characteristic. As described by Boud et al. (1985, cited in Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), reflection is a fundamental human activity wherein individuals recapture their experiences, engage in introspection, contemplate them, and evaluate their significance. According to Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), being reflective means being willing to consider what might be wrong with established ideas and beliefs, including your own. They further stated that examining one's own assumptions, biases, and values critically, particularly those that may unconsciously influence interactions and decision-making processes. By doing so, leaders contribute to a more inclusive work environment (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). However, while it was clearly stated that reflectivity is important in managing generational diversity, it was also acknowledged that the successful execution of reflection can often be hindered. Several barriers were found to impede effective reflection, including individual cognitive capacity and ambitions, as well as contextual conditions, limited time for contemplation, and organizational structures that inhibit contact with peers (Castelli, 2016).

Lastly, in the context of multigenerational settings, the literature underscored the interrelated ability to switch perspectives. This ability is a contingency for critically examining one's assumptions, biases, and values and a powerful tool to combat stereotypes and prejudices (Tresh et al., 2019). Importantly, it has been observed that the successful implementation of strength-based leadership is correlated with the ability to change perspectives as it enables a better understanding of diverse strengths and skill sets, a key consideration in multigenerational settings (Lapoint & Liprie, 2017).

### **2.3.2. Approaches for Leadership in Multigenerational Teams**

Implementing a leadership approach that fosters fairness, understanding, and inclusivity is indispensable in today's diverse workforce. Nonetheless, it stood out that much leadership literature argued against a one-size-fits-all leadership style and advocated for adaptability to meet the varying needs of subordinates based on generational differences (Davenport & Prusak,

2000). A diverse range of leadership styles has been promoted as a potential solution to navigate this landscape of generational diversity, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and responsiveness to the needs of different age cohorts (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). This underscored that leaders must recognize that what may be deemed inappropriate by some may be acceptable to others based on generational differences. Adding to these stances, Cran (2015) also presented that in the rapidly changing business environment, one-size-fits-all solutions and traditional leadership views are insufficient. She demanded a discourse on reflective leadership as it becomes even more pertinent to encourage leaders to critically examine established ideas and beliefs and consider alternative perspectives to respond swiftly to changing circumstances (Cran, 2015).

When examining this demand more deeply, it stood out that the leadership landscape encompasses various models. However, in the specific multigenerational context of this thesis, we found that a reflective leadership approach appeared most effective and appropriate for addressing the complexities of multigenerational teams. Reflective leadership offers a framework for leaders in multigenerational teams to introspect and self-assess to enhance organizational efficacy (Gardner et al., 2005). By evaluating behaviors, circumstances, and outcomes, leaders effectively navigate novel or conflicting scenarios, gaining clarity on their values, emotions, motivations, and objectives through sense-making (Gardner et al., 2005). Sense-making refers to a cognitive process through which individuals or groups interpret and understand the world around them (Pye, 2005). Deriving from this, reflectivity involves critically examining one's values, beliefs, biases, and behaviors, particularly relevant concerning generational differences, to identify areas for personal growth, challenge assumptions, and develop strategies for effectively leading and supporting diversity (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Moreover, Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) added to this and shared that reflective leadership manifests in three distinct forms, facilitating continuous learning and adaptation of leadership approaches: reflection-before-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. According to Castelli (2016), reflective leadership helps anticipate the long-term impacts of decisions in an evolving landscape.

### **2.3.3. Critical Reflection on Leadership Discourse**

However, considering the critical stances of Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), it is imperative to exercise caution against over-relying on leadership to solve all kinds of

organizational challenges or problems. Diddam and Chang (2012) claimed that the field of leadership often idealizes the role of leadership, portraying it as the solution for every challenge, thereby illustrating leaders as somewhat heroic figures. This is supported by Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), who urged the acknowledgement that leadership alone cannot address every issue and the acknowledgment of the limitations of leadership to provide a more nuanced discourse and perspective of leadership. For instance, one leadership limitation can be balancing the time-consuming nature of managerial tasks and strategic planning, which can leave little time for visionary or inspiring leadership (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). They further argued that the perception of a leader of him or her being able to complete managerial tasks and strategic and visionary aspects of leadership in one person is often unattainable.

#### **2.4. Research Gap and Research Question**

While existing literature extensively explored the realm of leadership from the subordinate's perspective, there is a notable gap pertaining to managers' perspectives on leadership demands. Thus, this case study aims to provide a nuanced perspective on leadership and identify the characteristics that managers consider necessary and essential for effective leadership in multigenerational teams within contemporary organizations. In alignment with the presented contents of the literature review and the resulting gap, the following research question will be analyzed and addressed throughout the paper:

What leadership characteristics do managers find essential for leading a multigenerational team?

The following sub-question is asked to provide further guidance throughout the research and to facilitate the answering of the main research question:

- I. Is leadership affected by stereotypical thinking and if so, how?

### **3. Methodology**

The following chapter presents the steps taken to analyze and address the main and sub-research questions of this thesis. The methodology encompasses an explanation of the philosophical grounding, guides through the research approach, presents the case context, and provides insights into how qualitative data was collected and analyzed. The chapter concludes by discussing our critical reflections on the ethical principles and limitations of the research.

#### **3.1. Philosophical Grounding**

To begin with, we establish the framework for the research methodology by describing the philosophical stance underpinning the adoption of the interpretative tradition, specifically symbolic interactionism, and hermeneutics. Within interpretive traditions, reality is subjectively construed, shaped by social contexts, individual interpretations of meaning and therefore posits a devoid of absolute truths (Prasad, 2018). By embracing this stance, we acknowledged that reality is socially constructed through subjective interpretation, shaping knowledge and perception (Prasad, 2018). Consequently, knowledge is best apprehended through exploring subjective interpretations of various actors, prioritizing understanding human behavior over the mere explanation of it (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Deriving from this, the choice to embrace an interpretative tradition stemmed from the intention to comprehend managers' subjective perception of how to lead a multigenerational team. This tradition influences both ontological and epistemological considerations (Prasad, 2018). Ontology pertains to the nature of being and reality, exploring whether objective, law-like rules and governing systems exist, asking, "What is the nature of reality?" (Prasad, 2018). While epistemology explores the nature of knowledge, considering whether it is cumulative, unchanging, and awaiting discovery, questioning "What can we possibly know?" and "Do we truly know what we claim to know?" (Prasad, 2018).

Moreover, symbolic interactionism posits that the meaning of objects and events is not inherent but constructed through individuals' interactions in their daily social lives (Prasad, 2018). In symbolic interactionism, the emphasis is placed primarily on individual sense-making and the self's role in shaping social realities, and it is acknowledged that these can be fluid, leading to multiple and ever-changing meanings for individuals (Prasad, 2018). As we researched managers in their work context or, more precisely, in leadership and team dynamics, symbolic interactions enabled us to understand the observed interactions better and be aware of the

individual sense-making of the interviewed and observed research participants. Given the chosen sample of managers, the research adopted a leader-centric approach and recognized the significant influence of individuals on sense-making processes (Prasad, 2018).

Along with symbolic interactionism, our study incorporated hermeneutics, a distinct interpretive approach (Prasad, 2018). Hermeneutics guided our analysis of interview responses, involving constant oscillation between transcripts and broader contexts like the organizational culture. This process, termed the hermeneutic circle, deepened our understanding by connecting managers' narratives to their leadership experiences (Prasad, 2018). Intending to peel back the layers of the text and unveil multiple meanings and subtexts, we deciphered metaphors and expressive language extending beyond their literal meanings to grasp managers' underlying thoughts and perceptions (Prasad, 2018). Additionally, our exploration was completed with hermeneutics' reliance on researchers' imagination for creative text interpretation. Being a collaborative team of two researchers fostered discussions that challenged and refined interpretations, encouraging a nuanced understanding of leadership in a multigenerational team beyond interviewees' expressions (Prasad, 2018).

### **3.2. Research Approach**

In pursuit of a comprehensive exploration of the research question, the thesis depicted a case study. Within the designated timeframe of our research, we adopted a micro-ethnographic approach, as outlined by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022), which entails focusing on a specific issue within specific time frames. Furthermore, an abductive approach was adopted, integrating deductive and inductive methods (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Deduction entails validating existing theories, while induction seeks to establish new theoretical concepts from empirical findings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Conversely, abduction entails an iterative process of reinterpreting theory and empirical facts, emphasizing the synergy between deduction and induction (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Abduction encompasses three sequential steps: firstly, the application of an established interpretive rule or theory; secondly, the observation of an empirical phenomenon contradicting the interpretive rule; and thirdly, the formulation of a new interpretive rule or theory to reconcile the discrepancy (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). The approach is rooted in the belief that the value of social science lies not solely in validated knowledge but also in suggesting relationships and connections that may have previously been overlooked, thereby catalyzing shifts in actions and perspectives (Weick, 1989, as cited in

Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Our rationale for employing this approach in our case study stemmed from the abundance of existing literature on the managers' perspective on leadership and multigenerational teams (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Navigating between existing theory and new empirical data, we as researchers aimed to uncover explanations for encountered phenomena, enriching theoretical discourse and practical implications. The abductive approach provided a robust foundation for analyzing the contemporary workplace characterized by diverse generational cohorts and fostered the emergence of fresh perspectives by challenging prevailing ideas and theories in response to empirical evidence (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017).

### **3.3. Research Context: The Organization of the Case Study**

Due to previous work engagements of one author with the company, from here on referred to as “case company”, the initial contact and conversation regarding collaboration on the thesis were quickly established. The case company, an international maritime organization, expressed interest in our project and facilitated access to managers of different departments. They articulated their interest in collaborating and emphasized the importance of understanding effective leadership in a multigenerational workforce for leadership development programs. The case company is represented worldwide and sustains a workforce of approximately 1.000 employees, comprising both onshore and onboard personnel. This research narrowed its scope to the onshore staff, particularly emphasizing leadership roles within multigenerational teams.

This industry, in general, was chosen as research context for several reasons. Firstly, the shipping industry is often associated with an age-diverse workforce, spanning from Baby Boomers to Generation Z. This diversity provided a rich context and ideal environment for researching how leaders interact with and manage employees of various ages. Secondly, most operating vessels in shipping organizations demand extensive coordination among different teams and departments. Studying leadership in such a complex environment provided valuable insights into how leaders navigate challenges and foster collaboration across generational lines. Lastly, the shipping industry continually evolves with technological advancements, automation, and digitization. This fast-paced, dynamic environment made it attractive for us to examine its impact on leadership demands (Sengupta et al., 2019).



### **3.4. Data Collection**

This section presents the methodology employed for data collection. The primary data collection of the case study derived from interviews and observations with representatives of the case company. Our qualitative study adopted a triangulation approach to gather empirical data (Bowen, 2009). This approach reinforced the reliability of our findings by leveraging multiple data sources and comprehending the intricacies of leadership within the case company as we focused on theories, observations, and semi-structured interviews (Bowen, 2009). The theory helped us better understand the research field, and the observations provided valuable contextual insights into the everyday interactions between team members and managers. In addition, semi-structured interviews constituted the cornerstone of our data collection efforts and were recognized as the primary study material (Styhre, 2013). By embracing the principles of symbolic interactionism, our interviews aimed to shed light on diverse perspectives and reflections of leaders of multigenerational teams in the shipping industry.

#### **3.4.1. Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique followed a set-by-step plan. First, the research field and objective were defined. Second, the research population was determined. To obtain relevant insights into the leadership of a multigenerational team, employees holding management positions were defined as population. In the third step, interviewees were selected by employing a specific type of non-probability sampling called purposive sampling. Following the method outlined by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022), we selected individuals based on their unique characteristics and experiences relevant to the research question. While purposive sampling did not allow for statistical generalization, it offered the advantage of generating highly pertinent insights into descriptive data, thereby contextualizing initial hypotheses regarding leadership demands and potential adaptations of leadership (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2022).

Interviewees were selected based on their appropriateness in representing characteristics relevant to the research question. Selection criteria included a current management position, previous or current experiences with the leadership of a multigenerational team, and age. The age selection criteria followed the intent to interview employees from varying age cohorts. Specifically, we aimed to include managers from all four generations, from Baby Boomers to Generation Z. This methodological decision was based on Bell, Bryman, and Harley's (2022) work, emphasizing the importance of mitigating biases through sample selection criteria. The

selection of participants based on these criteria increased the representativeness of the population sample, making the results more relevant and valuable. As the fourth step, the sample was aligned with the company, after which the interview partners were confirmed.

### **3.4.2. Sample**

We interviewed a selected sample of eleven individuals holding management positions within the respective case organizations. Our qualitative study was initially scheduled with thirteen managers, anticipating potential cancellations due to unforeseen circumstances. As expected, two interviews were canceled, resulting in eleven completed interviews. Nevertheless, during the analysis of the responses, we observed recurring themes and patterns, a clear indication of nearing theoretical saturation after nine interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

The sample representatives were deliberately chosen to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives and insights into leading multigenerational teams. Regarding positional hierarchy, the sample comprised six participants holding managerial positions and five participants occupying directorial roles, signifying higher hierarchical levels within their organizations. Appendix B provides an overview of interviewees' pseudonyms with their respective hierarchical positions and generational affiliations. Participants were further categorized into generational cohorts based on their age. The sample included three individuals from Generation Z, three from Generation X, three from Generation Y, and two Baby Boomers. This distribution ensured representation from each generational cohort, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of multigenerational leadership dynamics. As we aimed to capture diverse leadership experiences and viewpoints, we also considered gender balance and interviewed six male and five female managers. This balanced representation underscored our dedication to a fair and comprehensive study. Concluding, the sample composition encompassed a diverse mix of management positions, genders, and generational affiliations.

### **3.4.3. Interview Guide and Conduct**

Based on the research question, the need for qualitative data was identified. To delve deeply into this subject matter, semi-structured interviews employing a custom-designed interview framework emerged as the most suitable methodological approach. This approach aimed to

facilitate a nuanced exploration of the research subject while providing participants space to share their perspectives and experiences (Bryman, 2012). Aligning with Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007), this also accommodated unforeseen insights during data collection. However, this approach is also affected by potential subjectivity in interviews, as stated by Styhre (2013). Therefore, in the implementation, we employed semi-structured interviews with a set of predetermined questions to ensure a certain degree of consistency throughout all interviews and beyond those, flexibility to incorporate additional inquiries during the discussion (Bryman, 2012).

In our research, this flexibility provided space for a more dynamic dialogue, allowing us to understand participants' experiences better. An interview guide, presented in Appendix C, comprised of fifteen questions, was developed to assist both the interviewees and us during the interviews. This interview guide was designed to explore various facets of leadership dynamics. It encompassed vital topics such as participants' demographic information, perceptions of changing leadership demands, and considerations for leading a multigenerational team. Each interview question was formulated to elicit nuanced responses to contribute to a thorough understanding of the manager's perception of leadership challenges, trends, and characteristics essential to managing a multigenerational team.

Conducted were eleven interviews, each spanning approximately 45 minutes. The initial fifteen-minute segment was devoted to relationship-building before discussing the interview guide. Establishing a trusting setting was crucial to making interviewees comfortable sharing their thoughts, experiences, and opinions about past, current, and future leadership. To facilitate an open dialogue and enable a better understanding of the context, we provided an overview of the research objective and context before starting with the interview questions. The choice of language was a conscious decision to foster open communication as the interviews were conducted in German because all interviewees were native speakers.

Given the hermeneutics, one of us researchers focused on observation and note-taking while the other led the interview. This division of tasks ensured a comprehensive approach aligned with the criteria for effective interviewing outlined by Kvale (1996). Considering constraints related to cost and time, the virtual setting via the Microsoft Teams platform was deemed optimal for conducting the interviews. To foster a conducive environment for open discussion, we ensured privacy and minimized distractions during the virtual interviews by scheduling them during quiet periods. The data collection was completed with the consent of participants

throughout the entire study process. Additionally, the confidentiality of personal data was safeguarded through anonymizing participants. Tools such as a voice recorder and automated transcription software of Microsoft Teams were used to transcribe the interviews and ensure seamless documentation.

#### **3.4.4. Observations**

Following interpretive traditions, observations, in conjunction with interviews, are considered appropriate methods for data collection (Prasad, 2018). In addition to interviews, observations were conducted. This methodological approach served as a vital component in triangulating our research data, thereby enhancing the credibility of our empirical findings (Prasad, 2018). We participated in three team meetings held with managers and subordinates. Notably, our observations were conducted during weekly online meetings, where we participated as silent observers, muting ourselves to minimize disruption (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2022). After the meeting, informal discussions were held with organizational members to clarify potential questions between our observational findings and interview responses. By immersing ourselves in the organizational setting, we gained valuable insights into the interactions and practices of the managers. Moreover, these observations played a significant role in shaping our interpretation of the interview data. Similar to the interview, seamless documentation was ensured through transcribing tools and individual notes of us as researchers.

#### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The data collection involved the acquisition of qualitative data through interviews and observations. The interviews and observations were carefully recorded and transcribed into raw data files, marking the completion of Step One, the gathering of qualitative data. Step Two focused on structuring the raw data. A manual approach to organizing the data was chosen. Observation notes were organized similarly, ensuring consistency and ease of reference between the data sets. Step Three, the coding process, involved the identification of keywords and phrases within the interview transcripts, which were subsequently assigned labels. These were referred to as codes and captured the essence mentioned in interview statements and observed behaviors. The coding approach was inductive, meaning the codes were developed based on the available data and the insights from the literature review (Saunders and Lewis,

2017). Importantly, the coding process was not a one-time event but an iterative one, involving revisiting codes as new data was analyzed (Prasad, 2018). This iterative process also applied to the analysis of the observations, ensuring that emerging themes were consistently integrated. The step of allocating codes to interview statements and observational data was repeated until all data was covered. Following Step Four, categories were defined. These categories played a crucial role in supporting a more systematic analysis and facilitating the identification of key themes. Each code was systematically assigned to the categories, facilitating a comprehensive overview of the collected data. The categories and their corresponding codes elucidate the discourse's content, addressing the "what" aspect of the communication process. Concurrently, insights from observations made during and after the interviews contributed to understanding how information was conveyed, thus addressing the "how" dimension, as posited by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018).

The observations provided real-time validation and context to the interview data, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the leadership dynamics. For instance, during online team meetings, observations highlighted the discrepancies between stated leadership ideals and actual behaviors. In one meeting, a manager's treatment of punctuality varied significantly between older and younger employees, underscoring the presence of generational prejudice which were also mentioned in interviews. Such observations enriched the analysis by providing tangible examples of otherwise abstract behaviors in interview responses. Integrating observational data provided a more robust foundation for these discussions, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in both stated perspectives and actual practices.

### **3.6. Ethical Principles**

This section presents the ethical principles governing our research methodology. Conducting research ethically was paramount throughout the research process (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). Our research journey was underpinned by a steadfast commitment to the ethical principles of integrity, fairness, and transparency (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). At the beginning stage of data collection, efforts were made to obtain informed consent from participants, ensuring they were fully apprised of the study's purpose and procedures. Open and transparent communication ensured that participants' consent was fully informed. Moreover, confidentiality and anonymity are ethical considerations and crucial pillars of respect in qualitative research (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). Central to this commitment was the

safeguarding of participants' anonymity throughout the study, which we realized by anonymizing participants and their direct quotations through pseudonyms, further fortifying their privacy and minimizing associated risks.

### **3.7. Research Limitations**

This research provides valuable insights for answering the research questions. However, it is essential to acknowledge and address research limitations to maintain the integrity and validity of our research findings. In this section, we examine the limitations inherent in our study.

#### ***Methodological Choices***

While the study provides significant insights, it possesses limitations that affect its generalizability (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). The qualitative nature of the research focused on a specific case company, which means that the results of the case-specific analysis may not directly apply to different types of organizational or cultural settings. Pertaining to the cultural aspect, it is acknowledged that the German participants primarily reflect a European cultural context. While the insights garnered provide a valuable understanding of leadership dynamics within multigenerational teams in this region, they may not fully capture the nuances present in other cultural settings. However, qualitative studies, such as phenomenological case studies, can provide pioneering knowledge and deepen our understanding of complex phenomena by providing new qualitative insights (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017).

In addition, the study's cross-sectional design poses another limitation because it did not consider potential temporal variations. Possible changes over time may impact the applicability of the findings. Moreover, the sample can be considered limited, as our findings are based solely on leaders' subjective perspectives. While this may not represent the viewpoints of the subordinates or other employees of the organization, the authenticity of the leaders' responses, particularly in discussing their perceptions as a leader, lends credibility to our empirical data.

Additionally, conducting interviews in German, the native language of all participants, aimed to enhance linguistic comfort and ensure that responses accurately reflected their intent. However, this approach also introduced a limitation, as nuances and idiomatic expressions may not have direct English equivalents, affecting translation accuracy. To provide maximum accuracy, meticulous efforts were made to maintain translation fidelity, and the overall data

collection process, recording and transcribing interviews in their entirety enhanced the study's reliability (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

### ***Potential Subjectivity***

Moreover, the subjectivity inherent in respondents' answers in qualitative research is a critical limitation to consider (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The reliance on self-reported data in interviews can introduce biases, as participants may present themselves in a more favorable light or according to socially acceptable norms, increasing the risk of misleading answers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). We ensured all interviewees' anonymity to address this limitation. This measure was taken to minimize the potential for dishonest responses, a consideration of special importance in our research context where leadership practices and inherent stereotypes or prejudices could be perceived as uncomfortable topics. We acknowledge that as researchers, we relied on the manager's openness and truthfulness without the ability to discern if portrayed stereotypical or prejudiced images are of a conscious or unconscious nature.

Furthermore, qualitative research often faces criticism for researchers' subjectivity, as the findings depend on what we, as researchers, deem significant (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). To mitigate this risk factor, we used multiple data sources, called triangulation, to cross-check empirical findings and base the analysis on several sources, thereby ensuring improved data credibility (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Moreover, the collaborative approach to the data analysis facilitated reflexivity throughout the analysis and a more nuanced interpretation with reflective discussions. This approach enables more critical reflection to mitigate the risk of heuristic biases (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Furthermore, we emphasized presenting empirical findings through demonstration rather than assertion to mitigate researcher bias.

#### 4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

This thesis section presents our qualitative data gathered from interviews and observations. Managers' and directors' perceptions of leadership in a multigenerational workforce are explored, and crucial characteristics that managers identified as indispensable for successfully navigating the complexities of leading a multigenerational team are presented.

To begin with, we want to present the initial finding that laid the fundamental groundwork for our thesis. Considering the argumentation of Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) depicted in part 2.4.3. of the literature review, we wanted to ensure that this research did not automatically assume the management of multigenerational diversity to be a leadership responsibility and over-rely on leadership to be the solution to all kinds of problems. Therefore, to ensure that we as researchers do not fixate on the idea of leadership, we openly discussed the role of leadership in managing multigenerational diversity and whether managers perceive this as an issue integral to leadership responsibilities. The clear finding was that all managers confirmed an interrelationship between generational diversity and the inherent challenges for the team and leadership, clearly expressing leadership's central role in managing multigenerational diversity.

Managers consistently advocated for human-centric, accepting, and reflective qualities in leading diverse age groups and portrayed them as prerequisites for successful leadership in environments characterized by diversity. These three characteristics further encompassed the sub-themes empathy, approachability, awareness, openness, and reflectivity. Despite a strong emphasis of the managers on these leadership characteristics, our analysis discovered contradictory statements and discrepancies between professed values and observed behaviors throughout all interviews. Here is an example to better understand the sorts of contradictory statements we refer to. Mia, one of our interviewees, began her interview by stating:

*"Regardless of whether someone older and experienced or someone with new, fresh ideas, everyone generally wants to be treated equally. We all want to be valued, listened to, have an impact, and be able to contribute, and I think that is very generation independent."* – Mia

She emphasized the importance of equal treatment and the manager's duty to ensure all employees feel valued and treated the same, looking beyond age and generational affiliation.



After advocating for equal treatment, she continued the interview and later highlighted the necessity of adapting leadership approaches to different generations for effective leadership:

*"I feel that the older generation is a bit too set in their ways and, therefore, needs to be "picked up" even more. The older generation sometimes needs to be taken out of this bubble, and then you have to work on making them a bit more relaxed, with the younger ones, you just have a lot more freedoms, but they need much more encouragement, and I also feel that they want to feel much more appreciation."* – Mia

This highlighted a common contradiction in our data, where leaders articulated certain aspects as crucial for effective leadership but appeared to not consistently implement them in their daily interactions with subordinates. We further observed this when attending online team meetings in which Mia demonstrated the inconsistency of her statements by treating subordinates differently concerning punctuality. When an older employee arrived, no comment was articulated. In contrast, a younger employee was publicly criticized in the following meeting after also joining later than scheduled.

#### **4.1. Managers' General Perception of Multigenerational Teams**

When exploring the perception of the dynamics of multigenerational teams, there was a notable shared understanding among managers. While variations in responses were observed, the overall perception of advantages, disadvantages, and resulting challenges for leadership in a multigenerational workforce were remarkably unified.

While the overall perception of multigenerational teams was positive, and many potential advantages were articulated. The managers had a significant consensus that multigenerational teams enhance workplace dynamics and mentioned more positive aspects and advantages of having a diverse age cohort. However, the perception of generations viewed in isolation was less favorable. When discussing the younger generations, Millennials and Generation Z, in isolation, a very negative perception emerged. In general, most negative comments and views expressed about generational characteristics predominantly directed towards younger generations.

#### 4.2. Leading a multigenerational team: Being Human

When asking managers about leadership characteristics essential for leading a multigenerational team, one overarching theme emerged prominently: The increased significance of humanity in leadership and the visibility thereof for subordinates. All interviewed managers expressed a firm conviction that leadership is an ever-evolving field with continuous streams of trends and constantly changing leadership demands. Sarah commented on this by saying, "In general, managers and the understanding of leadership are constantly evolving," which was confirmed by Sophie stating, "There has been a lot of change, and it is having an effect." The key leadership trend to consider nowadays was perceived to be the increased importance of social competence, which was referred to as humanity. Sarah articulated her belief that in contemporary leadership, social competence is the critical leadership skill of demand, superseding the former focus on expert knowledge:

*"I believe that in the past, people with specialist knowledge, i.e., with strong specialist knowledge, were often promoted and brought into management without being classic leadership personalities. Moreover, they were often not given the right support to get into the role. I think we are moving away from that. I think it is getting more important to have a good instinct for dealing with people and having social skills than specialist knowledge. Specialist knowledge helps, of course, to lead a specialist team, but you do not have to know it in depth because that is what the specialists in the team are for. So, what becomes more important is: How do you present yourself? How do you communicate? How do you deal with conflicts? I think we are moving more in that direction of prioritizing social competence in leadership." – Sarah*

Sarah, like most interviewees, confirmed that leadership in multigenerational teams necessitates a nuanced understanding of human dynamics and soft skills. Moreover, the advantages of increased emphasis on human-centric approaches were also linked to the external image of a company. Jacob articulated, "The humanity of managers is increasingly in demand, we must open up and be empathetic; otherwise, we have no chance in the labor market". He confirmed that managers' humanity, approachability, and empathy are in increasing demand and a prerequisite to staying relevant and attractive as an employer.

While it was evident that the characteristic of being human is perceived as an important prerequisite for leading a multigenerational team, its constraints were also acknowledged.

Sarah highlighted the risk that the volume of work associated with operational and managerial tasks could distract managers from focusing on human-centric values:

*"Regardless of the volume of work, I always wanted to know at the end of the day how everyone was doing and that everyone was doing well."* – Sarah

She vividly articulated the imperative to remain attuned to the human aspect of leadership amidst the demands of managerial responsibilities. In alignment with her statements, we observed Sarah to be very interested in team meetings, asking meeting participants how they were feeling. Charlotte underscored the importance of humanity as a guiding principle in fostering an inclusive and supportive organizational environment conducive to multigenerational collaboration:

*"Being human, I think, is very important... You can still implement things without shouting or being overly strict, you can be strict, but still, in being human and listening and being actively involved in the team, you can lead very well."* – Charlotte

While Charlotte acknowledged the significance of human characteristics in leadership, our findings revealed contradicting statements, pointing towards the already mentioned observed inconsistencies in managers statements or behaviors:

*"I don't see it in the leadership tasks to answer the emotional question of "bringing people together." In professional life, you shouldn't have such things; people are there for their job, and in private, you can ask how to bring people together."* – Charlotte

Aligning both of Charlotte's statements just presented indicated that the manager knows the growing demand for humanity. However, she compartmentalized it, and the contradiction suggested that she considers the task of "bringing people together" relegated to private life rather than being integral to leadership responsibilities. It can be derived from this that just because managers are aware of changing leadership demands and meet them, that does not necessarily mean they personally agree with the associated changes in their responsibilities.

The following passage continues to dive into the identified need for being human in leadership by elucidating how empathy and approachability were perceived as two ways of expressing and practicing humanity in leadership.

#### 4.2.1. *Empathy*

When analyzing how humanity is implemented in practice, empathy emerged as a cornerstone facilitating the manifestation of humanity in leadership. Sarah underscored the conventional expectation for managers to possess a high degree of empathy and sensitivity, articulating that "traditionally understood and expected of managers, a high degree of empathy and sensitivity must be a prerequisite," underscoring the integral role of empathy within leadership roles. In general, empathy was described to have two positive impacts. Firstly, the fostering of the reconciliation of humanistic values with organizational imperatives, as underscored by Henry's statement that "good leadership is when you can unite the human and empathetic side with the interests of the company." This indicated the pivotal role of empathy in bridging the gap between individual needs and collective goals. The second advantage referred to the role of empathy in cultivating a sense of belonging and understanding within multigenerational teams.

When diving deeper into the theme of empathy in the interviews, David provided further insights into how the practical implementation of empathy:

*"When we discuss a new project, my younger team members often jump directly into the brainstorming and use team messages to collect everything. Very different from that, particularly older team members become often quiet in the beginning stages of project planning. Eventually, I realized that this was because they were more comfortable with face-to-face discussions. I sensed that I had initiated the discussion with a face-to-face meeting to encourage open dialogue and followed up with a summary email to ensure everyone was on the same page. The main point, however, is that employees don't necessarily speak out when something bothers them, so being empathetic is important to be aware."* – David

David's insights acknowledged that empathy is significant in any leadership context and, beyond that, accentuates the imperative role of it in a multigenerational context. His experience illustrated how a manager can find a solution which everyone feels valued and included with while considering the team's needs. His remark further demonstrated the importance of empathy concerning both verbal and non-verbal language, referring to his remark that employees do not necessarily speak up.

Although all interviewees agreed that being empathic is of value in leadership, Franz issued a word of caution, recognizing the formidable challenge of seamlessly integrating clarity and

empathy. He pointed out the delicate balance required in leadership practices and cautioned against neglecting either clarity or empathy:

*"Good leadership is when leadership is clear and at the same time connected with empathy, which is very difficult to achieve."* – Franz

Franz's comment highlighted the challenge of aligning straightforward leadership with empathy. However, further investigation revealed that the issue extends beyond mere challenge. When analyzing all interview answers, several comments shed light on contradictions and revealed instances where managers, despite acknowledging the importance of empathy, did not consistently demonstrate it in practice. For instance, Franz noted the increased frequency of tears during critical discussions and implied a growing trend toward heightened emotional expression in professional settings:

*"Five or six years ago, tears did not flow in a criticism discussion, and today it is almost normal, so everything has become much more personal and emotional."* – Franz

Two things stood out when analyzing this quote. Firstly, this quote reflects a traditionalist viewpoint that perceives detachment in professional interactions as the norm. Secondly, when putting his quote in the context of our observations, it became evident that this increase in emotional displays was negatively associated with and not seen as legitimate or acceptable behavior in the work context. The fact that numerous subordinates have cried in feedback conversations in the past was not portrayed as a concern, and no plan to accommodate these emotional responses was shared, indicating a lack of empathy and a discrepancy between his statements.

The disparity between the communicated emphasis on empathy and the actual demonstrated behavior and statements in interviews was highlighted by another statement expressed by William. Like other interviewees, he affirmed the importance of human-centric leadership in managing multigenerational teams. However, akin to Franz, William exhibited a limited ability to demonstrate empathy, as evidenced by the following example:

*"One of our trainees constantly complained that everything was too much for her. Then I looked at the hours, and she hadn't even fulfilled her scheduled hours. So, she hadn't fulfilled her hours, and yet it was already too much for her, and she needed more "Me-*

*Time" and more time to think. I replied that she only needed more life energy, joy, and passion, but worlds collided there." – William*

Despite the subordinate's complaints of feeling overwhelmed, William appeared to trivialize their concerns by focusing solely on the quantitative aspect of their work hours. His response that the subordinate simply needs to cultivate more "life energy, joy, and passion" indicated a dismissive attitude towards the psychological well-being of a subordinate who expressed feeling overwhelmed by their workload.

#### **4.2.2. Approachability**

When exploring how being human can be exemplified in leadership, approachability emerged as the second fundamental characteristic, complementing the notion of empathy. Our findings indicated that approachability was perceived as a critical trend of contemporary leadership, transcending mere accessibility. The perception shared in the interviews was that approachability represents a departure from the traditional image of an unapproachable and authoritative manager towards a more relatable and approachable manager image. Sophie underscored this perception and shared her belief of a broader shift, moving away from the traditional paradigm of leadership to one that emphasizes approachability:

*"Approachability as a leader will also become more important. Nowadays, you have to be more approachable so that people follow you and so that you can effectively and sustainably rally people towards a goal. Personal persuasion is becoming increasingly important." – Sophie*

The imperative of approachability to cultivate authentic connections to bridge generational divides was further recognized. However, some concerns were also raised. The perception of most managers was that approachability manifests through authentic engagement and acceptance on both sides, transcending hierarchical barriers to cultivate genuine connections with subordinates. This has caused some managers, such as Henry, to clarify that approachability is aspired to but has its limitations in practice:

*"Approachability as a leader will also become more central... As long as there is acceptance and respect for the leader, and it is clear who is in charge, being*

*approachable elsewhere is good and beneficial. If there is authority, you can be relaxed in other ways.* " – Henry

While Henry's quote underscored the importance of approachability in contemporary leadership, it also presented insights into how this form of approachability is conditioned. He asserted that approachability is contingent upon the respect and acceptance of subordinates and clear boundaries indicating authority. This presented a contradiction to the notion of limitless and authentic approachability.

During our observation in a team meeting, we noted a nuanced aspect of approachability within the group dynamics. In German, a formal and informal mode of addressing people exists: "Sie" and "Du". Sophie elucidated that within the German social context, there is a notable shift away from the traditional formal "Sie" culture towards more informal addressing of "Du," also in the professional context. Sophie stated, "Regarding the "Du" and "Sie" cultures, most companies are now moving away from the formal Sie-Culture and start using the first-name terms instead of surnames because it is no longer fashionable." Considering our data collection process as a whole, our interviews also confirmed this trend since we were allowed to address all interviewees with "Du" and first names. However, despite this trend towards informality, our observations during the team meeting revealed a discrepancy in addressing conventions and approachability. While team members employed the informal "Du" when interacting with each other, they reverted to the formal "Sie" when addressing the manager, even though the managers conversely addressed subordinates with "Du". This divergence in addressing styles underscored the enduring presence of hierarchical distinctions, suggesting that approachability might not uniformly extend to all levels. The position of the manager's superior to subordinates indicated that approachability was not exercised but represented an ideal.

Another incident provided us with a similar insight as the observation. A statement from William underscored how approachability is not necessarily wanted by managers or implemented in practice. He commented on his having already achieved his goals, including references to financial accomplishments, highlighted a sense of success and financial stability that seemed intended to separate him from his subordinates:

*"Many people think they are working for the boss and do not understand that they are doing it for themselves and the company. I already drive a Porsche, nothing changes for me, but for the employees and the company, it does."* – William

The effect of the quote was the image of an unapproachable manager. Additionally, his notion of employees working for their interests and the company rather than for him reinforces this perceived distance and detachment from the concerns of his subordinates. This distinction between hierarchical levels appeared to be the opposite of the emphasis on approachability.

### **4.3. Leading a multigenerational team: Being Accepting**

In tandem with humanity, acceptance was the second fundamental characteristic managers identify as essential for leading a multigenerational team. The following section illuminates how managers perceive and demonstrate this characteristic and explore the correlated factors of awareness and openness.

Our interviews revealed a unanimous recognition among managers of the pivotal role acceptance plays in bridging generational divides and forming authentic connections within teams. Many have shared their perception that acceptance cannot be automatically assumed, underscoring the responsibility of leadership to facilitate it. Henry indicated this by claiming that "sometimes there is missing acceptance for the respective other generation." Sophie stressed this and elaborated that "if there is no acceptance of each other, the overall functionality of a team is likely to be hindered, and it can have an impact on efficiency and collaboration."

#### **4.3.1. Awareness and Openness**

The interviews showed that the managers perceive acceptance as the heart and centerpiece of collaboration and leadership in a multigenerational workforce. It was shared that acceptance is perceived as a critical success factor for effective leadership. Interconnected, awareness was found to be the fundamental prerequisite for acceptance, and the interviews illustrated that the two concepts go hand in:

*"I think acceptance is extremely important, and that has a lot to do with awareness and mindset, which means you can acknowledge other opinions. But that is also something that you either inherit or that we as leaders must let happen. Everyone must find the space to be themselves, to carry out their role, and to be heard and to say, "Okay, what you say is also important, and that is no less important than what I do." – Charlotte*



According to our data, awareness is necessary for individuals to acknowledge and embrace reality as it is rather than solely relying on personal beliefs about how things should be. Alongside awareness, managers emphasized that openness is closely intertwined and another correlated success factor of acceptance. Olivia remarked that "being open is important and recognizing change," highlighting the vital role of openness in navigating the demand for acceptance in the multigenerational team. In essence, it was declared that while awareness serves as the foundation for acceptance, openness is understood as the catalyst, propelling individuals and teams toward greater understanding and unity. This was echoed by Jacob, who emphasized the growing demand for managers to "be open and empathetic," stressing the interconnectedness of openness, empathy, and acceptance:

*"You need a lot of understanding to be very accepting. I think we are back to empathy, that you approach people openly and respectfully and are open and flexible to other approaches and ideas."* – Jacob

When analyzing how awareness and openness can look like in practice, Sophie illustrated this by elaborating how openness is crucial when planning team events to foster collaboration:

*"An example of what can bring more cohesion to a multigenerational team is team building and specifically looking at what your team really wants to do and what they feel like doing because there can be huge differences. One of our managers, for example, has a team that just wants to go out drinking and party, so he does that with them and simply gives them what they want."* – Sophie

She highlighted the importance of actively listening to the team's needs and preferences, even if they differ from one's personal opinions or expectations. She suggested that effective leadership involves being aware and accepting of the diverse desires of team members, such as in the context of team-building activities. Her example illustrates how accepting and realizing the team's wishes can contribute to a positive team atmosphere.

Our data showed that the managers recognized a strong demand for accepting leadership and portrayed it as a critical prerequisite to fostering an inclusive work environment. However, despite the professed importance of acceptance, there were notable discrepancies between the expressed ideals and the actual behaviors observed or implied by some managers' statements. For instance, as marked above, Olivia initially emphasized the need for acceptance across generational lines to promote a collaborative and inclusive atmosphere: "Being open is

important and recognizing change," however, later, she expressed her struggle to fully accept and integrate the work approaches of younger employees, demonstrating a lack of acceptance when it contradicts either traditional ways of doing things or her individual preferences:

*"When you think about the newest generation in the workforce, I notice that many basic things, like appearance or certain courtesy phrases, are no longer important to them. They come across so casually and much more direct."* – Olivia

Her dismissal of younger workers' differing approaches to courtesy phrases and formal dressing as insignificant suggested a lack of effort to understand or acknowledge evolving norms. Her viewpoint suggested that deviations from traditional standards, such as prioritizing informality and directness, are often perceived as a lack of effort, potentially misrepresenting the intentions of the workers in question. Moreover, it indicated a reluctance to embrace changing perspectives and preferences in the workplace, as expressed in the interview context. The addressed judgment was noted in another quote:

*"But in approaching a new person, it's important to be respectful and maybe not so assertive, and I'm surprised by how they can storm in and present themselves, whereas I think at that age, I was a bit more reserved initially."* – Olivia

With this statement, she further contrasted the behavior of younger workers with her behavior in the past. She believes that her approach is correct while criticizing the younger generation's more informal and assertive approaches as lacking in legitimacy as professional conduct. The displayed interaction with changing norms strongly contrasts other statements and poses the question of to which extent managers sincerely accept differences.

The remark of another manager further exemplified Olivia's assertions during an observed meeting. In the meeting it was referred to a scheduled meeting with the management board, and the manager emphasized the importance of being professionally attired for the occasion. This comment from the meeting stood out since other people stated in the debriefing that attire in the workplace has officially transitioned to informal dressing with no clear dress code. The discrepancy between the statements indicated a strong adherence to the personal conviction of work attire and a lack of willingness to embrace evolving norms and fashion preferences.

**4.3.2. A manager's responsibility to facilitate acceptance**

The interviews indicated that fulfilling the critical task of ensuring acceptance requires more than just acknowledging differences; it demands active engagement in bridging divides and cultivating a culture of acceptance. Charlotte emphasized this: "It has much to do with the mindset that you can also acknowledge other opinions." The quote showed that, in her perception, acceptance transcends mere recognition of differences; it encompasses a willingness to validate diverse perspectives. Moreover, the opinion was shared that it lies in the responsibility of leadership to ensure that individual- or generational differences and needs are acknowledged and accepted to foster an inclusive and thriving work environment:

*"I think it important that all generations can coexist evenly. I believe that at the end of the day, everyone needs the same thing: that employees know that they are well taken care of, regardless of whether they are young or old. As long as there is acceptance, that is possible. I see it as my leadership responsibility to ensure that acceptance is also in the minds of all colleagues, and that is how I lead. It does not matter if the employee is 60 or 25 years old, as a leader I must ensure that they are heard and that the best of all worlds can be utilized."*– Charlotte

Henry provided more insights into how this role can be implemented and declared the role as a translator as one possibility to ensure acceptance of contrasting stances in the team:

*"Between two contrary opinions and sometimes maybe unjustified opinions towards another generation, as a leader, you have to do much translating to make the perception of the other generation seen, so that you can build more acceptance."* – Henry

This general perception that a translator's role is central to an accepting work environment was supported by other managers. Alongside other interviewees, Olivia added the importance of communication as part of translating and stated that she believes that "open communication is important, as well as a feedback system". Sophie portrayed a similar stance and reflected on the impact of a manager who invested time in personal interactions on bridging gaps and fostering understanding among team members and observed that "taking time can make a big difference, especially when there are generational differences in the team." She continued with a concrete example, illustrating how another manager in the organization utilized communication and interaction to be aware of different needs and to foster acceptance:

*"We have a manager in the company who takes much time for her employees, or at least tries to. She takes the time to talk to everyone individually. She does not always try to inspire and address everyone as a whole team but also talks to everyone individually in an informal way. There is more communication and contact than just team meetings and formal appraisal interviews, she reaches out and involves the individuals. Taking time can make a big difference, especially when there are extreme differences; informal conversations can build more understanding and acceptance."* – Sophie

That interaction and communication help to get to know subordinates better was also supported by Franz, claiming that "you can only lead well if you understand the other person professionally and personally. Good leadership means good interaction between". Other managers, such as Sarah, supported Franz's sentiment. She confirmed that knowing your subordinates is beneficial and enables a better assessment of the skills and abilities of the team, which allows a better utilization thereof:

*"I always think it is good to be strength-oriented when leading. In other words, finding the individual strengths of the employees, and these can then manifest themselves in the generation. But of course, this also involves a lot of work: Getting to know your people, finding strengths, analyzing them, and then assigning people accordingly."* – Sarah

William continued the discourse and firmly argued about fostering acceptance within a leadership role. His statement illustrated that cultivating acceptance within a team is a fundamental characteristic that defines one's capacity to lead, and he claimed that managers who cannot foster acceptance have no rightful legitimacy in their leadership roles. He expressed that ensuring acceptance transcends managerial duty; for him, it constitutes a fundamental prerequisite of being a manager:

*"What is important is a responsibility hierarchy and acceptance hierarchy. If, as a leader, I am not able to build acceptance, then I am not a leader, and then I must go away and should not be a leader."* – William

In summary, acceptance emerged as a crucial characteristic for leading multigenerational teams and for recognizing diverse viewpoints within the team. Fostering acceptance was described as a managerial duty and a fundamental characteristic defining leadership capacities. Moreover, acceptance was identified to be interrelated to openness and awareness and was portrayed as a

way of Communication, translation, and investing time in understanding others were highlighted as key measures to promote acceptance. Nonetheless, while managers acknowledged their responsibility to facilitate acceptance, when encountering limitations of their own understanding or acceptance, several interviewed managers indicated no active steps to address or counteract this. The study underscored the significant variation in individuals' willingness to accept differing work behaviors or approaches.

#### **4.4. Leading a multigenerational team: Being Reflective**

When exploring the multifaceted dynamics of leadership in a multigenerational workforce, our research unveiled a third leadership paradigm critical to leading a multigenerational team: Reflectivity. In addition to humanity and acceptance, the interviews shed light on the interrelationship between self-reflection and equitable leadership within a multigenerational work environment and the perception of a growing demand for it:

*"Managers must reflect on themselves, including their values and behavior. I think there will be an increasing demand for managers to be self-reflective and be willing to work on themselves."* – Sarah

Charlotte continued and shared that leading by example is also crucial in the paradigm of self-reflection. By acknowledging one's limitations and demonstrating vulnerability, a manager can simultaneously practice self-reflection, approachability, and humanity in leadership:

*"And that you always lead by example, what you expect from others, you must be able to deliver or understand yourself and also say, "I do not know further here; I need your expertise to make a good decision or the right decision," so simply using the team and realizing that you as a leader do not have to be perfect helps to be approachable and shows that you reflect how far your skills and expertise goes."* – Charlotte

William provided an example of how reflection can be practiced when discussing what prompted him to adapt his leadership style over the years:

*"I grew up with my imprint, and my leadership style is also shaped by the motto "I'll keep running until I fall, then I'll get up and keep running." However, I now realize through learning in recent years that I cannot continue with this leadership style."* – William

His remark highlighted that learning and development are closely associated with practicing reflection and illustrated how reflection can catalyze personal and professional development. He underscored the importance of reflecting on past experiences and learning from them.

Moreover, it became evident in our interviews that stereotypes and prejudices about different age groups are prevalent in the workplace. Based on this, various managers emphasized the significance of reflection in navigating the delicate balance between what was described to be potentially harmless generalizations and harmful prejudices:

*"Self-reflection and development are very important. If managers today think they can leave everything as it was 30 years ago, then that is not possible. No matter what age, every manager should constantly put themselves to the test and question whether what they are doing is still up to date and if the actions and perceptions are fair and objective and not guided by wrongful perceptions. I, as a leader, have of others. Self-reflection and self-criticism are therefore extremely important." – Sophie*

However, there was a difference between emphasizing the need for reflectivity and being reflective. Besides the numerous articulations of the need for reflectivity, we also encountered numerous contradictory statements in the form of stereotypical and prejudiced images of other age groups, challenging the level of reflectivity presented in the interviews.

#### **4.4.1. Stereotypical Perceptions**

Many managers, such as Henry, confirmed that "there are stereotypes, on the one hand, between managers in the management team and then between management level and employees and I believe that you can quickly fall into this kind of stereotypical thinking." Almost all managers admitted that stereotypical thinking, or as Henry put it, the "thinking in labels," exists, especially in a multigenerational team. One hands-on example illustrated how labels can directly affect organizational decisions, for instance, in recruitment:

*"With employees, you quickly think in terms of labels. For example, in recruiting, you often hear, "I do not want so many old people anymore because I need employees who are willing to perform," or it is said, "I do not want to hire young people anymore because I do not have time to play kindergarten teacher, because the problems of young people are much bigger and more present." Our HR employee, for example, has said*

*that she would not hire a 60-year-old, and she is 60 years old herself. So, there are also prejudices against one's own age."* – Henry

When discussing generational differences, concrete examples of stereotypical images present in a multigenerational team were mentioned throughout the interviews. These portrayals of different age groups demonstrated the presence of generalizations. However, these were observed to be devoid of judgmental or negative connotations. Sophie observed that "older employees definitely have more experience than younger employees can learn from." She noted, "At the same time, however, the light-heartedness of younger employees and a certain inexperience is also a strength." Her observation presented an example of stereotypical perceptions about different generations, portraying one as more experienced based on their age and the other as naïve, which was associated with the positive impact of fresh perspectives. On the other hand, Charlotte expressed that being older doesn't necessarily mean having more experience, and vice versa. Another manager, Sarah, reflected on the diverse learning preferences among employees, noting, "Younger people are more likely to demand video material to learn, so they are more likely to use videos than text." Her observation hinted at underlying assumptions about age-related preferences. Other examples of stereotypical images associated with younger generations often revolved around concepts like work-life balance and technical proficiency:

*"I would say that the younger generation is more inclined towards ensuring work-life balance and tends to finish work on time."* – Olivia

*"If you stick to stereotypes, the younger generation, e.g., is very tech-savvy."* – Sarah

Also, stereotypical perceptions of older workers were discussed. In contrast to stereotypical expressions about younger workers, discussions regarding stereotypes of older generations were notably fewer and limited in number. The predominant stereotypes concerning older workers predominantly centered around their work experience and modes of appreciation:

*"Older employees have many advantages and disadvantages. They have lots of experience, but also fear and resistance when it comes to innovation."* – Henry

*"The older generation feels appreciated through salary. You show someone that you appreciate them if you have the salary increase accordingly."* – Mia

When discussing the potential origin of stereotypical images, Alex disclosed that they "often spread through the media", whereas other managers traced their stereotypical thinking back to their imprint and upbringing. William underscored the inevitability of stereotypes stemming from individual upbringing and generational values. He acknowledged that these stereotypes may be unconscious but emphasized the importance of introspection and conscious effort in not letting them dictate one's actions. William further suggested that it is acceptable to recognize stereotypes as long as one actively works to address and overcome them, focusing on how they handle these biases and their resulting behaviors:

*"Again, through one's own imprint and how one grew up, certain values in every generation/age group definitely lead to stereotypes, whether conscious or unconscious. What matters is how you deal with it. It is okay to have stereotypes as long as I reflect on them and do not let them dictate my actions. So, the question is more how I deal with it and what I do."* – William

Franz supported this statement and echoed the relevance of people's imprint:

*"There is always one's imprint, and I believe that leads to stereotypes and prejudices against others. And, the typification of the individual is ultimately a stereotype that one applies in everyday life."* – Franz

William and Franz posit that stereotypes, particularly those stemming from unconscious stereotypical thinking, are inherent and, to some extent, unavoidable. They underscored that possessing stereotypes is not inherently harmful when managers practice reflection and refrain from allowing these perceptions to affect their leadership actions and behaviors.

However, our findings indicated a distinction between stereotypes and prejudices regarding age groups. In practice, this thin line between harmless and harmful stereotypical thinking appeared blurred when observing a team meeting. This thin line was visible when attending a meeting; we observed that it was always younger employees who were asked and chosen to handle tech-related tasks, and older employees who could possess equal capacity appeared not to be considered. Based on this instance, stereotypical thinking in task allocation was seen, where managers automatically assumed that younger people must be more tech-savvy than older workers. In the subsequent chapter, we delve into the potential prejudices that may arise within multigenerational teams.



#### 4.4.2. *Prejudice Perceptions*

This section presents the second form of generalizations identified: prejudice generational images. As already mentioned, stereotypes were described as generalizations based on managers' observations of their teams, while prejudices appeared to stem from negative assumptions or opinions about an age group. The discourse surrounding prejudiced thinking portrayed them as the next level to stereotypes and indicated potentially more destructive impact on leadership effectiveness, fairness, and effective multigenerational collaboration.

Alex elucidated this differentiation and declared it to be a manager's responsibility to mitigate the negative consequences, emphasizing the negative connotation associated with prejudice:

*"The prejudice about Gen Z being lazy and Boomers being stuck in their ways, as I put it colloquially, what is, I cannot confirm that, and I see it differently. That is more of a perception than a fact. But if these perceptions are strongly entrenched in the departments, then it can certainly happen that there is a bad atmosphere. But even there, as a leader, you are responsible for resolving it."* – Alex

While most interviewees acknowledged the presence of stereotypical thinking, fewer opened up about prejudices, indicating varying levels of self-reflection. However, managers who addressed prejudiced perceptions described the topic as a central challenge within multigenerational teams and leadership, reinforcing the finding that team functionality and leadership efficacy are at risk without acceptance. Sophie was one of the managers who also openly admitted to herself being susceptible to prejudices in her function as a manager, underscoring the importance of addressing this topic in the context of leadership:

*"Yes, I do have prejudices. When I read an application and the person is a certain age, I immediately have prejudices, even as a manager. An application photo also has the effect that you judge the person directly, and that goes in the direction of prejudices."*  
– Sophie

Moreover, Franz, for instance, underscored the prevalence of generational conflicts and prejudices, stating that "90% of conflicts in the management team are due to generational differences." He elaborated, "Yes, there are considerable prejudices against other generations because they are simply shaped very differently, and this applies to all generations and goes in

both directions." He raised the aspect that generational prejudices are not only a potential for conflict in the manager-subordinate relationship but also within a management team itself.

A concrete example of a prejudiced image was, for instance, Franz's statement, "I find that younger generations, in parts, have a slight tendency towards arrogance and overestimation," highlighting the deeply ingrained prejudices toward younger generations in the workplace. Additionally, he expressed concerns regarding their self-esteem and psychological strength:

*"Younger people, from my point of view, are often aimless and have few anchor points to contribute to their self-esteem and develop psychological strength. If you tell a young employee a goal and define the frame of responsibility, you get two reactions as a response nowadays: The first option is that they collapse, and the second option is that they think responsibility is great. But that happens less often with a decreasing trend. So, cooperation is generally difficult due to different value systems, work styles, and expectations." – Franz*

William echoed this perception, describing younger generations as follows:

*"For example, I have the image of the younger generation in my head that they are no longer loyal. Instead of confronting conflict, they resign directly, and sometimes I perceive them as more arrogant, and often there is a tendency to overestimate themselves." – William*

The statements reflect prejudiced attitudes that are likely to overlook individual characteristics and unfairly generalize entire age cohorts. In the case of William, he further elaborated that based on this perception of less loyalty, his trust in younger employees is limited.

While fewer were seen, prejudices about older generations were also articulated. They were characterized to be "set in their ways". Jacob provided another prejudiced assumption by stating that "when you look at the age groups from 50 plus, it is still very conservative, and they are also not very open to change." Nevertheless, it was generally observed that much fewer prejudices were articulated than those about younger generations.

#### **4.4.3. *The role of reflection in navigating stereotypes and prejudices***

When introducing this chapter, we already mentioned our finding of self-reflection as a crucial component alongside humanity and acceptance. In most instances, the notion of self-reflection was expressed in connotation to the risk of stereotypical and prejudiced thinking in leadership. As illustrated above, William and Franz provided valuable insights into their perception of inevitable stereotypical thinking stemming from personal experiences and generational influences. However, they emphasized the necessity of conscious reflection and proactive mitigation of stereotypes to avoid the formation of more deep-rooted prejudice and to ensure fair and equitable leadership practices:

*"What matters is how you deal with it. It is okay to have stereotypes as long as I reflect on them and do not let them dictate my actions. So, the question is more how I deal with it and what I do."* – William

Jacob echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of not allowing stereotypes to disrupt team cohesion. He stated, "As a leader, it is important not to let these stereotypes disrupt the team." In this context, self-reflection was meant to refer to one's behavior and interaction with others; Henry stated: "Self-reflection should reflect on your leadership style and how you interact with employees." As an answer to Jacobs's demand to not let stereotypes or prejudice disrupt team cohesion or leadership reflectivity emerged. In the interviews, many managers acknowledged the presence of stereotypes and prejudices within the workplace and stressed the significance of self-reflection in preventing prejudices from influencing their leadership capabilities and decision-making processes.

Moreover, a notable discovery was that reflection within the context of multigenerational teams was depicted to serve two primary purposes: Firstly, to acknowledge that generational preferences, characteristics, and differences do not uniformly represent everyone within those groups but individuality needs to be considered. Sarah emphasized the importance of being self-reflective and constantly reminding oneself that generalizations are not a complete and realistic rendering of the individuals by stating that she "notices different needs between the individual characters, but you cannot pin that down to the generation." She underlined her stance by sharing the following example:

*"For example, there is also more focus on work-life balance these days due to the expectations of younger generations. Conversely, some younger people do not need a*

*work-life balance; they can work 24/7, and that also exists. So, there are also individual aspects and preferences."* – Sarah

Her contribution underscored the necessity of critically reflecting on generalizations and recognizing the individuality inherent within each group affiliation:

Secondly, reflectivity was essential for managers to recognize and understand their own limitations and recognize stereotypical and prejudiced thinking they might have. Some managers openly acknowledged their susceptibility to prejudiced perceptions, as indicated by the example of Sophie above, and emphasized the deriving need for self-reflection to avoid acting upon these prejudices:

*"Personally, I cannot understand many things, values, and behavioral patterns of younger people anymore because of my age, and that is how I see that I have prejudices and misunderstandings."* – Franz

#### **4.5. Summary of Empirical Findings**

Our findings conclude with several significant findings on leadership in multigenerational teams. To begin with, interviewed managers confirmed that leadership is responsible for managing the inherent challenges of multigenerational teams. Beyond the overall finding of leadership's strong influence on successful collaboration in multigenerational teams, the key finding pertained to concrete leadership characteristics.

The interviews highlighted the evolving demands on leadership, emphasizing the need for managers to embody the characteristics of humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity. These three characteristics were identified as desirable and essential for effective leadership in multigenerational teams. In more detail, the findings on the subtheme of empathy emphasized the importance of managers grasping diverse needs across age groups. Moreover, we identified the perception of a growing demand for approachability in leadership. In addition, acceptance emerged as crucial and was presented as intertwined with awareness and openness. The interviews highlighted that a manager's role is as a mediator, fostering understanding and cooperation among team members and bridging gaps for mutual respect. Lastly, reflectivity was associated with monitoring and adjusting behaviors and promoting fairness. We found that

self-awareness is seen as a vital tool for managers to mitigate the pitfalls of stereotypes and prejudices in multigenerational constellations.

The other key finding is an identified discrepancy between these ideal leadership characteristics and observed behaviors. Managers demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the importance of humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity for effective leadership in a multigenerational team; however, several statements and observations led to the finding that these are not necessarily realized by many managers, indicating a discrepancy. Moreover, when analyzing this gap in more depth, it became apparent that stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions and a lack of reflectivity are often associated with the discrepancy.

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## **5. Discussion**

Examining the findings within the framework of existing literature reveals further insights that guide us through the following discussion. Summarizing, our research underscored two pivotal findings regarding leadership in multigenerational teams. First, the indispensable leadership characteristics of humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity are central to effectively managing a diverse age group. These qualities, as identified by managers, are crucial for effectively and successfully leading a team with generational diversity. Second, a significant discrepancy emerged between the stated ideal and the observed behaviors in leadership practices, associated with stereotypes and prejudices inherent in leadership of a multigenerational workforce and limited reflection thereof. The following discussion dives deeper into this, exploring the relationship between reflectivity and the observed discrepancy.

### **5.1. Leadership Ideals versus Reality**

The first key finding of our research was the consistency with which managers advocated for the importance of human-centric, accepting, and reflective qualities in leading diverse age groups. Throughout the interviewees, these characteristics were portrayed as prerequisites for successful leadership in a multigenerational environment. However, despite a strong emphasis on these characteristics, our second vital finding was an observed discrepancy between the professed importance of these characteristics and observed behaviors, often challenging if the ideal is feasible and sometimes even contradicting the articulated importance.

#### ***Humanity in Leadership – Ideal or Reality?***

Our findings underscored the essential role of human-centric leadership characteristics such as empathy and approachability for effective leadership addressing various generational cohorts. Interviewees often addressed the perception of a trend toward more human-centric leadership in the contemporary workplace. This aligns with Nahavandi's (2019) assertions, confirming a prevailing shift towards human-centric leadership and approachability in today's leadership. This trend reflects the evolving dynamics of the workplace and leadership and the inherent challenge for managers to remain aware of changing demands and be capable of implementing those in their leadership styles and behaviors. In addition, our research outlined that younger generations are perceived to contribute to this trend toward more human-centric leadership

significantly. This illustrated the perception that younger employees are articulating their leadership demands strongly and are driving changes in the leadership landscape.

The specific connotation of “the younger generations“ illustrated another pivotal finding that generational differences are, in practice, often referring to two bigger age cohorts, combining Generation X and Boomer to “the older generation“ and Millennials and Generation Z to “the younger generation.“ All interviewees only differentiated between “the young“ and “the old, indicating that it was less focused on generational affiliation but on age in general and that differentiations refer to much bigger age spans than initially expected. Berkup (2014) suggested that this is due to the most significant discrepancies between generations being identifiable between the older (Boomers and Generation X) generations and both the younger generations (Millennials and Generation Z).

Especially given the complexities of the contemporary workplace, characterized by an intensifying generational diversity, the necessity to embrace human-centric qualities was emphasized in both our research and scholarly discourse. In alignment, the literature exemplified by Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) underscores the importance of adopting human-centric qualities. Additionally, genuine interpersonal engagement is crucial in managing multigenerational teams (Kalshoven, Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2011). The associated quality of empathy was linked with fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, which is critical for multigenerational teams' productivity and cohesion, as Alvesson and Einola (2019) noted.

While managers acknowledged the importance of empathy and approachability, our findings revealed several instances where these characteristics were not consistently demonstrated in practice. This suggested that individual managers may vary in their competencies in embodying human-centric leadership qualities, emphasizing the importance of recognizing each manager's individuality and associated strengths and flaws. Especially concerning approachability, some managers provided illustrative examples, depicting their being approachable, while others did not demonstrate approachability or the intent to do so in the future. It also stood out that mainly older interviewees contrasted the articulated demand for approachability by showing a solid stance on more traditional views on leadership, with a clear distinction between themselves and subordinates. Based on this, it is suggested that the growing importance of approachability is strongly associated with age and the interest or willingness of managers to adopt more

contemporary and less traditional views on leadership. Considering literature in the field, Elliot and McCusker (2010) come into mind, who highlighted that the distinction between traditional and contemporary leadership discourses confirms the ever-evolving nature of leadership and the imperative for constant leadership development, particularly given the complexities posed by multigenerational workforces and rapid changes. Furthermore, considering Alvessons and Einola's (2019) comments on the need for contemporary leadership to transcend task-focused directives and to acknowledge that their humanity must contribute to individuals' emotional well-being, our findings indicate that humanity in leadership is one attribute of leadership style transcending generational boundaries.

The analysis underscored the imperative for managers to embody human-centric characteristics when leading a multigenerational team while acknowledging that individual willingness and openness to adapt their own leadership style and behavior vary. This significantly impacts the implementation of these leadership characteristics.

#### ***Acceptance in Leadership – Ideal or Reality?***

Moreover, the findings section underscored acceptance's pivotal role in effectively managing multigenerational teams. While the literature often emphasized the importance of subordinates' acceptance of managers, our research highlighted the equally crucial role of manager acceptance towards their subordinates as a significant finding, offering hope for creating harmonious and productive multigenerational teams (Malik, Aziz & Hassan, 2014).

Our data underscored the strong demand for acceptance for those acting in managerial positions, highlighting awareness as the cornerstone and openness as a catalyst for greater understanding and unity among individuals and teams. The practical implications of these leadership characteristics are significant, as openness is presented to foster an inclusive and collaborative environment in which individuals of varying backgrounds feel valued and respected (Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Considering the context of this research, the criticality of openness and acceptance became apparent when considering the diverse perspectives of multigenerational leadership, stressing the pivotal role of acceptance in multigenerational teams. DeRue and Ashford (2010) support this inclination, advocating for acceptance to nurture a diverse, unified environment across generations. In practical terms, Sophie emphasized the significance of open dialogue and individual interactions to bridge



generational gaps and foster acceptance. She suggests that this approach enables managers to truly understand their team members, cultivate mutual acceptance, and promote inclusivity.

Our findings stressed that acceptance is essential and beneficial for enabling strength-based leadership and fostering risk mitigation. Interviewees consistently highlight the mutually beneficial relationship among different generations, aligning with Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2013), advocating for strength-oriented leadership, and recognizing and leveraging each generation's strengths. However, if acceptance is not demonstrated, numerous risk factors are associated. The risks of lacking genuine acceptance, often stemming from stereotypes and categorizations, are significant and include team divisions, poor leadership outcomes, conflict escalation, and suboptimal performance (Tresh et al., 2019). The issue of stereotypical perceptions was a central theme in the findings section; discussed examples illustrated that, especially in multigenerational settings, the risk of alienation is heightened, and that acceptance is vital for all employees to feel respected and valued beyond age-related stereotypes. Concrete examples referred to tearful feedback conversations and emotional or psychological issues not being taken seriously and downplayed with statements such as "you just need more life energy," "demonstrating a lack of acceptance of the other's perspectives and emotions. These examples highlighted the immense role of acceptance in fostering an inclusive work environment and the managers' impact on the subordinates' work lives, and how their interactions and statements influence whether subordinates feel accepted and respected. Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of "Accepting people as they are" (p.355) to counteract risks and nurture an inclusive work environment.

Another issue observed in the manager-subordinate interaction was stereotypical perceptions which we found to be also associated with a lack of acceptance. As elaborated in the findings section, awareness is a crucial prerequisite for acceptance. However, managers appeared to not necessarily be aware of employees' individual strengths beyond age-based stereotypes, for instance, when allocating all technological tasks to younger employees without considering older employees. Kuhlmann et al. (2016) emphasized the crucial role of leaders in addressing and challenging stereotypes and prejudices. According to them, leaders are not just bystanders but are responsible for actively promoting mutual respect, underlying the importance of acceptance within multigenerational teams. Hogg (2015) underscored this and emphasized an additional consideration by shedding light on the dangerous influence of stereotypes and prejudices when harbored by individuals in leading positions within organizations. Powerful

and authoritarian people, such as managers, who cannot critically reflect on their own biases, can cause harm through discriminatory behavior and abuse of power toward their subordinates (McCarthy, Heraty & Bamberg, 2019).

Summarizing the findings pertaining to displayed acceptance levels, it can be said that our data acknowledged and confirmed the importance of acceptance. Nevertheless, there were noticeable gaps between professed ideals and observed behaviors among some managers. This indicated that the openness and willingness to accept who or what differs from their own norms and values was inconsistent. Throughout the interviews, we observed contradictions and prejudices, highlighting a significant deviation between what has been stated as ideal and practice regarding acceptance, as many appeared to not look beyond stereotypical or prejudiced perceptions to be aware of or accept the individuals behind preconceived notions. This is likely compounded by the complex reality that managers themselves have entrenched operational norms or personal prejudices. Considering academic discourse such as Smith and Garriety (2020), the practical application of acceptance may falter due to existing prejudices or norms, challenging leadership effectiveness in multigenerational settings. In conclusion, we found that managers' ability to embody acceptance is tested in their daily interactions and through internalized stereotypical or prejudiced images, which leads to limited implementation of the ideals advocated.

### ***Reflection in Leadership – Ideal or Reality?***

Reflectivity was the third essential leadership characteristic considered paramount for leading a multigenerational team. The relevance was largely traced back to the complex dynamics of multigenerational teams and the increased risk of entrenched stereotypes and prejudices that require reflectivity. Reflectivity is a vital aspect that helps prevent conflicts arising from misperceptions about team members, their capabilities, and motivations (Gardner et al., 2005). Especially considering the diverse generational values, beliefs, and behavioral norms, as illustrated by McMullin, Comeau, and Jovic (2007), it is increasingly important for managers leading diverse teams, to assess their thoughts and behaviors critically. This enables them to ensure that their actions and decisions are influenced by genuine understanding rather than preconceived notions, biases, or misconceptions, as demonstrated by many in the interviews (McMullin, Comeau & Jovic, 2017). By expressing similar benefits of reflection, the interviewees demonstrated awareness and understanding of this and expressed the importance

of reflectivity. When comparing interviewees' statements, the answers throughout an interview revealed significant discrepancies between their stated level of reflectivity and their observable behaviors. Our findings suggested an identified challenge in genuinely integrating it into the daily practice of leadership, going beyond mere acknowledgment of the importance of reflectivity. Several managers acknowledged the need for self-reflection to avoid prejudicial thinking; however, their statements and decisions contradicted this principle numerous times. When analyzing what could explain the inconsistency in the statements, scholarly discourse calling for managers to continuously engage in self-reflection, actively questioning and adjusting their perceptions and behaviors to ensure they align with fairness and inclusivity, provided an answer (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). In our data, we saw indications of reflectivity and self-awareness in some parts, but not in a consistency that would align with Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson's (2017) call for continuous self-reflection. Most managers revealed a pattern of negative assumptions, specifically about younger team members, indicating a discrepancy between expressed levels of reflectivity and observable ones.

Inconsistent levels of reflectivity can result in a strong challenge for leadership as the manager's actions are not fully informed by an objective understanding of individual team members but are instead influenced by unchecked stereotypes and biases (Gardner et al., 2005). Commitment to genuine reflectivity would help mitigate that risk and facilitate leadership that is responsive to subordinates' needs (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Furthermore, as Hogan (2007) stated, limited reflectivity undermines the manager's effectiveness as it can contribute to workplace conflicts and diminished team performance, stemming from a misalignment between leaders' intentions and their actual impact on the team. Lastly, it was highlighted that reflectivity is linked to the previous leadership characteristics, as managers must examine their behaviors and hinder underlying prejudices to enable genuine acceptance.

## **5.2. The Discrepancy between Ideal and Reality**

Our second key finding referred to the perceptible gap between idealized characteristics and manifestation in the actual leadership practices among the interviewees. This discrepancy suggested that while the ideal of leadership is well-understood and articulated, it does not necessarily translate into a practical application. Such tensions between ideal and practice underscore the inherent challenges of leadership, where continuous self-reflection is paramount

(Cran, 2015). While there was an overall trend of inconsistency throughout all interviews, we acknowledge that the level and degree of it cannot be generalized and varied between individuals and the respective leadership characteristics referred to.

### **5.2.1. Contributing Factors to the Discrepancy**

Throughout the interviews, managers recognized the presence of stereotypical perceptions in multigenerational teams. Moreover, we found that some managers were significantly influenced by prejudiced notions or assumptions about generational cohorts rather than focusing on the individual's unique attributes, for instance, in team-related decisions. Our research highlighted numerous instances where managers held prejudiced views, particularly towards younger generations. Both in quantity and severity, negative associations increased when referring to younger employees, often affiliated with Generation Z. Referring to the already discussed finding of Berkup (2014), this pattern could be explained by the presumed significant generational gap between the two older and younger generations.

The limited reflection stood out in connotation with stereotypes and prejudices. For instance, a statement from William suggested that stereotypes are a human and seemingly harmless trait if they do not guide one. Nonetheless, contrary to this statement, many managers, including himself, failed to show the degree of reflection that would indicate that he or the others are indeed not guided by their negative prejudices. Most were unable to acknowledge their own prejudiced assumptions or the implications and resultant effects of these biases, which led to the finding of a discrepancy between the behaviors managers professed and those they demonstrated. As Tresh et al. (2019) noted, inherent prejudices and insufficient reflection can cause misalignments between stated intentions and actual behaviors.

In the context of leadership, misalignment refers to a lack of shared meanings within organizational settings, leading to divergent interpretations of the same situation or event. This can occur when leaders perceive themselves and their leadership style and behavior in a way that is not mirrored by the observer or subordinates. While we do not have insights into the subordinates' perceptions, already our research observations and interviews did not mirror the self-presented leadership behaviors of the managers. The recurring theme of limited reflection was identified as the main link to this discrepancy, indicating that a lack of self-reflection was a significant contributor. As demonstrated in the empirical findings, the reflectivity level exhibited by managers during the interviews often failed to provide an objective assessment of

employees from different generational cohorts than their own. Reflectivity in leadership, as described by Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), involves critically examining one's values, beliefs, biases, and behaviors. This was found to be particularly relevant in addressing generational differences, where stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions can significantly affect managers' views of their subordinates, consciously or unconsciously.

The finding that limited reflectivity contributes significantly to the alignment adds to Toegl, Kilduff, and Anand's (2013) observation that cognitive biases, lack of shared meanings, and the overburdening of managers can drive a misalignment between leadership expectations and reality. Our findings confirmed the significant impact of cognitive biases and, beyond that, highlighted the additional impact of limited reflection and self-awareness.

### **5.2.2. Potential Implications of the Discrepancy**

When juxtaposed with existing literature, our research findings on leadership misalignment reveal a profound leadership challenge with extensive implications. The contrast between an anticipated humane, accepting, and reflective leadership and an actual directive and detached approach can corrode trust and respect, cause confusion, and impede vital teamwork and collaboration (Hogg, 2015). This, in turn, can foster disengagement and dissatisfaction among team members, potentially leading to conflict (Joshi, Dencker & Franz, 2011).

Our study identified stereotypes, prejudiced images, and limited reflection as critical contributors to leadership misalignment. These factors respectively inherent significant risks for effective leadership. Firstly, stereotypes and prejudiced images increase the risk of being guided by subjective interpretations and images of subordinates and their needs rather than the individuals, diminish the likelihood of implementing leadership strategies tailored to meet individuals' needs, and heighten the risk of ineffective leadership (Tresh et al., 2019). Moreover, Kuhlmann et al. (2016) underscored that a lack of reflectivity of prejudices is associated with the risk factors of unfair treatment and a lack of respect within the team if not implemented. Pertaining to limited reflection, McCarty, Heraty, and Bamberg (2019) pointed out that leaders' lack of genuine reflectivity and acceptance can lead to leadership failure to meet the needs of diverse teams, ineffective and potentially discriminatory management, and disengagement among team members. Especially in multigenerational teams, a lack of genuine acceptance and understanding can exacerbate tensions and misunderstandings (Zemke, Raines

& Filipczak, 2000). These potential risk factors of misalignment between stated and observed behavior underscore the importance of addressing the misalignment between expressed statements and demonstrated behavior.

### **5.3. Bridging the Discrepancy: Reflective Leadership**

Our discussion has revealed that stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions, as well as limited self-reflection, have contributed to the identified discrepancy. Implementing reflective leadership presents an opportunity to address this as it offers a pathway to aligning leadership behavior more closely with the ideal (Schön, 2017).

As Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) described, reflective leadership involves a self-examination approach that challenges entrenched beliefs and cultural conventions, encouraging the consideration of diverse viewpoints. By critically assessing their own assumptions and biases, managers can reflect on whether their views are objective and accurate, potentially bridging the identified gap between expressed ideal and observed leadership. Reflective leadership is particularly fitting and beneficial for leadership in multigenerational teams as it allows adaptability to suit the needs and expectations of employees from different generations (Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson, 2017). Reflective leadership specifically was chosen because it could help address prejudices and stereotypes and foster an environment of mutual respect and understanding, thereby enhancing communication, collaboration, and overall team performance (Schön, 2017).

In conclusion, reflective leadership is a vital model for managing a multigenerational team as it encourages leaders to continuously evaluate and improve their practices, ensuring they are meeting the evolving needs of their team members (Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson, 2017).

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the perceived leadership characteristics necessary for effectively managing multigenerational teams from the manager's perspective. This concluding chapter presents a comprehensive overview of our empirical findings, aligning them with our research objectives and contributions to the existing literature. Additionally, a critical evaluation of the limitations of our study will be presented. Moreover, suggestions for future research directions will be offered before concluding with the discussion of practical implications.

### 6.1. Empirical Findings

#### *What leadership characteristics do managers find essential for leading a multigenerational team?*

The empirical findings of this thesis underscored the complex dynamics of leadership in multigenerational teams, highlighting both the ideal leadership characteristics and the challenges managers face. In the pursuit of addressing the main research question, our research revealed several key leadership characteristics essential for managing multigenerational teams effectively: humanity, acceptance, and (self-)reflection. We found it to be the manager's perception that if these characteristics are harnessed effectively, they can create an inclusive environment that respects and integrates the diverse perspectives of different generational cohorts, empowering managers to bridge the generational gaps.

It has become apparent that adopting a human-centric approach is indispensable in the contemporary workplace. Managers consistently emphasized the importance of human-centric characteristics, such as empathy and approachability, in navigating the diverse needs of multigenerational teams. Empathy emerged as a cornerstone to facilitate understanding among all team members and bridge gaps between generational differences. Furthermore, our findings confirmed the ubiquitous trend toward more human-centric leadership and supported that a manager's approachability is increasingly in demand. Approachability in leadership was presented as a trend, indicating a shift of moving away from traditional authoritative leadership to a more relatable leadership figure and role. However, the findings pointed to a notable discrepancy between the professed values of empathy and approachability with their actual implementation. Managers often articulated the importance of these characteristics but needed

to demonstrate them consistently in practice. This was especially apparent regarding the characteristic approachability.

Moreover, our research emphasized the significance of acceptance for successful leadership in multigenerational teams. In the findings, acceptance was closely tied to the subthemes of awareness and openness. Awareness and openness were emphasized as fundamental prerequisites for acceptance as they allow leaders to recognize different perspectives and ideas. Acceptance, as the overarching characteristic, was recognized as the step of valuing these diverse experiences, ideas, and skills each generation brings to the table to promote a culture of mutual respect and collaboration. Managers recognized their responsibility to facilitate acceptance and proposed that translating and mediating between different generational perspectives are two potential ways of fostering acceptance and ensuring mutual respect. Despite the acknowledged importance of acceptance, discrepancies were observed, particularly in managers' attitudes toward younger employees' evolving norms and behaviors. This indicated a gap between the ideal of acceptance and its realization in everyday interactions.

As a third characteristic, reflectivity, a critical component highlighted in our study, was deemed crucial for equitable leadership, helping managers to assess their behaviors and biases critically. Our research underscored the importance of reflectivity as a cornerstone of leadership in a multigenerational context. Similar to acceptance, this was identified as a pivotal criterion for mitigating stereotypes and prejudices, which can hinder effective leadership in multigenerational settings. The interviews highlighted the prevalence of stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions among managers, often influenced by their own experiences and generational imprints. While managers acknowledged the need for self-reflection to overcome these biases, the actual practice of reflectivity varied. This further led to our finding of inconsistency between stated beliefs and observed behaviors.

In addition to the three leadership characteristics, our second key finding revealed a significant gap between expressed ideal leadership characteristics and the behavior exhibited by managers. Managers appeared to understand the importance of the ideal leadership qualities, however they were not seen to apply their self-proclaimed ideal consistently in practice. This discrepancy stood out because managers demonstrated the awareness of how implementing the three mentioned characteristics would enhance leadership effectiveness; nonetheless, we still observed a noticeable gap between the expressed and demonstrated behavior. For instance, while managers advocated for equal treatment and acceptance, their actions frequently



contradicted these principles, as seen in differential treatment based on age. Considering all data gathered, we concluded that several factors contributed to this misalignment between ideal and reality, mainly cognitive biases and limited reflectivity. Managers frequently exhibited stereotypical and prejudiced views, particularly towards younger generations, indicating a lack of self-reflection and critical examination of biases.

In conclusion, the empirical findings highlighted the evolving demands on leadership in multigenerational teams, emphasizing the need for managers to embody humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity. These characteristics are crucial in addressing and accommodating a multigenerational team's perceived varied expectations and demands. However, the practical realization of these characteristics appeared inconsistent and challenging, which we explored under the overarching theme of leadership discrepancies and misalignments. Our results indicated that identified discrepancies are likely a result of cognitive biases and limited self-reflection. Addressing these discrepancies requires ongoing self-reflection and a genuine commitment to fostering an inclusive, reflective, and human-centric leadership approach.

### ***Is leadership affected by stereotypical thinking?***

Addressing the sub-question of this thesis, the research highlighted how leadership is significantly impacted by stereotypical and prejudiced thinking in addition to the effect of limited self-reflection. The direct answer to the sub-question is that stereotypes and prejudices do affect leadership. However, our research concluded that a lack of or limited reflectivity is the primary factor affecting leadership, and stereotypes, as well as prejudices, are rather a symptom highlighting this phenomenon.

While many managers acknowledged the presence of stereotypical perceptions in multigenerational teams on a general and impersonal level, almost none of the interviewees seemed to recognize their own. The research findings illustrated that managers' reflectivity level during the interviews frequently prevented them from offering an unbiased evaluation of workers from other generational cohorts than their own. Considering these unchallenged stereotypical thinking and limited self-reflection, we conclude that leadership is undeniably impacted by stereotypical thinking or images, often manifesting as preconceived notions about the capabilities or preferences of different generational cohorts. Associated risks highlight that when managers fail to reflect on their own stereotypes and prejudices critically, it can hamper

their ability to lead authentically, inclusively, and ultimately effectively. Considering the identified misalignment and the associated risks, we further conclude that overcoming stereotypical thinking through continuous self-reflection is crucial in ensuring that all generational cohorts are led fairly and respectfully. We will dive deeper into how this can be achieved in the section on practical implications.

### ***Critical Reflection on Empirical Findings***

We want to highlight that the mentioned discrepancies between the idealized characteristics of leadership and the behaviors observed do not ultimately signify poor leadership but highlight areas that could impair effective leadership if not recognized and addressed. It is vital to recognize that discrepancies between ideal and demonstrated leadership practices do not necessarily stem from a lack of effort but can arise from challenges in consistently embodying these ideals. Managers may excel in certain areas yet struggle in others due to personality, individual biases, past experiences, or a lack of skills necessary to effectively manage the complexities associated with a diverse team (Diddams & Chang, 2012). Moreover, it is important to highlight that there are several factors that possibly impede adequate reflection, including individual cognitive limitations and contextual conditions such as limited time for contemplation and rigid organizational structures (Castelli, 2016). Recognizing these barriers is crucial to remain realistic about the demands placed on leaders and acknowledging the challenges inherent in leadership.

Additionally, following Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), we want to underscore that leaders are human, not infallible heroes as often depicted in traditional leadership narratives. This human aspect is important to highlight to remind readers that leaders, like any other individual, are susceptible to tendencies toward stereotypical thinking, potentially subconsciously affecting their perceptions and actions. We acknowledge that observed discrepancies in leadership practices and disclosed unempathetic, unapproachable, or unaccepting leadership behaviors do not necessarily stem from intentional malice but can result from unconscious prejudices. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design provides only insights into isolated observations, not representing the entirety of the manager's leadership behavior. Acknowledging these factors and the humanity of leaders, underscores the importance of avoiding mythologizing them (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017).

## 6.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for practical guidance for organizations and managers.

To begin with, it is highlighted that we continuously adopted the word “manager“ when referring to those holding leadership positions, a conscious consideration inspired by the distinction between leadership and management by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016). While the terms are often used interchangeably, some scholars discern between the two and claim that leadership and management are intertwined yet distinct concepts within organizational frameworks (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Leadership, vital for navigating multigenerational team complexities, focuses on influence, meaning, and persuasion rather than merely executing predefined and administrative tasks associated with management. It involves inspiring and guiding teams with a vision, fostering a collective purpose, and motivating toward common goals (Northouse, 2021; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). In contrast, management revolves around formal authority and obligations, entailing the planning, organization, coordination, and control of resources and activities within an organization to achieve predetermined objectives (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Our research underscores that the distinction between leadership and management becomes particularly significant in today's fast-paced and diverse workplace. Considering the conscious choice of applying the word “manager” in this study, this decision was based on the nature of the manager's roles and tasks. Completing our research in a case company of hierarchical structure with a more traditionalist leadership understanding, the term manager represented the interviewee's role more appropriately. Now, considering the insights of the findings, a practical suggestion would be to emphasize the cultivation of leadership qualities alongside traditional management tasks. Our research suggests that providing time, resources, and space for leadership activities, as described above, would be advantageous and should even be prioritized in a multigenerational context to foster inspiration, motivation, and sense-making.

Another practical implication is to consider reflective leadership when managing multigenerational teams. Our research highlights the importance of managers challenging their own beliefs and considering alternative viewpoints. This practice is crucial in mitigating the negative impact of stereotypical, or even worse, prejudiced thinking. As highlighted above, we found a discrepancy between ideal and observed leadership behaviors and practices. Implementing reflective practices could help bridge the gap between idealized leadership

characteristics and actual behaviors, enhancing multigenerational teams' overall dynamics and performance. Further insights pertaining specifically to overcoming the discrepancy with reflective leadership can also be found in the thesis section “5.3. Bridging the Discrepancy”. Considering the general context of a multigenerational workforce, we found that leaders who are willing to challenge their individual entrenched beliefs are more likely to foster fair and inclusive leadership. Reflective leadership, in this regard, offers a comprehensive framework for addressing the inherent complexities of diverse workplaces in today's context (Gardner et al., 2005). It is characterized by proactive self-awareness and critical examination of stereotypes and biases, which fosters innovation, collaboration, a more respectful and inclusive workplace culture, and, ultimately, organizational effectiveness (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). By implementing policies that promote reflective practices, organizations can ensure that their managers continuously reassess their assumptions and strategies to align with the evolving dynamics of their teams.

### **6.3. Theoretical Contribution**

Firstly, this study contributes to the contemporary leadership discourse by exploring managers' perspectives on essential characteristics for managing multigenerational workforces. This research enriches our understanding of leadership, specifically in the context of multigenerational team dynamics. Specifically, examining a manager's point of view through both interviews and observations provides a comprehensive understanding of how they lead a multigenerational team.

Secondly, the empirical findings add to the theoretical leadership discourse by providing real-world examples and data on how managers perceive and handle generational diversity. In addition, we contribute to the broader discourse on workforce diversity by examining the intersection of multigenerational teams and leadership effectiveness.

Thirdly, our research critically views the existing leadership image and discourse, highlighting the gap between idealized leadership characteristics and practical behavior. Addressing the prevailing challenge of stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions in leadership, we provide a critical perspective that contributes to a better understanding of the barriers to effective leadership in multigenerational teams. In addition, we aimed to add a nuanced perspective to the leadership literature by discussing the inherent human limitations, such as biases and

stereotypical thinking. By doing so, our research challenges the traditional heroic portrayal of leaders, aligning with the demand of Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) call for a more realistic and feasible leader image.

#### **6.4. Reflexivity in the Research Process**

Now, in retrospect on the entire research, we want to acknowledge our role as qualitative researchers in the research process. Further insights into overarching research limitations can be found in section 3.8. of the methodology, referred to as “Research Limitation. “ We deemed early on that a high degree of reflexivity was fundamental, especially considering the research topic, investigating underlying and potentially unconscious stereotypes and prejudices. Reflexivity, a dual process of interpretation and reflection, entails a continuous self-examination and critical reflection on how these personal factors shape the research outcomes (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Especially the critical perspectives adopted required much reflexivity to not let our prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs unconsciously influence our research. Just as we addressed the issue of conscious or unconscious prejudice with the interviewed managers, we recognize that we, too, cannot detach ourselves from this issue during the research process. As a team of two researchers, we fostered reflexivity by challenging each other's assumptions and interpretations, thereby aiming to minimize the influence of personal biases and ensure a more objective and credible analysis. The collaborative approach enabled us to engage in discussions to reciprocally question our biases and perspectives, especially during the interpretation of data. Also, the triangular data collection supported us in ensuring that findings and discussions portray the data and not individual perceptions of us as researchers. From our point of view, this reflexive approach was integral in navigating the challenges of researching leadership dynamics and ensuring the findings were grounded in a thoughtful and self-aware research process.

#### **6.5. Future Research**

Considering methodological choices, several aspects would be worth considering in future research. First, future studies could benefit from a mixed methods approach to validate the qualitative findings with quantitative research and enhance the reliability of the results across different organizational and industry contexts. Another approach would be a comparative

analysis, in which the findings at hand would be compared with another organization or a control group. Secondly, longitudinal studies could add to the depth of the research by examining the long-term effects of reflective leadership practices on organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Moreover, further research is needed to enhance the studies generalizability. Generalizability would be enhanced by expanding the scope of research beyond our current sample size of eleven. Including a broader sample size would facilitate more comprehensive and representative findings and enhance the research by making the findings more reliable and valid. Additionally, a larger sample would capture a wider range of experiences and perspectives, providing a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics in multigenerational teams and potentially uncovering different facets of leadership that might not be visible in our current sample size.

When considering content-based optimizations, we would also find it appropriate to expand the sample beyond the current German representation. By incorporating diverse cultural viewpoints, the research could uncover how cultural contexts impact the effectiveness of various leadership approaches. This would provide even more enriching insights into the contemporary workplace, characterized by globalization, and provide a global perspective on the challenges and strategies for leading age-diverse teams.

Moreover, enriching the current findings with subordinates' perceptions would be interesting. Investigating the subordinates' points of view would provide complementary insights and allow a more holistic image of the contemporary demands on leadership. Investigating the subordinates' perspective in future research would provide valuable insights and contribute significantly to a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics in multigenerational teams. Investigating the subordinates' points of view would provide complementary insights and offer a more holistic view, validating and contrasting the findings from managers. This could explain the identified discrepancies between managerial intentions and actual outcomes, especially regarding empathy, approachability, and acceptance, in more depth.

## **6.6. Concluding Words**

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the complexities of leadership in multigenerational teams, emphasizing the importance of humanity, acceptance, and reflectivity in today's diverse work and leadership environment. By investigating specifically the discrepancies between idealized leadership qualities and actual practices revealed throughout the research process, we have contributed a more critical discourse on leadership. We conclude that addressing the discrepancy within leadership can enhance leadership's effectiveness and foster a workplace culture that values and leverages the unique contributions of all generational cohorts. Nonetheless, it is underscored that this requires ongoing efforts and commitment. The research as a whole reveals the importance of awareness and reflection on stereotypes and prejudices in leadership. It underscores the pivotal role of continuous self-reflection and a willingness to adapt to mitigate biases and foster an inclusive and human-centric work environment. In conclusion, we found that multigenerational teams are perceived to have many advantages and opportunities; however, how to lead them effectively to realize this potential remains a research field necessitating further research, especially in consideration of the continuously changing leadership demands.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. Appendix A: Overview of Definitions

**Acceptance:** This involves recognizing and valuing all team members' diverse perspectives and backgrounds within a multigenerational workforce.

**Generational Diversity:** The presence of multiple generations within the same workforce, each bringing different experiences, skills, and expectations to the organization.

**Humanity:** In the context of leadership, humanity refers to the quality of being compassionate, understanding, and respectful towards all team members.

**Leadership:** The dynamic process of influencing a group toward achieving a common goal. Leadership in the context of your study focuses on how managers adapt their strategies to lead and integrate a diverse range of generational cohorts effectively.

**Multigenerational Workforce:** A workplace environment that includes employees from several generations, each with distinct values, expectations, and work styles. This often includes Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z.

**Prejudices:** Preconceived biases toward individuals or groups, not based on reason or experience. They greatly affect leadership effectiveness, especially in multigenerational teams, by favoring certain groups, resulting in unfair treatment and lack of inclusivity.

**Reflection:** A process by which managers critically examine their own behaviors, beliefs, and the outcomes of their decisions. Reflection in leadership is crucial for continuous learning and adaptation, allowing managers to assess the effectiveness of their approaches in managing diverse teams and to make informed adjustments to enhance team cohesion and performance.

**Reflective Leadership:** Involves a leader's willingness to examine their own beliefs, behaviors, and biases critically. By engaging in self-reflection, leaders can adapt their approaches to meet employees' diverse needs and expectations, thereby potentially bridging the gap between ideal and actual leadership practices.

**Stereotypical Thinking:** The preconceived notions or generalized beliefs about specific groups or categories of people that can affect managerial decisions and team dynamics, particularly in diverse settings like multigenerational workplaces.

**8.2. Appendix B: List of Interviewees**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Interviewee Pseudonym</b>	<b>Hierarchical Level</b>	<b>Generational Affiliation</b>
1	Sarah	Manager	Generation X
2	Olivia	Director	Generation Y
3	Alex	Director	Generation X
4	Charlotte	Manager	Generation Y
5	Jacob	Manager	Generation Y
6	Henry	Manager	Generation Z
7	Sophie	Manager	Generation Z
8	William	Director	Boomer
9	Franz	Director	Generation X
10	Mia	Director	Boomer
11	David	Manager	Generation Z



### 8.3. Appendix C: Interview Guide

Interview Protocol	
Theme	Interview Questions
<p><b>Preface and preparatory steps in the Interview:</b></p> <p><i>Note: The preface does not illustrate the word for word conversation, instead it provides an overview of the topics addressed in the beginning of the interviews to establish a trust base with the respective other.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of us and the research (purpose, aim, content).</li> <li>• Guide through the data privacy measures and anonymity of all interviewees and the thesis, step ensures the obtaining of consent of each interviewee for transcription and recording of data and utilization of the statements in the thesis.</li> <li>• Clarification of potential questions.</li> </ul>	
Introductory Questions/ Background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What experiences in your professional journey have shaped your understanding of leadership?</li> <li>2. Are you in a leading role in your company?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. If so, how many employees are you managing and what age span is represented in your team?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Questions regarding Multi-generational Workforce	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Can you share your experiences of working with a multigenerational workforce?</li> <li>4. Does working in a multigenerational workforce impact your workday? If so, how?</li> <li>5. In your opinion, what are the potential strengths of a multigenerational workforce?</li> <li>6. In your opinion, what are the potential weaknesses associated with a multigenerational workforce?</li> </ol>
Questions regarding Leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. In your opinion what is good leadership?</li> <li>8. When managing the team, do you notice varying needs between subordinates and/ or different generations?</li> <li>9. In future, do you expect any leadership trends to become more relevant?</li> </ol>

<p>Questions regarding the relationship between leadership and Multigenerational Teams</p>	<p>10. What leadership challenges have you experienced/ do you expect when managing in a multigenerational team?</p> <p>11. In your experience, do stereotypes exist in a multigenerational workforce?</p> <p>11.1. If yes, could you please elaborate?</p> <p>12. When reflecting on your leadership, do you think belonging to a certain age group yourself is a potential for unconscious prejudices?</p> <p>12.1. If yes, could you please elaborate?</p> <p>13. Does the corporate hierarchy have an impact on the management of a multinational workforce? If so, how?</p> <p>14. In your opinion, what characteristics are essential to effectively manage a multigenerational team?</p> <p>15. Have you experienced an instance where leadership successfully bridged a generational gap?</p> <p>15.1. If yes, can you give an example?</p>
<p>Closing Question</p>	<p>Is there anything else you would like to add?</p>
<p><b>Closure of Interview:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanking Interviewee.</li> <li>• Clarification of any remaining questions/ remarks/ concerns.</li> </ul>	

#### 8.4. Appendix D: Statutory Declaration

We herewith declare that we have composed the present thesis ourselves and without using any other than the cited sources. Sentences or parts of sentences quoted literally are marked as such; other references with regard to the statement and scope are indicated by full details of the publication concerned. The thesis in the same or similar form has not been submitted to any examination body and has not been published. This thesis was not yet used in another examination or as a course performance.

Tossa, 19.05.2024



Philine Schmitz



Cara Paulina von Bothmer