Conscious Leadership in the Generation Z

An Analysis of the Expectations of

Generation Z towards their (Future) Leaders

Munich Business School Working Paper

2024-03

Anne Kolbet
E-Mail: Anne.Kolbet@munich-business-school.de

Christian Schmidkonz, Prof. Dr.
E-Mail: Christian.Schmidkonz@munich-business-school.de

Table of contents

Figures and Tables

Introduction

1.1. Background and Context of the study

Although the majority of Generation Z is still in the state of higher education or in school, studies from the year 2021 reveal that the generation already accounts for approximately 9.5% of the working population in Germany (Lehmann, 2021). However, these numbers will change dramatically in the upcoming years, as more or less the entire "Boomer" generation, which currently accounts for 23.5 percent of the working population in Germany, will retire within the next 10 years. In addition, Generation X, which currently represents 36%, and therefore the largest part of the working population, will begin to disappear from the labor market ten years from now (Lehmann, 2021). Moreover, Germany still faces a shortage of skilled workers. This shortage is exacerbated by the fact that the absolute size of the active working population will be declining in the upcoming years due to common demographic changes like "a shrinking and aging population" (Breidenbach et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, these figures alone are not the sole reason why organizations need to strengthen their focus on recruiting and retaining employees from Generation Z to ensure their future viability in the upcoming years. Furthermore, grievances are already prevalent in the labor market: Studies reveal that 48% of 18-29-year-olds are considering quitting their jobs (XING, 2023). In addition to low pay and high levels of stress, 27% indicated the leadership style of their leaders and managers is one of the reasons why they consider leaving the company (XING, 2023). Another development that could also be observed in social media is the concept of quiet quitting, which for instance gained considerable momentum in 2022. The term describes the inner resignation from work and in conclusion, doing only the bare minimum. People who are in a quiet quitting stage most often do not see the purpose of their work (Harter, 2023). However, this raises the question, of what leadership skills is Generation Z looking for in their leaders and what can leaders do to attract and retain Generation Z. Thus, the concept of Conscious Leadership might offer one possible method to solve this gap in competencies.

Conscious leadership is one of the four tenets or principles of conscious capitalism introduced by John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia in their book "Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business" in 2013 (Sisodia & Mackey, 2013). According to Rajendra Sisodia (2009), who was decisive in shaping the concept of conscious capitalism, conscious leadership is closely intertwined with service-oriented

leadership (Sisodia, 2009). Moreover, conscious leaders are motivated by the organization's higher purpose and aim to pass this on to their employees (Sisodia & Mackey, 2013).

1.2. Research questions and objectives

The forecasts of future workforce proportions, as well as the current deplorable trends reflected in the significant proportion of 18-29-year-olds considering quitting their jobs due to a lack of satisfaction with their current leaders, argues in favor of immediate action from organizations to attract and retain generation Z to ensure viability and competitiveness in the future labor market. A possible approach might be integrating more conscious leadership practices to appeal to the needs of generation Z toward their leaders. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of research linking the conscious leadership concept and the needs and demands of generation Z. Thus, the purpose of this study is to elucidate whether conscious leadership is an appropriate leadership style to manage generation Z and which elements of conscious leadership can be adapted to meet the expectations of the generation. Thus, the objective of this research is to identify desired characteristics that generation Z is seeking in their (future) leaders and to analyze whether these characteristics are in line with the inherent values of a conscious leader. Consequently, the following research question is posed. What leadership characteristics do generation Z desire from their (future) leaders and is conscious leadership a suitable approach to lead generation Z?

1.3. Outline of the paper

The research paper is structured as follows. The next chapter defines and explains the most important theoretical frameworks to establish a common understanding of the theoretical foundations used. Thus, a definition of generation Z will be given, and the most striking characteristics of the generation will be highlighted drawing on previous research. In the next step, previous research on Gen Z´s perception of leadership characteristics will be presented. Secondly, a working definition of the term "conscious leadership" will be developed. Therefore, different approaches used in academia and in the popular literature will be analyzed, and the key characteristics of a conscious leader will be highlighted.

The research design is based on a qualitative empirical approach. To collect the data a qualitative street survey will be conducted using a semi-structured interview guideline. Next, a content analysis based on Mayring's approach is used to access and analyze

the data and to place them in the broader context of previous research. Finally, the relevance of the results will be discussed regarding further research, findings, and possible implications for the practice.

2. Theoretical part

In this chapter, a common understanding of the theoretical framework is developed. Furthermore, the key concepts are defined and put into the context of the study.

2.1. Definition and characteristics of Gen Z

There is no uniform definition of the term "generation Z". However, before discussing and elaborating on the different approaches used to describe the term generation Z, it is important to first clarify the term "generation". According to McCrindle and Wolfinger (2010), a generation is a group of individuals born in the same period of time and thus shaped by common political, social, economic, and technical constraints (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010). Generation Z includes those individuals who follow generation Y. Hence, according to Zemke et al. (2000) these include all individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (cited by Bencsik et al., 2016). Other authors like Dimock (2019), however, claim that those born from 1997 to 2012 constitute generation Z (Dimock, 2019). Another approach used by Turner (2015) defines generation Z as those born between 1993 and 2005 (Turner, 2015).

However, throughout this paper, Zemke's approach, which was taken up by Bencsik et al. (2016) has been followed. Consequently, individuals born between 1995 and 2010 are considered to be members of generation Z (Bencsik et al., 2016). In addition to the time span defining generation Z, a number of characteristics exist which are distinct and specific to generation Z through their composition. Numerous scholars examined these distinct character traits associated with the so-called digital affine generation. First of all, their tech savviness and their comprehensive understanding and use of the latest technology is empathized by several scholars (Nieżurawska, 2023).

Also, scholars have found that generation Z is perceived as a self-confident, multitasking (Nieżurawska, 2023), and entrepreneurial generation (Drenik & VandeBoom, 2022). In addition, a study in the US conducted with members of individuals born between 1997 and 2012, revealed that the members of Gen Z, in general, enjoyed a higher education (Fry & Parker, 2018).

To get a more sophisticated understanding of what shaped the generation and serves as the underlying assumptions in forming them in their beliefs and values one must consider the events and environment the generation grew up in. These include growing up in a stable and safe environment, the omnipresence of social media and smartphones, and the events of social justice movements (Schroth, 2019).

Nevertheless, generation Z is also characterized by certain job-related traits. Some authors for example claim that generation Z would rather work in groups and in open and shared offices than in isolation (Iorgulescu, 2016). However, other scholars argue that Gen Z tends to reject working in teams (Nieżurawska, 2023). Besides, studies indicate that the generation has a strong need for professional development and also demands their managers to fulfill these expectations (Iorgulescu, 2016). Moreover, the generation is driven by intrinsic motivation (Mahmoud et al., 2020) which is also reflected in the fact that they often develop their careers based on their desires and values, detached from the norms of society (Bencsik et al., 2016). This implies that intrinsic motivations are important for the generation and should be considered in leadership practices. Fernandez et al. (2023) claim, that generation Z prioritizes transparency associated with gratification and recognition (Fernandez et al., 2023). Finally, generation Z requires safety and security which according to Iorgulescu is also reflected in their demand for safe and secure jobs as well as a decent salary (Iorgulescu, 2016).

Consequently, the specific traits mentioned lead to the question of what generation Z expects from their leaders and working environment. In the following, previous studies and articles will be evaluated regarding this question. Additionally, already existing approaches to lead Gen Z will be highlighted.

2.2. Previous research on Gen Z's perceptions of leadership styles

In the following section, previous findings of academic research dealing with the topic of GenZ's perception of leadership styles and practices will be presented.

According to a study conducted by Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) generation Z is in need of managers who are listening to their ideas (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Besides, Iorgulescu (2016) confirmed in their study Gen Z´s need for ongoing development and self-optimization (Iorgulescu, 2016).

Since Gen Z is the first Generation that has 24/7 access to online media and information they are perceived to be confronted with a lack of control and uncertainty

regarding the future. Therefore, it is even more important for this generation to have an open communication policy to build trust (Fernandez et al., 2023). Along with the desire for open communication arises the need for setting clear objectives and providing disclosure of performance metrics (Fernandez et al., 2023). Moreover, the employees of generation Z expect their employers to deliver the following capabilities. Generation Z emphasizes the importance of mental health and requires this awareness from their employers as well. In addition, managers and employers are expected to demonstrate ethical business practices. Finally, they want leaders who advocate and embrace diversity and inclusion (O'Boyle, 2021).

Bennet et al. highlight the importance of companies adapting their organizational culture to meet the demands of future generations. Thereby they refer to changing patterns of work and life emerging in multigenerational workforces (Bennett et al., 2012). Consequently, the question of whether the introduction of conscious leadership approaches is able to appeal to the needs of the generation arises. Thus, the concept of conscious leadership will be defined in the next chapter and the key characteristics of a conscious leader will be highlighted.

2.3. Definition and Characteristics of conscious leadership

Despite the tremendous opportunity that the conscious leadership approach offers, so far very few scholars have conducted empirical research in this field. This leads to the fact that there is almost only "popular-" and "practitioner" literature" dealing with characteristics of conscious leadership (Fry & Egel, 2021). Consequently, in addition to a limited number of journal articles, popular literature will be used in the following to define and elaborate on the concept of conscious leadership.

Fry and Egel (2021) describe conscious leadership as a kind of overarching entity used to encapsulate a variety of leadership concepts aiming to contribute to a better world, such as responsible leadership, moral leadership, and sustainable leadership (Fry & Egel, 2021).

Although John Mackey et al. (2020) emphasize the fact that the characteristics of a conscious leader can differ significantly, they were able to outline nine characteristics defining a conscious leader based on practical observations. According to Mackey et al. (2020) a conscious leader is driven by purpose (Mackey et al., 2020). This perception also goes along with the perception of Chapman et al. (2015). The authors not

only refer to the purpose of the organization but also point out that the leaders first need to define their purpose themselves to be able to demonstrate the purpose of the organization (Chapman et al., 2015). Also, Mackey et al. (2020) stresses the fact that conscious leaders strive to promote and encourage the development of other people (Mackey et al., 2020). In addition, conscious leaders shall demonstrate a high level of integrity (Mackey et al., 2020). Thus, by acting decently and adhering to high standards, conscious leaders earn the trust of their employees. This is also in line with the view of Champan et al. (2015) referring in their book to the presence of integrity in commitment six, "Practicing Integrity". Besides, they specify 4 pillars of integrity. The first pillar is related to taking on responsibility, the second pillar refers to being authentic, the third pillar is called "feeling through completion" and the fourth pillar is defined as "having impeccable agreements" (Chapman et al., 2015). Furthermore, the authors claim that conscious leaders aim to create win-win-win solutions (Mackey et al., 2020). Chapman et al. (2015) described this approach as the act of creating a "win for all solution" (Chapman et al., 2015). According to Mackey et al. (2020) a conscious leader creates inspiring cultures around them and stimulates and encourages creativity, innovation, and open exchange within the company. Besides, they plan for the long term and focus on the consequences of their decisions (Mackey et al., 2020). In addition, conscious leaders are concerned about the development of their subordinates and function as a facilitator and promoters for their employees (Chapman et al., 2015). This is also echoed by Mackey et al. (2020) who claim that the development of their team is at the top of the agenda of conscious leaders (Mackey et al., 2020). Next, conscious leaders also maintain their physical and mental health and embrace life-long learning (Mackey et al., 2020). In addition, Chapman et al. (2015) define further dimensions which are according to the authors typical for conscious leaders. They claim conscious leaders are taking responsibility, being curious, "feeling feelings", being candid, stopping gossip, generating appreciation, excelling in their zone of genius, living a life of play and rest, exploring the opposite, sourcing approval control and security, and having enough of everything (Chapman et al., 2015).

2.4. Summary of Theory and research question

The fundamental theoretical literature review revealed the following insights. For the purposes of this study, individuals born between 1995 and 2010 are considered as members of generation Z (Bencsik et al., 2016). In addition, generation Z is characterized by their digital savviness (Nieżurawska, 2023) and in general entrepreneurial orientation (Drenik & VandeBoom, 2022). Besides, they are perceived as having a strong need for professional development, safety, and security (Iorgulescu, 2016). Also, they prioritize, based on their exposure to the influences of the digital media landscape, open communication to build trust (Fernandez et al., 2023).

In addition, using popular literature, it was also possible to identify the key characteristics of a conscious leader. To sum it up, several authors aim to define different dimensions of a conscious leader. In the context of this research, the nine dimensions of Mackey et al. (2020) as well as the "15 Commitments of Conscious Leaders" by Chapman et al. (2015) are investigated to define the term "conscious leadership". In general Conscious leaders are driven by purpose, strive to promote and encourage the development of other people, act decently and adhere to high standards, aim to create win-win-win solutions, create inspiring cultures to foster creativity and innovation, plan for the long term and focus on the consequences of their decisions, foster the development of their team and lastly take care of their own physical and mental health and embrace life-long learning (Chapman et al., 2015; Mackey et al., 2020).

The aim of the study is to determine whether conscious leadership is a suitable approach to lead generation Z. Hence, in the following, the research question will be examined taking into account an appropriate research method.

Therefore, the demands of generation Z towards their leaders will be identified and analyzed by means of a qualitative empirical research design. Subsequently, the discussion aims to demonstrate to what extent these requirements can be met using the conscious leadership approach and highlighting the conscious leadership dimensions that are particularly important to address the demands of generation Z towards their leaders.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The research design is based on an empirical qualitative approach. Using the insights gained in a sequence of concise street interviews, conclusions regarding the research question and new insights about the relationship between the expectations of generation Z and the conscious leadership concept should be established. Empirical research in general is used to enhance the development of a theory based on observation or investigation of a selected research subject (Gläser & Laudel, 2010).

3.2. Sampling

To draw a conclusion about the population, which is defined as members of generation Z born between 1995 and 2010, a sample group of twelve participants from the respective age cohort is utilized. The sample includes five male and seven female participants. Due to the fact that the emphasis was placed on obtaining detailed in-depth knowledge regarding characteristics generation Z desires from their leaders, purposive sampling was used as the sampling method (McCombes, 2019). The most significant inclusion criterion was the identification as a member of generation Z. In addition, the ratio of men and women was balanced as far as possible. However, it must be mentioned that despite the chosen inclusion criteria, the sampling method is associated with certain disadvantages in terms of objectivity and statistical inferences (McCombes, 2019). These limitations will be considered in the later discussion.

As a suitable location to conduct the interviews a vibrant shopping mall and the English garden in Munich were selected. Due to its proximity to a local business school and the public university individuals of generation Z are perceived to spend frequent time there and consequently are likely to be found. Moreover, Table 1 provides further details regarding the age and relevant social and economic contexts of the interviewees. For reasons of anonymity, the participants' names have been replaced.

Table 1 Social and economic contexts of the interviewees (source: own illustration)

Num-ber	Age	Type of degree	Current Profession	Gender
#1	1995	Bachelor's degree	Senior Digital Media Consultant	Female
#2	2002	A-levels	Temporary employee in sales	Female
#3	1999	Dual studies (bachelor's degree + working experience)	Municipal social work	Female
#4	2000	Master's degree	Working Student Corporate Communication	Female
#5	1997	Master's degree	Working student management consultancy	Female
#6	2003	A-levels	Student	Male
#7	2001	A-levels	Student	Female
#8	1998	Master's degree	Founder	Male
#9	1998	Bachelor's degree	Project manager	Male
#10	1997	Bachelor's degree	Real estate broker	Male
#11	1999	Bachelor's degree	Student	Female
#12	1997	Bachelor's degree	Student	Male

3.3. Data collection methods and procedures

The data were collected by means of street interviews. The aim of these interviews was to adopt an expert interview approach, in which generation Z themselves serve as experts of their own age cohort. According to the literature, experts are individuals possessing certain knowledge and therefore capable of being appointed as experts for this specific area or question encompassed by the area of expertise (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). Due to the increasing popularity of street interviews across social platforms in recent times, and their increasing adoption by generation Z in the past years, a new approach has been adopted in this study. The street interviews in this study can be regarded as a type of face-to-face interview. The advantages of this approach include the ability to observe the interviewee's body expression and the facilitation of queries. However, it has to be taken into consideration that the presence of the interviewer can influence the validity of the data (Pfeiffer, 2019).

The interviews took place on April 28 and 29 2023. Therefore a semi-structured interview was used to capture the data. Thus, a preliminarily designed interview guideline facilitated the comparability of the questions and at the same time allowed for the consideration of the characteristics of the individual interviewees (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). By operationalizing the research question, the research question was placed in the cultural context of the sample group. Based on this, the research question could be translated into an interview question (Gläser & Laudel, 2010; Kaiser, 2014). Thus, depending on the current occupation, the question was adjusted accordingly. Interviewees who were currently in permanent employment, including full-time and part-time jobs as well as student traineeships, were asked the following question: "Is there a leader in your professional environment whose leadership style matches your professional requirements? Please describe his/her characteristics." Interview participants who declared themselves to be currently not in a permanent employment relationship were asked the following question: "Please, imagine a person you consider an ideal leader. Which characteristics would this person have?" Both questions were designed to provide comparable results in terms of the characteristics of leaders that are important for Generation Z.

The interviews were conducted in German. The aim was to enable the interviewees to express themselves in their respective native languages. The interviews were either recorded as short videos or audio files. In the next step, they were transcribed, and thereby unwieldy vowels or extended pauses have been discarded.

Finally, the answers were translated into English using artificial intelligence. The use of artificial intelligence is intended to maintain objectivity and eliminate subjective mistranslation or bias by the researcher. For this purpose, Deepl was used as a utility. Both answers, in original German and the corresponding translation, can be extracted from Table 2 in the appendix. It should be noted that in the course of translation, the word manager is to be equated with the word leader since in both cases it serves as a derivative of "Führungskraft". Subsequently, the transcribed and translated answers were analyzed using Mayring's qualitative content analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

Next, the collected data were structured and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Hence, Mayring's approach of using inductive categories was applied to assess the data. Therefore, the categories will be derived directly from the material (Mayring, 2015). The inductive approach in this study facilitates the derivation of a theoretical

framework and practical implications on the basis of the collected data derived from the material (Pfeiffer, 2019). Thereby, the 6 steps developed by Mayring which are displayed in Figure 1 have been followed.
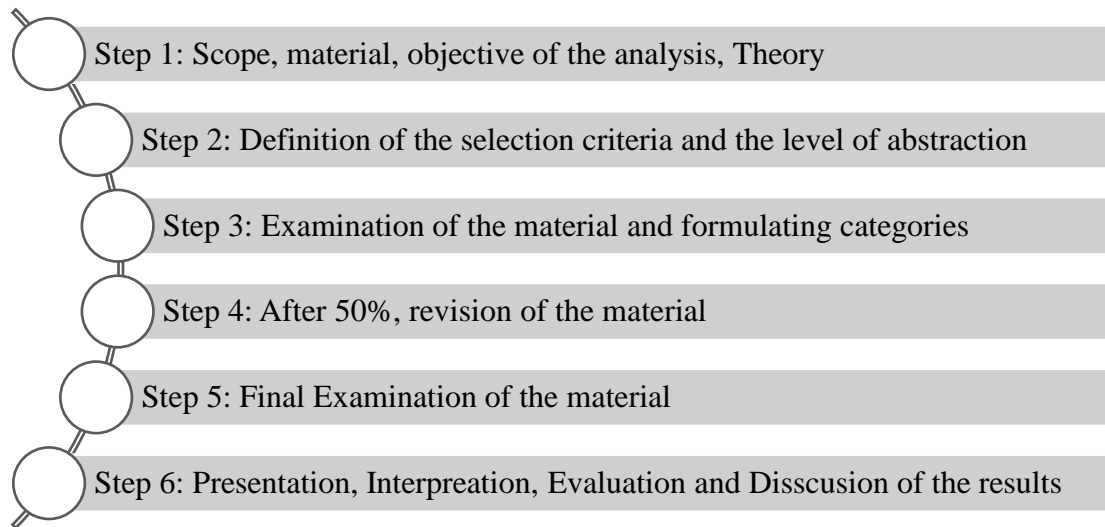
Step 1: Scope, material, objective of the analysis, Theory

Step 2: Definition of the selection criteria and the level of abstraction

Step 3: Examination of the material and formulating categories

Step 4: After 50%, revision of the material

Step 5: Final Examination of the material

Step 6: Presentation, Interpreation, Evaluation and Disscusion of the results

Figure 1 Process model of inductive category formation (Source, own illustration adapted from Mayring, 2015 p. 86)

The first step is to define the scope, the material, and the objective of the analysis based on the theory. The scope and underlying assumptions of the analysis can be derived from the preliminary theoretical considerations. Hence, the inductive generation of categories aims to identify common attributes that generation Z desires from their leaders.

Next, the material is examined for the first time, and categories are formulated. For this purpose, the coding application MAXQDA was chosen. In addition, the abstraction level of the categories needs to be taken into account as well. Also, new sections were either assigned to existing categories or new categories were defined (Mayring, 2015). A revision of the coding system took place after about 50% of the text. After a final review of the data, the results will be presented in the concluding chapter, followed by a discussion of the results, in which the results are evaluated and contextualized in the context of the research question by means of theoretical consideration.

4. Results: Analysis of the demands of Gen Z on their (future) leaders

Altogether, 16 categories could be derived from the available data. In the following, the respective categories and their relevancy will be explained briefly using evidence

from the corresponding reference texts. For an overview of the categories and the respective supporting evidence and references, please refer to Table 4 in the appendix.

Good communication skills

In six of the twelve interviews, the participants highlighted the importance of good communication skills as a leadership characteristic, which they consider as important (see appendix table 3). Further examination of the results revealed a more precise understanding of the qualities that generation Z perceives as good communication. Accordingly, communication at eye level is particularly emphasized among respondents. Evidence supporting this argument can be taken from Interview 1, lines 1-2, stating "she communicates with me at eye level." (see appendix Interview 1, line 1-2) as well as in interview 7 line 1 "communication at eye level"(see appendix interview 7, line 1), and in interview 10 lines 2 to 3 "a good quality for a leader is definitely to communicate at eye level."(see appendix Interview 10, line 2-3) In addition, the participants expressed a preference for an open communication culture, which can be inferred from interview 4 line 7, "there was always this culture of open communication that was simply nurtured "(see appendix interview 4, line 7). Furthermore, it was also mentioned that regular communication and availability are considered important, which is reflected in the following quote: "Regular communication, i.e., where I know that the person is always available" (see appendix interview 5, line 4).

Supportive

Another quality highlighted by the three participants as an important characteristic of leaders is supportive behavior (see appendix table 3). Thereby, providing individual support of was highlighted as a desire, exemplified by the following quote "I think it's individual, and therefore you have to promote the individual, ..." (see appendix interview 8, lines 12-13). Moreover, a candid approach towards dealing with problems was highlighted by the following interview passage "...come to her with problems" (see appendix interview 2, line 4).

Cooperative

However, five out of twelve participants stated that they would like to work with a leader who demonstrates a more cooperative approach (see appendix table 3). The participants' statements in the subsequent interviews express this aspiration. Interviewee

1 claims that "you don't have the feeling that she's five steps above you, but it's very cooperative" (see appendix interview 1, lines 2-3), thus confirming the statement. In addition, the survey emphasized the importance for Generation Z of being involved in decision-making processes and being heard by their leaders. Supporting evidence can be found in Interview 10, where it is reported that "important for me is that decisions are made together in a smaller team so that opinions and suggestions are taken into account" (see appendix interview 10, lines 3-5) and interview 12 (see appendix interview 12, lines 2-3).

Empathy

According to four out of the twelve participants, it is important to them that their leaders have a sense of empathy (see appendix table 3). In Interview 3, two references highlighting this character trait have been identified. On the one hand, the respondent expressed that "she [the leader] should have empathy and also be able to put herself in the other person's situation" (see appendix interview 3, lines 1-2), and on the other hand, the interviewee emphasized that "yes, perhaps something that goes a bit hand in hand with empathy, that you are a bit compassionate" (see appendix interview 3, lines 4-6). Further references highlighting empathy as an important characteristic of a leader can be found in interviews 5 and 8 (see appendix interview 5, lines 1-2, and interview 8, lines 1-2). In addition, the interviewee in interview 11 refers to the fact that not only empathy towards the employees is important, furthermore, he/she emphasizes that self-reflection and self-control are crucial to be able to respond appropriately in each situation (see appendix interview 11, lines 5-11).

Encourages development

The category "Encourages development" was derived by analyzing interview responses conducted with 4 out of 12 participants (see appendix table 3).

The following statement in interview 8 can be taken as evidence for this statement. The interviewee is stating that "I think it's important that you yourself have the intrinsic motivation to do your job. And if your manager then enables this, it is actually best." (see appendix interview 8, lines 4-6) In addition, she/he concludes that "I think you have to really see what you want as a person, as an individual, where you want to go, and then enable that," (see appendix interview 8, lines 9-11) which also strengthens the argument that "Encourages development" is a characteristic that is important to

generation Z when it comes to their desires towards their leaders. Another quote that validates generation Z's desire for leaders who encourage development is "...he [leader] was very interested in the development of his employees and was very committed to ensuring that we also develop further, ..." (see appendix interview 9, line 3-5). Furthermore, a participant stated, "what made the management style so good was this encouragement that enables you to work very quickly, very independently." (see appendix interview 4, lines 2-4) and thus referring to the fact that Generation Z is not only interested in personal development but also in getting support for their professional development.

Flexibility

Furthermore, the interview results of 4 interviews revealed that for generation Z, general flexibility is an important characteristic with regard to the desired leadership qualities (see appendix table 3).

Generation Z refers to flexibility primarily in terms of working hours when asked about their perception of good leadership attributes. Evidence for this can be taken from interviews 6 (see appendix interview 6, line 1), 7 (see appendix interview 7, line 2), and 10 (see appendix interview 10, lines 5-6). In addition to the understanding of flexibility in terms of working hours, the participant in interview 11 referred to "robustness and flexibility, also in the sense of mental flexibility, and simply being open to new ideas," (see interview 11, lines 12-13). This refers to the fact that the general flexibility of their leaders also matters for generation Z.

Delegation of tasks

In addition, 3 of the interviewees declared that delegating tasks is an important leadership characteristic for them (see appendix table 3).

One statement confirming that generation Z considers the delegation of tasks to be an important characteristic of a leader is "that you were always given a lot of responsibility right from the start, so to speak, and that trust was also placed in you" (see appendix Interview 4, lines 4-6). The interviewee is referring to the benefits of delegating tasks, as well as the effects of delegation, such as the feeling of being trusted, which is appreciated by generation Z. In addition, the statements in interview 5 emphasize the relevance of this leadership characteristic for generation Z (see appendix interview 5, Line 3). Furthermore, interview 12 stresses that the "ideal manager should also be able

to work and delegate projects effectively, based on the strengths and weaknesses of the employees." (see appendix, interview 12, lines 4-5) This highlights the relevance of leaders delegating projects based on the strengths and weaknesses of their employees.

Motivating

Besides two interviews demonstrated that motivation is seen as an important characteristic of a leader (see appendix table 3).

Evidence for this claim is provided in interviews 7 (see appendix interview 7, line 1) and 8 (see appendix interview 8, lines 4-6). In addition, interview 8 indicates that "I think it's important that you yourself have the intrinsic motivation to do your job. And if your manager then enables this, it is actually best" (see appendix interview 8, lines 4-6), thus referring to the fact that the leader is expected to address the employee's intrinsic motivation.

Foster creativity and innovation

According to another 2 interviews, fostering creativity and innovation is a leadership quality Generation Z appreciates (see appendix table 3).

In fact, this can be illustrated by remarks made in interviews 11 and 12. Moreover, according to interview 11, Generation Z considers "simply being open to new ideas, especially in order to promote innovation and creativity among employees" (see appendix interview 11, lines 13-14) to be an important characteristic of leaders in terms of fostering creativity and innovation. In addition, interview 12 suggests that both the own creativity and innovative ability as well as the ability to challenge employees to come up with creative and innovative ideas are characteristics that Generation Z ascribes to a good leader (see appendix interview 12, lines 1-3).

Giving Feedback

Finally, two interviews revealed that generation Z perceives and appreciates having the opportunity to receive regular feedback as a good capability of leaders (see appendix table 3).

The significance of providing feedback is highlighted in interviews 2 and 3 by generation Z and according to the interviewees a desirable characteristic of a leader. In addition, particular the importance of honest feedback is emphasized in generation Z (see

appendix interview 2, lines 2-3). Also, the advantages associated with honest feedback according to generation Z are described in interview 3. The statement "She [leader] should be honest, by all means. In other words, criticism is of course also important, to enable you to work on yourself." (see appendix, interview 3, lines 3-4), suggests that the Generation Z values feedback, in particular, to be able to develop further on the basis of it.

Furthermore, 6 additional characteristics were identified in isolated interviews, although none of these would be confirmed by other interviews at this point in time, which can be observed in Table 3 in the appendix. However, for reasons of exhaustivity, the categories are listed in the following and their relevance is illustrated by means of specific passages in the material.

Evidence for the leadership characteristics "**Guides well**" and "**Being just**" can both be found in interview 6 (see appendix interview 6, line 1). However, since they were not confirmed by further incidents during the interview series, and considering their vague nature, further research is required to validate these characteristics.

Another leadership characteristic mentioned only once in the course of the interview series and thus cannot be confirmed by other interviews was "**Resilience**". According to Interviewee 12, resilience is "Then I would say that resilience is also very important, in other words, a certain resistance to stress and robustness and flexibility," (see appendix Interview 11, lines 11-12).

Moreover, the dimension "**Organizational ability**" was mentioned by generation Z as "good leadership ability" in only one interview. Nevertheless, evidence supporting this claim can be taken from interview 11. The interviewee refers here to the capability to "have an overview of everything and to be structured, organized, because that simply has to come from above, that you have this organizational ability" (see appendix interview 11, lines 18-20).

Likewise, the category "**Role Model**" was not confirmed by further interviews. According to the interviewee, this characteristic refers to the fact that "the ideal manager should also clearly represent the company image, especially to new employees, so that the entire company culture is also passed on in the same way." (see appendix interview 11, lines 5-7)

Ultimately, the identified category of "**Emotional Intelligence**" could not be confirmed by further interviews either. The leadership characteristic of emotional

intelligence is mentioned in interview 12 in conjunction with empathy and self-reflection as a tool to ensure the ability to react appropriately in certain situations. (see appendix interview 12, lines 5-11).

5. Discussion

The following chapter will discuss the findings derived from the qualitative content analysis in the context of the theoretical considerations. The aim is to identify the significance of the results with regard to their contribution to existing theories. Furthermore, it is intended to provide a hypothesis, taking into account the existing principles of conscious leadership, enabling leaders to address and retain generation Z using deliberate conscious leadership dimensions. Finally, the results will be evaluated critically, and an outlook regarding further fields of research will be given.

5.1. Interpretation and contextualization of the results in existing theories

Based on the findings of the theoretical consideration, generation Z appreciates an open communication culture to be able to build trust (Fernandez et al., 2023). These findings were also confirmed by the results of the interviews. According to the interviewees, the ability to communicate is a key characteristic they desire in a good leader (see e.g. interview 11, lines 1-3). In addition to open and regular communication, which is also emphasized by the theory, they appreciate communication on an eye level (see e.g. interview 7, line 1). Moreover, the theoretical consideration revealed generation Z´s need for professional development (Iorgulescu, 2016) which was also reinforced by the conducted interviews. The participants claimed that they perceive good leaders as those who encourage their professional development (see e.g. interview 9, lines 3-5). In addition, they prefer leaders who support them by enabling them to develop a high degree of personal responsibility through the delegation of tasks (see interview 4, lines 4-6 & interview 12, lines 4-5). According to Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) generation Z is in need of managers who are listening to their ideas (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). The interviews confirmed generation Z's commitment to a more collaborative leadership philosophy. They claim to prefer leaders who involve them in decision-making processes (see interview 10, lines 3-5). Furthermore, they like to be heard and appreciated by their leaders (see interview 12, lines 2-3). Fernandez et al. (2023) emphasized the fact that generation Z desires their leaders to provide disclosure of performance metrics and clear objectives (Fernandez et al., 2023). Evidence supporting this finding was also presented throughout the interview results. Both feedback

and the delegation of clear tasks and responsibilities have been identified as characteristics of good leaders.

5.2. Implications for leadership practice and development

A feasible concept that could be applied as a leader to meet the needs of Generation Z is the following which is based on the key characteristics of a conscious leader tailored to generation Z's specific leadership needs and expectations. Accordingly, three dimensions that are typical for a conscious leader have been identified as matching the needs of generation Z.

Initially, leaders should focus on the **creation of an inspiring culture**. The interviews revealed that generation Z appreciates open communication and mutual exchange (see interview 4, line 7 & Fernandez et al., 2023). Moreover, the (future) employees of this generation expect their managers to encourage creativity and innovation and to exemplify this spirit themselves (see interview 12, lines 1-3).

Also, flexibility is very important to the generation. Thereby, they do not only refer to the flexibility of their work structure through, for example, flexible working hours, but also to the fact that they desire their leaders to have a certain degree of flexibility regarding new ideas and strategies (see interview 11, lines 12-13). Thus, leaders should encourage and foster a culture of open exchange.

To address the needs of generation Z using conscious leadership methods, leaders are also advised to take an active role in the **development of their teams**. This responsibility is based on the generation's need for professional development and self-optimization (Iorgulescu, 2016). When implementing and practicing this dimension, leaders refer on the one hand to Gen Z´s desire for professional development and on the other hand to the demand for support and constructive feedback (see interview 1, lines 3-4; interview 3 lines, 3-4 and interview 9, lines 3-5). Moreover, having this ability is particularly important to provide a supportive culture in which employees are encouraged to report problems to their leaders at any time (see interview 2, lines 4). In addition, generation Z demands ongoing candid and constructive feedback to develop further based on it. Furthermore, it is also reflected in the need for the delegation of tasks to foster individual responsibility (see interview 4, lines 2-4).

Lastly, leaders ought to have a strong perception of both their own and the company's **purpose** to appeal to generation Z. The interviews as well as the theoretical considerations demonstrate generation Z's desire for intrinsic motivation (see interview 8, lines

4-6 & Mahmoud et al., 2020) which could be approached by appealing to a **higher purpose**. Moreover, Bencsik et al. suggest that generation Z tends to develop their careers based on their desires and values, (Bencsik et al., 2016) which also speaks in favor of adhering to a higher purpose.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this approach is not complete, given the limitations discussed in the adjacent chapter. Thus, in the following the limitations of the study will be elaborated.

5.3. Limitations of the study

Subsequently, the methodology as well as the results obtained will be analyzed critically to identify possible limitations of the study.

It should be acknowledged that due to the choice of a qualitative method and the narrow sample group, the results of the study require further investigation to be validated. Nevertheless, the study provides an initial theory that can be utilized as a starting point for further investigation. Due to inherent personal biases and the selected sampling method, the results may have been biased by the researcher. However, this could be reduced by defining more detailed selection criteria in advance as well as by increasing the number of researchers involved in the selection of interview participants in order to minimize individual preferences. In addition, due to the translation of the data into English, translation errors may have occurred. Thus, this should be taken into account when evaluating and discussing the results. Consequently, artificial intelligence was used in the translation process to mitigate the researcher's personal bias in the translation process. Moreover, a lack of academic research articles focusing on fundamental research in the field of conscious leadership has been identified during the theoretical review. These findings were supported by Fry & Egel (L. W. Fry & Egel, 2021).

5.4. Suggestions for future research

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, it is worthwhile to delve further into empirical research investigating the principles of conscious leadership. A feasible approach to be taken up is provided by Brazdau et al. (2021) who developed the Consciousness Quotient Inventory (Brazdau et al., 2021). Moreover, not only the generation to which the individual belongs influences the preference for certain leadership skills. Zehetner et al. (2022) also emphasize the fact that the cultural perspective should be considered (Zehetner et al., 2022). This is also supported by Nieżurawska

(2023), who extends this position by adding to consider personal motivations as well (Nieżurawska, 2023).

Consequently, this consideration might be incorporated into future studies. Finally, it should be noted that although the dimensions of emotional intelligence, empathy, and resilience were not confirmed by any subsequent interviews, they might conceal interesting characteristics that require further investigation.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to find out the characteristics that generation Z attributes to a good leader and to assess the extent to which these characteristics coincide with the characteristics of a conscious leader. First, a theoretical analysis was used to identify a set of characteristics associated with conscious leadership. Moreover, in the empirical study, individuals born between 1995 and 2010 were interviewed and the characteristics they ascribed to good leadership were collected. By means of an inductive approach, it was possible to identify 16 dimensions the interviewees ascribe to a good leader. These dimensions include the following: "Role model", Delegation of tasks", "Fosters creativity and innovation", "Organizational ability", "Resilience", "Emotional Intelligence", "Motivating", "Being justice", "Guides well", "Flexibility", "Encourages development", "Empathy", "Giving feedback", "Supportive", "Cooperative", "Good communication skills". Subsequently, considering the preceding theoretical considerations as well as the 16 characteristics of good leaders, three aspects of the concept of conscious leadership have been identified as helpful for leading generation Z. On the one hand, communicating a purpose might be instrumental in attracting generation Z and motivating them intrinsically. On the other hand, the generation prioritizes its professional development, which can be addressed by leaders through the proactive development of their teams. Also, leaders should create an inspiring culture by practicing open communication and fostering creativity and innovation. Finally, it should be mentioned that due to the limitations discussed in chapters 5.3 and 5.4, the three aspects do not constitute an exhaustive model. Hence, they require further investigation. Nevertheless, the findings provided in this study do serve as a solid foundation for future research and meet the objectives of the proposed research question.

7. Bibliography

Bencsik, A., Horváth-Csikós, G., & Juhász, T. (2016). *Y and Z Generations at Workplaces*. n/a. https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.03.06

Bennett, J., Pitt, M., & Price, S. (2012). Understanding the impact of generational issues in the workplace. *Facilities*, *30*(7/8), 278–288. https://doi.org/10.1108/02632771211220086

Brazdau, O., Ahuja, S., Opariuc, C.-D., Jones, V., Sharma, S., Monsanto, C., Andrews, S., & Fiveson, K. (2021). An Exploratory Analysis of Collective Patterns of Conscious Experience Using a Self-Report Questionnaire. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.634677

Breidenbach, P., Kaeding, M., & Schaffner, S. (2019). Population Projection for Germany 2015–2050 on Grid Level (RWI-GEO-GRID-POP-Forecast). *Jahrbücher Für Nationalökonomie Und Statistik*, *239*(4), 733–745. https://doi.org/10.1515/jbnst-2017-0149

Chapman, D., Dethmer, J., & Klemp, K. (2015). *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Success*. Conscious Leadership Group.

Dimock, M. (2019, Januar 17). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

Drenik, G., & VandeBoom, J. (2022, Dezember 22). *Why Gen-Z Is Our Next Wave Of Business Owners*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/garydrenik/2022/12/22/why-gen-z-is-our-next-wave-of-business-owners/

Fernandez, J., Lee, J., & Landis, K. (2023, Januar 18). Helping Gen Z Employees Find Their Place at Work. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2023/01/helping-gen-z-employees-find-their-place-at-work

Fry, L. W., & Egel, E. (2021). *Global Leadership for Sustainability*. *13*(11). https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116360

Fry, R., & Parker, K. (2018, November 15). Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet. *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/

Gläser, J., & Laudel, G. (2010). *Experteninterviews und Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*. VS Verlag.

Harter, J. (2023, Mai 17). *Is Quiet Quitting Real?* Gallup.Com. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/398306/quiet-quitting-real.aspx

Iorgulescu, M.-C. (2016). GENERATION Z AND ITS PERCEPTION OF WORK. *CrossCultural Management Journal*, *1*, 47–54.

Kaiser, R. (2014). *Qualitative Experteninterviews: Konzeptionelle Grundlagen und praktische Durchführung*. Springer-Verlag.

Lehmann, K. (2021, März 22). Neue Generationen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. *MINDSET MOVERS*. https://www.mindsetmovers.de/blog/neue-generationen-auf-dem-arbeitsmarkt/

Mackey, J., Mcintosh, S., & Phipps, C. (2020). *Conscious Leadership: Elevating Humanity Through Business*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Mahmoud, A. B., Fuxman, L., Mohr, I., Reisel, W. D., & Grigoriou, N. (2020). "We aren't your reincarnation!" workplace motivation across X, Y and Z

generations. *International Journal of Manpower*, *42*(1), 193–209. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-09-2019-0448

Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. 12., überarb. Aufl.* (12. Aufl.). Beltz.

McCombes, S. (2019, September 19). *Sampling Methods | Types, Techniques & Examples*. Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/sampling-methods/

McCrindle, M., & Wolfinger, E. (2010). Generations defined. *Ethos*, *18*, 8–13.

Nieżurawska, A. N., Radosław Antoni Kycia ,. Joanna (Hrsg.). (2023). *Managing Generation Z: Motivation, Engagement and Loyalty*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003353935

O'Boyle, E. (2021, März 30). *4 Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace*. Gallup.Com. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx

Ozkan, M., & Solmaz, B. (2015). The Changing Face of the Employees – Generation Z and Their Perceptions of Work (A Study Applied to University Students). *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *26*, 476–483. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00876-X

Pfeiffer, F. (2019, August 2). *Induktiv in deiner wissenschaftlichen Arbeit vorgehen*. Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.de/methodik/induktiv/

Schroth, H. (2019). Are You Ready for Gen Z in the Workplace? *California Management Review*, *61*(3), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619841006

Sisodia, R., & Mackey, J. (2013, Januar 14). "Conscious Capitalism" Is Not an Oxymoron. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2013/01/cultivating-a-higher-conscious

Sisodia, R. S. (2009). Doing business in the age of conscious capitalism. *Journal of Indian Business Research*, *1*(2/3), 188–192. https://doi.org/10.1108/17554190911005354

Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, *71*, 103–113. https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2015.0021

XING. (2023, April 13). *Generationen-Auswertung des Job-Netzwerks XING - Jung, qualifiziert, wechselwillig: So tickt die GenZ*. NEW WORK SE. https://www.new-work.se/de/newsroom/pressemitteilungen/2023_pm_xing_jung_qualifiziert_wechselwillig_so_tickt_die_gen_z

Zehetner, A., Zehetner, D., Lepeyko, T., & Blyznyuk, T. (2022). Generation Z's expectations of their leaders: A cross-cultural, multi-dimensional investigation of leadership styles. *European Conference on Management Leadership and Governance*, *18*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.34190/ecmlg.18.1.891

8. Appendix

8.1. Interviews (English) including row information.

Interview 1

1   Yes, my director, who I have right now, because she communicates with me at eye

2   level and you don't have the feeling that she's five steps above you, but it's

3   very cooperative, but she also stands up for you and puts herself in front of

4   you like a mother lion when something goes wrong.

Interview 2

1   Yes, my supervisor. And I think it's great that she's always a very nice and

2   friendly person. But when she then provides feedback, she always provides very

3   honest feedback, although you never have to be afraid of the feedback. And you

4   can also always come to problems with her, come to her with problems.

Interview 3

1   Well, she should have empathy and also be able to put herself in the other

2   person's situation, to simply look at the whole thing from a different

3   perspective. She should be honest, by all means. In other words, criticism is of

4   course also important, to enable you to work on yourself, and yes, perhaps

5   something that goes a bit hand in hand with empathy, that you are a bit

6   compassionate.

Interview 4

1   Um, well, I'm in my current... It's difficult because I haven't been there that

2   long. But before that, I also had good managers, and I would say what made the

3   management style so good was this encouragement that enables you to work very

4   quickly, very independently. I always appreciated that and yes, that you were

5   always given a lot of responsibility right from the start, so to speak, and that

6   trust was also placed in you, and then despite that, if you had any questions,

7   there was always this culture of open communication that was simply nurtured.

Interview 5

1   Yes, my manager, whom I particularly like and with whom I work best together, is

2   characterized by the fact that she always shows a high degree of empathy for me.

3   Furthermore, she delegates a high degree of personal responsibility to me.

4   Regular communication, i.e., where I know that the person is always available,

5   where there is a certain approachability, where you can always turn to the

6   person without somehow having to fear that you will somehow say something wrong

7   or whatever, so you can really notice that this really leads to a better result

8   in the end.

Interview 6

1   Yes, someone who actually provides good working hours, i.e. flexible hours, and

2   someone who can also guide well, someone who can lead in a just way, that was

3   already the case!

Interview 7

1   Um, cooperative, communication at eye level, it should also be motivating, yes,

2   and allow flexible working hours.

Interview 8

1   Oh, that's difficult! I believe a bit in the "new school". So it's a lot about

2   empathy, and it has to fit. But to be honest, if you work somewhere, and I think

3   the environment doesn't fit like the company, and your job is not right, I don't

4   think the manager can do much either. So, I think it's important that you

5   yourself have the intrinsic motivation to do your job. And if your manager then

6   enables this, it is actually best. So actually someone who looks at you, sees

7   what exactly is your profile, where do you want to go, and then tries to make it

8   possible for you. But I don't think it's such a, well, I don't think it's such a,

9   he has to be nice or somehow be hard or be somehow chasing. I think you have to

10 really see what you want as a person, as an individual, where you want to go,

11 and then enable that. I think that's the number one thing. Because I think there

12 is no such thing where you can say, this is a good one, this is a bad one. I

13 think it's individual, and therefore you have to promote the individual, that

14 would be my number one.

Interview 9

1 In my work environment, there was one manager whose leadership style I really

2 appreciated. That was my old team leader, Murat. I started my career one and a

3 half years ago, so I also had my first manager, and he was very interested in

4 the development of his employees and was very committed to ensuring that we also

5 develop further, that we work jointly on each other, that he is somehow also a

6 trustworthy person for you in the workplace. So is a smaller company with 50

7 employees I think is relevant somewhere at every level. So, I appreciated him

8 very much, would be my current team leader now. He's a bit younger, he still has

9 to gather his experience, but that's exactly what my leadership is.

Interview 10

1 Well, in my direct work environment, there is no manager who meets my

2 requirements for a manager 100 percent. But a good quality for a manager is

3 definitely communicating at eye level. What is also personally important to me

4 is that decisions are made jointly in a smaller team, so that opinions are taken

5 into account and suggestions, for example, regarding the flexibility of working

6 hours, can be jointly discussed and decisions made on this basis.

Interview 11

1 For me, an ideal manager would definitely have a high level of communication skills, i.e.,

2 to be able to really communicate problems and all kinds of things, and to evaluate and

3   assess them, and then just to be able to pass them on to the people, I think that's

4   important and it would also be very important to me. And I would say empathy and also a

5   certain degree of emotional intelligence, because in the topic of... not only in terms of

6   being empathetic towards other people, towards me in this case, but that the manager also

7   needs to have a degree of self-reflection and self-control somewhere, because I think

8   that's very important in this position, because as a manager you are often confronted with

9   stressful situations, and I think it's important for the manager to be able to distinguish

10   between when and how I have to react, and I think emotional intelligence and the factors I

11   just mentioned are also very important. Then I would say that resilience is also very

12   important, in other words, a certain resistance to stress and robustness and flexibility,

13   also in the sense of mental flexibility, and simply being open to new ideas, especially in

14   order to promote innovation and creativity among employees. And if the manager were not

15   open, I believe that they would be very limited in their work and in what they do. So there

16   is definitely a certain openness, flexibility and exact. And the last thing I would

17   definitely say is, I don't know exactly, as a characteristic to really have a picture of

18   everything, so to speak, and to have an overview of everything and to be structured,

19   organized, because that simply has to come from above, that you have this organizational

20   ability, and here I simply expect that the manager also really has an overview of the

21   company and of the activities that are happening, and so on. So in any case still

22   structured, organized and, as I said, resistant, emotionally intelligent, and with

23   communication skills, exactly.

Interview 12

1   To me, the perfect leader should be creative and innovative in his or her

2   thinking, and at the same time be supported by the creativity of the employees,

3   which means asking for ideas and getting other perspectives on certain topics.

4   An ideal manager should also be able to work and delegate projects effectively,

5   based on the strengths and weaknesses of the employees. And in my eyes, the

6   ideal manager should also clearly represent the company image, especially to new

7   employees, so that the entire company culture is also passed on in the same way.

8.2. Overview Codes

Table 2 Overview Codes (source: own illustration)

Colour	Code	Number of code found in documents
●	Supportive	3
●	Empathy	4
●	Fosters creativity and innovation	2
●	Good communication skills	6
●	Delegation of task (MbO)	3
●	Being just	1
●	Giving feedback	2
●	Organizational ability	1
●	Emotional Inteligence	1
●	Encourages development	4
●	Resilience	1
●	Motivating	2
●	Guides well	1
●	Role model	1

	Cooperative	5
●	Flexibility	4