

Assessing Generational Preferences in Characteristics of an Admired Leader Among Career Library Professionals

Amy Tureen & Susie Skarl

Abstract

This study utilizes Posner and Kouzes' Characteristics of an Admired Leader (CAL) instrument to determine if there are generational preferences in characteristics of an admired leader among career library professionals. Data was gathered from nearly 800 respondents, coded into generational cohorts, and assessed from commonalities across generational lines. Additional assessment of the data sought trends across generational cohorts within the context of employment status, library type, library subfield, and generational identity. The authors concluded that while there is little generational difference in the characteristics of an admired leader, there are commonalities across the profession at large and suggest that library administrators and leaders prioritize developing the shared characteristics and competencies as they develop and engage in their own practice.

Introduction

Both scholarly and popular publications have, in recent years, spent a significant amount of time and text remarking on the multigenerational workplace. Owing largely to both increasing lifespans and later retirement dates, for the first time most workplaces are likely to include employees representing five generations (Traditionalists or the Silent Generation, the Boomer or Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z). The confluence of so many generations simultaneously in the workforce has resulted in a broad range of theories and reflections regarding generational differences in approach to work/life balance, pay expectations, motivation and incentive patterns, and other perceived generational differences that impact the workplace.

These purported generational differences may impact both library workplaces and library leaders who may need to accommodate varying employee expectations and needs; however, confirmation of generational differences solicited solely from those within the profession have been scant. Moreover, where these generational studies have taken place, few have focused specifically on how generational differences may impact perceptions of library leadership within the context of admired traits. In this study, responses were solicited from nearly 800 library career professionals regarding the most valued characteristics of an admired leader and then assessed for generational trends across the profession, within library subfields, within specific library subtypes, and within gender identity categories.

Literature Review

For the first time in history, five generational cohorts (Traditionalists or members of the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Z) are potentially working side by side. Because of this, there has been an abundance of scholarship analyzing the differences and similarities between the generations, as well as the complexity of simultaneously managing multiple generations with different priorities, values, motivators, and demotivators (Nwosu, Igwe & Nnadozie, 2016; Hayes, Parks, McNeilly & Johnson, 2018). In recent decades, several narratives about age and generational differences in academic

librarianship have surfaced in the professional library and information science (LIS) literature (Gardner & Galoozis, 2018) and like all other industries, libraries have also had to address navigating dynamics that arise in a multigenerational workplace (Graybill, 2014). Munde (2010) states that librarianship is a profession distinguished by the need for renewal and refreshment of technical, discipline-based, and managerial skills. With the five generational cohorts working together, researchers have focused on best practices in how to manage and train multi-generations successfully in a variety of fields for nearly 20 years. This research has collectively identified a number of shared generational characteristics which may be useful in understanding, generally speaking, the perceived motivations, values, and training needs and preferences of workers within each generational cohort.

Common Values, Needs, and Preferences Among Generational Cohorts

Research notes that workers within the Traditionalist or Silent Generation are loyal to employers, respect authority, and honor the chain of command. Additionally, the research indicates that the key to managing Traditionalists or members of the Silent Generation is to respect their experience. Because members of this generational cohort have seen and done a lot, managers are advised to spend time learning about and honoring their backgrounds. Although some generational cohort members may be resistant to technology, members of this generation often adjust well and generally prefer face-to-face instruction with step-by-step instructions and handouts. For library managers, providing this generation with a detailed orientation to the library and its history, as well as long-term goals for the position, are essential (Nwosu, et al., 2016; Park, Scott & Schnabel, 2014; Zemke, 2000; Martin 2006; Long & Sheehan, 2015; Hayes, et al, 2018).

Baby Boomers are broadly perceived to be service-oriented, committed, and collaborative team players who are eager to please but can, on occasion, be self-centered, judgmental, and may place too much emphasis on the process rather than the results. They are also the parents and grandparents of the Gen Xers and Millennials, which may add another power dynamic when interacting with employees who are the same age as their own children and/or grandchildren. Research points out that the key to managing Boomers is to appreciate their strong work ethic and the extra time and effort they are willing to put in to finish a project. Supervisors need to assure Baby Boomers that their library is a humane place to work and give them the “inside scoop” about the politics of the library. For training, Boomers prefer interactive lectures and may interrupt teachers in the classroom when seeking greater clarity. They also tend to appreciate flexible schedules and opportunities to learn new skills (Nwosu, et al., 2016; Martin 2006; Deeken, Webb & Taffurelli, 2008).

As employees, Gen Xers tend to be technologically savvy, open to change, independent, and eager to learn new skills. The research suggests that Gen Xers are results-oriented, possess an entrepreneurial spirit, a do-it-yourself attitude, and embrace change in the organization. Although they are career-oriented, members of this generation tend to place a strong emphasis on work/life balance and value flexibility and informality in the workplace. Gen Xers are perceived to require minimal supervision and appreciate leaders who consider their input, offer feedback, and provide a clear support system. They are not in favor of attending too many meetings and prefer guidelines with an objective and a deadline for their work rather than supervisors micromanaging them. Many members of Gen X have had other careers before coming to librarianship and bring diverse skills to the field. They appreciate the fast-paced and varied work of busy libraries and adapt well to the frequent changes required to maintain relevance (Martin, 2006; Patterson, 2007; Park, et al., 2014). When learning new skills, Gen-

Xers are comfortable with both in-classroom and online training and are considered to be self-sufficient learners (Mosley, 2005).

Millennials are seen by many in-field researchers as determined to redefine academic librarianship in the 21st century (Gordon, 2006). Broadly speaking, they are team players who are optimistic and good at multitasking. Research shows that the key to managing this generation of librarians is to provide them with the latest technology, a structured work environment, and detailed instructions for tasks with deadlines. Millennials tend to value diversity a great deal more than the preceding three generations, and some may simply refuse to work in a place where diversity is non-existent. Millennials desire training and mentoring from older employees and they seem to function best in a collaborative environment (Martin, 2006). Millennials prefer online training to classroom instruction. There is a body of research that suggests that because most Millennials grew up with more access to television than the preceding generations, they have short attention spans and need constant stimulation (Deeken, 2008). Managers are reminded that Millennials tend to value their personal lives more than their jobs and, unlike Boomers, they have no trouble letting their bosses know this (Graybill, 2014). In professional settings, Millennials have proven eager to take on increasing responsibility. They expect opportunities to continually grow and learn and “prefer regular, consistent feedback and recognition” (Smith & Galbraith, 2012, 143).

Multi-generational Cohorts Working Together

How do generational differences play out in the workplace among colleagues? Is it rewarding or challenging? Park, Scott, and Schnabel (2014) & DiRomualdo (2006) report that workers from every generation saw the positive aspects of intergenerational work relationships more than the negative ones. They are working together well and taking advantage of their diverse perspectives and skills to get the job done and learn from each other in the process. However, there is still tension and friction among generations with conflicts regarding acceptable work hours between generations, breakdowns in communication, and a perceived over or under-reliance on technology. To evaluate the importance that different generational cohorts place on specific workplace factors, Mencl and Lester (2014) distributed a survey to 636 employees aged 18 and older across government, health care, manufacturing, technology, real estate, and nonprofit organizations. Regarding workplace factors, the researchers found that all three generations (Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials) placed importance on seven of 10 workplace factors (such as teamwork and collaboration, flexible work arrangements, and a challenging job), demonstrating that the generations were more alike than different. Their findings suggest the most significant generational differences concerned career advancement opportunities, which Millennials valued more than did Generation X and Boomers.

What Generations Want from Leaders in Libraries

Leadership traits of generational cohorts are abundant in the literature; however, research on the leadership expectations and qualities that individuals of different generations hold and value for themselves as leaders is more limited (Heyns, Eldermire, Howard, 2019). Young, Herson, and Powell (2006) surveyed Gen X librarians and found that they valued a diverse array of attributes, including leaders being successful in securing resources-funds, technology, and staffing; good interpersonal skills; honest; articulated vision that inspires others; and building partnerships within the library or across campus. Graybill (2014) studied Millennial academic librarians' desired traits in a leader and found five main traits Millennial librarians wanted in their leaders: “interpersonal relations,” “competency,” “self-management,” “management of others,” and “communication.” In a generational analysis of Baby Boomers,

Generation X, and Millennials, Martin (2018) suggests that all three generations value the same traits for past leaders: emotional intelligence, empowering, visionary thinker, communicator, librarian/manager, trustworthy, and a catalyst for change. For future library leaders, Millennials most valued the theme of change agent, while Gen Xers valued the theme of communicator more than other generations. As these two generations increasingly make up more and more of the working population, library leaders will need to hone the associated skills; ensuring that library organizations and services avoid becoming stagnant, while also communicating the need for, the process of, and the result of change.

Questioning the “Generational Divide”

While several authors have focused on generational differences in the workplace and the impact on co-workers and managers, there have been scholars who have refuted the significance of generational differences among colleagues. In a 2019 interview with the American Management Association, research scientist Jennifer J. Deal argued that the generations value essentially the same things. Her findings indicated that all generations share the same values, in addition to wanting to trust their supervisors, receive feedback, and have the opportunity to learn (American Management Association, 2019). In a study by Mlodzik and De Meuse (2010) reviewing the scholarly literature on generational differences, it became apparent that the results more often than not found few or no consistent differences between the generations in the workplace. There appears to be many more similarities than differences across generations. Contrary to the claims about generational differences, Costanza et al (2012) discovered that there were no significant differences in job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intent to turnover that can be explained by different generation membership. Although older workers were slightly more satisfied than younger workers and they were less likely to leave their jobs, this result was explained by the age difference or length of employment of the employees, not because of generational differences. Within libraries, some authors caution against focusing solely on workforce generations and generational differences because it is a “single axis of identity” to anticipate attitudes and behaviors and it does not address other aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and class. (Gardner & Galoozis, 2018; Ettarh, 2014).

Methodology

The study used quantitative data derived from an online survey form that replicated, with permission, Posner and Kouzes’ Characteristics of an Admired Leader (CAL) instrument. The instrument articulates and defines 20 positive leadership traits from which participants are to select the seven they most look for in a leader. Each primary characteristic is followed by additional related terms. Traits and synonyms used in the study included:

- Ambitious (aspiring, hard-working, striving)
- Broad-Minded (open-minded, flexible, receptive, tolerant)
- Caring (appreciative, compassionate, concerned, loving, nurturing)
- Competent (capable, proficient, effective, gets the job done, professional)
- Cooperative (collaborative, team player, responsive)
- Courageous (bold, daring, gutsy)
- Dependable (reliable, conscientious, responsible)
- Determined (dedicated, resolute, persistent, purposeful)
- Fair-Minded (just, unprejudiced, objective, forgiving)

- Forward-Looking (visionary, foresighted, concerned about the future, has sense of direction)
- Honest (truthful, has integrity, trustworthy, has character, ethical)
- Imaginative (creative, innovative, curious)
- Independent (self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-confident)
- Inspiring (uplifting, enthusiastic, energetic, humorous, cheerful, optimistic, positive about future)
- Intelligent (bright, smart, thoughtful, intellectual, reflective, logical)
- Loyal (faithful, dutiful, unswerving in allegiance, devoted)
- Mature (experienced, wise, has depth)
- Self-Controlled (restrained, self-disciplined)
- Straightforward (direct, candid, forthright)
- Supportive (helpful, offers assistance, comforting)

Selections were not ranked, and repeated selection of the same trait was prohibited. Additional prefatory demographic questions were inserted into the study related to current career status, library type, library subfield, birth year, and an optional gender identity category.

The form was distributed through the researchers' individual social media accounts, listservs, and personal contacts. The targeted demographic was career library professionals of all types from those still enrolled in information science degree programs through and including retirees. Participation in this survey was not restricted to individuals who employed in or were training to be employed in a "librarian" title role but, rather, anyone who worked in a non-volunteer, non-student-employment capacity in a library of any type. Over a four-month period, February 2019-June 2019, a total of 862 responses were recorded. Of these, 799 surveys were fully completed and 797 met the study criteria (this excluded nonsensical responses suggestive of user error).

Following data cleaning, birth year responses were re-coded to reflect the generation labels and year ranges articulated by the Pew Research Center: Silent Generation (1928-1945), Boomer Generation (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and Generation Z (1997-Present). The decision to omit a question regarding generational membership and instead request birth year only was an attempt to standardize the data and to avoid misattribution that may result from varying understandings of generation definitions, individual perceptions of personally identifying more with an adjacent generational label, or affiliation with the growing concept of "micro generations." The Pew Research Center generational classifications were selected as the metric of choice for generation assignment due to its authority and pervasive presence in US-based sociological study (Pew, 2019).

Results

Emphasis on "career library professionals," even when including students enrolled in an MLIS or MLS granting program, is believed to explain the lack of Generation Z participants. Members of this generation are at most 22 years of age, meaning they have had a limited period to be in the workforce at all, much less a workforce which often requires both a BA and a Master's degree to obtain employment. See Table 1 for generational demographics by Pew metrics.

Table 1. Generational Demographics by Pew Metrics

| | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial | Generation Z |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Total Participants by Generation | 6 | 231 | 308 | 252 | 0 |
| % Participants by Generation | 0.75% | 28.98% | 38.64% | 31.61% | 0% |

In addition to birth year/generational identity, the data pool was further divided into four biographical subsets. Data provided in all subset tables below include both the whole number of responses and the percentage within a generational grouping. No totals have been rounded and all numbers in excess of 1% have been calculated to one decimal while those calculated at a rate of less than 1% have been recorded to two decimals for greater clarity.

Employment Status

Regarding employment status, 755 (94.7%) respondents identified as currently employed, overwhelmingly dominating the data pool. Only 21 (2.6%) respondents self-identified as retired, 16 (2%) as current library school students, and 5 (0.62%) as MLS/MLIS-holders who were unemployed. Respondents were restricted to a single response and participation in this question was required. Examination of employment status within generational subcategories revealed largely expected employment status for the associated generation and stage of life. See Table 2 for employment status.

Table 2. Generational Data by Employment Status

| Employment Status | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial |
|--|---------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Currently Employed | 2 (33.3%) | 213 (92.2%) | 301 (97.7%) | 239 (94.8%) |
| Retired | 4 (66.6%) | 16 (6.9%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (0.39%) |
| Current MLS/MLIS Student | 0 | 1 (0.43%) | 6 (1.9%) | 9 (3.5%) |
| MLS/MLIS-Holding Unemployed | 0 | 1 (0.43%) | 1 (0.32%) | 3 (1.1%) |

Library Type

Respondents were asked to identify the type of library in which they were currently employed. Where respondents were not currently employed, they were asked to indicate the type of library in which they had spent the majority of their career (retired) or the type of library in which they would most prefer to seek employment (current MLS/MLIS students and MLS/MLIS-holding unemployed individuals). As with employment status, respondents could select only one response and could not skip or otherwise decline to answer the question. Of the total respondents, 452 (56.7%) worked in academic libraries, 44 (5.5%) worked in corporate libraries, 17 (2.1%) in law libraries, 65 (8.1%) in medical libraries, 8 (1%) in a museum or archive, 146 (18.3%) in a public library, 8 (1%) in a school or K-12 library, and 57 (7.1%) in a library type not identified in the survey form itself. See Table 3 for data by Library Type.

Table 3. Denerational Data by Library Type

| Library Type | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Academic Library | 1 (16.6%) | 130 (56.2%) | 170 (55.1%) | 151 (59.9%) |
| Corporate Library | 0 | 22 (9.5%) | 15 (4.8%) | 7 (2.7%) |
| Law Library | 1 (16.6%) | 4 (1.7%) | 9 (2.9%) | 3 (1.1%) |
| Medical Library | 1 (16.6%) | 17 (7.3%) | 28 (9.0%) | 19 (7.5%) |
| Museum or Archive | 0 | 1 (0.43%) | 2 (0.6%) | 5 (1.9%) |
| Other | 3 (50%) | 16 (6.9%) | 19 (6.1%) | 19 (7.5%) |
| Public Library | 0 | 38 (16.4%) | 61 (19.8%) | 47 (18.6%) |
| School/K-12 Library | 0 | 3 (1.2%) | 4 (1.2%) | 1 (0.39%) |

Library Subfield

Respondents were asked to identify the library subfield in which they were currently employed. Unlike other demographic questions, respondents were permitted to select multiple responses, reflecting the lived realities of both library professionals working in multiple areas of expertise and library professionals who serve in both leadership and functional expert capacities. A total of 1,300 responses were logged, with 332 (25.5%) employed in administration/leadership roles, 97 (7.5%) in cataloging roles, 98 (7.5%) in circulation and/or stacks management roles, 131 (10.1%) in collection development roles, 78 (6%) in digital collections and/or digitization roles, 24 (1.8%) in facilities roles, 259 (20%) in instruction and/or reference roles, 43 (3.3%) in interlibrary loan roles, 74 (5.7%) in special collections and/or archives roles, and 12.6% (164) in other roles not described in the survey. See Table 4 for Library Subfield.

Table 4. Generational Data by Library Subfield

| Library Sub Field | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial |
|--|------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Administration/Leadership | 2 (20%) | 81 (20.5%) | 143 (29%) | 106 (26.3%) |
| Cataloging | 0 | 34 (8.6%) | 36 (7.3%) | 27 (6.7%) |
| Circulation and/or Stacks Management | 0 | 32 (8.1%) | 33 (6.6%) | 33 (8.2%) |
| Collection Development | 0 | 46 (11.6%) | 45 (9.1%) | 40 (9.9%) |
| Digital Collections and/or Digitization | 2 (20%) | 21 (5.3%) | 32 (6.4%) | 23 (5.7%) |
| Facilities | 0 | 11 (2.7%) | 5 (1%) | 8 (1.9%) |

| | | | | |
|--|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Instruction and/or Reference | 3 (30%) | 86 (21.7%) | 95 (19.2%) | 75 (18.7%) |
| Interlibrary Loan | 0 | 14 (3.5%) | 18 (3.6%) | 11 (2.7%) |
| Special Collections and/or Archives | 0 | 24 (6%) | 23 (4.6%) | 27 (6.7%) |
| Other | 3 (30%) | 46 (11.6%) | 63 (12.7%) | 52 (12.9%) |

Gender

Respondents were given the option to state their gender identity using a text entry box. The resulting data was then assessed for common themes, resulting in five overarching categories: Male, Female, Nonbinary, Other Gender Expressions, and Undisclosed. Among respondents, 619 (77.6%) identified as female, 125 (15.6%) identified as male, 6 (0.75%) as nonbinary, 3 (0.37%) as other gender expression, and 44 (5.5%) as undisclosed. For the purposes of categorization, responses categorized as “Female” included “female,” “woman,” “cis woman,” “cis female,” and “F” while responses categorized as “Male” included terminology such as “male,” “man,” “cis man,” and “M”. Responses categorized as “Nonbinary” included self-identification that explicitly rejected a gender binary, including terminology such as “genderqueer,” “third gender,” “fem-genderqueer,” and “nonbinary.” Responses categorized as “Other Gender Expression” included terminology that neither reflected the male/female binary or an identity that explicitly rejected that binary including “questioning,” “masculine,” and “female presenting.” Responses categorized as “Undisclosed” included responses in which the text entry was left blank and responses completely unrelated to gender identity (i.e. “Caucasian,” and “Heterosexual”). See Table 5 for Gender Identity.

Table 5. Generational Data by Gender Identity

| Gender Identity | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Female | 2 (33.3%) | 180 (77.9%) | 242 (78.5%) | 195 (77.3%) |
| Male | 3 (50%) | 31 (13.4%) | 52 (16.8%) | 39 (15.4%) |
| Nonbinary | 0 | 0 | 3 (0.97%) | 3 (1.1%) |
| Other Gender Expressions | 0 | 0 | 1 (0.32%) | 2 (0.79%) |
| Undisclosed | 1 (16.6%) | 20 (8.6%) | 10 (3.2%) | 13 (5.1%) |

Analysis of preferred characteristics of an admired leader revealed minimal differences between generations. All four generations included in the survey prioritized, in alphabetical order, the following characteristics among their top-seven tier: Broad-Mindedness, Competent, Fair-Mindedness, Forward-Looking, Honest, and Intelligent. “Honest” was the most valued characteristic for all groups including the Silent Generation respondents, who rated the trait as of equal importance to a forward-looking orientation. The remaining five commonly shared traits within the top seven tiers did not consistently share rank order across all four generational groupings.

Respondents in two of the generational groupings, Silent and Millennial, identified a unique characteristic of importance within their top seven: “Inspiring” (of third rank importance for silent generation respondents) and “Dependable” (of seventh rank importance for Millennial respondents). Baby Boomer and Generation X respondents, on the other hand, identified the “Supportive” characteristic to be of seventh rank importance to both groups. These generational differences are slight, however, as the Silent Generation’s “Inspiring” characteristic is of ninth

rank importance to all groups, the Millennial’s “Dependable” characteristic is of tenth rank importance to Silent Generation respondents and eighth rank importance to both the Baby Boomer and Millennial respondents, and Boomers and Generation X’s “Supportive” characteristic holds an eighth rank for Silent Generation respondents and ninth for Millennial respondents.

Table 6 below identifies the rank order of each characteristic by generation, followed by the percentage of each generation that prioritized a given trait. Gray shading indicates the top seven characteristics selected by each generation. Bold text identifies prioritized traits that are not shared in the top seven traits across all groupings.

Table 6. Characteristics by Generational Data

| Rank # | Silent | Boomer | Generation X | Millennial |
|--------|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Honest 5 (83.3%) ¹ | Honest 199 (86.1%) | Honest 270 (87.6%) | Honest 219 (86.9%) |
| 2 | Forward-Looking 5 (83.3%) ¹ | Competent 175 (75.7%) | Competent 214 (69.4%) | Competent 161 (63.8%) |
| 3 | Inspiring 4 (66.6%) ² | Forward-Looking 142 (61.4%) | Forward-Looking 208 (67.5%) | Forward-Looking 160 (63.4%) |
| 4 | Fair-Minded 4 (66.6%) ² | Intelligent 133 (57.5%) | Intelligent 178 (57.7%) | Broad-Minded 146 (57.9%) |
| 5 | Broad-Minded 4 (66.6%) ² | Fair-Minded 130 (56.2%) | Broad-Minded 174 (56.4%) | Fair-Minded 143 (56.7%) |

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6 | Intelligent 3 (50%) ³ | Broad-Minded 129 (55.8%) | Fair-Minded 162 (52.5%) | Intelligent 128 (50.7%) |
| 7 | Competent 3 (50%) ³ | Supportive 112 (48.4%) | Supportive 138 (44.8%) | Dependable 119 (47.2%) |
| 8 | Supportive 2 (33.3%) ⁴ | Dependable 101 (43.7%) | Dependable 132 (42.8%) | Cooperative 118 (46.8%) |
| 9 | Straightforward 2 (33.3%) ⁴ | Inspiring 92 (39.8) | Inspiring 120 (38.9%) | Inspiring 109 (43.2%) |
| 10 | Dependable 2 (33.3%) ⁴ | Cooperative 86 (37.2%) | Cooperative 98 (31.8%) | Supportive 107 (42.4%) |
| 11 | Caring 2 (33.3%) ⁴ | Straightforward 73 (31.6%) | Straightforward 95 (30.8%) | Straightforward 70 (27.7%) |
| 12 | Loyal 1 (16.6%) ⁵ | Imaginative 54 (23.3%) | Imaginative 85 (27.5%) | Imaginative 63 (25%) |
| 13 | Imaginative 1 (16.6%) ⁵ | Caring 48 (20.7%) | Caring 72 (23.3%) | Caring 62 (24.6%) |
| 14 | Determined | Mature | Mature | Mature |

| | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | 1 (16.6%) ⁵ | 41 (17.7%) | 51 (16.5%) | 36 (14.2%) |
| 15 | Courageous 1 (16.6%) ⁵ | Ambitious 20 (8.6%) | Self-Controlled 36 (11.6%) | Courageous 28 (11.1%) |
| 16 | Cooperative 1(16.6%) ⁵ | Courageous 19 (8.2%) | Determined 33 (10.7%) | Loyal 26 (10.3%) |
| 17 | Ambitious 1 (16.6%) ⁵ | Self-Controlled 19 (7.79%) | Ambitious 26 (8.4%) | Self-Controlled 22 (8.7%) |
| 18 | Self-Controlled 0 (0%) | Loyal 17 (7.3%) | Loyal 25 (8.1%) | Ambitious 18 (7.1%) |
| 19 | Mature 0 (0%) | Determined 17 (7.3%) | Courageous 24 (7.7%) | Determined 17 (6.7%) |
| 20 | Independent 0 (0%) | Independent 11 (4.7%) | Independent 15 (4.8%) | Independent 12 (4.7%) |

¹Equivalent first ranking, ²Equivalent second ranking, ³Equivalent third ranking, ⁴Equivalent fourth ranking, ⁵Equivalent fifth ranking

In addition to assessing overall generational trends, the gathered data was analyzed for trends within demographic subgroups and, further, generational trends within said demographic subgroups. In virtually all cases, the nine characteristics identified as within each generation's top seven characteristics of an admired leader fell within each demographic subgroup and each generationally divided demographic subgroup's top seven characteristics. The few outliers tended to cluster around smaller groups of participants, where single respondents had more

power to push traits up or down the rank order listings. Outliers included Gender: Non-Binary, Gender: Other Gender Expressions, and Employment Status: MLS/MLIS-Holding Unemployed, all of which identified the “Imaginative” trait within their top seven admired characteristics. Additionally, respondents employed in law libraries prioritized the “Cooperative” trait as a top seven characteristics. Given the low population totals of these pools, it is not certain if the existence of these outliers indicates actionable meaning.

Limitations and Future Research

A primary limitation of this study is that the Kouzes and Posner survey is a pre-defined list of terms and characteristics of a manager; therefore, survey respondents were forced to choose from a list of terms that may not fully encompass what they value. Additionally, the manner in which the survey was distributed (primarily through social media platforms such as Twitter and library listservs) may have also been a limitation. Since respondents were self-selected and the study did not use a random sample, the authors were unable to extrapolate to the population as a whole.

The results of the survey also broadly reflect the possibility that the respondents who either identified as non-binary or other gender expressions may uniquely value the “Imaginative” trait, defined by Posner and Kouzes as “creative, innovative, curious.” However, the combined sample size (9) was too small to reveal a true trend. The authors of this article recommend future researchers consider assessing the potential for determining if there are unique values of characteristics of an admired leader among this subpopulation. Similarly, future research into the needs and values of other minoritized library professionals whose lived experiences may impact the qualities and traits they most value in leaders (i.e., librarians of color, veterans, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, etc.) and librarians by specialty (i.e., law librarians, health sciences librarians) may be beneficial.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that, broadly speaking, there are minimal differences between generational cohorts of library professionals in regard to the most valued characteristics of an admired leader. While other generational differences may exist, our results demonstrate that it would be unwise for library leaders to refine or alter their leadership approaches for different generational cohorts based solely on generational cohort identity alone. Rather, our findings suggest that library leaders seeking to enhance their practice should instead prioritize developing and practicing the following nine skills and traits regardless of the generational makeup of their staff, teams, or faculty: broad-mindedness, competent, dependable, fair-mindedness, forward-looking, honest, inspiring, intelligent, and supportive.

The results of this study further affirm findings conducted by Posner and Kouzes across multiple professions and nationalities between 1987 and 2017. Over 100,000 respondents across four decades have consistently identified the nine following traits as most important in rank order: honest, competent, inspiring, forward-looking, intelligent, broad-minded, dependable, supportive, and fair minded (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Respondents to this survey

closely match Kouzes & Posner's findings, with the exception of the placement of the "Inspiring" value, which the majority of generational groups in this survey (Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) rank much lower in importance, although still within the top nine traits (rank 9 for respondents to this survey, rank 3 or rank 4 for Kouzes & Posner's 1987, 1995, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017 studies). This difference in weighted importance may reflect the increased autonomy granted to library professionals when compared to the autonomy granted to professionals in other industries.

While generational differences may not influence the traits individual career library professionals prefer when assessing and defining the characteristics of an admired leader, this study should not be read as fulsome and all-inclusive rebuttal to claims that generational differences play a role in the contemporary workplaces, be they in libraries or elsewhere. Rather the conclusions drawn from this study reflect that all four generations assessed are broadly united in favoring traits that emphasize the relationship and interaction aspects of leadership. This in turn reflects the lived reality that leadership is an ongoing reciprocal process between leaders and followers and that skill sets useful in relationship building and maintenance are pivotal. Library leaders are reminded that ongoing training, reading, and skill development that emphasize and support the successful management of relationships is evergreen professional development, regardless of the generations that enter into or exit the workplace.

Amy Tureen (amy.tureen@unlv.edu) is Head of the Library Liaison Program at the University of Nevada Las Vegas

Susie Skarl (susie.skarl@unlv.edu) is Urban Affairs Librarian at the University of Nevada Las Vegas

Published: September 2020

References

American Management Association. "The Myth of Generational Differences in the Workplace ", last modified January 24, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.amanet.org/articles/the-myth-of-generational-differences-in-the-workplace/>.

Costanza, David P., Jessica M. Badger, Rebecca L. Fraser, Jamie B. Severt, and Paul A. Gade. 2012. "Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 27 (4): 375-394.

Deeken, JoAnne, Paula L. Webb, and Virginia Taffurelli. 2008. "We are all Winners: Training Silents to Millennials to Work as a Team." *The Serials Librarian* 54 (3-4): 211-216.

DiRomualdo, Tony. 2006. "Geezers, Grungers, Genxers, and Geeks: A Look at Workplace Generational Conflict." *Journal of Financial Planning* 19 (10): 18.

- Ettarh, Fobazi. 2014. "Making a New Table: Intersectional Librarianship." *The Library with the Lead Pipe*, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/making-a-new-table-intersectional-librarianship-3/>
- Gardner, Carolyn Caffrey and Elizabeth Galoozis. 2018. "False Narratives of Generational Difference in Academic Libraries: Toward an Intersectional Approach." *The Library Quarterly* 88 (2): 177-192.
- Gordon, Rachel Singer and Richard G. Gordon. 2006. *The Nextgen Librarian's Survival Guide* Information Today, Inc.
- Graybill, Jolie O. 2014. "Millennials among the Professional Workforce in Academic Libraries: Their Perspective on Leadership." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40 (1): 10-15.
- Hayes, Jessica B., Cecelia Parks, Samantha McNeilly, and Phill Johnson. 2018. "Boomers to Millennials: Generational Stereotypes at Work in Academic Librarianship." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44 (6): 845-853.
- Heyns, Erla P., Erin RB Eldermire, and Heather A. Howard. 2019. "Unsubstantiated Conclusions: A Scoping Review on Generational Differences of Leadership in Academic Libraries." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 45 (5): 102054.
- Kindrick Patterson, Constance. 2007. "Generational Diversity—The Impact of Generational Diversity in the Workplace." *The Diversity Factor* 15 (3): 17-22.
- Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner. 1999. *The Leadership Challenge Planner: An Action Guide to Achieving Your Personal Best*. Vol. 1 Jossey-Bass.
- . 2012. "The Leadership Challenge: How to make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations." *Panarchy, the Collapse of the Canadian Health Care System*: 124.
- Long, Valeria and Lynn Sheehan. 2015. "Sustaining Library Faculty: The Elephant is Big and Gray and is in the Library."
- Martin, Jason. 2006. "I have Shoes Older than You: Generational Diversity in the Library." *The Southeastern Librarian* 54 (3): 4.
- . 2018. "What do Academic Librarians Value in a Leader? Reflections on Past Positive Library Leaders and a Consideration of Future Library Leaders." *College & Research Libraries* 79 (6): 799.
- MencI, Jennifer and Scott W. Lester. 2014. "More Alike than Different: What Generations Value and how the Values Affect Employee Workplace Perceptions." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 21 (3): 257-272.
- Mlodzik, Kevin J. and K. De Meuse. 2010. "A Scholarly Investigation of Generational Workforce Differences: Debunking the Myths." Retrieved March 20: 2014.

- Mosley, Pixey Anne. 2005. "Mentoring Gen X Managers: Tomorrow's Library Leadership is Already Here." *Library Administration and Management* 19 (4): 185-192.
- Munde, Gail. 2010. "Considerations for Managing an Increasingly Intergenerational Workforce in Libraries." *Library Trends* 59 (1): 88-108.
- Nwosu, Moses C., Kingsley N. Igwe, and Chuma O. Nnadozie. 2016. "Managing Generational Diversity in the Workplace: Implications for the Digital Era University Library Management." *International Journal of Applied Technologies in Library and Information Management* 2 (2): 28-44.
- Park, Betsy, Rachel Scott, and Jennifer Schnabel. 2014. "Generations in Tennessee Libraries." *Tennessee Libraries* 64 (3).
- Pew Research Center. "The Generations Defined." <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-P->, accessed January 17, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ft_19-01-17_generations_2019/.
- Smith, Sara D. and Quinn Galbraith. 2012. "Motivating Millennials: Improving Practices in Recruiting, Retaining, and Motivating Younger Library Staff." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 38 (3): 135-144.
- Young, Arthur P., Peter Hennon, and Ronald R. Powell. 2006. "Attributes of Academic Library Leadership: An Exploratory Study of some Gen-Xers." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32 (5): 489-502.
- Zemke, Ron, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak. 1999. *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*. New York: Amacom.