

2021

## Exploration of Effective Leadership Traits to Retain Millennials in Federal Service

Tony Augustin Damian  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tony Augustin Damian

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Exploration of Effective Leadership Traits to Retain Millennials in Federal Service

by

Tony Augustin Damian

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

B.S., University of Phoenix, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2021

## Abstract

The federal government faces critical human capital management challenges because of workforce retirements. Millennial retention is key to addressing some of these challenges. However, job satisfaction surveys have indicated retention concerns for existing millennial federal employees. The federal sector is struggling to compete with the private sector in employee retention among the millennial generation. An intrinsic motivation approach was used in this study, focusing on leadership and its role in retention. Strauss and Howe's generational theory, the trait-based approach to leadership, and three leadership styles—transformational, ethical, and authentic—comprised the conceptual framework. The purpose was to explore the preferred leadership traits that may influence millennials to remain in federal service. A general qualitative inquiry was used, and 15 purposefully sampled federal millennial participants were recruited. The online survey data were analyzed using a deductive and inductive approach to coding. Traits were matched to their corresponding leadership style. The civilian participants favored a mix of traits, with many related to authentic and transformational leadership. A small sampling of military participants also indicated a preference for this same leadership style. This may indicate the need for the creation of a fresh style of leadership for millennials combining the preferred traits from all three leadership styles. This study's results may lead to positive social change by helping federal leadership programs adapt leadership styles to improve employee retention among millennials. By maintaining and strengthening its millennial workforce, the federal government can continue to provide effective and efficient services on a national level.

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## Dedication

In loving memory to Augustin Damian, my father, who always called me “professor” growing up. To my devoted wife, Marian, who supported me through my educational journey. She stuck by me throughout my bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and Ph.D. programs—no matter how long it took. She lovingly spell-checked and edited my papers—many times finding errors the computer missed. She showed her love by learning JAVA, which is not her forte, and helped me debug my programs. To my loving daughter, Teela, who shared her dad with his learning team and learned the social graces by serving cookies to my study mates on Team Leland. To Leland, who taught me that leaders do not make the team, but the team members do. Though he took a different path after our first class, his memory lived on in a team name that signified excellence and perseverance. To Team Leland, a multiethnic learning team with a rotating list of exceptionally talented members from my bachelor’s and master’s programs. We helped each other stay focused on the goal of graduating with the distinction while balancing our hectic careers and family lives.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The makeup of the federal workforce is continuously changing with retirements and other types of attrition. These natural human resource activities are typically voluntary and often create new opportunities to bring fresh talent into an organization. However, employee turnover can leave an organization vulnerable. If not carefully watched, turnover can create gaps in institutional knowledge and leadership roles (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). The population of the newest federal workers, the millennials, grew from less than 7% in 2018 to 24% in 2019 (Archuleta, 2014; U.S. Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2019). The retention of this new workforce will be critical because more than one third of the federal workforce will be eligible for retirement starting in 2020 (Gutierrez, 2017). With this most recent generation of workers, government leaders will need to understand how to retain these workers and close the mission-critical skill gaps left by the growing number of eligible retirees projected in the coming years (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2015). Federal millennials represent an opportunity to backfill the institutional and mission-critical gaps left behind by a retiring workforce and reenergize the government with a new generation of workers.

In the next sections of this chapter, I describe the phenomenon investigated and the research question. A brief overview of the conceptual framework that guided this study and the basic research design will be provided. Finally, the chapter concludes with

the significance of this study, how this study is different from others, and how it addresses a topic not studied before.

### **Background**

Generational differences are inevitable because of different social, economic, and cultural contexts each generation was exposed to as they were growing up. Millennials (also known as Generation Y, Gen Y, or Generation Me) were born from 1982 to 2004 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Researchers have suggested that this generation of workers differs from earlier generations. To retain them may require a different management strategy (Calk & Patrick, 2017). One significant difference is the fact that millennials are three times more likely than other generations to change jobs within a year, according to Gallup Polls (Adkins, 2016).

Other researchers have found that federal millennials were more likely to leave the public sector altogether (Ertas, 2015). While millennials were more satisfied than other generations with their immediate supervisor, manager, or senior leaders, they scored lower on their overall satisfaction with their job and organization (OPM, 2014a). To cope with these differences, leaders need to understand the generational dynamics involved and change their leadership style accordingly (Boggess-de Bruin, 2017). The challenge to retain this new generation of workers may be the catalyst for a reevaluation of federal leadership and employee retention models.

Leadership plays a substantial role in influencing employee retention (Mwita et al., 2018; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). From 2016 to 2017, turnover among federal employees increased from 16.4% to 16.7%, making employee retention critical to

supporting the government's ability to serve the public (Wald, 2018). Leadership's relationship with employee retention has been studied extensively. However, there has been a lack of studies on how millennials' preferred leadership traits may affect employee retention in the federal sector. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in leadership research and help open the door to further research into federal leadership development practices.

### **Problem Statement**

The retirement of the government's aging workforce is causing agencies to lose institutional knowledge and creating a mission-critical skills gap. This gap that retirement creates threatens to impact public services and poses an elevated risk of federal agencies being unable to carry out their missions (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2015). This federal attrition problem is heightened by research findings that millennials have a higher turnover or attrition rate than previous generations. There is an even higher proportion of federal millennials who have expressed a desire to leave the public sector entirely because of lacking job satisfaction (Nevbahar, 2015; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016).

If millennial federal employees can be retained, they can bolster federal agencies with innovative ideas and skills because of their differences from other generations. Millennials are known to be highly educated, technology savvy, innovative, flexible, and optimistic (Adrenaline, 2018; Brack, 2012). They also possess an elevated level of volunteerism and civic-mindedness, and they want to make the world a better place



(Ertas, 2016; Hentra & McGowan, 2016; O'Neil, 2014; Stone, 2009). The characteristics inherent to millennials can transform the future of public service.

The unique characteristics millennials possess can be valuable assets in government (Aaron & Levenberg, 2018; Chambers, 2010; Jerome et al., 2014). The government uses a tool called *FedScope* to assess trends and issues with the federal workforce. However, the FedScope data on employee separation do not have sufficient detail to shed light on why retention was challenging in some areas and successful in others (Viechnicki, 2015). This lack of information on retention can make the government ill-equipped to retain this workforce effectively. If this knowledge gap could be bridged, the millennial workforce's full potential within the federal government may be realized, which may usher in a new government performance era. In this study, I attempted to close this gap by viewing millennial retention through a different lens, from the millennial federal employees' viewpoint.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research paradigm for this study was qualitative because this method is best suited when looking into a complex phenomenon from the viewpoint of a group or population (Creswell & Poth, 2108). The intended purpose for this study was to explore the preferred leadership traits of federal millennials. The phenomenon of interest was how preferred leadership traits could contribute to retention of millennial federal employees.

### **Research Question**

The following research question was central to this study:

What specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

In this qualitative study, I used a conceptual framework designed to increase understanding of federal millennials' leadership needs. With this framework, I took an approach not traditionally used in federal research, focusing on leadership traits desired by a specific generational cohort. This conceptual framework combined the Strauss-Howe generational theory [SHGT] (Strauss & Howe, 1991), the trait approach to leadership (Fleenor, 2007), and the three different leadership styles favored by nonfederal millennials. SHGT has been used to describe each generation as possessing different attitudes, values, beliefs, and aspirations based on pivotal generational events. The trait approach to leadership is used to describe leaders as having certain key traits and characteristics that could influence others toward mutually beneficial goals. Leadership styles are made up of a collection of leadership traits that, when put together, comprise a leadership style. These styles define a leader's behavior or what they do to lead (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Styles are ways that leaders communicate, solve problems, and make decisions with their followers (Duggan, 2019). For this study, I chose to use three different leadership styles that in the literature have shown a negative effect on employee retention: (a) transformational, (b) ethical, and (c) authentic leadership (Azanza et al., 2015; Babalola et al., 2016; Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020). In Chapter 2, I discuss how the conceptual framework provided the foundation for exploring and answering the research question.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers conduct research because a problem needs to be explored, but they first must determine which research method to use. The quantitative method is used to measure or test hypotheses based on numerical data. Because I wanted to explore federal millennials' thoughts and feelings, a qualitative method was best suited for this study. Among qualitative methods, there are several approaches to this type of inquiry, and I considered two approaches: phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology is focused on understanding an experience through user stories of an event of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the goal was not about understanding an event but understanding the leadership preferences participants favor that may cause them to stay in an organization longer. Creswell and Poth (2018) wrote that ethnography's goal was to understand an event from a group's perspective with a shared culture. However, this study was not about understanding an event. The best choice was a general qualitative study to explore the research question without being limited by a particular approach.

The fundamental concept guiding this study was to explore whether generational experiences influence federal millennials' preferred leadership traits. These preferred leadership traits may affect millennials' desire to remain in federal service. The study's data were collected from a purposeful sampling of federal millennials through an online survey (see Appendix F). A qualitative data analysis tool was used to analyze the data to look for patterns and categorize and code the data into relevant themes to answer the research question.

## Definitions

*Attrition:* Any form of separation from the government, such as resignation, retirement, or transfer (OPM, 2009). This action is a natural process of any organization and can usually be planned.

*Federal workforce:* Nonelected federal employee in any of the three branches of the U.S. government: (a) executive, (b) judicial, and (c) legislative. The federal workforce consists of permanent, temporary, full-time, and part-time employees (Government Organization and Employees, 2006; Tuutti, 2012).

*Generation:* Individuals of the same age group and historical events who also share a similar set of experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs, and aspirations; these individuals are considered a cohort (LifeCourse Associates. n.d.a; Center for Generational Kinetics, 2016).

*Leadership style:* A leader's behavior or what they do to lead others. The style flows from a leader's values, traits, and characteristics (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

*Leadership traits:* A leaders' values, personal traits, or characteristics. These can influence leadership effectiveness and are usually consistent across various leadership situations (Zaccaro et al., 2004).

*Millennial:* Strauss and Howe (1991) originally defined the millennial generation as born from 1982 to 2004. However, the Pew Research Center has identified the millennial generation as those people born from 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019). LifeCourse Associates (n.d.b), a consulting company formed by the originators of the SHGT, still supports the original millennial timeline from 1982 to 2004. For this

research, I used Strauss and Howe's (1991) original timeline to be consistent with the SHGT.

*Retention:* When an employee remains employed at a federal agency (Langbein & Stazyk, 2018). Employee retention efforts within an organization help to keep employee turnover rates low.

*Turnover:* The rate at which employees leave a federal agency to seek employment with another federal agency or leaves the federal government entirely (Lee et al., 2018). This action is often unplanned and can leave knowledge gaps within an organization.

### **Assumptions**

There were three assumptions I made that could have potentially influenced this study. If any of these assumptions were proven false, it could have invalidated this study's meaningfulness (Simon & Goes, 2011). The first assumption was that this study's conceptual framework would yield meaningful data to advance leadership and retention research in the federal government. The second assumption was that federal millennials would be interested in this study and that I would have more than enough participants to complete this study. The use of an online survey (see Appendix F) proved invaluable for data collection because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third assumption was that federal millennials would be honest and truthful in sharing their views and leadership experiences. Respondents are not always honest in their answers, sometimes because they want to answer with what the researcher wants to hear (Infosurv, 2017). In this study, most of the participants' answers were believed to be

honest; they were descriptive, if not colorful, regarding their leaders' descriptions and preferences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The specific aspect of the research problem explored was that federal millennials might have different preferred leadership traits than their counterparts in the private sector. These preferred traits may define the style of leadership best suited to lead and retain the millennial generation in federal service. The population under study consisted of millennials employed federal workforce with over 1 year of employment. This study's potential transferability may not be applicable to any other sectors outside the public sector. However, this study's results could be generalized to other public sector agencies, such as state and local governments, with millennial employees with over 1 year of service.

### **Limitations**

Several potential limitations could have affected the validity of this study. Simon and Goes (2011) wrote that a study's limitations are often the result of choices made in the study's methodology and design. One potential limitation was my design choice of using a general qualitative approach to understand an aspect of leadership from the millennial generation's viewpoint. This approach's potential limitation was acquiring a representative sample of federal millennials because individuals within a generational group could have different individual experiences. These individual differences could skew the data and the results.

A second potential limitation was the transferability of this study. Because of this study's narrow scope, the findings may not apply to any other sectors outside the federal government. A third potential limitation may be the dependability of the study. Dependability refers to a study's findings being consistent and repeatable (Olivia, 2017). After the publication of this study, the results may not be repeatable because it was conducted at a specific point in time.

To overcome these limitations, I took the following steps: To mitigate the risk of not having a representative sample, I used purposeful sampling. I focused on the characteristics found in the population of interest to answer the research question. To mitigate the transferability limitation, I provided as much detail as possible in the study so that readers could decide for themselves if the study was transferable. The research mitigated the study's dependability limitation by keeping a detailed audit trail of the research activities. This audit trail could be easily examined by another researcher acting as an independent auditor. I kept a comprehensive record of the research steps from the start of the project to report the findings, including the raw data collected and the reflexive journal.

Because the researcher is the tool in qualitative studies, researcher bias could cloud the results. In this study, there were two different potential biases. One such bias was generational because I am from a different generation than the generation being studied. The second type of bias was organizational bias because I am employed by a federal agency. I acknowledged that unconscious bias could exist. Any unconscious bias was documented in my reflexive journal. By being aware of bias, I was able to course

correct any biases that arose during the study. My journal is documented proof of whether the study results are bias-free. I have stipulated that this study was not conducted as part of any affiliation or involvement with any governmental organizations or entities to address any organizational bias. My employment in the federal workforce did not affect my professional objectivity. I have abided by what the data showed and have not manipulated the results.

### **Significance**

This study has the potential to make three contributions. The first potential contribution is advancing the government's understanding and knowledge by filling in gaps in the current literature on the federal millennial workforce. The second potential contribution is advancing leadership practices within the government to understand how to retain millennial employees. The third potential contribution is influencing social change. The government can leverage millennials' unique characteristics and talents to fill skill gaps left by retiring workers. The retention of millennials in the federal workforce can improve government efficiency and effectiveness to address growing public needs.

### **Summary**

Government leaders need to understand that the millennial workforce is different from previous generations. One advantage is that this generation is more inclined technologically and is more civic minded. The skills brought by millennials can make the government more efficient and reduce costs. A significant disadvantage is that millennials tend to have a higher turnover rate than earlier generations, making retention



a top priority in keeping this workforce. In this qualitative study, I explored the specific leadership traits and characteristics that may influence millennials to continue federal service. The results of this study may impact positive social change by helping government leaders understand how to retain the unique talents and skills of the millennial workforce.

In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature written in the last 5 years. This review helped develop my understanding of what is known and unknown regarding this study's topic. In the next chapter, I explain how the selected method and the conceptual framework will help to answer the research question.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

With an increasing portion of the federal government's workforce nearing retirement age, the next generation of workers will be needed to backfill the gaps. This most recent generation of workers, often referred to as *millennials*, has unique characteristics and needs. Some studies have shown millennials have a higher turnover rate than earlier generations (Adkins, 2016; Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017). Because leadership plays a role in why employees leave an organization, leadership may also play a significant role in retaining this generation of workers.

This qualitative research study involved exploring the leadership traits and characteristics that may influence federal millennial employees to remain in public service. The first step in this study was to review the current literature. In this chapter, I examine scholarly peer-reviewed and other credible sources to develop a foundation for answering the research question.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The primary search engine used in this study was Google Scholar. Google Scholar allowed me to search using keywords and phrases for scholarly literature available on the internet. I also performed multidatabase searches on the electronic library databases of Walden University and the University of Phoenix. The primary electronic databases used at these institutions included Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, CINAHL Complete, Complementary Index, Educational Source, MasterFILE Premier, MEDLINE Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, SAGE Journals

(formerly SAGE Premier), and Taylor and Francis Online. I also searched government agency websites like the OPM, a federal agency that manages the federal civilian workforce. A comprehensive list of databases searched can be found in Appendix A.

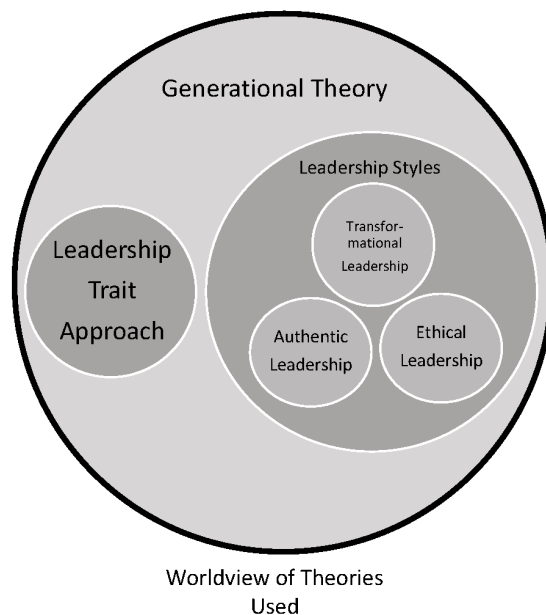
My literature search strategy consisted of using key concepts related to the research question to develop a general list of keywords and phrases for the database searches. The keywords and phrases used in the literature review included: *millennial*, *millennials*, *gen y*, *generation y*, *generation me*, *attrition*, *civil servants*, *federal*, *federal employees*, *federal government*, *government*, *intention to leave*, *leader satisfaction*, *leadership*, *leadership and management styles*, *leadership influence*, *leadership style*, *leadership traits*, *leadership traits and characteristics*, *management influence*, *public administration*, *public sector*, *public service*, *retention*, *supervisor influence*, *supervisor satisfaction*, *turnover*, *turnover intention*, *U.S. federal government*, and *management satisfaction*. A complete listing of the search term combinations, Boolean operators, and search limiters used for this study's literature research can be found in Appendix A.

In my review of the scholarly literature within the past 5 years, most of the articles focused on millennial recruitment and motivation in the private sector. I did not find any current peer-reviewed research on millennial retention in the government related to the research question. When I changed tactics and started to search for nonpeer reviewed scholarly work, such as dissertations, I was a bit more successful. Still not satisfied with the small quantity of literature on the topic, I decided to search government websites. While government documents are not always scholarly or peer-reviewed, they are considered authoritative and credible sources of information.

The government search took me to OPM, an independent federal government agency responsible for managing the government's civilian workforce. This agency oversees the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). This annual voluntary, confidential, and anonymous survey measures U.S. federal employees' perceptions to help agency leadership strengthen employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention across the government's civilian workforce (U.S. OPM, n.d.). The raw data from these surveys were publicly available through OPM's FedScope, a data visualization tool. Many of the dissertations and scholarly works I found written on federal millennial retention relied on the FEVS or FedScope as their primary data source.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The phenomenon studied was federal millennials' preferred leadership traits and characteristics and their relationship to this generational cohort's workplace retention. The study focused on the newest employees to the federal workplace, the millennials, and what specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service. The conceptual framework to examine this phenomenon consisted of a generational theory, the leadership trait approach, and three different leadership styles that nonfederal millennials seem to favor based on the extant literature. This framework was used to explore federal millennials' retention in the workforce (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***Conceptual Framework***Generational Theory**

SHGT has been used to explain the reasons for generational differences from Strauss and Howe's (1991) study of American history. Strauss and Howe found that each generation has been shaped by their age location or their age-determined participation at a particular age during significant events in their lifetimes. SHGT is used to explain why each generation tends to have different views and values than the generation before or after it. SHGT has similarities to Mannheim's generational theory. Mannheim wrote in 1928 that location in the lifecycle (age), space and historical setting, and not physical birth date separated generations (Wolff, 1993). Where Mannheim differed was that the similarity of location was more local or covered a smaller geographic area.

In contrast, SHGT is used to look at generations from a larger geographic area such as the entire United States. In this study, I examined millennials in the federal government. My data collection process entailed interviewing federal millennials throughout the United States, so Strauss and Howe's (1991) approach was more in line with this study.

Generational differences make working in a multigenerational environment difficult. Strauss and Howe (1991) theorized that differences among generations could be expressed in behavioral traits and attitudes, which can influence a generation's values and characteristics in adulthood. These distinct values and characteristics can shape workplace conduct and actions (VanMeter et al., 2013). Mmatli (2015) found that generational differences affect the exchange of views and ideas between generations. These differences could result in conflicts and even social exclusion in the workplace from multigenerational peers and managers. Generational differences also extend to learning styles; coursework stimulating to one generation may not be effective at engaging another generation (Bosscher, 2018). Trevino (2018) supported the idea that each generation has a distinct set of needs, desires, and expectations. These studies confirmed that generational differences must be considered in assessing employee retention. With a multigeneration workforce, the federal government needs to understand these generational differences when engaging, motivating, and retaining employees.

The cutoff date for each generation is not precise, and scholars disagree. According to both SHGT (1991) and Mannheim (Wolff, 1993), a birth date is not a consistent measurement of a generation. The earlier onset of puberty and the advent of

extended reproductive health technology in recent years has made it possible for children to be born 30 or more years apart. Because of this, SHGT (1991) has been used to define the length of a generation as roughly 22 years. However, the length of each generation can vary throughout history. Strass and Howe (1991) wrote that a generation born within a specific time frame would have common significant events the generation members share. Strauss and Howe have defined the millennial generation as born between 1982 and 2004, a birth of 23 years. However, the Pew Research Center has used the birth years 1981 to 1996 to define millennials (Dimock, 2019). LifeCourse Associates, a consulting company formed by the originators of SHGT supports the original millennial timeline from 1982 to 2004. In this study, I used Strass and Howe's (1991) original timeline to be consistent with SHGT.

This study benefited from this framework because the key to retaining millennials may not solely rely on extrinsic rewards. In a congressional subcommittee meeting, the OPM (2015) outlined several extrinsic and intrinsic retention methods to retain millennial employees. These methods included streamlined hiring, flexible compensation, flexible workplace policies such as telework and alternative work schedules, and education development opportunities. While these methods are a good start, they do not address the important intrinsic motivation that the right leadership can bring to retaining millennial employees. These important intrinsic motivations include employee empowerment, recognition, and open communication. Mishra and Mishra (2017) found that intrinsic motivations play an important factor in retaining millennials and benefit organizations in the form of higher employee commitment and productivity. In this study, I attempted to

determine the millennials' intrinsic needs and what type of leaders they prefer to remain in the federal government.

### **Trait Approach to Leadership**

The trait approach to leadership was an early attempt to understand leadership, but remains relevant today (Northouse, 2019). This approach focuses on a leader's traits because they influence their followers and their relationships (Fleenor, 2007). This approach has been criticized because no definitive list of leadership traits exists; nonetheless, scholarly literature has shown that traits are significant indicators of leadership effectiveness (Zaccaro, 2007; Zaccaro et al., 2004 ). Substantial empirical evidence has shown that many traits are consistently identified with successful leadership, such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (Northouse, 2019). Many organizations continue to use leadership trait tools, like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, for their leadership development programs. This approach remains a viable means to hone positive leadership traits in future leaders because of the motivating effects it has on their followers.

Leadership has always been a vital component in organizations because of its effect on employee engagement and positive outcomes. Yoon and Bono (2016) discovered that supervisory traits were essential in creating high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships. Nichols (2016) expanded on this, noting that leaders with personalities closely related to those traits desired by their subordinates resulted in positive outcomes. These two studies confirm that a leader's traits can directly affect their subordinates. The right leadership traits can result in positive organizational outcomes.



Research has shown that with the right leadership traits, a successful leader-subordinate relationship can result. But these relationships may also be affected by leaders and subordinates coming from different generations. Generational differences in the workplace can result in conflicts, social exclusion, and voluntary or involuntary employment termination by the subordinate (Mmatli, 2015). However, Stewart et al. (2017) found that understanding and embracing these differences can foster a positive workplace culture and address an organization's retention issues.

I chose to use the leadership trait approach for three reasons. First, this approach has been applied successfully in earlier research to explore and explain a relationship between a leader and their subordinates or followers. Second, this approach might explain why the strategies used for millennial retention should be different from the retention strategies of other generational cohorts. Finally, despite an exhaustive search of the literature, I found no research-based analysis of how the theory has been applied in ways like this study.

One weakness of this approach was that no well-defined core set of leadership traits required for effective leadership exists. Perhaps studies in this field have not accounted for generational differences. The benefit of using a trait approach to leadership (Fleener, 2007) alongside SHGT was that in this study I was examining one generational cohort, the millennials. The fact that multigenerational conflicts exist makes using these two approaches ideal for exploring the traits millennials desire in leadership.

## **Leadership Styles**

Leadership styles define a leader's behavior and how they lead (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Whether leading a team or an organization, leaders use different approaches or styles to complete tasks. These approaches influence the way leaders communicate, solve problems, and make decisions with their followers (Duggan, 2019). In this study, I chose three different leadership traits that have a negative effect on employee retention.

Transformational leadership is one leadership style that positively affects employee retention in millennials (Jauhar et al., 2017; Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020). This type of leadership involves an elevated level of employee communication and involvement with management. Another leadership style examined that plays a negative role in employee retention is ethical leadership (Babalola et al., 2016; Ouakouak et al., 2020). This type of leadership values open communication, respect and promotes a community bound in the common good. The last of the three styles is authentic leadership, which was found to diminish turnover intentions (Azanza et al., 2015; Oh & Oh, 2017). Authentic leadership is the type of leadership that results in honest, truthful relationships with their followers.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviewed the current literature related to the constructs of interest in this study and identified the gaps that this study addresses. This study centered around employee retention in the federal government and focused on what leadership traits may affect millennial federal employees to remain in federal service.

## **Employee Retention**

Retention is a critical business strategy by an organization to provide a conducive environment to retain its employees for the long term. Generational differences of different needs, desires, and expectations can make this effort challenging (Arrington, 2017; Trevino, 2018). Despite generational differences, an organization must strive to keep its best and brightest to maintain a high performing organization (Latham, 2012). A U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board OPM study of federal employees found a relationship between employee retention and elevated employee engagement levels (Lavigna, 2014). However, in the federal government, workers were more disengaged than those in the private sector (Cowart, 2014). When employees are disengaged, there was a higher risk of lower productivity and performance. These disengaged federal employees can have a detrimental effect on government agencies' mission and employee retention efforts.

The most reliable insight into federal government employees has been the FEVS, managed by the OPM. OPM has surveyed federal employees since 2002 to improve the workforce by gauging employee perceptions and job attitudes (OPM, n.d.). Public administrator researchers and scholars have also used this publicly available data.

The OPM surveys have resulted in many public administration studies. They have provided many useful insights into the work environment of federal employees. Kim and Schachter (2015) conducted a mixed-methods study combining the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey and a random sample of federal managers. They found that a leader plays a vital role in influencing organizational behavior.

In a congressional budget report, the federal government recognized that certain leadership behaviors contribute to employee engagement and performance (OPM, 2015). Another study combined the FEVS with the Enterprise Human Resources Integration Statistical Data Mart. Researchers found that honest and trustworthy leaders inspire high job satisfaction levels within their employees (Moon & Jung, 2018). These studies demonstrate the importance of leadership within federal agencies and the effects on their employees.

### **Leadership and Retention**

In literature, leadership has been one of the contributing factors that affect employee retention. Scholarly literature has found that leaders from the chief executive officer to managers all play an essential role in employee retention (Biro, 2017; Mwita et al., 2018; Nolan, 2015; Thompson & Gregory, 2012; Ulep, 2018). A study by Thibodeaux et al. (2015) found that leadership behaviors significantly impacted an employee's intent to remain. A later study by Yoon and Bono (2016) found that supervisory traits strongly predicted the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship relating to leader-member exchange. Leadership behaviors could also set the tone or culture of an organization. The leader's role in setting organizational culture was significant because a healthy work environment has been linked to retention. Dario (2014) found that a conducive working environment, such as good management and employee relationship, was necessary for employee retention. Another study by Ruiz and Davis (2017) showed that a positive working environment was vital in encouraging millennial retention.

Just like retention, generational differences affect the organization's leadership from senior leaders down to managers. Because of these differences, management must adapt to each generational cohort's leadership styles (Arrington & Dwyer, 2018). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2016) wrote that federal managers must actively engage with millennials to create a culture of engagement by valuing and understanding them. Thus, the importance of understanding federal millennials and their preferred leadership traits.

### **Leadership Styles, Traits, and Millennials**

There are many ways to lead. A leader can be truthful, listen to their team members, or even get their hands dirty. These different ways to lead have led to the creation of many different leadership styles, with each claiming to be more effective than the rest. One such leadership style was called *transformational leadership*, which has been found to have a direct inverse relationship or negative correlation with turnover intention (Asiedu et al., 2017; Caillier, 2016; Jauhar et al., 2017; Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020). Another leadership style was called *ethical leadership*. It has been shown to positively influence staff retention (Babalola et al., 2016; Mayende & Musenze, 2018; Ouakouak et al., 2020). However, another style called *authentic leadership* was shown to negatively affect turnover intentions (Azanza et al., 2015; Oh & Oh, 2017). These three leadership styles have been shown to lower turnover rates or produce higher employee retention rates. The big question remained: what was the best leadership style to retain millennial employees in the organization?

With the various leadership styles to choose from, millennials did not seem to fit cleanly in any of them. For example, transformational leadership is broad and covers a wide range of activities and characteristics. This style centers around creating a vision of the desired state and motivating followers as a group toward that future state (Chao, 2017; Northouse, 2019). However, Anderson et al. (2017) noted that this leadership type could be difficult because of the increased individualism in millennials when trying to motivate this group as a collective. Other studies found that millennials wanted individual support and mentoring from their leaders. (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016; Mohammad & Lenka, 2018). These studies showed that a literal transformational leadership style might not be the right fit for millennials.

Another style to consider for millennials was ethical leadership. Northouse (2019) wrote that this style centered on the leader's actions and who they are as a person. Once again, this style did not resonate with millennials because they were unprepared for ethical situations and were unlikely to seek ethical counsel from their leader (Neill & Weaver, 2017). Jauhar et al. (2017) found that millennials viewed work as less critical in their lives, thereby de-emphasizing workplace ethics. Once again, these studies showed that a literal ethical leadership style might not be the right fit for millennials.

Nevertheless, another leadership style to consider for millennials was authentic leadership. While authentic leadership is a new type of style, it focuses primarily on the leader who leads others from the values and beliefs based on their individual experiences (Northouse, 2019; Pinelli et al., 2018). These leaders are open and honest with their followers on their beliefs and values (Pinelli et al., 2018). Anderson et al. (2017) found

that millennials' work values differed because they have an increased desire to achieve work-life balance more than any other generation. Furthermore, millennials were more interested in leaders with leisurely values (Anderson et al., 2017). Even if a leader showed openness and honesty, this style might not work if the leadership style did not match their millennial followers' expectations. A literal, authentic leadership style may also not be the right fit for millennials because they believed themselves as unique and desired a tailored leadership approach (McNeil, 2018). From the studies of just the three leadership styles examined so far, I found that all these styles have their shortfalls. These leadership styles have their limits and cannot be fully used as defined in the literature to lead millennials (Putriastuti & Stasi, 2019). None were an exact match for what millennials expected or wanted from their leaders.

These leadership styles may be viewing leadership from too broad a brush, and a thinner brush may be needed. No matter what leadership style previously described, each style could be broken down into several leadership traits. All these unique styles shared some common leadership traits. For example, honesty was common to ethical leadership (Aghighi, 2019) and authentic leadership (Read & Laschinger, 2015). Transformational leadership and authentic leadership placed their followers' needs above their own (Northouse, 2019). Looking at leadership from this perspective, I saw that the line among leadership styles was not well defined. Because traits are the building blocks of leadership styles, they may be the key to employee retention.

In studies on millennials, certain leadership traits were common among each of the leadership styles. In a transformational leadership study, millennials favored

employee recognition (Jauhar et al., 2017). Another study found that millennials wanted individual support and mentoring from their superiors (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016). These characteristics matched up to supportive and caring (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Studies like these showed that leadership styles do not have defined boundaries, and traits are essential elements in all leadership styles.

Other millennial studies showed some unique leadership traits that set some leadership styles apart. In the study on authentic leadership, millennials were more interested in leaders who believe in a work-life balance (Anderson et al., 2017). This need for a work-life balance could translate to a leader who has the traits of being supportive and caring for their employees (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Neill and Weaver (2017) found millennials unprepared for ethical situations and unlikely to seek ethical counsel. This unpreparedness and unwillingness to seek counsel may indicate that millennials need leaders with the trait of being supportive and coaching (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This trait was similar to other study findings (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016; Cox, 2016) that found millennials wanting individual support and mentoring from their superiors. Studies like these seemed to imply that millennials do not conform to a leadership style but preferred certain traits from their leaders. The possibility exists that millennials may change the world by defining their own leadership style.

There have been many studies done in the private and nonprofit sectors on millennials. However, there are still questions in the federal sector. The FEVS studies do not provide enough information to determine what leadership traits federal millennials desire of their leaders and how it may affect employee retention. In a scholarly work on



federal millennial retention, Bennett (2018) wrote that millennials from the 2015 FEVS seem not to have any intentions to leave and were generally more satisfied with their leadership than other generations. However, because the study was taken from secondary quantitative data, there was no explanation of what leadership style or traits were precisely responsible for this leadership satisfaction. In another scholarly study, using the FEVS, Hyde (2017) found that leadership was essential to employee engagement and instrumental in influencing retention in the federal government. In both studies, the data could not provide a detailed narrative into federal millennials' leadership perceptions, nor did any of these studies answer this study's research question.

All the studies that I had found in the literature imply that certain leadership traits may influence millennial retention. However, I had not found any studies that address the specific leadership traits that federal millennials prefer that may influence them to remain in federal service. Even the studies from the government's own FEVS data cannot provide an answer. That is why a general qualitative approach that uses the conceptual framework was the best choice to answer this study's research question.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

I found five significant points of interest during the literature review. Two of these points centered on leadership traits. From a review of the literature, I found that leadership traits may influence the leader-subordinate relationship and affect employee retention. Another point was that leadership styles do not have defined boundaries. Finally, the last two points were that millennials do not fit perfectly into one leadership style. They may require their own leadership style, consisting of various leadership traits.

From a review of the literature review, I found millennial habits and traits in the private sector to have been well documented. However, this was much different from the federal sector because of limited access to federal employees. The only authoritative data on federal employees were from the FEVS, which only provides a small window into federal employees' viewpoints and perspectives in the workplace. Unfortunately, this small window does not give us the critical information needed to interpret the data to answer this study's research question.

Conducting a qualitative study fills a considerable gap in the literature on federal millennials. The preferred leadership traits to engage a generational cohort has not been addressed in any government survey. This study explored the federal millennials' unheard voices and the preferred leadership traits they desire from their leaders. This finding may help in retaining millennials in federal service.

The next chapter examines the researcher's role and reveals potential biases that may affect this study's outcome. Lastly, I outline the methodology for the study in enough detail so that other researchers who choose to do so may replicate the study in a similar or different environment.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In this study, I explored the specific leadership traits and characteristics that may contribute to retaining federal millennials. The focus for Chapter 3 is the study's methodology; I provide the rationale for the design choice and discuss my role as the researcher in this study. In this chapter, I discuss the data collection instruments and data collecting sources, including recruitment participation and the data analysis plan. The chapter concludes with a confirmation of the data's trustworthiness and a discussion of the ethical issues surrounding this research study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In this study, I explored the following primary research question: What specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service? The phenomenon studied was the leadership traits and characteristics associated with a generational cohort's workplace retention. There was little to nothing known or understood in the literature about the viewpoint of this generational cohort's preferred leadership traits that may influence them to remain in federal service. Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote that knowledge comes from studies that heed the voices of others. Because I wanted to obtain the federal millennials' viewpoints on this topic, I chose to use qualitative research.

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because this type of inquiry helps to understand others' perspectives and experiences (Patton, 2015). There are various qualitative inquiry frameworks to choose from with disciplinary roots ranging

from anthropology to the literary arts. Patton (2015) wrote that there is no single right approach when choosing a qualitative inquiry framework because it depends on the study's emphasis or focus.

I considered two approaches for this research: phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology focuses on understanding an experience through stories of a particular event (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the goal was not about understanding an experience but understanding the leadership preferences a shared group favors that may cause them to stay in an organization longer. Creswell and Poth (2018) wrote that ethnography is used to describe or interpret a shared culture group from the perspectives of those experiencing an event. However, the research question in this study was not about describing or sharing a common experience. The best choice among all the possible approaches in the literature was a general qualitative approach to explore the research question without being limited by a particular approach.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Any researcher has an obligation to conduct research responsibly with honesty and integrity (National Academy of Sciences, 1995). In qualitative research, the researcher takes on the role of a key instrument in the study. In this study, I was the human instrument responsible for interpreting the data. In this sense, the relationship can be described as a researcher-research relationship (Nastasi, 2020). In this relationship, a researcher adopts a subjective posture toward the research process by influencing the study's research questions, the data collection, and final data analysis.

Because I am a federal employee, I was a natural member of the social setting under study and interacted daily with many generations of federal employees, including millennials. I found that my membership in this group helped in two ways. First, by being a federal family member, federal millennials were more comfortable participating in this study. Second, because I work in federal service, federal employees were more comfortable in referring me to other federal millennials who would be willing to participate in the study; my federal membership provided insider access to the federal millennial workforce. This method was the best for gathering the data and obtaining the rich context required for this study.

In any research study, personal and professional relationships with any of the participants can negatively influence the study results. One type of relationship is a power relationship. This relationship is where a researcher may have power over a participant because they are their supervisor or instructor. To alleviate any ethical concerns, I did not accept any participant in this study over which I had a supervisory or instructor relationship.

### **Potential Researcher Biases**

Being the sole researcher and human instrument in this study, I could have been subject to many potential biases because all data were mediated through me. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that this interaction could introduce several personal and ethical biases in a study, which can affect results. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) identified that researchers need to be aware of their own beliefs, expectations, and cultural values because these can taint research findings.

One type of bias is going into a study with a hypothesis or belief and using the data to confirm that belief. I did not prejudge the data as they came in, and I was open-minded to the data results to minimize this bias. Another type of bias is cultural. This bias could exist in this study because I was not a millennial; there may be unintentional bias toward a different generation. To help mitigate this type of bias, Cope (2014) suggested keeping a reflective journal during a study to create transparency in the research process. I used a reflective journal in this study and no unintentional perceptions or biases were found.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethics or norms of conduct in a research study are of great concern when research involves human participants; a researcher must protect participants' dignity, rights, and welfare. There were various ethical issues that might have affected this study, and I took steps as the researcher to address them.

One major ethical issue is informed consent. This issue was addressed by mirroring the terms and conditions of Walden University's standard study consent form. All potential participants were required to give consent through this form before participating in the research study. The consent form also stated that whatever data were obtained during the study could be evaluated and published if the participant's anonymity was protected. The form also provided the participants the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences. In all cases, the data obtained were protected and will be destroyed according to university guidelines.

A second ethical concern involving human subjects is beneficence. In this study, I did not include any questions that might have caused distress or harm to participants. In any of the leadership preference questions, participants had an opportunity to give examples of leaders with whom they have had negative and potentially harmful experiences. However, none of the questions were used to goad participants into a more in-depth discussion that might have surfaced destructive emotions. Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved all questions asked participants.

A third ethical concern is conducting a research study within one's own workplace. Because I work in a federal environment, potential study participants may have already known me in my professional role. Conducting a study within one's workplace can create a situation where there is a perceived pressure on potential participants to participate. To mitigate this situation, I communicated verbally and through a recruitment email (see Appendix D) that the study was voluntary. The consent form again reinforced to potential participants that the study was voluntary and stressed that there was no pressure to participate. The consent form further stipulated that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

A fourth ethical concern is whether there is a financial or other personal consideration given, which could lead to a potential conflict of interest. In this study, no financial consideration was given to any of the participants. The only personal consideration given to all participants was to be respectful of their time. The survey's online format allowed participants to answer survey questions on dates and at times that were most convenient to them. In conclusion, as the researcher I did more than just

connecting the dots between data and theory. I also maintained an ethical focus on protecting the participants' rights and interests and conducting the research honestly without any bias that may have affected the study results.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

This study's population of interest was a subgroup of the millennial generation, born in the United States between 1982 and 2004 with one or more years of employment. Members of this subgroup are expected to be part of the federal workforce. This group's sheer size made it impractical to canvass the entire federal millennial workforce population for this study. Therefore, I used sampling to infer information about my target population based on a population subset.

A purposeful sampling strategy was used for this study. This sampling strategy, widely used in qualitative research, can provide a researcher with a rich, in-depth understanding and insights related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). Of the 40 strategies outlined by Patton (2015), I chose to use both snowball and network sampling. These two purposeful sampling strategies rely on a few potential participants to recruit or refer to one or more contacts from their personal network. Just like a snowball that grows as it rolls down a mountainside, each initial participant referred my survey to the next potential participant and so on.

A primary source for identifying potential study participants were federal employees, both millennials and nonmillennials, from my network. From these sources came referrals to other federal millennials. A secondary source was social media. Social



media is an indispensable part of the lives of millennials; 88% of millennials use social media daily (Cox, 2019). This generation uses the internet to stay in touch with friends, search for information, find a sense of community, or expand their social and professional networks. The best way to recruit this generation was to go online, and I selected from many different social media options to find potential participants. LinkedIn is a business network of professionals I am a member of. I invited millennial and nonmillennial contacts to distribute a link regarding the study to federal millennials in their network. I also belong to several LinkedIn groups that cater to public administrators employed in local, state, and federal governments. In these groups, I posted the link to the survey on social media (see Appendix E). A tertiary source for identifying potential study participants was Walden University's Online Research Participation System. This system is a virtual bulletin board where researchers can connect and access a diverse community of potential participants. I also posted the link to my survey, asking for potential participants in this system as well.

### ***Saturation and Sample Size***

The number of participants, or sample size, is not a numerical calculation in qualitative research as it is in quantitative studies. To determine sample size in qualitative research, many factors must be considered, such as the study's design, scope, and the quality of the data. There are no fixed rules on sample size (Marshall et al., 2013). However, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that grounded theory studies consist of 20 to 30 interviews. Nonetheless, this can also depend on the amount of data generated; for example, according to Morse (2000), a phenomenological study involving

multiple interviews might only need six to 10 participants. Because the depth and detail of a participant's answers can never be anticipated in advance, the exact size for an online qualitative study is open to interpretation by the researcher (Braun et al., 2020). In qualitative inquiry, there are no rigid rules. Patton (2015) indicated that sample size is determined based on what is known, the purpose, the usefulness of the data obtained, and the available time and resources of the researcher.

For this study, I used a qualitative approach and estimated I would need between 10 and 15 participants to reach data saturation. Data saturation occurs when new data contains no new information or themes, and further data collection at such a point is unnecessary. Data saturation can occur before or after the sample size is reached. For this study, data saturation occurred at the 15th participant. At this point, no additional new information was revealed in participants' responses to the interview questions.

### **Instrumentation**

The choice of the data collection instruments used in this study was based on the research problem and the research design. Because little was known about the research problem, I needed a research design that would gather information directly from the subject of the study. A qualitative design was chosen because it is primarily exploratory research and is best used to gain an understanding of a research problem. Many data collection methods can be used in qualitative research, such as focus groups and one-on-one interviews. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to use an online survey (see Appendix F) as the data collection instrument instead of the face-to-face interviews initially planned.

Bosch et al. (2019) wrote that millennials have a lower participation rate with surveys than other generations. However, they had a significantly higher participation rate with surveys using their smartphone. Because millennials are connected to their smartphone, I chose to use an online survey (see Appendix F) as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The survey was web-enabled and accessible via the internet through a computer, laptop, smartphone, or a notepad device. The online survey (see Appendix F) was hosted on SurveyMonkey, which allowed the participant to type their response to each question in about 565 words with spaces or 4000 characters. This extended field length provided more than ample space for the response to each question.

The survey used a series of open-ended questions to draw out information in the form of thoughts and feelings from the participant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The open-ended questions were researcher-developed from the literature review and aligned with this study's conceptual framework.

Another data collection tool was memoing, which was done during the coding phase. This instrument captured the outflow of my thoughts and ideas while interpreting the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data and resulting analysis helped to answer the research question as well as uncovered new insights.

### **Researcher-Developed Questionnaire-Based Survey Instrument**

The scarce amount of data on this study's research question necessitated the need to develop a customized research instrument. The FEVS has been the tool of choice for the federal government to manage its civil servants since 2002 (OPM, n.d.). This

questionnaire-based survey instrument was based in part on the FEVS and scholarly literature related to the research question.

The questionnaire-based survey consisted of 10 questions with two closed-ended and eight open-ended questions. Four sections formed the core constructs of the questionnaire: (a) preferred leadership styles of millennials, (b) millennial experiences, (c) agencies preferred by millennials, and (d) millennial demographic information. The first construct revolves around the preferred leadership styles of millennials. One of the shortfalls of the FEVS is on leadership. There are very few questions on the FEVS that measure leadership behaviors or styles (Fernandez et al., 2015). This survey attempted to rectify this by asking millennials open-ended questions about the leadership behaviors that they prefer and value. This construct also asked participants questions on what type of leadership behaviors frustrated them in the workplace.

The second construct centers on millennial experiences. The literature notes that workplace experiences shape employees' perception of the organization and its effects on the employee's organizational commitment level (Bowers, 2019). Fernandez et al. (2015) noted that questions on key outcomes such as organizational commitment are lacking in the FEVS. This construct attempted to hear the employee's experience using the employee's own voice by providing a free-flowing text box to document their response instead of a 5-point rating scale. Many millennials noted bad experiences with leadership when this question was asked, which could seriously impact the government's efforts to retain millennials.

The third construct was the millennial motivation for government work.

Fernandez et al. (2015) wrote that the FEVS omitted key variables noted in the literature as being important, like work motivation. This construct was meant to correct this by asking the participant what motivated them to work in the federal government. Knowing the answer to this question may help the government better understand their employees and lead to changes in how the government markets itself to millennials.

The fourth and last construct was the millennial demographic information. This construct was decomposed into two questions; one was the demographic information on the millennial's agency of employment. Like the FEVS, I wanted to know which agencies took part in this survey. The other was a standard demographic survey question to know where the participants are located. It could be combined with other data to understand millennials better.

### **Validity of the Survey Instrument**

A questionnaire always has some amount of error built-in; therefore, there is a need to test or validate the questionnaire before implementation. One way to validate is by translational or representational validity. In this method, experts look at the theoretical or conceptual constructs involved and how well it is represented in the questionnaire (Bolarinwa, 2015). Within this type of validity is face validity and content validity. Face or surface validity is a subjective and the simplest method of measuring the validity of a survey. This type of validity is usually established by having a research expert review the questionnaire items, whether it, on the surface, matches any given conceptual domain of the research question (Bolarinwa, 2015). However, face validity cannot solely be relied

upon, so there is content validity. This type of validity relates to how well the instrument measures the theoretical or conceptual constructs involved (Bolarinwa, 2015; Salkind, 2010).

This questionnaire was partly based on the FEVS, a well-established government survey instrument. Public administration experts and academia have used the FEVS to generate numerous research papers on federal employees. Because this questionnaire was partly based on the FEVS, the questions' face validity can be justified. Furthermore, because the questions are based on scholarly literature, the content validity can also be justified.

Because of time and resource constraints, no pilot test was done, but when the first two of the participants took the survey, they sent me comments after they took the questionnaire. In these comments, they wrote that it was a good survey and thanked the me for doing this survey.

## **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

### ***Survey Data Collection***

Potential participants were recruited either by a recruitment email accompanied with a survey link (see Appendix D) or given a survey link via a referral. The email (see Appendix D) did not substitute for the consent form. However, it was merely an invitation to participate in the survey. The survey link took the potential participant to the home page of the survey. The home page presented the potential participant the consent form's full text. They had to read and agree to before proceeding to the survey questionnaire. Once the participant accessed the survey questionnaire, the participant's

responses to the questions were saved and stored when they selected the “Done” button at the bottom of the screen.

After the survey was hosted on a commercial website, the survey was accessible 24 hours a day and 7 days a week by the participants. The data collection lasted for 50 days or 1 month and 19 days. I archived the survey data onto a password protected computer and restricted access to everyone except myself.

If the survey yielded too few participants, the follow-up plan was to keep the survey open longer and send out additional invites for participation or referrals. Participants had two ways to exit the study. One way was not to select the “Done” button and exit the web browser. This would not record any of the data entered by the participant. The second way to exit the study was to select the “Done” button in the survey questionnaire. This action saved any data previously entered into the survey. Afterward, a dialog was then presented, thanking them for their participation, and they were promptly logged out of the survey. Because the survey was structured as anonymous, there were no follow-up procedures to contact the participants once they completed the survey and the data saved.

### ***Researcher Data Collection***

In addition to the data collected directly from participants, I included two additional data types. The first was a reflexive journal which helped me understand my mindset, biases, and emotional states during the study. This was recommended by Meyer and Willis (2018). The journaling application stored the reflexive data electronically in the cloud. Journaling was attempted to be done daily, however, it often occurred

whenever I thought about or worked on the study. This journal will not end when this study is published as I expect it to continue long after the study is published to continue to grow as an individual.

Another type of data collected I included was memoing, which was done during the coding phase. Memoing is intended to capture the outflow of the researcher's thoughts and ideas while interpreting the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Memoing was done inside NVivo's memo feature during the data analysis phase.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis plan for the qualitative data in this study involved identifying patterns and themes using a deductive approach. Patton (2015) wrote that this approach involves using the study's data to support existing general conceptions or theories. Therefore, in this study, the conceptual framework and the literature guided analyzing the survey data. For this reason, I developed a preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) based on the scholarly literature and their relationship with the theories used in my conceptual framework for this study. This framework made the data analysis easier and faster because it gave me a general picture of what the participant's responses may be from the review of the literature.

After the survey's conclusion, the next step was to export the raw data from SurveyMonkey, the survey collection instrument and repository to NVivo. NVivo was the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software used in this study for coding the data. Once the survey was imported, I used the Preliminary Coding Framework (see Appendix B) as a baseline for my theme nodes. This framework of pre-defined codes was



developed from the scholarly literature during the literature review. Using the Preliminary Coding Framework (see Appendix B), I organized the content from each of the questions to the appropriate node.

I first coded the data using the Preliminary Coding Framework (see Appendix B). Then, I recoded the raw data with an inductive coding approach called the Lean Coding Framework (see Appendix C). This process involved using the survey data to drive the creation of the theme nodes. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that researchers use this coding method because pre-conceived codes could restrict the data's interpretation. I encountered several codes that were not initially in the Preliminary Coding Framework (see Appendix B). Thus, in this study, I used two different coding methods, which yielded some interesting and yet similar results. It was like having a second separate researcher reviewing the data from a different viewpoint.

Throughout the coding, I was memoing and taking reflective notes about the data during coding. Miles and Huberman (1994) wrote that memoing is documenting uncensored ideas that come to the researcher during the coding process. Memoing can add to credibility because it can be used to defend the researcher's results.

As with any data analysis effort, there may be contradictions to the data or unexpected findings that can lead to discrepant cases. Because these discrepant cases may invalidate, disprove, or require a reformulation of the study's assumptions, these findings were not disregarded. Instead, any discrepant cases found were thoroughly examined and included in the study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In quantitative studies, trustworthiness refers to validity and reliability. However, in qualitative studies, these concepts are harder to prove because of the lack of metrics around validity and reliability. Therefore, in qualitative studies, the study's trustworthiness is measured by four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. The data's trustworthiness is accomplished by intracoder and intercoder reliability. The following sections describe each validity and reliability method and how it was accomplished in this study.

#### **Credibility**

This type of validity is a means by which the data can be credible or trusted according to how well the study was conducted. One strategy to defend credibility in a qualitative study is through triangulation. One type of triangulation is investigator triangulation. Patton (2015) wrote that this type of triangulation uses different researchers or investigators to confirm their findings. In this study, I used two different coding methods, the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) and lean coding framework (see Appendix C). The preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) was structured around themes from the literature review. In contrast, the lean coding framework was done manually free flowing with the themes generated from the data.

Each coding method took a different approach, similar to having two different investigators looking over the data. Patton (2015) wrote the point to triangulation was not to yield the same results but test for consistency. Different types of inquiries may yield different results because of the different approaches used. Patton (2015) wrote that these

inconsistencies should not be viewed as credibility weaknesses but as an opportunity to explore the relationship between the inquiry approach and the phenomenon being studied.

Another technique to ensure credibility is member-checking. Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote this technique allows the participants to clarify the correctness of the data supplied. Member-checking allows the participants the ability to correct any errors or provide any additional clarifying information. This is usually done in an interview where there is an ongoing dialog concerning the questions asked. However, in this survey, all the survey questions were presented to the participant at one time, on one form. At any time, the participant had the ability to correct or add clarifying information before they ended the survey. In this way, member-checking was achieved by the participant.

Another means of defending the credibility of the results is through memoing. Memoing is similar to field notes. It can be used in data collecting, data analysis, or coding (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). When used as field notes, it can help during the data collection phase to document any ideas or concepts. Edmonds and Kennedy (2017) wrote that when this technique, called analytic memoing, is used during the coding phase, it mirrors the quantitative method of preliminary data analysis. I used this memoing technique to record the meanings resulting from the data to add credibility to this study.

### **Transferability**

This type of validity is a means by which the study's findings can be applied in various degrees to similar contexts or settings in the real world. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) wrote that using a rich, thick, detailed description could inform readers to draw

their conclusions on the study's transferability to a particular context or situation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study's potential transferability on federal millennials may not apply to other geographic regions of the federal government or other sectors outside the public sector. However, this study has enough detail so the reader can decide for themselves if the study's results could be generalized to other millennials in federal, state, or local governments.

### **Dependability**

This type of validity refers to the study's findings being repeatable and consistent over time when viewed by other researchers. Dependability ensures a study's process is well documented and auditable (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I have documented all research processes from start to finish in sufficient detail to provide an audit trail so that other researchers may replicate the study's findings.

### **Confirmability**

This type of validity refers to the degree to which the study results can be confirmed or supported by other researchers. Without this confirmation, the data and my interpretation of it for this study could be easily written off as made up. Confirmability was ensured by taking reflective notes during the research. Those reading this study will understand the influence of the researcher's background and perspectives on interpreting the data.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

There are two types of reliabilities that refer to the different analysis processes used to evaluate the data's consistency. One type of reliability is intercoder. Intercoder

reliability is a way to ensure high reliability with the coding using more than one coder in the code's data analysis. Using this method, two or more researchers can code the data independently. If all the coders obtain similar coding results, a high degree of reliability can be proven (Given, 2008).

In this study, two coders were not used, but two different coding methods were used. I used both the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) and the lean coding framework (see Appendix C) on the data. This was like two different researchers looking at the same data but approaching the coding from two different perspectives. Interesting enough, both coding methods achieved similar results after the first coding of each coding method.

### **Intracoder Reliability**

Another type of reliability is intracoder reliability, which refers to the consistency of the researcher's codes (Given, 2008). I chose to use intracoder reliability for this study. This coding method involves revisiting and re-coding from scratch my first participant's survey transcript after coding four or five other survey transcripts. The first coding of the participant's survey transcript would be compared to the second coding from the same participant to compare its consistency. If the two coding of the first participant's survey transcript do not agree, I would have to change the coding scheme and start over. In this study, I used this method at least four times each and slightly changed the coding scheme when some of the codes seemed to be related and would benefit from consolidation.

**Ethical Procedures**

Ethics is vital in any research involving human subjects to protect the research participants from being used as a means to an end. This protection applies to all phases of the research study, from conception to publishing the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure compliance with the legal and ethical guidelines governing human subjects in research, I completed a mandated university training requirement. The training was for the protection of human subjects, a course given by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. The NIH, a part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for biomedical and public health research.

This study was overseen by Walden University's IRB for compliance with the university's ethical standards for research. This board ensures all research conducted by students respect the rights and welfare of any human subject recruited to participate in a study under Walden University's auspices. In this process, all research materials used for the study were examined for consistency with the ethical standards for conducting research. My proposal to collect data from human subjects for this study was granted on February 26, 2020 (02-26-20-0132872).

***Recruitment Concerns***

A primary ethical concern in research studies is with recruitment methods. The study's recruitment plan was to contact potential federal study participants, both millennials and nonmillennials. Recruitment was accomplished from my social network,

either in person or via a recruitment email (see Appendix D). Only potential participants with a power relationship to myself were ineligible to participate in the study.

Potential participants were informed of the study's voluntary nature, how their privacy would be respected, and was provided a clear, accurate description of the study with its benefits and risks. These potential participants were directed to the survey's home page, which displayed a university approved consent form that further outlined their rights in greater detail. If any of these potential study participants referred others to the survey home page, this new group of study participants also were presented with the consent form. The first page thoroughly explained to potential participants their rights, including the study's voluntary nature. In this way, all potential participants provided their informed consent before taking part in the survey.

### ***Data Collection Concerns***

The survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey, a secure commercial survey website. The data collection only began after the participants viewed and agreed to the terms and conditions of the university approved consent form. The survey questions were pre-vetted by the university's IRB to ensure they did not pose a risk to the participant's safety or wellbeing. The participant's data were only saved and stored on the survey site if they selected the "Done" button at the end of the survey. The survey data were collected anonymously, no names or contact information was required to fill out the survey. The website did not record or keep track of the user's IP address to assure an additional level of privacy and anonymity.

***Data Archival Concerns***

The raw data from the completed surveys were only accessible by myself during data analysis and afterwards downloaded to a password-protected computer. The raw data were not shared with anyone beyond my committee chair who validated the data to ensure compliance with the university's IRB procedures. Any data converted to paper and not needed was destroyed with my own personal micro-cut shredder. This type of shredder provides a higher level of security than even a cross-cut shredder and it is used primary when shredding highly confidential documents. Any research data, electronic or paper, from the study will be kept for a period of 5 years and destroyed according to the university guidelines.

***Other Ethical Concerns***

There were no other ethical issues encountered before or after the data collection. While the study was being conducted on federal employees, there was no conflict of interest. I was not soliciting potential study participants from within my immediate department, nor were there any power differentials between myself and any study participants. Finally, quid pro quo, the ancient roman principle of compensation, was not used to provide study participation incentives.

**Summary**

This chapter focused on the methodology used in the study, the research design, its rationale, and the vital role that the researcher plays in a qualitative study as a human research instrument. Next, the chapter discussed the data collection instruments, recruitment, and participant selection process. Lastly, the chapter concluded by



addressing the data analysis plan, trustworthiness issues, and the ethical procedures associated with this research study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This study's objective was to explore millennials' preferred leadership styles that may help the federal workforce retain employees from this generation. Previous studies on millennials have not explored the leadership preferences of this generational cohort in the federal sector. I used a general qualitative approach to collect the views of a purposeful sampling of 15 millennials employed in civilian agencies within the federal government. The following research question was central to this study: What specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service?

In the previous chapter, I described the research design and its rationale, the methodology, and plans for addressing trustworthiness. In this chapter, I explain the variations that occurred in the data collection because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter continues with how survey data were finally collected and coded. This chapter concludes with evidence of data trustworthiness, the study results, and a chapter summary.

### **Setting**

The study's data collection method was approved on February 26, 2020. However, soon after, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (American Academy of Pediatrics News & Journals Gateway, 2020). By March 2020, San Francisco and five other Bay Area counties were among the first in the United States to be under a mandatory lockdown to slow the spread

of COVID-19 (Fowler et al., 2020). Many states were soon in partial or complete lockdown with businesses and schools closed or meeting virtually. The crisis had already affected more than 39,000 or 1% of civilian and federal military employees (Katz, 2020).

The original data collection method called for virtual interviews with potential federal millennials. However, because of the pandemic, I found no willing potential participants among the federal workforce willing to spare 60 minutes of their time for an interview. Despite posting the study invitations on popular social media sites and professional user groups (see Appendix E), the invites did not garner any potential participants. The social and psychological effects of COVID-19 on the general population might have been responsible for the lack in participation.

By mid-June, I still had no responses from the target audience. The pandemic affected my study and the studies and dissertations of countless other students (Metzier, 2020). After conferring with the committee chair, I sought and gained approval from Walden's IRB to change the data collection method from one-on-one interviews to an online survey (see Appendix F).

I again reached out to federal employees, and the response was more favorable. Fifty days later, 15 federal millennials had filled out the survey. The favorable response was likely because the online survey (see Appendix F) was shorter and less time consuming. Another benefit of the survey was availability; participants could access it online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The online survey also had the benefit of producing more accurate data. Because participants entered their responses to the survey directly, there was no chance of error in misquoting participants.

## Demographics

The criteria for inclusion in this study were that each potential participant had to be (a) from the millennial generation, born from 1982 to 2004, (b) employed within the federal workforce, and (c) employed by the federal government for over 1 year. Potential participants with a power relationship with me were excluded from this study. However, I did not exclude any qualifying federal millennial based on gender, racial or ethnic identity, or education. The survey was written in my native language, so any potential participant had to be able to read and write in English to consent and take the survey. A total of 15 federal millennials from seven states participated in this study (see Table 1). Of the total participants, there were two from federal military agencies. Their responses were separated from the other nonmilitary civilian agencies and were evaluated separately. In the following section, I discuss how the categorical geographic data were organized in a frequency distribution. This distribution, designated as [ $f = x$ ], lists the number of occurrences for each data category.

### Geographic Location of Participants

The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) divides the United States for census taking into four general divisions and nine regions. Many of the survey participants were located in the West region, which was made up of the Pacific and mountain division (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.). In the Pacific division, 62% of the participants ( $n = 8$ ) were located in California. Hawaii and Oregon had one participant each. In the mountain division, Utah had one participant. The higher participation in the western states was consistent with data compiled by SmartAsset, a financial advising company (Horan, 2020). The company

tracked homeownership from the 2018 Census Bureau data. The company found that western states such as California saw the highest millennial homeownership rates.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Study Participants*

| Agency                               | State      | # Participants |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| NASA                                 | California | 5              |
| Citizenship and Immigration Services | California | 1              |
| Department of Veterans Affairs       | California | 1              |
| Environmental Protection Agency      | California | 1              |
| Department of the Army               | Colorado   | 1              |
| Department of Defense                | Hawaii     | 1              |
| NASA                                 | Hawaii     | 1              |
| U.S. Department of Agriculture       | Louisiana  | 1              |
| NASA                                 | Oregon     | 1              |
| Internal Revenue Service             | Texas      | 1              |
| Department of Veterans Affairs       | Utah       | 1              |

The rest of the participants were located in the Southern region, within the West South-Central division (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In this division, one participant was located in Louisiana and one in Texas. Horan (2020) wrote that Texas was another state where homeownership showed growth in 2018. Two participants from federal military agencies also took part in the survey. One participant lived in Hawaii, and the other participant lived in Colorado. These two states are also part of the West region, where millennials have chosen to live.

**Federal Agencies of Participants**

The participants came from eight different federal agencies (see Table 2). The majority of the participants, 54%, were employed at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) [ $f = 7$ ]. The next highest participation rate came from the

Department of Veterans Affairs [ $f = 2$ ], with 15%. Other agencies like the Citizenship and Immigration Services [ $f = 1$ ], Environmental Protection Agency [ $f = 1$ ], Department of Agriculture [ $f = 1$ ], and the Internal Revenue Service [ $f = 1$ ] constituted 8% each.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Agency of Employment*

| Agency                               | # Participants |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| NASA                                 | 7              |
| Department of Veterans Affairs       | 2              |
| Citizenship and Immigration Services | 1              |
| Department of Defense                | 1              |
| Department of the Army               | 1              |
| Environmental Protection Agency      | 1              |
| Internal Revenue Service             | 1              |
| U.S. Department of Agriculture       | 1              |

Two participants from federal military agencies also took part in the survey.

These two military participants worked at the Department of Defense [ $f = 1$ ] and the Department of the Army [ $f = 1$ ]. The military agency responses were separated from the other civilian agencies and were evaluated separately.

**Data Collection**

I was granted approval by IRB for data collection on February 26, 2020 (02-26-20-0132872). However, for several months, I did not receive any responses to my invite for study participants. By mid-June, I contacted the IRB and submitted a change to add a financial incentive such as a gift card. Before the financial incentive could be fully incorporated into the study, I reached out to the committee chair to give an update. After conferring with my committee chair on the data collection issues, the chair suggested

converting the interview method to an online format. The financial incentive was then disregarded and never implemented.

Once again, I contacted the IRB to change the study procedures. This time it was to change the data collection method from qualitative one-on-one interviews to a qualitative online survey (see Appendix F). After I made significant changes in the methodology to accommodate the new format, the IRB in mid-July approved the changes. Despite this deviation, I did not find that the changes negatively affected the study's outcome (see Table 3).

**Table 3***Methodology Changes From Original Proposal and Study Effects*

| Chapter 3 methodology      | Description                                       | Change from original proposal   | Effect on study  |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Qualitative inquiry        | Type of research                                  | None  | No change  |
| Sampling method            | Purposeful sampling: Snowball & network sampling  | None  | No change  |
| Study participants         | Millennials employed in the federal workforce     | None  | No change  |
| Sample size                | 10-15 participants                                | None  | No change  |
| Method of contact          | My social network/Walden survey site              | None  | No change  |
| Consent form               | Based on IRB approved consent form                | Changed to online format  | No change: Adjusted wording to be applicable to an online format   |
| Data collection instrument | Method of data collection                         | Changed from qualitative one-on-one virtual interviews to qualitative online survey | No change: Clarifying questions could not be asked because the survey was now anonymous, but this was mitigated by the participant's words taken verbatim as entered into the survey |
| Questions asked            | 10 questions                                      | Rephrased, reduced, added addition questions for clarity for online format          | Improvement: Revised questions helped in the absence of not being able to ask clarifying questions   |
| Data analysis plan         | Preliminary coding framework (deductive approach) | Added lean coding framework (inductive approach)                                    | Improvement: Simulated effect of having a second separate researcher reviewing the data  |
| Trustworthiness            | Same as chapter 3                                 | None  | No change  |
| Ethical procedures         | Same as chapter 3                                 | None  | Improvement: Online survey adds additional layer of anonymity and confidentiality  |



Once the final change was approved, I sent out another round of invitations to potential participants through recruitment emails (see Appendix D) and social media (see Appendix E). Data started to come in through SurveyMonkey (see Figure 2). I continued to expand the survey's reach through social networks and multiple announcements on social media. I also joined several social media groups where federal millennials may visit and participate. In total, survey announcements were posted on (a) 10 LinkedIn groups, (b) five Facebook groups, (c) one personal Twitter account, and (d) one personal professional LinkedIn account.

**Figure 2**

*Survey Participant Response Volume*



The online survey was open for 50 days, and participants took an average of 19 minutes to complete the survey. I reviewed the raw data as they were collected. At the 15th participant, I found that the study had reached data saturation, so I ended data collection to begin data analysis.

## Data Analysis

After reaching data saturation, I followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) steps for the data analysis process. The first step of this process involved managing and organizing the data. I exported the survey data from SurveyMonkey into NVivo for analysis. The participants' identification numbers (RespondentID) were then simplified to a three-digit code. The letter *M* was added to the RespondentID of the two federal military millennials. The military participants' data were coded separately as discrepant cases and compared with the civilian cases.

Step 2 involved reading and memoing emergent ideas from the data to get a general sense of its meaning. In this step, I looked at all the individual surveys. I took notes on what respondents indicated was the general type of leadership traits they preferred based on their responses in the survey.

The last step involved using coding to interpret and categorize the data collected. I first coded the raw data using the codes from the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B), which were developed from the literature review. Using the intracoder reliability method, I coded about four or five survey transcripts using one coding method. They then waited one day before revising the raw data and recoded the first survey transcript from the previous day. When I found that the two transcripts did not agree, I had to slightly change their coding scheme. After using the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B), I used the same intracoder reliability method with the lean coding framework (see Appendix C). This method of reliability resulted in changing the code twice for each coding framework.

However, because the lean coding framework (see Appendix C) did not have the codes already predefined, I coded the data manually from the raw data. I started with about six codes and slowly expanded them to a list of 17 codes developed from the participant's own words. These codes were grouped into seven themes.

By using two different coding schemes, I also performed intercoder reliability. This method simulated the effect of having two researchers, each taking their own approach to analyze the data. The research found that both coding methods and approaches accomplished similar results after each coding method's first coding. I applied these coding schemes separately to both the federal civilian and military participants.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In a qualitative study, trustworthiness is measured by the degree of confidence in the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Four criteria are considered for trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. No adjustments to these four criteria were made after they were introduced in Chapter 3.

#### **Credibility**

As previously described in Chapter 3, I used three strategies to defend credibility in this study. One strategy was triangulation and, in particular, investigator triangulation. I used two different coding methods, the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) and the lean coding framework (see Appendix C). This was similar to investigator triangulation and using two different researchers.

Patton (2015) wrote the point to triangulation was not to yield the same results but test for consistency. Different types of inquiries may yield different results because of the different approaches used. Patton (2015) wrote that these inconsistencies should not be viewed as credibility weaknesses but as an opportunity to explore the relationship between the inquiry approach and the phenomenon being studied.

Both coding methods did not yield the same result unilaterally because of the different approaches used. However, when preliminary coding was used for both the civilian and military participants, they yielded similar results. In addition, when the lean coding was used for both the civilian and military participants, they also yielded similar results.

Another strategy used was member-checking. Each participant had the ability to correct or add clarifying information before they ended the survey. This procedure was similar to member-checking. The participants can correct any errors or provide any additional clarifying information. Thus, this similar member-checking was done by the participant in this study.

The last strategy was analytic memoing. When used as field notes, it can help during the data collection phase to document any ideas or concepts. This type of memoing was done in the study's coding phase to distance myself from the raw data and forced me to form my own thoughts about the research phenomena.

### **Transferability**

No change was made for this criterion from Chapter 3. This study's potential transferability on federal millennials may not apply to other geographic regions of the

federal government or other sectors outside the public sector. However, this study has enough detail so the reader can decide for themselves if the study's results could be generalized to other millennials in federal, state, or local governments.

### **Dependability**

As postulated in Chapter 3, there were no changes made for this criterion. The strategy for ensuring the consistency and reliability of the findings was to document the research process thoroughly. Therefore, I have documented all the processes used, from the conceptual framework, the study questions, and to the research tools. I also maintained an audit trail with this documentation consisting of my research notes, analytic memoing, and NVivo event logs. This study may be repeatable and consistent over time. However, there are no guarantees because this study was conducted at a specific point in time and during the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Confirmability**

No adjustments were made to this criterion from Chapter 3. This last criterion of trustworthiness affirms that this study was based on the participants' own words and not fabricated from my own bias. During the study, I took reflective notes that provided insight into the influence of my background on potential biases. These insights were necessary because I was the instrument to analyze and interpret the data in this study.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

As noted in Chapter 3, I used intercoder reliability to ensure high reliability with the coding simulating using more than one coder in the code's data analysis. I did this by using two different coding methods, the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B)

and the lean coding framework (see Appendix C) on the data. This simulated the effect of having two researchers, each taking their own approach to analyzing the data. By doing this, both coding methods achieved similar results after the first coding of each coding method.

### **Intracoder Reliability**

The same method of intracoder reliability described in Chapter 3 continued to be used during the coding phase. The key to this method is coding consistency. This was achieved by revisiting the raw data and re-coding using the same method from scratch. I coded about four or five survey transcripts using one coding method and then waited one day before revising the raw data and recoded the first survey transcript from the previous day. When I found that the two transcripts did not agree, they had to change their coding scheme. I did this every few transcripts in both coding methods and changed the coding scheme as needed. This change occurred when codes seemed to be related and would benefit from consolidation, or a new code was required. I found that this happened twice using both coding methods.

### **Results**

Each study participant was assigned consecutive alphanumeric codes from M01 to M15. M05 and M14 were the codes for the military participants. Some of the participant's answers to the survey questions have been edited for brevity and clarity. However, a concerted effort was made to preserve the participant's original meaning and intent.

Although this was a qualitative study, I used symbols commonly found in a quantitative study to designate the number of times a particular code was used. A lowercase italicized  $f$  was used as a symbol for a code frequency as in the example  $f = x$ . A code frequency using the preliminary coding framework (see Appendix B) was designated as  $[f_p = x]$ . For the lean coding framework (see Appendix C), the frequency was designated as  $[f_l = x]$ .

### **Thematic Analysis**

Employee rewards are not the only consideration when an employee decides to remain with an organization. The employee's happiness is another consideration, and their happiness is affected by the type of environment created by their leader (Zafar, 2015). The leader creates the workplace environment through their actions or inactions toward their employees. In this study, I wanted to understand the federal millennial's viewpoint on leadership actions that can affect retention. This query resulted in the following question: What specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service? The following themes were developed from the raw survey data applying thematic analysis. Two coding methods were used to answer this question (see Table 4).

**Table 4***Themes, Coding Frameworks Used and Representative Quotes*

| Themes                                     | Preliminary coding | Lean coding                             | Representative quote   |
|--|--------------------|---|--|
| Theme 1: Traits valued by participants     | Favored traits     | Favored relationships with superiors    | [One] of the qualities I value the most to remain in the federal service is support. [A leader] believing in you, appreciating you, understanding you, [and] helping you even though they are in a higher position than you. [A leader who is] fair and encourages you to move up the career ladder.   |
| Theme 2: Traits not valued by participants | Disliked traits    | Disfavored relationships with superiors | Micromanager, no communication, plays favorites, does not lead by example, [and] does not recognize individual subordinate achievements.   |
| Theme 3: Support valued by participants    | Support valued     | Support needed                          | We're not going to be able to buy houses on a government salary, which leaves us with a large amount of financial and geographical instability, so we need to be able to work on things we care about and/or have a flexible enough lifestyle that we are able to have a good work-life balance. This means having leaders who support training and travel opportunities, opportunities for upward mobility in the workplace, and enough vacation time [so] that we can have meaningful life experiences. [This means] a flexible telework policy, and flexibility regarding family, perhaps including the ability to split jobs or revert to part-time for a few years if we have children. |

**Theme 1: Traits Valued by Participants*****Preliminary Coding Method (Theme 1)***

According to the results of this theme, there were 96 references noted using the preliminary coding framework under the code "Favored Traits." The top five subcodes or



traits were: (a) “Promote Collaboration or Team building” [ $f_p = 12$ ], (b) “Charismatic” [ $f_p = 8$ ], (c) “Concern for Others” [ $f_p = 8$ ], (d) “Decisive or Decisiveness” [ $f_p = 6$ ], and (e) “Courage to Admit Mistakes” [ $f_p = 6$ ]. From these top five traits, the leadership styles that these traits were related to (see Appendix B) was (a) transformational [ $f = 4$ ], (b) ethical [ $f = 2$ ], and (c) authentic [ $f = 4$ ].

One participant valued an honest leader, one who listens and creates an environment that promotes teamwork. M04 wrote:

A good leader is someone who listens to feedback from their team and protects or shields them from negative influences. Another good leadership quality is honesty with the team while providing support for the team, to be honest in return. [A good leader] has the capability to create a psychologically safe work team.

Another participant expressed they valued leaders who can get members of different disciplines and viewpoints to work together toward a common goal. M12 wrote:

During my tenure at NASA, I have been involved in several projects. [In these projects,] leadership played a significant role [in] motivate[ing] an interdisciplinary group of individuals. [They] ensure[d] the team [were] on the same page to determine the scope of the project and ensure[d] that the entire team [were] in constant agreement.

Another participant indicated they valued leaders who were fair, concerned, and cared about their workers. This participant believed that their ideal leader should be fair and be an example for others to follow. M13 wrote:

There are those who genuinely seem to care for the employees and are willing to go to bat for them. I find those managers the best kind. They are supportive [of] [employee] career goals, though the things they can do to help are limiting. They are also knowledgeable and hold themselves as good examples to employees. For example, they are sharp, consistent, and show no favoritism.

One participant wrote they favored leaders who could create an environment where they could make a difference working with diverse team members and be intellectually challenged. M12 wrote:

Working in the federal government provides opportunities to support and get involved with a variety of interesting projects and programs that make significant impacts on humankind. I'm motivated by the ability to work for an organization that allows [me] the opportunity to work with interdisciplinary teams on interesting and challenging topics to develop innovative solutions.

One last trait important was "Courage or Admit Mistakes." Some participants wrote they felt leaders needed to be responsible. M11 wrote, "Anyone can be a manager. A leader takes responsibility for the outcome of their actions." Still, another participant believed that honesty and responsibility go hand in hand with being a good leader. M07 wrote, "honesty and responsibility [are the traits of a good leader]. That, and they can't be humorless c\*nts."

### ***Military Participants (Theme 1 – Preliminary Coding)***

For the two military participants, there were 17 references noted under the code of "Favored Military Traits." The top five subcodes or traits were: (a) "Promote

Collaboration or Team building” [ $f_p = 2$ ], (b) “Lead with Heart” [ $f_p = 2$ ], (c) “Humble” [ $f_p = 2$ ], (d) “Self-Confidence” [ $f_p = 2$ ], and (e) “Courage or Admit Mistakes” [ $f_p = 2$ ]. It is interesting to note that courage is only the only military core value on this list, and this trait was at the bottom of this list (Redmond et al., 2015).

From these top five traits, the leadership styles these traits were related to (see Appendix B) were (a) transformational [ $f = 2$ ], (b) ethical [ $f = 2$ ], and (c) authentic [ $f = 5$ ].

For the two military participants, all the traits were rated equally. However, only two traits were similar to the civilian participants. The two traits, “Promote Collaboration or Team building” and “Humble,” were shown to be similarly valued by these military participants. In terms of styles, authentic leadership was 3 points above the other two styles.

Regarding the trait “Lead with Heart,” M05, inspired by a great leader, wrote:

In America, we don’t have to simply accept things as they are. We have the power to change (President Barack Obama).” President Obama [was the leader] who helped shape my opinion of leadership. He was not afraid to wear his heart on his sleeves and speak for what he believed in. The above quote comes from his stance when asked about his repeal of DADT (Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell) in the military.

### ***Lean Coding Method (Theme 1)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 48 references noted under the code of “Favored Relationships with Superiors.” The top five subcodes or traits were: (a) “Authentic” [ $f_i = 22$ ], (b) “Transformational” [ $f_i = 8$ ], (c) “Ethical” [ $f_i = 7$ ], (d)

“Communication” [ $f_i = 3$ ], and (e) “Mentor or Coach” [ $f_i = 2$ ]. From these top five traits, the leadership styles these traits were related to (see Appendix C) was (a) transformational [ $f = 3$ ], (b) ethical [ $f = 3$ ], and (c) authentic [ $f = 3$ ].

The top trait was “authentic,” but when the trait was matched up with their styles, all the styles fared equally. Despite the styles being equal, many of the participants described their favored leaders to be authentic.

One participant wrote about an authentic leader and the positive effect it had on their workers. M01 wrote:

My father ran a high-class steakhouse restaurant and taught me quite a few lessons about how to lead. Those who worked for him were deeply devoted to him and considered him to be a second father. I think it was because of his willingness to work hard to protect those below him and reward those who did their job well.

Another participant added they favored an authentic leader because these leaders promote an atmosphere of honesty around them. This participant saw this type of leader as supportive, listening to them, and creating a safe environment where one can thrive.

M04 wrote:

A good leader is someone who listens to feedback from their team and protects or shields them from negative influences. Another good leadership quality is honesty with the team while providing support for the team, to be honest in return. Has the capability to create a psychologically safe work team. Most importantly, a good leader needs to be continually trying to improve and do better.

Communication, openness, and commitment are other valued assets of a leader, according to another participant. M12 wrote, “The qualities/traits of a good leader are someone that is an effective communicator, has to have a commitment to the particular task/activity and confidence in the team’s ability to obtain the desired outcome.” One more participant added that a good leader needed to be fair, open, and adaptable to change. M08 wrote that leaders need to be an “effective change agent...one who is not afraid to change an archaic culture that has benefited one particular race.”

***Military Participants (Theme 1 – Lean Coding)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 8 references noted under the code of “Relationships with Military Superiors.” The top four subcodes or traits were: (a) “Authentic” [ $f_i = 4$ ], (b) “Transformational” [ $f_i = 2$ ], c) “Fairness” [ $f_i = 1$ ], and (c) “Values Teamwork” [ $f_i = 1$ ]. From these top four traits, the leadership styles these traits were related to (see Appendix C) were (a) transformational [ $f = 2$ ], (b) ethical [ $f = 2$ ], and (c) authentic [ $f = 2$ ].

As with the civilian participants, “Authentic” was the highest valued trait. However, when the traits were matched with their appropriate styles, all the styles were of equal value.

M05 wrote that the qualities they valued in a leader were “clarity, decisiveness, courage, passion, [and] humility.” M14 added additional valued leadership traits such as (a) patience, (b) even-tempered, (c) logic[ly] balanced with compassion, (d) [with] fortitude, (e) no “paralysis by analysis,” (f) appreciates a team approach when they lack skills, and (g) thoughtful. Once again, the military core value of courage is noted by a

federal military participant but so too are other values not necessarily the values emphasized in the military culture (Redmond et al., 2015).

***Preliminary and Lean Methods Compared (Theme 1)***

The leadership styles leaned toward transformational and authentic leadership (see Table 5) in the civilian participants when combined. There seemed to be a strong tendency toward authentic leadership using preliminary coding in the military participants when combined. The strongest differences showed up using preliminary coding.

**Table 5**

*Civilian and Military Leadership Styles Rated by Coding Method*

|                  | Civilian participants |             | Military participants |             |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|
|                  | Preliminary coding    | Lean coding | Preliminary coding    | Lean coding |
| Transformational | 4                     | 3           | 2                     | 2           |
| Ethical          | 2                     | 3           | 2                     | 2           |
| Authentic        | 4                     | 3           | 5                     | 2           |

Although there is no one clear style preferred by civilian participants, there is one style that combines these two styles. That style is called authentic transformational leadership (Zhu et al., 2011). This type of leadership is transformational and has a moral vision that promotes virtuous behavior. The comment by M15 seemed representative of what the civilian participants favored in leadership:

[One] of the qualities I value the most to remain in the federal service is support.

[A leader] believing in you, appreciating you, understanding you, [and] helping

you even though they are in a higher position than you. [A leader who is] fair and encourages you to move up the career ladder.

While transformational leadership is the dominant style of leadership in the military, the military participants seem to prefer some of the traits found in an authentic leader (Kolditz, 2009). These military participants may prefer something like an authentic transformational leader like their civilian counterparts. One military participant seemed to express this sentiment when they described civilian leadership's closeness at its best. M14 gave their thoughts on the difference in leadership styles between military and civilian:

Other times, I've seen civilian leaders coach their branches and divisions to become close knit, high performing teams. Some love to gather and do outdoor running activities. Unfortunately, it wasn't the team I worked on. I would have loved to be in that other team. They looked like they had fun!

## **Theme 2: Traits Not Valued by Participants**

### ***Preliminary Coding Method (Theme 2)***

According to this theme's results, 37 references were noted using the preliminary coding framework under the code "Disfavored Traits." The top five subcodes or negative traits were: (a) "No Confidence and No Respect for Followers" [ $f_p = 6$ ], (b) "Not Providing Support and Recognition" [ $f_p = 4$ ], (c) "No Courage or Not Admitting Mistakes" [ $f_p = 3$ ], (d) "Not Leading by Values" [ $f_p = 3$ ], and (e) "Incompetence" [ $f_p = 3$ ]. From these top five negative traits, the leadership styles these traits were related were the opposite of the three positive leadership traits talked about previously (see Appendix

B). As a result, these traits were labeled and translated into the following: (a) nontransformational [ $f = 3$ ], (b) nonethical [ $f = 3$ ], and (c) nonauthentic [ $f = 4$ ].

There were four comments from participants who disliked leaders who had no confidence or respect for their followers. These participants called them a “micromanager.” M10 went as far as describing this type of leader as a “ruler [or] dictator.” M15 expands on the type of negative leadership they disliked:

Some of the behaviors of leadership I experienced ... were not so pleasant. I felt that leadership took credit from the hard workers in the service I worked in but never appreciated the workers. When national reports run negative, they don't try to help the workers but push [them] harder to make [the leaders] look good. They don't support the leads or managers when they bring up problems in their area but support those who misbehave [on] the job and turn [the] tables on the leads and managers. When I was harassed by a supervisor daily, leadership did nothing to fire that supervisor and continue[d] to [employ that] supervisor [despite their] foul and threatening behaviors.

***Military Participants (Theme 2– Preliminary Coding)***

According to this theme's results, 9 references were noted using the preliminary coding framework under the code “Disfavored Traits.” However, no subcode or negative leadership traits stood out. All the negative leadership traits identified were equal in frequency [ $f_p = 1$ ]. These negative traits were: (a) not open, (b) not showing justice, (c) no sharing or communicating vision, (d) not leading by values, (e) no integrity, (f)



noncharismatic, (g) no self-confidence, (h) no courage or not admitting mistake, and (i) not take risks.

From these negative traits, the leadership styles these traits represented were the complete opposite of the three positive leadership traits discussed in this study (see Appendix B). As a result, these traits were labeled and translated into the following: (a) nontransformational [ $f = 4$ ], (b) nonethical [ $f = 6$ ], and (c) nonauthentic [ $f = 8$ ].

M05 described their less-than-ideal leader as having “poor integrity, lack of adaptability, little vision for the future, lack of accountability, and [with] poor communication skills.” M14 added other undesired traits using descriptors like: “(a) quick-tempered, (b) hot-head[ed], (c) violent, (d) always right, (e) no room for discussion, (f) not a team player, and (g) dismisses emotion.”

### ***Lean Coding Method (Theme 2)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 28 references noted under the code of “Disfavored Relationships with Superiors.” The top four subcodes or negative traits were: (a) “Absentee Leader” [ $f_i = 10$ ], (b) “Self-Centered” [ $f_i = 9$ ], (c) “Unethical Conduct” [ $f_i = 6$ ], (d) “My-Way-or-the-Highway Mindset” [ $f_i = 3$ ]. These four negative traits were not related to positive transformational, ethical, or authentic leadership. The study participants disliked these negative leadership traits.

The worst leadership trait was the “Absentee Leader” trait because leaders with these traits stay hidden in many organizations. Once in management, these leaders enjoy the fruits of leadership without assuming any responsibility that goes along with leadership. (Gregory, 2018). M11 described this type of leader as “authority without

responsibility. You do good, and the 'leader' is responsible. [However], if you do bad, then it's all on you for being a defective piece of sh\*t that is lucky to have the job (according to the 'leader')."

When the leadership reins are absent, the organization suffers, and good employees can leave. M15 wrote of their experience with this type of leadership and the frustration they feel:

One thing I think that is messed up working in the federal service is the agency not [able] to fire an employee right away. Bad employees seem to have power because of the years they put into working for the federal agency. They can come to work and not do work, collect a check and still have a job working for the agency. [These] are employees with years in the federal services [and] have red flags on their records but [can] still work in the federal service and continue their bad behavior. [They] continue to harass other employees and collect a check. I think leadership needs to do more and get rid of these employees.

***Military Participants (Theme 2– Preliminary Coding)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 4 references noted under the code of "Disfavored Relationships with Superiors." The top three subcodes or traits were: (a) "Absentee Leader" [ $f_i = 2$ ], (b) "My-Way-or-the-Highway Mindset" [ $f_i = 1$ ], and (c) "Unethical Conduct" [ $f_i = 1$ ]. These three traits were not related to transformational, ethical, or authentic leadership. The participants disliked these leadership traits.

M14 wrote of their harrowing experience with a leader that displayed all three of the top undesirable traits:

[My] senior leader [was] being spineless and [did] not investigate [an] insubordination. He told me he was tired of having to answer for my behavior. He threatened me with paperwork if I ever piped up again. He wasn't specific about what he meant. He was a hot head, threatened paperwork, slammed my door, and loomed over me in a physical position of dominance. Awful.

### ***Preliminary and Lean Methods Compared (Theme 2)***

Between the two coding methods, the negative leadership traits differed by name and frequency. However, the message was clear that these were undesirable traits, as noted by the participants. Interestingly, there seemed to be more of a variety of negative traits from the military participants, 9 versus 12 on the civilian side. In contrast, on the civilian side, the negative traits seem consistent. From the comments in this survey, some of these negative leadership traits (see Table 6) are still experienced by the participants.

**Table 6**

*Negative Civilian and Military Traits by Coding Frequency (Combined)*

| Negative leadership traits                 | $f_{p+1}$ |          |
|--|-----------|----------|
|  | Civilian  | Military |
| Absentee leader                            | 10        | 2        |
| Self-centered                              | 9         |          |
| No confidence and no respect for followers | 6         |          |
| Unethical conduct                          | 6         | 1        |
| Not providing support and recognition      | 4         |          |
| Incompetence                               | 3         |          |
| My-way-or-the-highway mindset              | 3         | 1        |
| No courage or admit mistakes               | 3         | 1        |
| Not leading by values                      | 3         | 1        |

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| No integrity                       | 1 |
| No self-confidence                 | 1 |
| No sharing or communicating vision | 1 |
| Noncharismatic                     | 1 |
| Not open                           | 1 |
| Not showing justice                | 1 |
| Not take risk                      | 1 |

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The two top quotes from civilian participants that may sum up this theme came from M09 and M13. The leadership characteristics disliked by M09 was:

“Micromanager, no communication, plays favorites, does not lead by example, [and] does not recognize individual subordinate achievements.”

From one military participant, the following comment from one participant seemed like a cry for help because of the bureaucracy and their federal agency’s unwillingness to accept change. M13 wrote about the reasons why they may leave the federal workforce:

Another thing that needs to be addressed is the openness [to] change. It seems that leaders that are far older than millennials push back so much when we want to help or be more efficient. I’ve seen millennial colleagues leave because of that. They’re frustrated with the bureaucracy (it can be TOO MUCH) and the hypocrites within the system that they decide to leave. It’s a huge loss when you have bright, young minds leaving and thinking all the agencies are jokes. I’m still hanging on, but I feel like they’re starting to rub off on me and am thinking about leaving the federal service if a good opportunity comes.

Bad leadership is not only demotivating to individuals, but it can be learned. This type of leadership has been found to be toxic to missions and innovation in federal workplaces (Williams, 2018). This toxic leadership may even result in a cycle of continuing bad leadership within an organization. Another military participant, M14, wrote this sad commentary:

I've been nearly equally as motivated by bad leaders as inspirational ones. For example, a spineless leader--two levels above my position--who I worked with and knew for 12 years in my civilian position, I considered a father-like figure and mentor. When a known toxic mid-level manager and co-worker reported falsely that I was engaged in insubordination, the senior manager sided with the toxic co-worker without further investigation. As the senior manager retired several months later (nonrelated), I inquired with him why he chose that course of action. It was because he feared confrontation. He had been in that position for 30 years and always sought to avoid confrontation. I explained how the senior-level leader's decision had resulted in additional scrutiny of my actions by the mid-level manager as if he had "won," thinking he could get away with whatever he wanted. I was verbally abused in front of my team, emasculating my authority with them. The senior manager apologized, but I explained, knowing his family, that he should seriously reconsider [the] approach he takes, even with his family (having several teenage daughters still remaining in the house). Although this senior manager was very caring of people, he had no spine to stand up in a

situation. From that lesson, I learned when to back down and when to double down in defense of a team.

### **Theme 3: Support Valued by Participants**

#### ***Preliminary Coding Method (Theme 3)***

According to this theme's results, there were 17 references noted using the preliminary coding framework under the code "Support Valued." The top four subcodes were: (a) "Common Good" [ $f_p = 8$ ], (b) "Job Stability" [ $f_p = 5$ ], (d) "Work-Life Balance" [ $f_p = 3$ ], and (c) "Competitive Pay" [ $f_p = 1$ ].

Around the subcode of "Common Good," M01 wrote about "the opportunity to serve outside of capitalism, science focus (i.e., not military)." M13 wrote about being "...a part of something bigger than myself and to help people." M12 expressed their reason as to "...make significant impacts on humankind." This is in line with the results of the 2014 FEVS that federal millennial employees "strongly believe[d] the work they do is important" (OPM, 2014a).

Some of the comments around "Job Stability" included references to (a) "steady paycheck [and] holidays," (b) "No particular reason other than needed a steady job with benefits," and (c) "steady paycheck, holidays, [and] I want to earn my f\*ck\*ng tax money back."

Work-life balance or equally prioritizing personal life and career work were essential for this participant. M03 wrote this:

[There is a] need [for] a flexible workplace that allows [federal millennials] to have a work-life balance. A lot of shifts happening now towards that balance are

radical shifts but sensible changes. A leader must be able to recognize and support that.

M03 added, “Agency leadership has often listened to concerns about work-life balance, which is great to see, but no changes have filtered down to our level yet.”

Another participant commented on the inequalities of private and public sector compensation. They wrote of competitive pay and its effects on workers like themselves. M13 wrote, “Well, more like wishes. If the federal government can be more competitive with pay, it would help more “smart” people stay in government.”

### ***Military Participants (Theme 3– Preliminary Coding)***

According to this theme’s results, there was 1 reference noted using the preliminary coding framework under the “Support Valued for Military” code. However, only one subcode was identified, and that was “Work-Life Balance” [ $f_p = 1$ ]. M05 wrote of wanting “college and a better life for my family.”

### ***Lean Coding Method (Theme 3)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 27 references noted under the code of “Support Valued.” The top five subcodes or traits were: (a) “Socially Conscious” [ $f_i = 9$ ], (b) “Job Stability” [ $f_i = 6$ ], (c) “Opportunities” [ $f_i = 6$ ], (d) “Challenging and Meaningful Work” [ $f_i = 3$ ], and (e) “Work-Life Balance” [ $f_i = 3$ ]. These five top subcodes were important and valued by the participants in this study.

Some participants wrote of working for the government as part of a higher calling to help others. For others, it was a moral commitment. M13 wrote the reason they joined the federal government was because of “the mission. My family came as refugees, I

believe in America and its values. I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself and to help people.” M09 wrote, “being a veteran myself, I [felt] it [was] my duty to serve my fellow brothers and sisters.” M06 wrote that they believed in “public service to others.”

The participants also expressed another reason for working for the government, job stability. In this coding method, “Job Stability” [fl = 6] rated just one point higher in frequency than “Job Stability” [fp = 5] in preliminary coding. Also, the subcodes of “Job Stability” and “Opportunities” were equal in frequency to the participants.

The participants cited that they favored both career and training opportunities within the federal government. M04 wrote:

Availability of opportunities. Initially, I started working as a contractor I was thinking about quitting before I was offered a civil servant position that provided many growth opportunities that I didn’t think I could get elsewhere in the same time period.

One participant wrote that many of these opportunities included working with diverse teams on challenging and meaningful work to benefit humanity. M12 wrote:

Working in the federal government provides opportunities to support and get involved with a variety of interesting projects and programs that make significant impacts on humankind. I’m motivated by the ability to work for an organization that allows the opportunity to work with interdisciplinary teams on interesting and challenging topics to develop innovative solutions.



The subcode “Work-life balance” [ $f_i = 3$ ] was the last of the top five in lean coding. It was mirrored in the preliminary coding framework by the same name and frequency.

***Military Participants (Theme 3– Lean Coding)***

When the lean coding framework was used, there were 4 references noted under the code of “Support Valued for Military.” All the subcodes were equal in frequency [ $f_i = 1$ ]. The four subcodes were: (a) “Opportunities,” (b) “Job Stability,” (c) “Socially Conscious,” and (d) “Work-Life Balance.” These four subcodes were important and equally valued by the military participants in this study.

One military participant indicated that they when from part-time to full-time as a defense contractor, but the job volatility was too stressful. M14 preferred job stability as a federal military employee despite getting paid less than in the private sector. M14 wrote, “Although I was paid a lot less, I had much more stable work and less stress. I carried my work ethic with me though!”

One military participant valued being supported through training, mentoring, and one-on-one opportunities but felt that career tools like USAJOBS were inadequate in today’s job market. M14 wrote:

I appreciate being supported when I want to go to a professional development seminar. I also like the mentorship sessions, but I would really value [it] if they provided 1-on-1 opportunities. Not every agency or service offers career paths that are appealing or understandable. They seem locked in the 1990s. I feel like they need to revamp what they do to appeal to updated skill sets. Not only is

USAJOBS very burdensome and outdated with even trying to interpret what you might do in a job, all of the skill sets are prehistoric, in my opinion. I have skill sets I've learned in each job (military and civilian) that are translatable. The system could use an overhaul.

For another military participant, the federal government offered consistency. M14 wrote:

I started in Active Duty Air Force, then transitioned to part-time employment in the Air Force Reserves and full-time employment as a defense contractor for the Army. However, the volatility was too stressful. When my contract position transitioned to federal employment, I applied (three times). Eventually, I gained employment as a civilian for the same command I worked for as a contractor. Although I was paid a lot less, I had much more stable work and less stress. I carried my work ethic with me, though!

Furthermore, another military participant wrote about being socially conscious and joined the federal service to help others and build a better world. M05 wrote they wanted to “enrich others, build [a] better organization and ultimately foster a just and caring world.”

### ***Preliminary and Lean Methods Compared (Theme 3)***

The subcodes showed what the participants valued in the federal government (see Table 7). Note that the subcode “Common Good” in preliminary coding was similar to “Socially Conscious” in lean coding.

The participants commented their government employment was in line with their desire to serve the public good. The participants also noted they valued the job stability and opportunities to make a difference in the workplace. Work-life balance, challenging and meaningful work, and competitive pay was cited as important to the participants.

However, the military participant's responses did not identify challenging or meaningful work or competitive pay in the support they valued. Work-life balance was the only highly rated code identified by the military participants.

**Table 7**

*Civilian and Military Support Valued by Coding Frequency (Combined)*

| Support valued                   | $f_{p+1}$ |          |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------|
|                                  | Civilian  | Military |
| Socially conscious / common good | 17        | 1        |
| Job stability                    | 11        | 1        |
| Opportunities                    | 6         | 1        |
| Work-life balance                | 6         | 2        |
| Challenging and meaningful work  | 3         |          |
| Competitive pay                  | 1         |          |

This quote by M03 may sum up the key factors in this theme that the civilian participants valued in their decision to stay with the federal government:

We're not going to be able to buy houses on a government salary, which leaves us with a large amount of financial and geographical instability, so we need to be able to work on things we care about and/or have a flexible enough lifestyle that we are able to have a good work-life balance. This means having leaders who support training and travel opportunities, opportunities for upward mobility in the workplace, and enough vacation time [so] that we can have meaningful life

experiences. [This means] a flexible telework policy, and flexibility regarding family, perhaps including the ability to split jobs or revert to part-time for a few years if we have children.

For the military participants, only one subcode stood out, work-life balance.

However, it differed by only one point above the others. This finding may not be entirely accurate because it only came from two military participants who took the survey.

### **Discrepant Cases/Nonconforming Data**

During lean coding, one created code did not match up to any of the themes identified. This code was called “Transactional” [ $f_i = 3$ ], which represented transactional leadership. Two civilians and one military participant defined this code with an almost textbook answer. M06 described this type of leader as, “... (without supervisory status) because [they] can influence [their] teammates and peers to complete a certain task. That often times translated to [a] transactional type of leadership behavior.” M10 described a leader as a “coordinator, carrying out a plan,” and M15 wrote, “leadership is leading a group.” These neutral answers were in response to a question on their definition of leadership. This discovery led me to check the other answers these participants gave. The other answers were very descriptive and directly related to the leadership styles being studied, so I felt that the participants merely interpreted the question at face value. Therefore, these answers will not be factored into the interpretation of the findings.

One interesting comment by M06 was, “I think capturing the perspectives of those NOT in leadership, with interest in leadership can give insight into shifts from upcoming generational leaders.” This comment seemed to be directed toward future

studies of this topic and will be examined in the context of the limitations and recommendations for this study.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a broad overview of what the federal participants in this study thought about leadership. I separated the federal civilian and military participants to compare and contrast their potentially significant similarities and differences. In this study, I also viewed the data using two different methods. The first method, through the preliminary coding framework lens. Second, through a process called lean coding, which viewed the data from the study participant's own words. Both methods were interpreted through my own lens and perspective.

The dominant leadership style that the civilian participants favored in both coding methods was a combination of authentic and transformational leadership. In the military, transformational leadership is already embedded in their culture, so the military participants seem to favor an authentic leadership style as well. As for the leader traits not valued, the trait most chosen was the absentee leader. This type of leader is toxic because they provide no direction or feedback to their followers. The research found this finding troubling because some participants seemed to have encountered and may still have this toxic style of leadership within their work environment. Also, the participants valued career and training opportunities for challenging and meaningful work with a work-life balance. Finally, with the military participants, there seemed to be a strong tendency toward authentic leadership.

As this chapter draws to a close on summarizing the survey results, the next chapter will dive deep into the findings' interpretation. The findings will be examined with the conceptual framework in mind and compared with the existing literature on millennials. The recommendations for future research and the limitations of this study will be discussed. The next chapter will conclude with a discussion of the social implications of this study and the conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

With each new generation of employees, the federal workforce changes. As the last of the baby boomers in the federal workforce retire and Generation X nears retirement age, millennials will comprise the newest generation of federal workers. However, retaining them may be a challenge for the federal government because in recent years, millennials have been discouraged by federal shutdowns, furloughs, and pay freezes within the federal government (Rein, 2014b). The results from the 2013 FEVS showed that millennial like government work but don't stay long (Lunney, 2014; Rein, 2014a). This is growing problem, as baby boomers continue to retire. Since then the government has been actively recruiting this new workforce to fill the positions of retiring federal servants (Bates, 2016).

However, researchers have noted a disconnect between organizational commitment and culture because millennials have different needs and values unlike other generations (Stewart et al., 2017). These differences may require a different management style to retain millennial employees (Anderson et al., 2017; Green & Roberts, 2012). The viewpoint of millennials' preferred leadership traits and the influence of these preferences on federal sector employee retention has not been explored. The Ertas (2015) found that federal millennials have a higher likelihood than previous generations of leaving positions for another government agency or permanently leaving government for the private sector. While this has been disputed by Viecevicki (2015), the author acknowledged that the number of millennials has been shrinking every year from 2010 to

2014 for workers under 35. This is troubling because hiring of millennials in this time period has been flat or declining with the number of new millennial hires taking 6 years to double from 12.8% to 24% in 2013 to 2019 (OPM, 2013; OPM, 2019; Vielnicki, 2015). The continuing retirement and attrition of current federal employees combined with the slow hiring of millennials has made federal millennial retention critical to maintaining the public service infrastructure.

The conceptual framework consisting of a generational theory, the leadership trait approach, and three different leadership styles that nonfederal millennials favored were derived from a review of the literature. guided the research question, instruments, and data analysis. Three themes emerged from the data and conceptual framework: (a) traits valued by participants, (b) traits not valued by participants, and (c) support valued by participants. In the next section, I explore the interpretation of the key findings and the limitations of the study. Recommendations for further research and the social implications are discussed. Lastly, I present a conclusion that reviews the study.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The first theme identified in the data was traits valued by participants, which gave insights into the traits and characteristics this group favors in leadership. The most favored participant trait differed by coding method. In deductive or preliminary coding, the trait *promote collaboration or team building* was first with *charismatic* and *concern for others* following in the second and third positions, respectively.

The top trait was in line with the literature, which has indicated that millennials are collaborative. Faller and Gogek (2019) suggested that millennials need collaboration



in their workplace. This is a soft leadership skill that future leaders will need to build relationships and bring individuals and teams together (Arrington, 2017). Collaborative efforts in the workplace promote a sense of belonging and importance and translate into improved employee satisfaction, recruitment, and retention (Gion & Abitz, 2019). M12 wrote about how they value teamwork: “I’m motivated by the ability to work for an organization that allows the opportunity to work with interdisciplinary teams on interesting and challenging topics to develop innovative solutions.”

The number two traits were *charismatic* and *concern for others*, separated from each other by one point. Charisma is more than an allure that inspires follower devotion. Leaders with this trait deemphasize extrinsic rewards and emphasize intrinsic rewards, linking the follower’s identity with the organization (Northouse, 2019). While evidence suggests millennials are more interested in extrinsic rewards, public workers have been known to put more value on security and work-life balance (Furnham et al., 2014; Schullery, 2013). Concern for others was another leadership trait that resonated with the participants. Millennials have a desire to be supported (Farrell & Hurt, 2014), and federal participants in this study expressed the same desire. M13 wrote, “There are those who genuinely seem to care for the employees and are willing to go to bat for them. I find those managers the best kind.” M15 added, “Some of the qualities I value the most to remain in the federal service support. [Leaders who] believe[s] in you, appreciate[s] you, [and] understand[s] you.” When all the traits were aligned with their respective leadership styles, authentic and transformation leadership stood out.

In inductive or lean coding, a different pattern emerged but still aligned with the literature. The most valued trait was authenticity. This trait is often associated with authentic leadership. Northouse (2019) wrote that these leaders demonstrate self-awareness and know how their actions will affect others. Authentic leaders have integrity and lead with their hearts (George et al., 2013). M01 wrote that this type of leader has “empathy [and] trust in subordinates. [They] takes risks/blame for the team [and] empowers followers. [These leaders] maintain a supportive environment by setting a positive example and discourage unhealthy behaviors.” While the literature indicates that this leadership style is less effective with millennials because they are more extrinsically motivated, this does not seem the case for the federal millennials in this study. When all the traits were aligned with their respective leadership styles, no one leadership style stood out.

Furnham et al. (2014) suggested that federal workers are motivated more by security and work-life balance than extrinsic rewards. About 40% of the participants in this study joined the government because of job stability, and 27% wrote about a work-life balance. M15 wrote that they joined federal service because of its “stability and a job with benefits.” M03 accepts the fact that they may not be able to buy a home on a government salary, but they want to continue to work in government and would like to have work-life balance. M03 said they want “to be able to work on things [they] care about and/or have a flexible enough lifestyle that [they] are able to have a good work-life balance.”

The next theme identified in the data was *traits not valued by participants*. In both coding methods, the trait that participants most disliked was *absentee leader*. This leader type does not fit the stereotype of a typical toxic leader, but it can be just a destructive (Leonard, 2020). However, this leadership behavior is common in many organizations (Gourguechon, 2018). While this leader type may not bully or micromanage employees, this type of leadership is closely related to laissez-faire leadership (Gregory, 2018). The lack of direction or interest in leading can be frustrating to most employees, but this may be significantly truer for millennials. Millennials desire structure, achievement-focused, and seek attention and feedback (Farrell & Hurt, 2014)—none of which the absentee leader provides. M11 described this leader as “Authority without responsibility. You do good, the ‘leader’ is responsible, but if you do bad, then it’s all on you.” M12 wrote that this type of leader had a “lack of vision for the future, poor integrity, lack of accountability and lack of communication skills.” These types of leaders are hard to root out because they stay under the radar (Gregory, 2018). However, for millennials, leaders like these may cause them to leave for other job opportunities.

The last theme identified in the data was *support valued by participants*. This theme originated from participants’ comments on what they valued. Participants indicated valuing socially conscious work, job stability, career and training opportunities, challenging and meaningful work, work-life balance, and competitive pay. These responses provide a guide on how these federal millennial participants compare to the extant literature regarding millennials in general.

Henstra and McGowan (2016) found that millennials, in general, identified a career in public service as a “calling.” The participants in this study view their government career as socially conscious work. One participant, M13, wrote, “I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself and to help people.” M12 commented on the significant impact to society their job makes: “Working in the federal government provides opportunities to support and get involved with a variety of interesting projects and programs that make significant impacts on humankind.”

The literature on millennials indicates that this generation is ambitious and has a strong need for growth (Gong et al., 2018). The participants in this study displayed similar traits toward career and training opportunities. M03 wrote about valuing government leaders who “support training opportunities, travel opportunities, opportunities for upward mobility in the workplace.” M03 wrote, “We need new experiences and meaningful work that give us the incentive to stay.” The 2015 FEVS also recognized that career development and training activities were essential tools to engage millennials (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016). However, the numerous federal shutdowns, furloughs, and pay freezes within the federal government seem to have slowed this effort in recent years. M03 wrote, “If I’m not learning or enjoying my work, I can make twice as much money in [the] private industry.”

Millennials want challenging and meaningful work (Calk & Patrick, 2017), and this seems true for the participants in this study. M12 wrote about numerous federal government opportunities to “get involved with a variety of interesting projects and programs that make significant impacts on humankind.” Without the right type of

leadership, others miss their chance to work on challenging and meaningful projects. M03 wrote about missing their chance because of poor leadership. M03 wrote, “higher leadership has often lacked initiative for bringing new projects to the center, which leaves us without some opportunity for exciting or meaningful work.” A 2019 International employee survey also cited that meaningful work among millennials was more important than company culture, compensation, and perks (Workhuman, 2019). This has not escaped the notice of private companies like Google which compete with the federal sector in this area (Gillett, 2016). Bad leadership could drive federal millennials to the private sector in search of meaningful and challenging work.

According to the literature and to the federal millennials who took this study, work-life balance was important to millennials. This fact was also identified in the 2015 FEVS and reported in testimony before the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016). In the subcommittee testimony, work-life balance was identified as one of the four factors that drove millennials’ employee engagement. Unfortunately, the government has been slow to implement these changes throughout its federal agencies. M03 wrote, “agency leadership has often listened to concerns about work-life balance, which is great to see, but no changes have filtered down to our level yet.”

Money has been an issue with millennials because three decades of stagnant wages, the fallout from the Great Recession, and student loan debt has given this generation an uncertain economic future (Cussen, 2020). Because government agencies

pay less than the private sector, competitive pay is becoming an issue with millennials. M13 wrote, “If the federal government can be more competitive with pay, it would help more “smart” people stay in government.”

In this study, the federal millennial participants stayed because of a “calling to serve” despite getting paid less. M03 wrote, “We’re not going to be able to buy houses on a government salary, which leaves us with a large amount of financial and geographical instability, so we need to be able to work on things we care about and/or have a flexible enough lifestyle that we are able to have a good work-life balance.”

The wrong type of leadership can upset this work-life balance, and it has started to affect some. M13 has been disappointed with the lack of openness to change and the bureaucracy in their agency. They have seen others like them leaving the federal sector. M13 sadly wrote, “It’s a huge loss when you have bright, young minds leaving and thinking all the agencies are jokes. I’m still hanging on, but I feel like they’re starting to rub off on me and am thinking about leaving the federal service if a good opportunity comes.”

This study revealed that while many different leadership traits were favored, the scales tipped toward a combination like authentic transformational leadership style for civilian participants and more of an authentic leadership style for military participants. I would like to note that transformation leadership is already a part of the military culture, so this finding seems to suggest a combination of styles like authentic transformational leadership. This fact does not mean that all the traits were only related to authentic transformational leadership. The participants also chose other traits that have

transformational, ethical, and authentic elements. Two federal military millennials also took part in the study, and they had results similar to the federal civilian participants. Because millennials are different in many ways, none of the current leadership styles and their theories perfectly fit this new generation (Putriastuti et al., 2019). For federal millennials, a one leadership style approach also does not seem to work for them. This new generation of federal workers may need a new leadership style consisting of various transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership styles similar to a combination like authentic transformational leadership.

The research question central to this study was “what specific leadership traits and characteristics may influence millennials to continue in federal service?” However, has this already been addressed with so much literature written and known about millennials in the private sector? The answer is no. There is a difference between millennials who choose to work in the public sector versus the private sector. Millennials who choose to work in public service do so because it aligns with their passion for making a difference (Henstra & McGowan, 2016). While the private sector’s extra extrinsic benefits may lure some millennials, federal millennials stay because of their dedication to the mission. One participant spoke of why they joined the federal sector. M01 wrote, “The opportunity to serve outside of capitalism, science focus (i.e., not military).” Another participant, M03, wrote they wanted to “focus on exploration for exploration’s sake, rather than only working on for-profit deliverables.” Furthermore, M13 wrote, “I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself and to help people.”

Like their counterparts in the private sector, the federal millennial participants have high employment expectations and want job stability (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017). 46% of federal millennial participants chose a federal career because of job stability. Like their private-sector counterparts, they are motivated by challenging work (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017). M12 wrote, “Working in the federal government provides opportunities to support and get involved with a variety of interesting projects and programs that make significant impacts on humankind.” Another similarity between the private sector millennials and the federal millennial participants was work-life balance (DeVaney, 2015). The participants in this study indicated the need for this in government. M03 wrote, “[we] need a flexible workplace that allows us to have a work-life balance.”

In this study, the literature review pointed to leadership as a factor in employee retention. Leaders can create an environment where employees can feel comfortable in staying or be uncomfortable and leave. Three leadership styles were examined as part of the conceptual framework. However, the literature pointed out that no one pure style seemed to suit millennials. This study looked at leadership traits in literature and found they were not bound to any pure style of transformation, ethical, or authentic leadership. The study participants confirmed leadership was a factor in their retention and expressed the type of leadership they preferred. While they favored a collaborative or team-building trait similar to their private-sector peers, they indicated they wanted much more. When their favorite traits were tallied and aligned with the appropriate leadership styles, a mixture occurred. The results displayed a preference for transformational and authentic styles or authentic transformation leadership. This combination of leadership styles is an



ethical version of transformational leadership with authentic leadership's ethical virtues (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). M08 described their ideal leader as having "empathy, trust in subordinates [and] take risks/blame for the team. [This] empowers followers [and] maintains a supportive environment by setting a positive example and discouraging unhealthy behaviors." This description has traits common to transformational and authentic leadership styles. Putriastuti et al. (2019) believed that the existing leadership theories could not be fully effective with millennials. This study demonstrated that the leadership traits blurred the boundaries among the leadership styles. The participants did not choose one pure style over another but preferred traits from all different styles with a preference for both transformational and authentic traits. Putriastuti et al. (2019) wrote that as the workforce changes, so must leadership theories. If organizations want to succeed, they must adapt leadership and management styles that complement their millennial employees (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Millennials are so different from previous generations that many of the theories written long ago may have to be reevaluated for this new generation cohort. A new leadership style consisting of various leadership traits complementary to millennials may need to be created, such as authentic transformational leadership, which combines the best of two different leadership styles. For federal civilian millennials, this new leadership style's core components will need to include transformational, ethical, and authentic traits demonstrated in this study, to retain these millennials in federal service.

As for the military participants, there may be a need to have more authentic traits added or adopt an authentic transformational leadership style rather than a strict

transformational style already in place. However, the style suggested was just a preliminary observation with the two military participants in the study.

I believed that these two comments summed up what the participants valued to remain in federal service. M15 wrote, “Some of the qualities I value the most to remain in the federal service support. [Leaders who] believe[s] in you, appreciate[s] you, [and] understand[s] you.” M12 added, “The leadership qualities that I value the most to remain in the federal service are communication and commitment.” This study and the literature have shown that millennials want to be supported by their leaders, and because their happiness is important, they leave when unhappy. Millennial retention depends on how leadership supports and motivates this generational cohort. Current pure leadership styles like transformation, ethical, or authentic do not work with millennials. They need a new leadership style based on traits favored by this generation. This new leadership paradigm may be a combination of styles like authentic transformational leadership. However, this leadership style was not within the scope of this study.

In this study, the research touched on just some of the leadership traits, styles, and support that federal millennials participants favored. However, there is still much more work to be done in this area. It has been apparent in this study that some federal millennials are having problems with poor leadership. It is hoped that this study will alert federal leadership and HR professionals to address the poor leadership behaviors noted in this study. The future of federal service depends on retaining millennials to train and mentor the next generation of federal workers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative study provided a general glimpse into millennial leadership preferred traits and retention at the federal level through leadership. Previous research has not explored the topic of this dissertation in much depth. This research, however, was subject to several limitations. One limitation was that many participants wrote their answers in short bursts like a text message and without much context. The short answers maybe because this generation grew up texting and using platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where there is instant gratification from short tweets (Alton, 2017; Hanson et al., 2011). Because the methodology chosen to conduct the survey did not permit me to ask clarifying questions, there may be ambiguity in translating the coding data.

Another limitation was that the different generations tend to interpret written communications differently; this placed more pressure on myself to interpret the data. Because of this situation, my own bias could play a role in misinterpreting what the participant meant to say. To ensure trustworthiness, I used intracoder reliability and triangulation. These methods have helped reduce any translation ambiguity and potential personal bias and increased this study's credibility.

### **Recommendations**

This study's objective was to explore federal millennials' relationship to the leadership traits they favored to retain them in government service. However, this study only explored the leadership perspectives of federal millennials in civilian agencies. Because of the inclusion of the two federal military millennials, their comments gave a slight glimpse of this group's potential perspectives. However, this paper's findings

demonstrated the need for more future research to include the perspectives of all millennials of all federal agencies, including those of law enforcement and the military.

Also, the participant pool for this study was small, and many times the participant's answers were terse without much context. As noted in the literature, millennials communicate using the least number of words. Further research should include a more sizable number of participants and face-to-face interviews to get the proper context.

Furthermore, this study did not distinguish federal millennials by their leadership roles, as mentioned by one participant. Further studies could separate participants' viewpoints into supervisory/leadership and nonsupervisory/nonleadership roles. This study could benefit from knowing and understanding the viewpoints of these two groups of federal millennials. Exploring leadership viewpoints from different leadership roles would provide a greater understanding of millennial retention practices.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The findings of this research will contribute to social change by adding knowledge on the ways in which federal millennial leadership may be improved for effective employee retention of this new generation of federal workers. Federal human resource specialists may use the knowledge identified in this research to improve their leadership development courses. This knowledge may develop leaders who will better understand federal millennials. Federal human resource professionals may also use this information to help recruit millennials into the federal workplace.

Going forward, successful retention strategies like that suggested in this study are critically needed to retain federal millennials in the federal workforce. A recent public sector study on millennials showed that aligning public sector management with millennials may increase retention (Butler, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

While other studies have explored millennials' preferences, this study took a different approach. It explored the leadership viewpoints of federal millennials and how it may affect and improve employee retention. This study was timely because federal millennials' retention is vital to fill in the gaps left by retirements, attrition and to reduce federal service turnover. The approach taken was to examine how leadership traits may affect federal millennial retention. From the federal millennials' viewpoints in this study, it was clear that extrinsic methods were only one part of millennial retention in government. The other part may lie in intrinsic elements like the environment, which in organizations are formed by its leaders.

For an inclusive environment where federal millennials can grow and thrive, leadership practices must change. Before this generation decides to leave the federal sector entirely, federal leadership must realize that this new generation of workers, the millennials, are quite different. They are dedicated to change the world, but they need to be transformational in their work and have honest and ethical leaders who will support them. This shift in thinking maybe the biggest challenge for the federal government because change happens very slowly in the federal sector and the workforce is rapidly changing. Hence, I hope this paper will serve as a wake-up call to action.

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## Appendix A: Literature Review Search Log

| Database       | Search terms   | Date range | Criteria | Articles found | Notes              |
|----------------|--|------------|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me"  | 2014-2019  | All      | 39,000         | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "public sector" or "government" or "federal government" OR "public administration" | 2014-2019  | All      | 4,520          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "government" OR "federal government" or "public administration"                    | 2014-2019  | All      | 6,610          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government"   | 2014-2019  | All      | 3,120          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention   | 2014-2019  | All      | 2,140          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention   | 2014-2019  | All      | 3,120          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND turnover AND "leadership"                                 | 2014-2019  | All      | 4,310          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leadership"                                | 2014-2019  | All      | 4,550          | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND turnover AND "leadership style"                           | 2014-2019  | All      | 560            | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leadership style"                          | 2014-2019  | All      | 587            | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leadership trait" OR "leadership traits"   | 2014-2019  | All      | 149            | Too many to review |
| Google Scholar | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND turnover AND "leadership influence"                       | 2014-2019  | All      | 48             | 6 Scholarly works  |

| Database                           | Search terms   | Date range | Criteria      | Articles found | Notes                             |
|------------------------------------|--|------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Google Scholar                     | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leadership influence"  | 2014-2019  | All           | 48             | 6 Scholarly works (same as above) |
| Google Scholar                     | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leadership influence" OR "leadership satisfaction"   | 2014-2019  | All           | 56             | 6 Scholarly works (same as above) |
| Google Scholar                     | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "management influence" OR "management satisfaction"   | 2014-2019  | All           | 22             | 2 Scholarly works                 |
| Google Scholar                     | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "supervisor influence" OR "supervisor satisfaction"   | 2014-2019  | All           | 14             | 1 Peer-reviewed article           |
| Google Scholar                     | millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "federal government" AND retention AND "leader influence" OR "leader satisfaction"   | 2014-2019  | All           | 20             | 1 Peer-reviewed article           |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX ("federal government" or "public administration" or "public service" ) AND ( retention or attrition or turnover )  | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 13             | 1 Peer-reviewed article           |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX ( "federal government" or "public administration" or "public service" ) AND TX ( retention or attrition or turnover ) AND TX ( leadership and management )               | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 34             | 2 Peer-reviewed articles          |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool | TI ( millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" ) AND TX ( "federal government" or "public administration" or "public service" ) AND TX ( retention or attrition or turnover ) AND TX ( leadership traits and characteristics ) | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 1              | 2 Peer-reviewed articles          |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX ( "federal government" or "public administration" or "public service" ) AND TX ( retention or attrition or turnover ) AND TX leadership influence                        | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 3              | 2 Peer-reviewed articles          |



| Database                               | Search terms  | Date range | Criteria                               | Articles found | Notes                    |
|--|---|------------|--|----------------|--------------------------|
| Thoreau multi-database search tool     | TX (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND federal employees AND (retention or attrition or turnover)                                       | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed                          | 6              | 3 Peer-reviewed articles |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool     | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX federal government AND TX (turnover and leadership)   | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed                          | 2              | 1 Peer-reviewed article  |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool     | TX (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND (Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey)  | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed                          | 6              | 3 Peer-reviewed articles |
| Thoreau multi-database search tool     | TX federal workforce AND TX retention of employees AND TX (turnover or retention or attrition)  | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed                          | 146            | 5 Peer-reviewed articles |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND (federal employee AND civil servants) AND (employee retention)                                     | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 14             | 2 doctoral dissertations |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND ("federal employee" OR "civil Servant") AND ("employee turnover")                                  | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 1              | 1 doctoral dissertation  |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND ("federal employee" OR "federal government") AND ("employee turnover")                             | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 13             | 4 doctoral dissertation4 |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND ("federal employee" OR "federal government") AND ("employee retention")                            | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 14             | 1 doctoral dissertation  |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND ("federal employee" OR "federal government") AND ("employee retention") AND (leadership influence) | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 14             | 1 doctoral dissertation  |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | ti(millennial OR millennial OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND ("Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey" OR "fees")  | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 23             | 1 doctoral dissertation  |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | "FEVS" AND "Millennial" AND "retention"   | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 26             | 4 doctoral dissertations |
| ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global | Millennial AND ("Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey") AND turnover   | 2014-2019  | Scholarly work, doctoral dissertations | 35             | 6 doctoral dissertations |

| Database   | Search terms   | Date range | Criteria      | Articles found | Notes                             |
|--|--|------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX federal government AND TX ( turnover intention or intention to leave ) | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 9              | 1 Peer-reviewed articles          |
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX federal government AND TX retention                                    | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 13             | None found to applicable to study |

| Database   | Search terms  | Date range | Criteria      | Articles found | Notes                             |
|--|---|------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" ) AND TX federal government AND TX ( turnover intention or intention to leave ) AND TX leadership | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 5              | 1 Peer-reviewed articles          |
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text                     | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX federal government AND TX retention AND TX leadership                                     | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 12             | None found to applicable to study |

| Database   | Search terms   | Date range | Criteria      | Articles found | Notes                             |
|--|--|------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me") AND TX federal employees AND TX retention AND TX leadership                           | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 0              | None found to applicable to study |
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI (millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" ) AND TX federal employees AND TX turnover AND TX ( leadership and management styles ) | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed | 4              | None found to applicable to study |

| Database   | Search terms  | Date range | Criteria   | Articles found | Notes   |
|--|---|------------|--|----------------|---|
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI ( millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" ) AND TX ( public sector or government or federal or public administration ) AND TX ( turnover intention or intention to leave ) AND TX ( leadership and management styles ) | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed  | 37             | 2 Peer-reviewed articles                                |
| Academic Search Complete;<br>Business Source Complete;<br>CINAHL Complete;<br>Communication & Mass Media Complete;<br>Complementary Index; EconLit with Full Text;<br>Education Source;<br>Emerald Insight;<br>Entrepreneurial Studies Source;<br>Legal Source;<br>MasterFILE Premier;<br>MEDLINE Complete;<br>SocINDEX with Full Text | TI ( millennial OR millennials OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" ) AND TX ( "US federal government" OR "public sector" OR "government" OR "federal" OR "public administration" ) AND TX ( turnover intention or intention to leave )          | 2014-2019  | Peer-reviewed  | 81             | 2 Peer-reviewed articles                                |
| www.opm.gov  | " millennial" OR "millennials" OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me"  | 2014-2019  | An authoritative, credible source of information but not all gov docs are scholarly or peer-reviewed | 22             | Articles and blogs on millennials in federal government |
| https://www.opm.gov  | " millennial" OR "millennials" OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "retention"  | 2014-2019  | An authoritative, credible source of information but not all gov docs are scholarly or peer-reviewed | 64             | 7 Federal government produced articles                  |

| Database  | Search terms   | Date range | Criteria   | Articles found | Notes                                  |
|---|--|------------|--|----------------|--|
| <a href="https://www.opm.gov">https://www.opm.gov</a>             | "millennial" OR "millennials" OR "gen y" OR "generation y" OR "generation me" AND "retention" AND "leadership style" | 2014-2019  | An authoritative, credible source of information but not all gov docs are scholarly or peer-reviewed | 4              | None found to applicable to study      |
| <a href="https://www.opm.gov/fevs/">https://www.opm.gov/fevs/</a> | Millennial, Retention, and Engagement  | 2014-2019  | An authoritative, credible source of information but not all gov docs are scholarly or peer-reviewed | 122            | 10 Federal government produced reports |

## Appendix B: Preliminary Coding Framework

| Primary code/node                          | Secondary/child                                 | Survey Questions        | Source  |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|
| Approachable / accessible                  | Authentic                                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2012)   |
| Build community                            | Authentic, Ethical                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Rhine, 2015; Sama & Shoaf, 2008)   |
| Build trust / trustworthy                  | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Khan et al., 2020)           |
| Charismatic                                | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)   |
| NonCharismatic                             | (Opposite) Transformational                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Citizen behavior                           | Ethical   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017)   |
| Coaching                                   | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Schaubroeck et al., 2012) |
| Common good                                | Ethical   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lawton & Páez, 2015)   |
| Competence                                 | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Fullagar et al., 2007)   |
| Incompetence                               | (Opposite) Transformational                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Concern for others                         | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Rhine, 2015)  |
| No concern for others                      | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Confidence and respect for followers       | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017; Fullagar et al., 2007; Owusu-Bempah et al., 2012)         |
| No confidence and no respect for followers | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Consistency                                | Transformational, Authentic                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Johnson et al., 2012)                               |
| Inconsistency                              | (Opposite) Transformational, Authentic          | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Courage / admit mistakes                   | Authentic                                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Dirik & Seren Intepeler, 2017)   |
| No courage or not admitting mistakes       | (Opposite) Authentic                            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Decisive / Decisiveness                    | Transformational, Authentic                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Bradley-Cole, 2018; Shelton, 2012)   |
| Empowers Followers                         | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Dust et al., 2018; Fullagar et al., 2007)  |
| Disempowers Followers                      | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| Encourages "out of the box" thinking       | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017)   |
| Fairness                                   | Ethical   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017)   |
| No Fairness                                | (Opposite) Ethical                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |   |
| High performance expectations              | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Fullagar et al., 2007)   |
| Honest / honesty                           | Ethical, Authentic                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017; Fullagar et al., 2007)                                    |

| Primary code/node                            | Secondary/child                                 | Survey Questions        | Source   |
|--|---|-------------------------|--|
| Dishonest or Dishonesty                      | (Opposite) Ethical, Authentic                   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Humble                                       | Authentic                                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Oc et al., 2020)  |
| Humor  | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Fullagar et al., 2007)  |
| Inspirational                                | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)  |
| Not Inspirational                            | (Opposite) Transformational                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Integrity                                    | Ethical, Authentic                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Fullagar et al., 2007 ; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013)      |
| No Integrity                                 | (Opposite) Ethical, Authentic                   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Lead with heart                              | Authentic                                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)  |
| Leading by Values                            | Ethical, Authentic                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Dust et al., 2018; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)                                 |
| Not Leading by Values                        | (Opposite) Ethical, Authentic                   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Listens                                      | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2012; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; Xu et al., 2016)             |
| Mentoring                                    | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Bedi et al., 2016 ; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000)        |
| Open   | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Fullagar et al., 2007; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Xu et al., 2016 )           |
| Not Open                                     | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Promote Collaboration/ Team building         | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Bhatti et al., 2021; Fullagar et al., 2007; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)        |
| Not Promoting Collaboration or Team building | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Provides Support and Recognition             | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Anderson et al., 2017; Bedi et al., 2016 ; Yaviz, 2020)                         |
| Not Providing Support and Recognition        | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic |                         |  |
| Self Awareness                               | Ethical, Authentic                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Tu & Lu, 2016)                                     |
| No Self Awareness                            | (Opposite) Ethical, Authentic                   | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Self-Confidence                              | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011; Tu & Lu, 2016 ; Yaviz, 2020)                       |
| No Self-Confidence                           | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Sets Challenging Expectations                | Transformational                                | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Fullagar et al., 2007)  |
| Sets Personal Example                        | Transformational, ethical, authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011) |
| Not Set Personal Example                     | (Opposite) Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Share success with the team                  | Authentic                                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)  |



| Primary code/node                  | Secondary/child                        | Survey Questions        | Source   |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| Share/Communicate Vision           | Transformational, Authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)<br>(Rhine, 2015)                                 |
| No Sharing or Communicating Vision | (Opposite) Transformational, Authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Shows Justice                      | Authentic, Ethical                     | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Demont-Biaggi, 2019; Xu et al., 2016)   |
| Not Showing Justice                | (Opposite) Authentic, Ethical          | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Take Risks                         | Transformational, Authentic            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Dubinsky, Yammarino, & Jolson, 1995; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013; Yaviz, 2020) |
| Not Take Risks                     | (Opposite) Transformational, Authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Transparency                       | Authentic                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 | (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011)  |
| Competitive Pay                    | Support valued by participants         | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Job Stability                      | Support valued by participants         | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |
| Work-Life Balance                  | Support valued by participants         | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |  |

*Note: Emergent Codes are shown shaded*

## Appendix C: Lean Coding Framework

| Primary code/node               | Secondary/child                      | Survey Questions        |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Absentee leader                 | Leader behaviors disliked            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Authentic                       | Authentic                            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Challenging and meaningful work | Achievement oriented                 | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Communication                   | Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Fairness                        | Ethical                              | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Job stability                   | Stability                            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Mentor or coach                 | Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| My way or the highway mindset   | Leader behaviors disliked            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Open and adaptive to change     | Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Opportunities                   | Achievement oriented                 | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Self centered                   | Leader behaviors disliked            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Socially conscious              | Common good                          | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Training                        | Achievement oriented                 | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Transactional                   | Transactional leadership             | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Unethical conduct               | Leader behaviors disliked            | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Values teamwork                 | Transformational, ethical, authentic | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |
| Work-life balance               | Family centric                       | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 |

## Appendix D: Recruitment Email

To: *[Potential or Referring Participant]*  
Subject: RE: Study of Millennial Preferred Leadership Traits

Dear *[Potential or Referring Participant]*,

My name is Tony Damian, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am actively seeking participants to volunteer in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the specific leadership traits and characteristics that may influence millennial civil servants to continue in federal service.

Below is the link for an anonymous 10 question survey on the preferred leadership traits of millennials. Please pass this email on to federal millennials who would like their voices heard in the federal government.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FPP82TJ>

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tony Damian  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

## Appendix E: Social Media Post

Federal Millennials, let your voice be heard about Federal Leadership at  
<https://lnkd.in/gkfMBc2>  
[#FederalMillennialSurvey](#)

**Are You a  
Federal Millennial?**


Please take a short leadership  
survey that may shape the future of  
millennials in the federal workforce.





<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FPP82TJ>


Study by Tony A. Damian  
Doctoral candidate at Walden University  
[tony.damian@waldenu.edu](mailto:tony.damian@waldenu.edu)

This study has been approved by the Walden University  
Institutional Review Board, Study # 612-312-1210

Licensed Stock  
Photo of  
Millennials

 1

 Like  Comment  Share  Send

 152 views of your post in the feed

Online Survey Post

## Appendix F: Online Survey

**Exploring Favored Federal Millennial Leadership Traits****Your Preferred Leader Traits**

- \*1. What state do you currently reside in?
- \*2. What federal agency do you currently work with?
- \*3. What is your reason for working in the federal government? What motivated you?
- \*4. What is your definition of leadership?
- \*5. Can you tell me about a life experience or event that influenced your definition of leadership?
- \*6. What do you believe to be the qualities/traits of a good leader?
- 7. What do you believe to be the characteristics of a bad leader?
- \*8. Can you tell me about the types of leadership behaviors that you have experienced in the federal government? Please explain.
- \*9. What leadership qualities do you value the most to remain in federal service?
- 10. Do you have any further comments to add about this topic that was not previously covered?

<<Note: Questions with “\*” were required>>