



**Differences in Leadership Preferences and Levels of Narcissism Across Generations in
the South African Workplace: An Initial Investigation**

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With God, anything is possible.

Abstract

This study examined differences in leadership preferences and narcissism across three generations (Generations X, Y and Z). Based on most of the extant literature, both academic and popular, the expectation was that there would be significant differences across generations in their leadership preferences and levels of narcissism. A cross-sectional research design using an online survey obtained 230 responses (N = 230). Contrary to expectations, the research propositions were not supported; there were no significant differences across the generations on neither leadership preferences nor levels of narcissism. These unexpected findings are discussed with reference to recent research, aiming to inform organisational practices and generate dialogue for effectively managing generational diversity within organisations.

Keywords: Leadership, Generational Diversity, Narcissism, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, Multigenerational Workforce, South African Workplace

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Differences in Leadership Preferences and Levels of Narcissism Across Generations in the South African Workplace: An Initial Investigation

Modern organisations are becoming increasingly diverse, and globalisation is fast-tracking the need for such institutions to remain adept and competitive (Kraus, 2017). Today, leaders are presented with an added challenge; to effectively lead a multigenerational workforce (Bejtkovsky, 2016; Jonck et al., 2017; Kraus, 2017; Lester et al., 2012; Salvosa & Hechanova, 2021). At the same time, a younger generation has entered the workforce with a greater focus on self and is said to lack interpersonal skills (Bejtkovsky, 2016; Paris, 2014). Understandably a younger generation may disrupt the workplace, leading to increased conflict in the work setting if not managed appropriately (Bejtkovsky, 2016). As a result, managing a multigenerational workforce has become a rising topic of interest based on the assumption that generations differ (Kraus, 2017).

Generational cohort theory, developed and popularised by Inglehart (1977) and Strauss and Howe (1991), respectively, suggests that a generation is a social construction of groups of individuals born during a similar period (Lester et al., 2012). The idea of generation theory is based on past and present social comparisons (Winter & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, categorising individuals based on their birth year is also used as a tool to segment groups (Lappeman et al., 2020). Historical and social contexts purportedly influence these groups, and generations are differentiated upon these factors (Lester et al., 2012). As a result, some scholars have suggested that generational cohorts differ in the workplace because they have different characteristics, values, attitudes and behaviour (Deal et al., 2013). Moreover, these differences lead to different preferences in the work context, such as work values, including leadership (Kraus, 2017).

In addition to personal values, behaviour and attitudes shaping generational cohorts' preferences, narcissism also emerges as a potential factor that accounts for differences observed in generational cohorts (Berenson et al., 2017; Twenge et al., 2010). Specifically perceived rising levels of narcissism within the younger generational cohorts, like Generation Y (Giambatista et al., 2017). Essentially, narcissism is an inflated sense of self, which younger individuals are more likely to embody, given their experience of a more modern world (Giambatista et al., 2017). Whether generations differ in narcissism levels remains uncertain (Berenson et al., 2017; Wetzal et al., 2017). Though some studies remain steadfast that younger generations are more narcissistic than those older than them (Berenson et al., 2017; Giambatista et al., 2017).

However, much of the literature surrounding generations lack empirical evidence due to the rise of popular culture, resulting in criticisms of the theory and its relevance in social science (Lester et al., 2012; Sessa et al., 2007; Singh & Gupta, 2015). Nonetheless, it is proposed that organisations must acknowledge these differences to maintain levels of engagement and communication throughout their places of work (Deal et al., 2013). Moreover, acknowledging generational diversity can improve the modern-day workforce in the same way that recognising race and gender diversity has allowed organisations to evolve and adopt more inclusive practices (Bejtkovsky, 2016; Singh & Gupta, 2015). Thus, an understanding of the generations can improve organisational processes such as developing tailored recruitment and retention strategies, succession planning, as well as the ability to handle intergenerational conflict appropriately (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

The current workforce comprises four generations, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and those old enough to work in Generation Z (Louw & Steyn, 2021). Despite the current composition of the workforce, Baby Boomers are slowly exiting the workforce as they near retirement (Boveda & Metz, 2016), while Generation Z is entering the workforce as the newest employees to join organisations alongside their experienced colleagues (Kraus, 2017). Again, diversity of this kind is likely to influence various aspects of an organisation, from internal processes to external stakeholders (Williams, 2016).

However, with this diversity comes diverse perspectives that could benefit organisations' decision-making, but these differences may cause tension in the workplace as each generation has different needs to which organisations and leaders alike must adapt (Dulin, 2008; Mencl & Lester, 2014). As the different generations have different views of leaders and leadership (Sessa et al., 2007). Hence the need to better understand generational differences and for organisational leaders to develop more flexible leadership behaviours to suit better a multigenerational workforce to aid in achieving organisational objectives (Dulin, 2008; Salvosa & Hechanova, 2021). Therefore, emphasising the need to acknowledge generational diversity to remedy conflict within organisations.

Thus, examining generational differences in Organisational Psychology is relevant because it further develops diversity and provides insight and an understanding of generations. Specifically in identifying how employees prefer to be led, amongst other work preferences (Kraus, 2017). Furthermore, an investigation into generations and preferred leadership styles provides a benchmark for leaders to understand better their employees and their preferences (Kraus, 2017). Kull et al. (2019) defined leadership preferences as something influenced by

societal values and norms. Moreover, drawing from implicit leadership theory, an individual mentally composes their ideal leader, including the values, attributes and behaviour the leader should possess (Gruda & Kafetsios, 2022). This mental composition of a leader forms the basis of an individual's leadership preferences (Gruda & Kafetsios, 2022).

Research Aim and Question

This initial investigation aims to contribute empirical evidence to identify whether quantifiable differences are present among three generations, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z, concerning their leadership preferences. Particularly their preference for a specific leadership style, namely, transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership. Moreover, it was posited that younger generations are more narcissistic and self-focused than older generations. Therefore, a secondary investigation into the rising levels of narcissism among generations was conducted. Therefore, the research question is posed: Are leadership preferences different across the three generations, and are levels of narcissism rising among them?

Dissertation Structure

The current study is divided into four sections: The literature review, method, results and discussion. The first section aims to outline of the literature about the study. The following section describes the chosen research approach and provides detail about the research process and the measures used to assess the variables of interest. This section offers further insight into the ethical procedure, survey development, data collection and data cleaning process, and the analysis undertaken in the current study. Here, more insight into the sample demographics is uncovered. After that, the statistical analyses are documented, and the study results are presented. In the final section, the discussion is presented, detailing the findings and implications of the study at hand as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research are put forth. Ultimately, the concluding remarks of the study are presented.

Literature Review

Literature on generations, leadership and narcissism were reviewed as the variables under investigation. Furthermore, a specific leadership model is presented upon which this study is based. Finally, generations in South Africa are introduced, taking into account historical factors that influenced the society as it is known today. Propositions are then put forth.

Information Search Strategy

A general information search on leadership and generational cohorts was conducted using UCT Library's Primo search engine and Google Scholar. The broad search terms were "leadership", "generations", "generational cohorts", "Generation X", "Generation Y", "Millennials", "Generation Z", "Multigenerational", and "Narcissism". The search terms were used in several ways, with the addition of other words. Thereafter, databases such as PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and PsycTESTS were consulted, specifically for using APA journal articles. Other search platforms included Web of Science, JSTOR and EBSCOhost. The information search spanned the period of February 2022 to December 2022.

Leadership Preferences

Leadership has been studied in social and behavioural sciences for several years and is supported by empirical and theoretical evidence (Steffens & Haslam, 2022). Unfortunately, literature about generations and their leadership preferences, underpinned by theoretical evidence remains scant (Arsenault, 2004; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). By understanding leadership, scholars and practitioners can to effect change in organisations to improve leader effectiveness (Steffens & Haslam, 2022).

A leadership preference is an individual or follower's liking of a specific leadership style or, simply, a leadership style that is chosen over another (Ehrhart, 2012; Salehzadeh, 2017). Followers construct this preference based on what they believe an ideal leader is (Gruda & Kafetsios, 2022; Schneider & Littrell, 2003). Concerning generational cohorts, these preferences stem from different values, attitudes and historical events that inform feelings toward authority (Arsenault, 2004).

Despite the limited empirical evidence, younger generations prefer leadership that is centred upon dependability, support and trust (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). As opposed to task-focused leadership (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Furthermore, studies suggest that each generational cohort has different expectations of the workplace and, subsequently, different preferences of how they would like to be led (Lester et al., 2012; Williams & Turnbull, 2015).

Full-Range Leadership Model

The full-range leadership model consists of transformational and transactional leadership styles (Bass & Avolio, 1997) and is a well-established leadership theory (Fukushige & Spicer, 2011; Haddon et al., 2015). The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is considered to be the most widely used instrument to measure transformational and transactional

leadership (Eagly et al., 2003).

A non-leadership style is also included in the full-range leadership model, known as laissez-faire (Fukushige & Spicer, 2011; Michel et al., 2011). Bass and Avolio's leadership model considers the impact of all leadership types on a continuum from the most effective (transformational) to the least influential (laissez-faire) leadership styles, with transactional leadership at the midpoint (Xirasagar et al., 2005). Within this model, each leadership style's subdimensions are discussed below. This theory of leadership is known as the full-range leadership model (Avolio et al., 1999; Michel et al., 2011).

Transformational leadership is centred around leaders motivating followers and encouraging followers to think beyond themselves, while transactional leadership is geared toward a contingent exchange process between a leader and follower (Michel et al., 2011). Furthermore, transformational leadership builds on transactional leadership by raising followers' maturity (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Four behaviours are classified under transformational leadership in the full-range model of leadership that is measured using the MLQ. Namely, idealised influence, inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Fukushige & Spicer, 2011). Transactional leadership includes three behaviours which are the contingent reward, passive management-by-exception, and active management-by-exception (Fukushige & Spicer, 2011; Michel et al., 2011). In contrast, no other behaviours are categorised under laissez-faire. It is known as laissez-faire. Under this model, it is assumed that all leaders possess elements of each style to some extent (Avolio & Bass, 2002). However, transformational and transactional leadership styles are often at the forefront of leadership in organisations, and oftentimes the most influential leaders embody characteristics of both transformational and transactional leadership styles (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wu et al., 2022).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the most well-known and widely used approaches to drive an organisation, or individual, toward fulfilling their purpose (Northouse, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). Often characterised as charismatic, transformational leaders inspire individuals, encouraging them toward self-actualisation and are concerned about the interests of others (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Northouse, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). Moreover, transformational leaders seek to influence and motivate followers to achieve more than they set to accomplish (Northouse, 2004).

Upon reviewing transformational leadership, the definitions provided for the

subdimensions of transformational leadership were sometimes unclear as distinctions between the different dimensions could not be made (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). For example, a theoretical difference between the charisma and inspirational motivation subdimensions are often mistaken for each other (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). The four behaviours, or factors, of transformational leadership, are discussed below.

The first factor of transformational leadership is idealised influence, often referred to as charisma. A follower identifies with this attribute because this leader upholds ethical principles, acts as a role model and can be depended upon (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Northouse, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). This behaviour shows leaders' emotional appeal toward their followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Furthermore, followers have high regard, respect and trust for these leaders (Northouse, 2004).

Secondly, inspirational motivation is characterised as the ability to inspire recognition and confidence in followers and assign meaning to tasks (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). Likewise, leaders with inspirational motivation articulate their expectations to encourage individuals to be a part of an organisation's vision (Northouse, 2004). However, not without challenging individuals to pursue more meaningful goals (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Thereafter, intellectual stimulation is the degree to which a leader encourages creative thinking to solve problems, challenge assumptions, and value their followers' input (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). Finally, individual consideration is the extent to which a leader demonstrates individualised support and concern for followers' wellbeing (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wu et al., 2022). As demonstrated, the elements that comprising of transformational leadership are similar, but each contributes differently to this leadership style.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is centred around the exchange of resources and is commonly observed at many levels within organisations (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Northouse, 2004). This leadership style is classified into two factors, contingent reward and management by exception. The contingent reward is the manner in which a leader clarifies expectations and rewards individuals for task fulfilment (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Additionally, management by exception is generally considered as the corrective action taken by a leader based on the exchange results of the leader-follower relationship (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). There is an active and passive element of this characteristic. Active leaders foresee problematic behaviour and correct behaviour prior to incidents occurring, while a passive leaders embody a reactive approach and address behaviour after an incident occurs (Judge &

Piccolo, 2004). However, the measure used in this study measures passive and active management by exception as a combined element per Northouse's (2004) suggestion.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is the absence of leadership and is therefore considered non-leadership style (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). It is also the most passive form of leadership (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Some of the behaviours include; avoiding responsibility, absenteeism, delayed decision-making, and not being proactive enough to solve problems (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Furthermore, a follower's development and well-being are not prioritised under this leadership style, as is with a leader who conforms to transformational or transactional leadership styles (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Therefore, leaders who embrace the laissez-faire leadership style can sometimes be to a follower's detriment, and the organisation's due to the inefficient display of behaviours (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021; Wong & Giessner, 2018). For example, it was found that a negative relationship exists between laissez-faire leadership and job satisfaction (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021). Moreover, some individuals may perceive a laissez-faire approach as threatening to their personal goals and needs, particularly individuals who values interpersonal relationships (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021). Although laissez-faire is classified into the full-range leadership model, little literature focuses on laissez-faire compared to transformational and transactional leadership (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021).

Generations

A generation is a collective of individuals living about the same time who experience life similarly (Becton et al., 2014). Each generational cohort is assumed to be differentiated by their shared birth years over a period of approximately 20 years (Becton et al., 2014). Although, there is no definitive range of birth years segmenting generations (Becton et al., 2014; Louw & Steyn, 2021). Naturally, some individuals are born at either the beginning or the end year of each cohort; this is known as the cusp effect (Kraus, 2017). These individuals are likely to experience significant life events in one generation yet are termed another (Kraus, 2017). The current study considers the following cohort segmentation: Generation X (1965 – 1979), Generation Y (1980 – 1996) and Generation Z (1997 - Present) (Louw & Steyn, 2021).

Focusing on these generations that are currently in the workforce, each cohort is assumed to be differentiated according to their values, attitude, behaviours, and ideas of the workplace (Becton et al., 2014; Jonck et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2015; Salvosa & Hechanova,

2021; Stevanin et al., 2019). For example, Generation X views self-achievement and development as concurrent event and prefer working in silos (Rodriguez et al., 2003; Yu & Miller, 2005). Furthermore, Generation X and Generation Y both tend toward being more self-focused and regulated by self-need, but Generation Y is even more so than Generation X (Twenge et al., 2010; Yu & Miller, 2005). The focus on self and independence becomes even more apparent in Generation Z as a self-starting generation who plans for their future (Maloni et al., 2019). Table 1 summarises some of the characteristics of each generation.

It is apparent that Generation X and Generation Y, also known as Millennials, have been in the workforce for several years, whereas Generation Z has only recently entered the workforce (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). Moreover, Generation Y comprises the most the workforce and is likely to occupy leadership roles and may even lead the generation before them (Easton & Steyn, 2022). A multigenerational workforce already exists, further diversifying organisations with the addition of younger employees entering the labour market (Geysers & Geldenhuys, 2019).

As a result, intergenerational conflict is becoming a prevalent organisational issue, particularly affecting team dynamics and information sharing (Williams, 2016). Therefore, leaders and supervisors within these organisations must be able to address these diversity issues to maintain productivity levels and minimise conflict and high employee turnover (Bejtkovsky, 2016; Kraus, 2017).

As Lyons and Kuron (2014) suggested, generational differences are valid, and a necessary form of diversity and leaders should acknowledge it. From an Organisational Psychology perspective, segmenting employees according to birth years or generational cohorts becomes a framework for understanding the subcultures within these cohorts (Lappeman et al., 2020).

Table 1

Summary of Generational Cohort Characteristics

Generational Cohort	Characteristics
Generation X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynical • Prefers informal work • Challenges authority • Autonomous • Values direct feedback from leaders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-life balance is important. However, personal or other non-work life aspects take priority
Generation Y	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technologically savvy • Able to multi-task • Team-oriented • Value leaders whom they can relate with • Desires constant feedback from leaders • Strives for work-life balance
Generation Z	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More technologically advanced • Focused • Highly ambitious and self-confident • Prefers group work • Higher tolerance for diversity

Sources: (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Deal et al., 2013; Geysler & Geldenhuys, 2019; Grubbs et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2012)

Generations in South Africa

Generational cohort theory in South Africa is primarily led according to the American sense of generational cohort theory (Lappeman et al., 2020). However, defining moments of a generation, such as education, access to technology and living conditions, differ from country to country, especially in a developing country like South Africa (Lappeman et al., 2020). As a result, research on generational differences, specifically in the South African environment, is scarce, as most literature is geared toward the Westernised context, thus reflecting the American experience (Jonck et al., 2017; Salvosa & Hechanova, 2021). As a result, biases may negatively influence the characteristics of South African and other non-Western cohorts (Lappeman et al., 2020). For example, a South African born in 1980 may not share the same life experience as someone born in the same year in Japan (Lappeman et al., 2020).

As previously mentioned, language and dates surrounding generational cohorts are ambiguous and even more so in the South African environment, given the country's apartheid past (Lappeman et al., 2020). However, Lappeman et al. (2020) proposed a new age segmentation for South Africans and identified significant historical events that could differentiate South African generations. Such as apartheid (1948), the Soweto uprising (1976), the first democratic elections (1994) and the #feesmustfall movement (2015) (Lappeman et al.,

2020). See Table 2 for the proposed South African segmentation. Despite the effort, assigning collective names to South African cohorts is complicated. For example, the term “Born Free” is associated with different birth years, 1980 and 1994, both before and after the first democratic elections in 1994 (Lappeman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, generations are continuously expanding upon generations before them, which should be noted as an organic process (Lappeman et al., 2020). Mostly the Transition Generation and the Generation Second Wave are considered as South Africa’s youth, and they remain the most vulnerable in the South African labour market (Stats SA, n.d.). The highest unemployment rate is seen between those aged 15 to 24 years old, though these statistics vary according to education level (Stats SA, n.d.).

Table 2

Lappeman et al.’s (2020) Proposed New South African Age Segmentation

Birth year	Name	Description
Pre-1933	Pre-apartheid Generation	Racial segregation existed but was not legislated.
1933-1960	Apartheid Generation	Early and core apartheid, before the Sharpsville massacre in 1961.
1961-1979	Struggle Generation	An effort to pressure government to abandon apartheid regimes.
1980-1999	Transition Generation	Towards the latter part of apartheid. The transition into democracy.
2000-2020	Generation Second Wave	The second birth of youth into a democratised South Africa

Leadership Preferences, Generations and Narcissism

As generations experience different life or historical events and other defining events, these moments are known to influence, at a generational level, a person’s likes or preferences for later things to come (Kull et al., 2019). For example, one’s attitude toward work values or how someone would like to be led, i.e., what characteristics their ideal leader must have.

Leadership preferences can differ across individuals and time, where internal and external factors can influence these preferences (Foti et al., 2012; Heinitz et al., 2005). Furthermore, values, attitudes, and beliefs differ across generations, and these are assumed to influence how each generation perceives what constitutes effective leadership, which ultimately lends itself to differences in leadership preferences across generations (Farak et al., 2009; Sessa et al., 2007; Williams & Turnbull, 2015).

Kull et al. (2019) noted that leadership preferences arise from values and norms. Each generational cohort is assumed to have its belief system (Jonck et al., 2017). The characteristic differences between generations suggest that different generational cohorts of employees will respond better to different leadership styles and maximise their productivity under their preferred leadership style (Fukushige & Spicer, 2011; Moore & Krause, 2021; Yu & Miller, 2005). It was found that Baby Boomers adhere to the chain of command, needing their leaders to direct them toward achieving organisational goals and are loyal to their organisation (Yu & Miller, 2005) (Rodriguez et al., 2003; Twenge et al., 2010). Generation X has a lesser need for leadership than Baby Boomers, given their higher degree of autonomy and flexibility (Yu & Miller, 2005). Generation Y prefers a leader who is a mentor but also a friend, needing their leaders to show them the processes of the work environment and opportunities for growth (Campbell & Patrician, 2020; Dulin, 2008; Williams & Turnbull, 2015). Similarly, Generation Z prefers a leader who is a mentor, promotes equality and has high levels of emotional intelligence (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021).

Employee's work values indicate their leadership preferences and attitudes, and behaviours (Twenge et al., 2010). These values are a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic values (Twenge et al., 2010). Baby Boomers centre themselves around their job and job stability, thus prioritising work over life (Twenge et al., 2010; Yu & Miller, 2005). Whereas Generation X sees work as a resource to live life, suggesting that a work-life balance is important (Twenge et al., 2010; Yu & Miller, 2005). Generation Y emphasises their work-life balance and deems this balance critical to living a comfortable life (Twenge et al., 2010). However, Generation Y also wants to succeed in their organisation. Thus career progression and job security are essential for them and receiving leadership support (Maloni et al., 2019). While there are few empirical studies investigating Generation Z's work values, some evidence suggests that Generation Z values flexible career paths and competitive salaries (Maloni et al., 2019; Zehetner et al., 2020). Additionally, in-person communication is essential for Generation Z, needing their leaders to provide frequent feedback on their performance (Gabriellova &

Buchko, 2021; Zehetner et al., 2020). However, some values are shared across generations (Kraus, 2017; Yu & Miller, 2005). Such as honesty, because all generations believe this to be essential for all leaders to possess (Sessa et al., 2007). For example, idealised influence should be an attribute that is valued across generations since it is characterised by upholding ethical principles.

Generation Y prefers the relationship-oriented leadership style (Yu & Miller, 2005), similar to the transformational leadership style in the full-range leadership model. Moreover, Generation Y and Z prefer a courteous relationship between leader and follower (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa et al., 2007). Furthermore, Generation X prefer an equal relationship between a leader and follower and appreciates change (Arsenault, 2004; Sessa et al., 2007). Easton and Steyn (2022) classified Generation Y as those born between 1980 and 2000, in the focus of the study includes the Generation Z cohort. Here, it is evident that no apparent boundaries exist between different generations as this time frame includes the current study's youngest cohort, Generation Z. Nonetheless, Easton and Steyn (2022) convey that Generation Y will prefer a leadership style that is relational based, charismatic and meaningful. Furthermore, they posit that Generation Y will have little appreciation for transactional leadership (Easton & Steyn, 2022).

Moving from Generation X to Generation Z, the focus on the self becomes more evident, perhaps narcissistic, which is further perpetuated by popular culture (Twenge et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2021). For example, Generation Y is commonly described as confident and wanting to feel special. Some associate these characteristics with high levels of narcissism (Keener, 2020; Sternberg, 2012). Despite the self-focus, younger generations embrace diversity and equality more than the older generations (Grubbs et al., 2019). Narcissism is the inflated sense of self, characterised by excessive behavioural traits like arrogance, entitlement and the need for attention (Steffens & Haslam, 2022). As a general observation among younger individuals, this degree of narcissism can be held by a healthy population in varying degrees and would not be classified as a personality disorder (Wood et al., 2021). This type of narcissism is known as trait narcissism (McCain & Campbell, 2018). Narcissists seek attention in the most general sense; however, some behaviours of narcissists include bragging and engaging in downward social comparison (McCain & Campbell, 2018). The bias narrative assumes that younger individuals are more narcissistic than older individuals, mainly due to popular culture (Wetzel et al., 2017). Furthermore, narcissists wish to affiliate themselves with affluent individuals to maintain their inflated self-view (McCain & Campbell, 2018).

Unlike popular culture and anecdotal evidence, empirical research is needed to determine if generation narcissism is increasing (Wood et al., 2021) since there are mixed reviews on whether or not narcissism levels have increased with younger generations (Wetzel et al., 2017).

Propositions:

- 1a: Gen X's leadership preferences differs from Gen Y and Gen Z's.
- 1b: There is no difference between Gen Y and Gen Z leadership preferences.
- 2: There are significant levels of narcissism in Gen Z compared to Gen X.

Method

This chapter seeks to explain the method used to investigate the aim of the research: to identify differences in leadership preferences and levels of narcissism across generations in the South African workplace. The sub-sections address research design, participants and procedure, statistical analysis, measures, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study utilised a cross-sectional research design. This research design often seeks to measure outcomes and determinants or describe characteristics of a population rather than assess causality (Spector, 2019; Wang & Cheng, 2020). In line with the study's aim, this design is typically helpful for establishing preliminary evidence for a more advanced investigation, which is beyond the scope of this study (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Additionally, this design is commonly used in organisational research (Spector, 2019), further clarifying the use of the chosen design.

A quantitative approach was adopted, and a self-administered online survey was used to collect data at a single time point to ensure that the current study was completed within a year. Moreover, a cross-sectional design ensures that ethical dilemmas are almost non-existent, few costs are involved in the research process, and such research designs are quick to conduct (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Thus, an online survey was chosen for comfort, user-friendliness and ease, as it could be widely distributed and eliminated the need for extensive data entry (Weigold et al., 2013).

Participants and Procedure

The total number of participants was 230 individuals ($n = 230$) (160 female; 60 male; 4 other; and six undisclosed) from South African organisations across different industries, namely the fishing, financial and retail industries. The self-administered online survey collected data between July 2022 and September 2022. The survey included questions relating to demographic information, leadership and narcissism. A non-probability convenience sampling approach was employed in this study (Scholtz, 2021), based on the following inclusion criteria: birth year of participants had to be between the following years, 1965 to 1979, 1980 to 1996 or from 1997 onwards.

On average, participants were born in 1987 ($SD = 12.16$), suggesting that the average age of participants in the study was 35 years old in 2022. The oldest participant was 57 years old, while the youngest person was only 19. Therefore, clarity was obtained regarding the birth years of the Generation Z cohort, making the birth year range between 1997 – 2003, specifically for the current study. Fifty-two participants were classified as Generation X ($n = 52$), 87 as Generation Y ($n = 87$) and 66 as Generation Z ($n = 66$). The remaining 25 participants did not indicate a birth year and were not assigned to a generational cohort.

The sample included 80.1% permanent employees, 15.2% non-permanent employees, and 4.3% who did not indicate their employment status. The majority of the sample declared Coloured as their race (49.6%), while the remainder declared White (22.2%), African (13.9%), Indian (6.1%), Asian (.4%), and some participants preferred not to answer (5.2%). Noticeably, an overrepresentation of Coloured participants was recorded compared to the other self-declared race groups, possibly impacting the results.

Ethical clearance was granted from the University of Cape Town's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee (REC 2022/06/006). Once ethical approval was obtained, the electronic survey was developed in Qualtrics, and the link was distributed via email to the respective organisations and LinkedIn. The response from email survey requests was not as comprehensive as expected, and as a secondary option, the researcher relied on the professional network LinkedIn to assist with increased responses. As a result, the response rate was undeterminable due to the uncertainty of the number of people who had access to the LinkedIn link once the post was live (Deal et al., 2013). However, using Qualtrics, it was evident that 285 respondents attempted to take the survey, though 55 participants failed to complete the survey resulting in a total usable sample size of 230, as previously mentioned.

Statistical Analysis

After the data was imported from Qualtrics, it was cleaned and coded in Excel. The data was then exported into different statistical packages for analysis. Initial data analysis was conducted in both IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics Version 28 and R. However, the majority of the analysis was conducted in SPSS. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was computed in R, using Lavaan version 0.6-12 (Rosseel, 2012), as this function is not supported in SPSS. Secondly, Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted in SPSS with principal axis factoring as the extraction method. Thereafter, the reliabilities of the scales were computed using Cronbach's alpha. The descriptive statistics were also computed in SPSS to understand the data better. Finally, the propositions were tested using ANOVA and independent samples *t*-tests to test if differences between the generational cohorts exist.

Measures

Leadership Preferences

Leadership preferences were measured using an adapted version of the MLQ initially developed by Bass and Avolio (2004). The MLQ-6S, developed and modified by Northouse (2004), was used in this study as other versions of the MLQ are protected by copyright. In addition, the MLQ has been empirically tested for its reliability and validity by studies investigating leadership preferences between groups (Brain & Lewis, 2004; Fukushige & Spicer, 2011). The MLQ measures different leadership styles independently in a single measurement instrument (Batista-Foguet et al., 2021; Xirasagar et al., 2005). The leadership styles are transformational, transactional and laissez-faire. This version of the MLQ, the MLQ-6S, previously demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability ($\alpha = .87$) and ($\alpha = .78$) in previous studies (Moon et al., 2019; Waglay et al., 2020). This 21-item scale, rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = frequently, if not always; was used to determine leadership preferences of generational cohorts. The wording of the items was changed slightly for the study without changing its meaning. Items were introduced to make participants reflect on the leadership qualities they desire in a leader. For example, "I make others feel good to be around me" was introduced as "I prefer a leader who makes others feel good to be around them" and "I tell others what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work" was presented as "I prefer a leader who tells others what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work".

Narcissism

A brief measure of the Dark Triad (DT) was used to assess narcissism, known as the Dirty Dozen. This scale consists of 12 items, rated on a nine-point Likert scale, ranging from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”. Notably, only the narcissism items ($n = 4$) were used in this study. Example items include “I tend to want others to admire me” and “I tend to expect special favours from others.” Previous studies, such as Pechorro et al. (2021) and Kawamoto et al. (2020), reported adequate levels of internal consistency; $\alpha = .74$ and $\alpha = .79$ respectively.

Current Manager’s Leadership Style

Participants were asked to indicate their current manager’s leadership style on a single-item measure. A short explanation of the three different leadership styles, transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership, was given. Participants could only select one leadership style they felt best represented their current manager’s leadership style.

Demographic Variables

Single-item questions were developed to measure the demographics of the research participants, such as gender (1 = male; 2 = female; 3 = prefer not to say and 4 = other), job title, job tenure, employment status (1 = permanent; 2 = non-permanent), and birth year. Participants were then assigned to their respective generational cohorts based on their birth year (1 = Gen X, 2 = Gen Y, 3 = Gen Z).

Ethical Considerations

A procedure was followed to obtain ethical approval from the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. Firstly, ethical approval had to be obtained before data collection could commence. Thereafter, the survey was developed, and upon distribution, a brief description of the study was given to participants. Thereafter, participants were asked to indicate their consent to partake in the study by ticking a box. All recorded responses were anonymous and confidential and used solely for the purpose of this study. Participants were also informed that they might withdraw from the survey at any time without facing any consequences. All recorded responses were stored on a password-protected laptop of a single user to uphold the integrity of the data.

Results

This section presents the statistical analyses used to assess the propositions of this study. First, an initial analysis was conducted to test the psychometric properties of the measures using multivariate statistical tools. Thereafter, reliability and descriptive statistics are

discussed. Finally, the results of the ANOVA and independent *t*-tests are presented as the primary investigation of the current study.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a multivariate statistical tool often used in psychological research to test the construct validity of a set of observed variables amongst its latent constructs (Avolio et al., 1999; Jackson et al., 2009; Pallant, 2016).

Before running CFA, assumptions regarding sample size, missing data, normality, linearity and outliers were tested (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). According to research, the sample size must be greater than 200 ($N = 230$), though greater sample sizes are preferable for such statistical techniques (Kyriazos, 2018). Missing values were accounted for by using listwise deletion (Jackson et al., 2009; Rosseel, 2012). Histograms and P-P Plots were inspected to assess and confirm normality and linearity (See Appendix A). Finally, box plots were examined for outliers, for which there were none.

CFA was run to assess the factors of the full-range leadership using the MLQ-6S. Four models were assessed for a comparative evaluation to determine the best-fitting model (See Table 3). To assess the model fit, the following criteria was applied (Janse van Rensburg et al., 2022):

- The comparative fit index (CFI) $> .90$.
- The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values $< .05$ (.08 is acceptable).
- The standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) values $< .05$ (.08 is acceptable).

Table 3

Overall CFA Fit Indices for the Various Models Analysed

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Null model	1165.69	210	5.55	-	-	-
M1. 1 Factor model ^a	545.93	189	2.88	.63	.09	.09
M2. 2 Factor model: TFL & TAL	317.87	134	2.37	.77	.08	.07
M3. 3 Factor model: TFL, TAL & LF	435.67	166	2.62	.70	.09	.09
M4. 7 Factor model: II, IS, IM, IC, CR, MBE, LF	407.50	168	2.42	.75	.08	.08

Note. ^a All items loaded onto one global factor: leadership. TFL = transformational, TAL = transactional, LF = laissez-faire, II = idealised influence, IS = intellectual stimulation, IM = inspirational motivation, IC = individual consideration, CR = contingent reward, MBE = management-by-exception. $N = 225$ after listwise deletion. All chi-square statistics were significant ($p = .000$).

A two-factor model of transformational and transactional leadership (M2) was tested and saw the best model fit compared to M1, M3 and M4. The transformational factor includes the following indicators: Idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. The transactional factor comprises contingent reward and management by exception. The CFI reported in this model is .77, which is the closest to the proposed cut-off value of .90 compared to the other models. The RMSEA values across M2 and M4 fell within the accepted value of .08. Similarly, the SRMR values of M2 and M4 were within the accepted range of .05 and .08. Though the SRMR for M2 was marginally better at a value of .07. It is acknowledged that none of the four models met the above criteria for a well-fitting CFA model, which sometimes occurs even with established theory and scales alike, such as the MLQ (Knekta et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the relatively small sample size could have impacted the CFA results, as CFA is generally a large sample procedure (Kyriazos, 2018). Nonetheless, M2 is presented as the better-fitting model. Despite the low CFI value, the RMSEA and SRMR values demonstrated an acceptable fit.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used to determine the smallest number of factors that provide the simplest explanation of the covariation among the observed variables (Watkins, 2018). In Organisational Psychology, these factors are deemed to be unobservable accounts of behaviour, which are reflected in the scores recorded on the observed variable (Watkins, 2018).

A principal axis factor analysis (FA) was conducted on the four narcissism items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value ($KMO = .72$) confirmed the sampling adequacy for FA as it is above the minimum value of .5 (Field, 2018). Moreover, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, with $p < .001$, further verifying the factor analysis (Field, 2018). Eigenvalues were obtained in the initial analysis of the data. The analysis showed that one factor was extracted with an eigenvalue over 1 per Kaiser's criterion and explained 46% of the variance (Field, 2018). Each of the factor loadings is presented in Table 4 below. The scree plot, as shown in Appendix B, clearly shows a point of inflection that justifies retaining only one factor. As seen below, item 4 has the lowest factor loading, which it is above the recommended cut-off value of .30 (Pallant,

2016). However, this is not concerning as factor loadings are sensitive to sample size, and item 4 was; therefore it was retained (Field, 2018).

Table 4

Factor Loadings for Narcissism

		Factor 1
Item 1	I tend to want others to admire me	.713
Item 2	I tend to want others to pay attention to me	.744
Item 3	I tend to seek prestige or status	.754
Item 4	I tend to expect special favours from others	.458
Eigenvalue		2.34
% Variance explained		46%

Note. $N = 230$. The extraction method was principal axis factoring. No rotation required as only one factor was extracted. All factors were above the recommended value of .40 (Field, 2018).

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the transformational and transactional leadership scales. This measure is commonly reported in the organisational sciences when multiple items are measured and Cronbach's alpha is referred to as "internal consistency" reliability (Bonett & Wright, 2015). A scale is considered internally consistent, or reliable, if its alpha value is .7 or greater (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2016).

Transformational leadership consisted of 12 items that showed an adequate level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .74$). The corrected item-total correlations were above .3, except for the "enables others to think about old problems in new ways" item that had a corrected item-total correlation of .205. Though, Streiner and Norman (2003) suggested that a value of .20 is acceptable. Therefore, all item-total correlations for the transformational scale were retained and deemed acceptable within the ranges of .205 and .474.

Transactional leadership consisted of 6 items and showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$). The corrected item-total correlations fell within the range of .267 and .573. The item "as long as things are working, I do not try to change anything" had the lowest item-total correlation of .267, though it was retained.

Narcissism consisted of 4 items with a suitable level of reliability ($\alpha = .76$). The item-total correlations were above .4, and ranged between .407 to .642 (Pallant, 2016). Hereby suggesting that narcissism was a reliable measure.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics were analysed after the initial psychometric analyses (See Table 5). The minimum score for the transformational leadership scale was 3 and the maximum score was 5. The mean was above the midpoint of the 5-point scale, suggesting that on average, respondents could frequently indicate their preferred transformational leadership behaviours ($M = 4.32$; $SD = .47$). The transactional leadership scale had a minimum score of 2 and a maximum score of 5. The mean score was in the range of the midpoint, which indicated that participants had a moderate preference for transactional leadership behaviours ($M = 3.95$; $SD = .67$). The reported minimum and maximum score for narcissism was 1 and 9 respectively. On average, the respondents scored below the midpoint of the 9-point scale, implying that low levels of narcissism were reported across the sample ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.71$). Participants were also asked to indicate the leadership style of their current manager or supervisor, using a single item response measure. The mean result indicated that the current leadership style of respondents' manager or supervisor is typically that of the transformational leadership style ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.71$).

The skewness value gives an indication of the symmetry of the distribution while kurtosis shows the 'peakedness' of the distribution (Pallant, 2016). The transformational and transactional leadership variables are negatively skewed, suggesting that the scores are more clustered to the right while narcissism scores are clustered to the left due to its positive value (Pallant, 2016). The positive kurtosis value of transformational leadership indicate a heavy-tailed distribution whereas transactional leadership and narcissism are light-tailed distributions as they are negative values (Field, 2018).

As seen in Table 5 below, there are missing values pertaining to narcissism and leadership style. Though, it is regular to observe missing values within the social sciences (Acock, 2005). To address this issue, listwise, or case-wise deletion was employed in this study as it is the most common solution to missing values, and is the most conservative given the small sample size of this study (Acock, 2005). No other method was employed to address these missing values, such as mean substitution.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable Scale*

Variable	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational Leadership	230	3	5	4.32	.47	-.73	.67
Transactional Leadership	230	2	5	3.95	.67	-.39	-.25
Narcissism	225	1	9	4.39	1.71	.04	-.59
Leadership Style	226	1	3	1.56	.72	.89	-.54

Note. Listwise deletion. Leadership style is the current leadership style of a respondent's manager or supervisor. Min = minimum, max= maximum, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation. All skewness and kurtosis values fell within the ranges -2 and 2 to be considered normally distributed (Field, 2018).

Proposition Testing

ANOVA and independent samples T-tests were used to test the propositions outline in the current study as it is the most common test for assessing group differences for normally distributed data (Field, 2018). Before running the ANOVA, assumptions thereof were tested. Since the present study is investigating differences between groups, ANOVA and T-tests were chosen as the most suitable analysis to determine if there is evidence of mean differences between the three generational cohorts (Troncoso Skidmore & Thompson, 2013).

Assumptions of ANOVA

The assumptions of ANOVA are normality, homogeneity of variance, independence of observations and that the dependent variable is interval or ratio level in nature (Field, 2018; Troncoso Skidmore & Thompson, 2013). Importantly, the assumptions should be met to ensure the integrity of ANOVA output (Troncoso Skidmore & Thompson, 2013).

The data in this study is independent of one another (Pallant, 2016) and transformational leadership, transactional leadership and narcissism were measured on a continuous scale, thus representing ratio level data. Normality was assessed for transformational leadership, transactional leadership as well as narcissism (Field, 2018). The Normal Q-Q Plots were inspected for all three variables and each plot had a reasonably straight line, hereby indicating normality (See Appendix C) (Pallant, 2016). Normality was also confirmed using the skewness and kurtosis values in the previous section. Levene's test of homogeneity was used to assess whether the assumption of homogeneity was met or not. A

non-significant test statistic indicates equal variances are assumed which implies that the assumption of homogeneity is met (Field, 2018).

Proposition 1a: Generation X's leadership preferences differs from Generation Y and Generation Z's.

To test proposition 1a, a one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of generational cohorts on leadership preference scores. Participants were divided into three groups according to their birth year to align with a respective generational cohort (Gen X: 1960 – 1979, Gen Y: 1980 – 1996, and Gen Z: 1997 – 2003). Levene's test was not significant, $p = .103$, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity was met. There was no statistical difference in leadership scores for the three generational cohorts, $F(2, 220) = .248$, $p = .781$. Therefore, proposition 1a is not supported. Furthermore, the effect size was very small and close to zero ($\eta = .002$), suggesting that less proportion of variance is explained by the model (Mehler et al., 2019). As best practice with ANOVA, post hoc tests are usually conducted to assess which mean pairs differ if the overall result is significant (Field, 2018). In this case, the result was not significant, therefore no post hoc tests were performed.

Proposition 1b: There is no difference between Generation Y and Generation Z leadership preferences.

An independent samples two-tailed t -test was run to assess proposition 1b to determine if there was a difference between the two generational cohorts. The 87 respondents in the Generation Y cohort ($M = 4.14$; $SD = .46$) compared to 66 respondents in the Generation Z cohort ($M = 4.14$; $SD = .38$) demonstrated a non-significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups, $t(149.34) = -.007$, $p = .994$, $d = .001$. Therefore, proposition 1b is supported as there is evidence to suggest that these two generational cohorts do not differ in their leadership preferences. Evidently, the mean results indicate the same result, further suggesting that no difference is observed between the two generational cohorts.

Proposition 2: There are significant levels of narcissism in Gen Z compared to Gen X.

Similarly, an independent samples two-tailed t -test was also computed to test proposition 2. The test variable was narcissism, and the grouping variable was the generational cohort, Gen X and Gen Z respectively. Levene's test of homogeneity revealed a non-significant result, $p = .293$. Indicating that the assumption of homogeneity was met. The narcissism scores between Gen X and Gen Z did not differ significantly at a significance level of $p = .05$. Therefore, proposition 2 is not supported as narcissism scores among Gen X ($M = 4.25$, $SD =$

1.91) and Gen Z ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.75$) are not significantly different, $t(116) = -.874$, $p = .38$, $d = .16$. This outcome suggests that the current study's sample of Gen Z do not display higher narcissism scores than Gen X.

Additional analyses were run, whereby the datafile was split according to gender and race respectively. When split according to gender, non-significant results were obtained. Narcissism scores amongst males of Gen X ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.90$), and Gen Z ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 2.30$), were not significant, $t(28) = -.029$, $p = .977$, $d = .01$. Similarly for narcissism scores amongst female Gen X ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.93$), and Gen Z ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(84) = -.988$, $p = .326$, $d = .21$.

Interestingly, there was a significant difference in narcissism scores amongst males ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.73$) and females ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.68$), $t(218) = -1.986$, $p = .048$, $d = .30$ when generational cohorts were not considered. Moreover, the only self-declared race that displayed significant differences in narcissism scores amongst Gen X ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.70$), and Gen Z ($M = 6.00$, $SD = .750$) were Indians, $t(6) = -3.154$, $p = .020$, $d = 2.30$. As a matter of fact, this group was only 6.1% of the sample size and more specifically, 3 participants were classified as Gen X while 5 as Gen Z.

Additional Analyses

At the time of taking this study's survey, respondents were asked to indicate their manager's leadership style as either transformational, transactional or laissez-faire. As seen in Table 6 below, transformational leadership was the most common leadership style. More than half of Generation Y's managers were reported as transformational leaders. Only 42.3% of Generation X experienced transformational leadership while 60.6 % of Generation Z indicated their current manager as transformational in nature. The second most experienced leadership style was the transactional leadership style. Here, 21, 17 and 19 participants of Generation X, Y and Z reported their manager's style as transactional, respectively. The non-leadership style, laissez-faire was the least reported manager style. Accounting for only 29 of the participants' experience.

It is important to mention that participants did not have to indicate the age nor the generational cohort of their manager. As a result, reporting lines could not be determined. For example, whether a Gen Y employee reports to a Gen X employee or if a Gen Y employee reports to a Gen Y manager. Such insights could have yielded interesting relationships between a preferred leadership style and a manager's leadership style, i.e., a follower's preferred leadership style versus an actual leadership style.

Table 6*Current Manager's Leadership Styles as Indicated by Participants of the Study*

Participant	n	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-faire	Not Mentioned
Generation X	52	22	21	9	-
Generation Y	87	55	17	14	1
Generation Z	66	40	19	6	1

Discussion

The current study sought to compare the leadership preferences of three generational cohorts, born between 1965 and 2003, who occupy employment in South African organisations. Furthermore, it also sought to investigate the narcissism levels of these generations. Mainly if narcissism was more prevalent in the youngest generational cohort, Gen Z, compared to the oldest generation, Gen X, as seen in this study. This section outlines the psychometric properties of the scales and the main findings concerning the above rationale. Thereafter, the limitations and suggestions for future research are presented. Lastly, the concluding remarks notes are given.

The Psychometric Properties of Scales

Internationally developed and validated scales were used in a South African context. Hence, the psychometric properties of the two scales used in this study, are presented in the following subsection.

MLQ-6S

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is an established measure of leadership (Heinitz et al., 2005). This scale has undergone several revisions and adaptations in pursuit of a more parsimonious scale, resulting in several versions of the scale, each with a different number of items (Heinitz et al., 2005).

Despite the widespread use of the MLQ, its factor structure remains somewhat unconfirmed (Heinitz et al., 2005). In some instances, criticisms of the factor structure were considered in the revised versions of the scale in an attempt to improve the measure (Heinitz et al., 2005). For example, charisma was split into idealised influence attributed and idealised influence behaviour (Heinitz et al., 2005). The current study's version of the MLQ only had

idealised influence as a single factor. There is a vast amount of literature on the MLQ in work contexts, primarily used in relationship studies.

Despite the reported unsatisfactory factor structure of the MLQ, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was nonetheless conducted to confirm the construct validity of the MLQ-6S as it is an established measure of leadership (Heinritz et al., 2005). A two-factor model comprising transformational and transactional leadership emerged as the best-fitting model, aligned to previous studies and considered justified within the study's scope (Avolio et al., 1999). Furthermore, these distinct higher-order factors are deemed to be sufficient to explain leadership (Heinritz et al., 2005). Although, the two-factor model that emerged in this study never met all the criteria of a good model fit. The CFI was below the .90 threshold, though evidence suggests that it could be due to the relatively small sample size and general problems of the MLQ's factor structure (Heinritz et al., 2005).

Furthermore, ignoring the third higher-order factor of laissez-faire was not considered a significant loss, further illustrating support for the two-factor model (Geyer & Steyrer, 1998; Heinritz et al., 2005). However, little empirical evidence exists of the use of the MLQ in comparative studies relating to generations.

Furthermore, the MLQ-6S transformational and transactional items displayed acceptable levels of internal consistency, suggesting that it was appropriate for this study. Other studies have reported higher levels of internal consistency than the results obtained in this study.

Narcissism

Narcissism is a well-known socially malevolent behaviour (Book et al., 2015). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on narcissism. Accordingly, a unidimensional structure emerged, confirming the findings in previous literature (Czarna et al., 2016).

Narcissism scores across studies have seen high internal consistency scores, ranging from $\alpha=.80$ to $\alpha=.87$ (Czarna et al., 2016; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Kawamoto et al., 2020; Özsoy et al., 2017; Webster & Jonason, 2013). This study's narcissism score demonstrated an adequate level of internal consistency ($\alpha=.76$), although slightly lower than the consulted literature. Nonetheless, this instrument showed stable psychometric properties (Czarna et al., 2016), hereby validating its use in the South African context.

Main Findings

There are mixed reviews on whether generational cohorts differ (Gentry et al., 2011). A common assumption is that generations differ (Gentry et al., 2011). This cognition is perpetuated by the literature surrounding generational cohorts that primarily focuses on the shared life experiences that ultimately shapes these groups' attitude, preferences and values (Gentry et al., 2011; Jonck et al., 2017); highlighting that the lived experiences are distinct to the birth years of each generation (Jonck et al., 2017).

However, a contrasting assumption is that generations are more alike than they are different (Bertsch et al., 2022; Kraus, 2017). Moreover, since the birth years of the cohorts are loosely labelled, those born at the beginning and the end of a cohort may or may not experience events that define one generation yet be categorised in another (Kraus, 2017). The current study's findings highlight that generations do not differ concerning leadership preferences or narcissism levels. Although, an additional analysis presented found that there was a significant difference between Indian Gen X and Gen Z individuals when it came to narcissistic tendencies (Wetzel et al., 2017).

Leadership Preferences of Generations

This study proposed that generations will differ in their leadership preferences. Notably, Gen X compared to Gen Y and Z. Partially due to the cusp effect (Kraus, 2017). This proposition was evaluated, and it was found that there is no significant difference in leadership preferences among the three generations. Thus, the proposition remained unsupported. However, definite inferences could not be drawn from the non-significant result alone (Mehler et al., 2019). Other factors could have determined this outcome, such as the unequal sample sizes between groups, an overrepresentation of one gender and race group, or a weak development of the survey.

This non-significant result aroused a mixed reaction as there is literature to suggest that generations differ in their values, beliefs and behaviour, affecting their preferences, including leadership (Dulin, 2008; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). At the same time, other studies have suggested that generations are more similar than different (Moore & Krause, 2021). The current study's results provide limited evidence that the studied generations are perhaps more similar than different. For example, each generation may find value in the different leadership styles. Alternatively, each generation may perceive transformational and transactional leadership characteristics as timeless, therefore, equally valued by each generational cohort (Ahn & Ettner, 2014; Gentry et al., 2011).

Previous studies comparing leadership preferences and generations are sparse, particularly with the inclusion of Generation Z. Though similar to the current study, Lisbon (2020) investigated leadership preferences by generations, namely, the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. The study used GLOBE's leadership survey, where respondents had to rank characteristics that contribute toward effective leadership (Lisbon, 2010). Non-parametric tests were used to analyse the results following the non-normal distribution of the data (Lisbon, 2010). A significant difference was found between Baby Boomers and Generation Y regarding charismatic, otherwise known as value-based behaviour (Lisbon, 2010). The results showed that Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) believe this behaviour contributes to effective leadership more than Generation Y (Lisbon, 2010). Differences were also found between generations regarding behaviours not explicitly measured in the MLQ, such as self-protective and participative behaviour (Lisbon, 2010). Interestingly, like in the current study, there were no significant results when split by gender (Lisbon, 2010).

Arsenault (2004) sought to validate generational differences between four generations; the Veterans (1922 – 1943), Baby Boomers (1944 – 1960), Generation X (1961 – 1980) and Nexters (1981 – 2000). The naming convention and birth years of generations are slightly different across literature, as seen with Arsenault (2004) and Lisbon (2010), though the investigation into generational differences remains the same. Contrary to the current study, Arsenault (2004) found significant differences between the two older generations and Generation X and Nexters, referred to as Generation Y in this study. Generation X and Generation Y were more inclined to rank determination and ambition as needed leadership attributes (Arsenault, 2004). Generation X and Generation Y ranked determination and ambition similarly, $M = 4.39$, $M = 4.28$, $M = 5.37$, and $M = 5.05$, respectively (Arsenault, 2004). The current study found no differences between Generation X, Y and Z. Even though leadership preferences were measured slightly differently, still, it interesting to note that no significant difference was found between Generation X and Generation Y, even when investigating two particular leadership characteristics.

Narcissism Amongst Generations

Younger individuals are perceived to be more narcissistic than their older counterparts (Wetzel et al., 2017). Though, there is evidence of mixed reviews debating if younger cohorts are more narcissistic than older generational cohorts (Wetzel et al., 2017). The current study proposed that there would be significant levels of narcissism amongst the youngest generation, Generation Z. Furthermore, levels of narcissism would be more prevalent in them compared to

the oldest generation, Generation X, examined here in this study. Interestingly, a non-significant result was obtained, suggesting that the narcissism scores amongst Gen X and Gen Z were relatively similar within the sample. Narrowing in on the idea that generations could be more alike than they are different with respect to their levels of narcissism and even their leadership preferences.

Contrary to the evidence presented in this study and popular belief, Wetzel et al. (2017) found that narcissism levels of undergraduate students have decreased since the 1990s. Specifically, the 2010 cohort significantly reported the lowest levels of narcissism (Wetzel et al., 2017). However, unlike the current study, birth years of the undergraduate students are unknown, making it hard to know their generational cohort with confidence. Though the ages (18 – 24 years old) and undergraduate years of the sample were given (Wetzel et al., 2017). Therefore, it is estimated that the oldest cohort is likely to be Generation X and the youngest Generation Y. Nonetheless, declining levels of narcissism were reported as younger individuals entered their undergraduate programmes. This outcome presents opposing evidence to reports that suggest that younger generations more narcissistic (Wetzel et al., 2017). Considering the additional analyses run with narcissism, Wetzel et al. (2017) also found that Asians reported an increase in vanity, which could be classified as an element of narcissism. This finding is similar to the result of this study, where narcissism was more prevalent in the younger Indian generation compared to the older generation.

Non-Significant Results

Even though non-significant results were obtained, evaluating the possible reason for such occurrences is essential. Firstly, the sample size was not very large, and the evidence obtained from the sample needed to be more robust (Mehler et al., 2019). Regarding the sample size, 205 responses were used in the analyses. Thus, the small sample size likely explains the non-significant, further exacerbated by a lack of solid evidence presented in the sample. Moreover, the effect size was close to zero, which may be negligible (Lakens & Etz, 2017; Mehler et al., 2019). This could be as a result of the South African context and the need for more research to be conducted within South Africa, considering South African generational cohorts (Lappeman et al., 2020).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Literature on South African generations concerning to their leadership preferences remains an underdeveloped research area. This is an important area of investigation, given the

saturated studies of generations within the Western context and the historical, social and political events that may have shaped the generations as it is known today (Lappeman et al., 2020). Therefore, more insight into the South African context would benefit South African organisations in informing policies, practices and procedures. Furthermore, this is a worthy topic to pursue as it is more than likely that an organisation's workforce comprises more than one generation at any given time. However, the current study is not without limitations. The following section provides suggestions for future research by acknowledging this study's limitations and findings.

A cross-sectional research design was employed in the current study, which captured the data at a single point in time, thereby increasing the risk of common method bias (Taris et al., 2021). As a result, future research should consider a longitudinal research design to mitigate these risks, and to determine age effects from generational effects better (Gentry et al., 2011; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Stevanin et al., 2018). For the reason that people change, mature and develop as a function of age (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Sessa et al., 2007). For example, an individual's leadership preference could be determined by their current need aligned to their career aspiration, and this may change as their context changes.

Furthermore, this study utilised a self-report measure to collect data (Fein et al., 2010). Therefore, each response is unique and influenced by different individual experiences, further implicating the risk of common method bias (Fein et al., 2010). The responses obtained from the self-report measure yielded unequal sample sizes across the three chosen generations. Future studies should aim to randomly collect equal sample sizes from each generational cohort within multiple organisations to increase the likelihood of obtaining strong evidence from each cohort (Lester et al., 2012; Mehler et al., 2019).

Simply comparing group mean differences between the three generations on their leadership preferences and narcissism levels could disregard other factors that could possibly differentiate these generational cohorts (Moore et al., 2015). Therefore, in addition to a comparative study of leadership preferences among generations, future studies should explore more relational studies of generations and other workplace factors, such as mentoring programmes, environmental changes and approaches to technology (Stevanin et al., 2018).

In terms of generalisability, most of the respondents declared their race as Coloured; thus, a possibility of cultural bias exists (Fein et al., 2010; Jonck et al., 2017). Therefore, the current study's findings should be interpreted with caution, and a modest approach should be taken to generalise the findings across other ethnicities and races within South Africa.

Furthermore, a more in-depth approach to leadership preferences should be examined in future research. Such as considering actual leader behaviour or attributes, like honesty, rather than a general leadership style as investigated in the current study.

Concluding Remarks

Theoretically, this study adds to the existing literature by offering empirical support for the generational theory and leadership preferences in South Africa. This is noteworthy as this remains an understudied area in South Africa. Furthermore, Generation Z, the youngest employees, were examined, a cohort that is less researched than other generations (Kraus, 2017). Therefore, this study can be expanded upon to fully understand Generation Z's impact in the workplace and which leadership style best suits them.

Despite the findings largely not confirming the proposition that generations differ with respect to leadership preferences, awareness is created of leadership and the importance thereof. In a practical sense, organisations could implement better retention strategies for the youngest generations, as they remain the most vulnerable cohort in South Africa's labour market (Stats SA, n.d.). Moreover, through an additional analysis presented, this study contributed to the literature by investigating the ethnic composition of the generational cohorts' narcissism levels (Wetzel et al., 2017).

As demonstrated, this study aimed to compare leadership preferences across generations in a South African context as an initial investigation. Currently, there are multiple generations in the workforce, which brings about an additional source of diversity. Thus, it is important for organisations to be mindful of the different generational cohorts to effectively manage and implement practices and procedures that are best suited to each generational cohort. It was found that a non-significant result was obtained when investigating the leadership preferences of Generation X compared to Generation Y and Generation Z. In addition to the non-significant result, the effect size was negligible, suggesting the limited practical significance of the finding. Furthermore, it was also found that no significant difference was present between Generation Y and Generation Z, which was aligned with other studies (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Moreover, it appeared that narcissism in Gen Z was not as explicit as expected compared to Gen X. However, an additional analysis suggested that there was a significant difference between these two cohorts amongst those who identified as Indian. Moreover, exploring an area of research that is not saturated with findings, both in a local and global sense, this study contributed somewhat to the literature surrounding leadership preferences and generations albeit the study's limitations.

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Appendix A

CFA Assumptions

Figure A1

Normal P-P Plot of Leadership

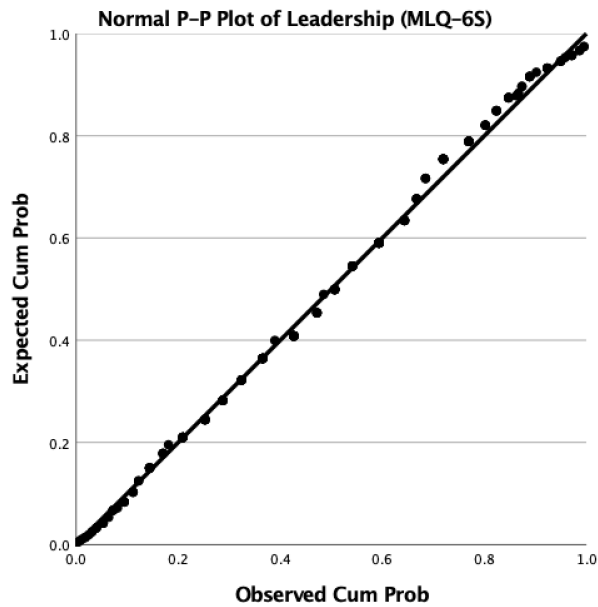
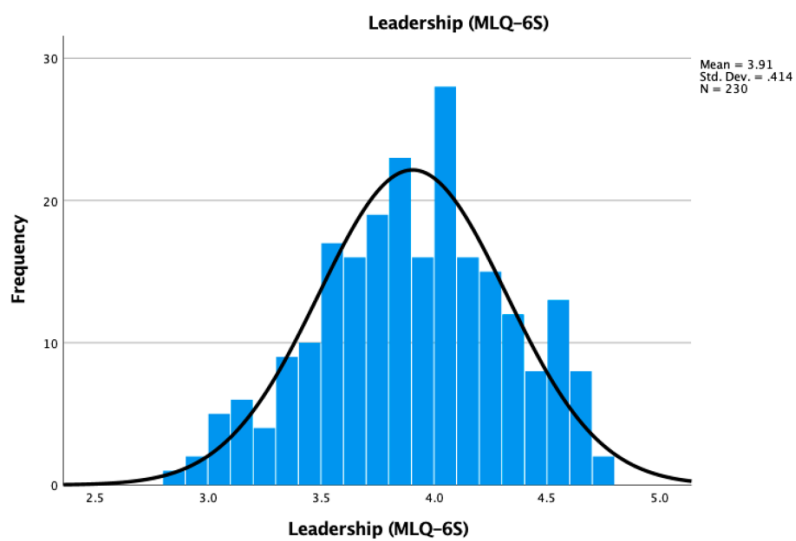


Figure A2

Histogram of Leadership to Show Normality

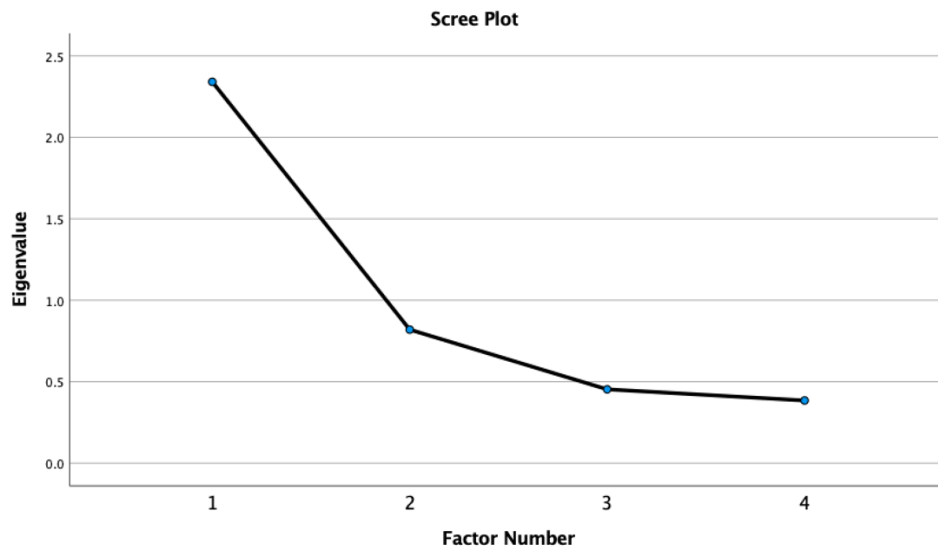


Appendix B

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Figure B

Scree plot for Narcissism items



Appendix C

Assumptions of ANOVA and T-Tests

Figure C1

Normal Q-Q Plot of Transformational Leadership

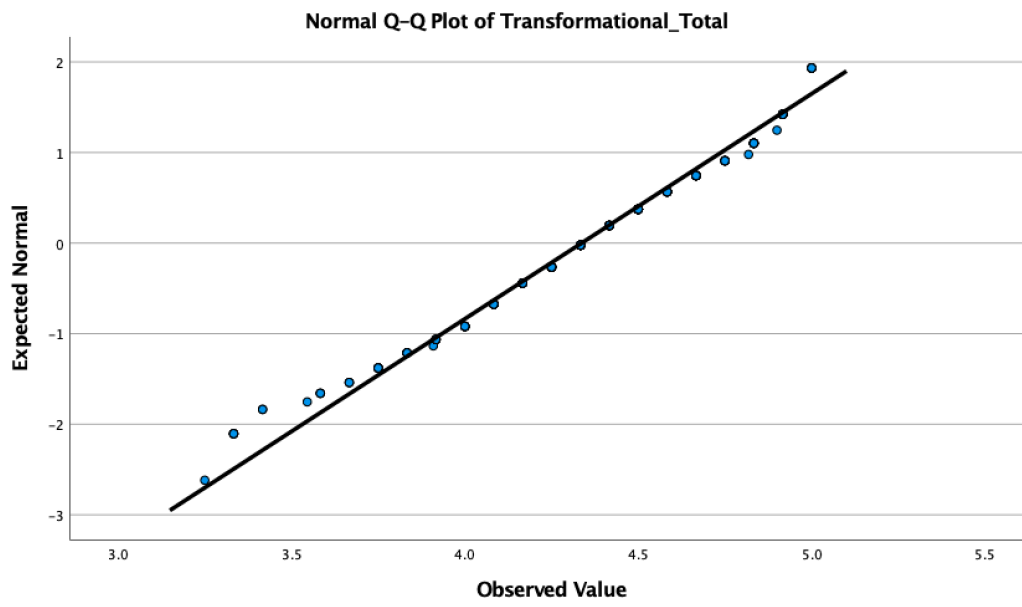


Figure C2

Normal Q-Q Plot of Transactional Leadership

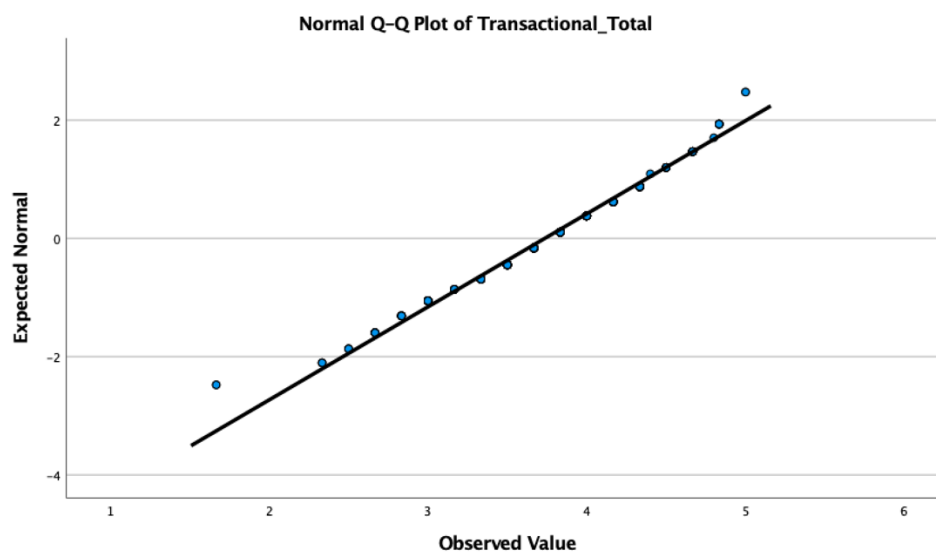
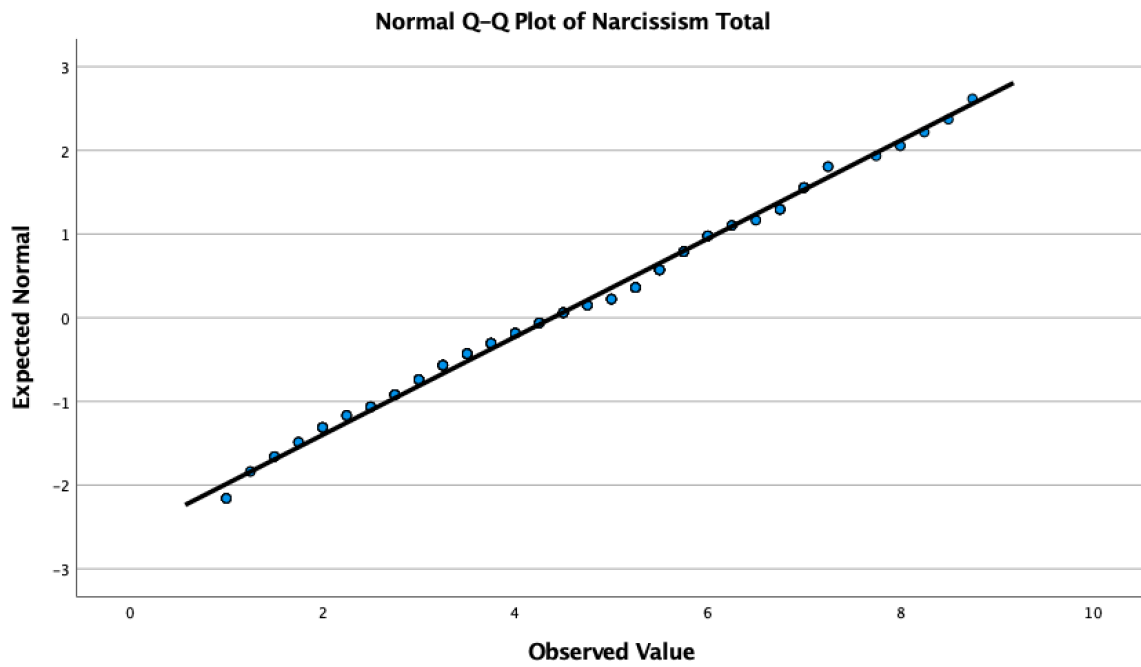


Figure C3*Normal Q-Q Plot of Narcissism*

Appendix D

Ethical Approval

Figure D

Confirmation of Ethics Approval

	<p>Faculty of Commerce</p> <p>Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701 2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369 E-mail: jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za Internet: www.uct.ac.za</p> <p>  @Commerce UCT  UCT Commerce Faculty Office </p>
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Nastassja Hardenberg
 School of Management Studies
 University of Cape Town
 REF: REC 2022/06/006
Comparing Leadership Across Generations

06 06 2022

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2023 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

Signed by candidate

2022.06.06
 21:54:36 +02'00'

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