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Millennial Leadership in the Retail Industry

Phyllis Atwood
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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Phyllis Jean Atwood

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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Millennial Leadership in the Retail Industry

by

Phyllis Jean Atwood

MA, Webster University, 2005

BS, Missouri Baptist College, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Leadership and Organizational Change

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

The retail industry contributes to the United States economy, and high turnover rates reduce the profitability of businesses, which affects their sustainability. The general problem is millennials employed in retail are not finding adequate leadership support and alignment with their career expectations or social beliefs. This qualitative single case study involved an embedded group of millennials employed as retail managers with at least three years of supervisory experience. The purpose of this study was to explore experiences and expectations involving effective leadership. The study involved using the generational theory, cognitive model of behavior, and servant leadership theory to address how perceptions of leadership are influenced by generational differences and leader behavior. Data collection from 8 semi-structured interviews was affected by the shared societal event of the COVID pandemic. Thematic analysis revealed transitional data from a follower's perspective to a leader's perspective and an emerging millennial leadership style. Millennials' skills and behaviors have evolved from life experiences and they can relate to other generations because of a need to know everything with a fearlessness to ask why. Future research of retail leadership will provide guidance to managers in the retail industry as they determine the style of leadership that fits their environment, culture, and employee needs. Reducing the voluntary turnover rate by putting people before profit in the retail industry will decrease the ripple effect that business closures have on local, state, and federal government sustainability.

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Dedication

Without my co-workers, friends, and family constantly challenging me, I would not have had the resolve to finish. Whether they encouraged or questioned my reasons for pursuing a doctorate, their words added to my continual self-evaluation of motive and reminded me of a life goal I made 30 years ago. It doesn't matter how much time passes, what matters is the journey.

I dedicate this work to Andy because without his generosity and disbelief that I was about to give up, my goal would have been unrealized.

Angels walk amongst me.

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When a dissertation committee convenes, the goal is simple, in theory. I know I was one of many candidates, but my committee never ceased to make me feel like I was their only concern. I was given strong guidance, honesty, and comments that instilled confidence. Thank you, Dr. Levitt, for finding my study interesting from the beginning, accepting it as viable, and for valuing the message. Whenever I needed validation of my pathway, you encouraged me and bolstered my courage. Dr. Halkias, I appreciate your guidance and all the resources you provided that kept me within the scope and purpose of my study. Thank you for your eye for detail, time, and devotion to getting it right the first time. You inspired me to write with purpose and clarity and served me well academically and professionally. Dr. Haussmann, if I could have chosen my URR, it would have been you. As my instructor for my first research class, you recognized and encouraged the multi-disciplinary approach I needed to pursue this study. Thank you for supporting my tendency to think outside the box. You helped me find my voice.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

--- *John C. Crosby*

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The turnover rate for millennials is three times more compared to other generations (Petrucci, 2017). The industry supports 52 million jobs and contributes over \$3.9 trillion to the U. S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP; National Retail Federation [NRF], 2020). A leadership style for the retail industry that serves the newest generation of employees instead of profit first might lead to social change (Akers, 2018). Akers (2018) argued that voluntary turnover is reduced when employees' sense of meaningful work increases.

Background information included in this study includes the evolution of the retail industry and an overview of leadership. Chinyerere and Sandada (2018) argued that current leadership expectations might conflict with previous retail industry leadership and adopting a more employee-centric style would improve organizational commitment. I addressed how millennials employed in the retail industry described their perceptions and expectations regarding successful leadership.

Societal influences and upbringing shape adult behavior (Fritsch et al., 2018; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The continuance of a specific behavior is dependent on the received response, and followers imitates positively received behaviors (Bandura, 1977). The concept of serving others as a style of leadership involves meaningful work and socially conscious and attentive leaders. This case study involved eight interview participants who were of millennial age with 3 years or more of leadership experience in

business. Interview questions involved millennial leadership viewpoints as employees with experiences as leaders and followers.

Background of the Study

Millennials' expectations and characteristics, generational differences, and current leadership theories in the retail industry were part of the scope of this study. The general problem is millennials employed in retail do not find adequate leadership support and alignment with their career expectations or social beliefs, often leading to a high voluntary turnover rate. Voluntary turnover does not apply to a single age group, but statistically, the millennial generation has the highest turnover percentages of other age groups and lowest tenure rates of less than 3 years (Petrucci, 2017; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Naim and Lenka (2020) said millennials desire to work where they continuously learn and add to their marketability.

Howe and Strauss (2000) recognized crossover generations that exhibited characteristics of two generations. There is a microgeneration within the millennial generation known as Xennials between Generation X and the millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000). This microgeneration does not identify wholly with either Generation X or millennials but considers themselves adaptable in terms of both (Erts, 2020; Taylor, 2018). Leadership training in the retail industry lacks soft skills needed to inspire positive behavior, like retention (Holtschlag et al., 2020; Lindblom et al., 2016; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Nolan, 2015). Current research involves the need to encourage expectations and the connection to voluntary turnover.

This study involved examining how millennials view the world differently from each other and other generations. The millennial generation's collective social influences that reportedly affect personality characteristics were significant in this study as environmental stressors and parental/mentor affectations. The values of a business are an essential factor in terms of success, and people before profit should be a key-value (Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2021; Friedman & Gerstein, 2017). Nolan (2015) noted the responsibilities of management to adjust organizational culture to include millennial needs and expectations instead of expecting the generation to assimilate. Nolan (2015) and Petrucelli (2017) included proposed behavioral adjustments in leadership needed to combat stereotypes associated with millennials and millennial dissatisfaction with the status quo. Nolan described benefits to the organization via lower turnover costs and increased performance by acknowledging and accepting millennial expectations.

The delicate balance of the retail industry management's need to drive business and develop leaders for a succession plan necessary for organization sustainability is significant in terms of interpreting millennials' needs and expectations. Smith and Garriety (2020) argued that organizational goals and employees' personal needs align with job satisfaction. I identified a gap in the literature between existing leadership styles in the retail industry and millennials' definition of successful leadership.

Acknowledgment of millennial characteristics of purposeful teamwork, social consciousness, and authenticity combined with the reported need for meaningful work, sincere feedback, and a work-life balance are basic guidelines for leading millennials

(Anderson et al., 2017; Sarwono & Bernarto, 2020). Arellano (2015) said leadership involved in developing leaders and organizations experience growth and stability by recognizing and embracing strength in others.

Positive behavior in leadership is reflected in the behavior of followers (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's social learning theory includes expectations of reciprocity or responding to benevolence with benevolence for others (Du et al., 2020; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020). A person is influenced by their environment, observations, and treatment from others, and they respond to these influences with actions toward others (Cherry, 2021). Received impact can be negative or positive, depending on the follower's expectations and the leader's motivations. A study focused on leadership in the retail industry to explore expectations and perceptions is valid to recognize the need for compassion in response to a paradigm shift.

There is little guidance for retailers about how to dispel negative connotations of retail management as a career option with long-term commitments. Hurst and Good (2009) said retailers are neglecting the chance to cultivate part-time college students for retail careers, causing a negative perception of the industry. In deference to new employee training, the National Retail Federation began a skills training and credentialing program to promote careers in retail. Successful leaders need to coach the next generation by recognizing their beliefs and aspirations (Akers, 2018; Broadbridge et al., 2009). Holtschlag et al., (2020) said millennials do not necessarily make retail a career choice but are less likely to assign negativity to the experience.

Problem Statement

The general problem was that millennials employed in the retail industry are not finding leadership support which aligns with their career expectations or social beliefs, often leading to a high voluntary turnover rate. Excessive turnover in a retail setting negatively affects staff efficacy, knowledge transfer, cohesiveness, and customer loyalty (Berisha & Lajçi, 2020). The 4.3% turnover rate in retail trade contrasts with the total national average of 3.6% and the voluntary turnover rate, which is at 30% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

The pandemic effect on the turnover rate was 57.3%, and the previous three-year average was 42-45% (DailyPay, 2021). Millennials change jobs three times as often compared to other generations, compounding the turnover rate. Costs associated with recruiting and training replacements are detrimental to successful organizational operations (Petrucci, 2017).

A literature search produced limited results regarding retail industry leadership, and the majority of the research centered on how to lead millennials. Anderson et al., (2017) said the struggle for leaders to determine millennials' needs and develop them into successful leaders resulted in organizations without succession plans and millennials with no faith in organizational leadership. The specific problem was that current leadership styles in the retail industry are not effective in terms of recruitment and retention of millennials for leadership positions (Anderson et al., 2017; Friedman & Gerstein, 2017; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Taylor, 2018).

Limited information about retail leaders' behavior supports the retail industry's need for research on how retail leader behavior affects voluntary turnover. Lee et al. (2017) argued for examining why employees remain employed in the retail industry, thus providing practitioners insight into followers' perceptions of successful leadership. Gunn et al. (2017) said the academic community should explore the literature gap involving perceptions and expectations of millennial leaders and current leadership techniques in the retail industry.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study involved exploring experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry and their expectations involving effective leadership. An organization with a higher purpose than profit contributes to society and promotes servant leadership that aligns with millennials' expectations for successful leaders (McCleskey, 2018; O'Connell & Gibbons, 2016). Conceptually, a leader's behavior reflects in the performances of those that follow (Bandura, 1977), and each generation has unique perceptions and expectations (Mannheim, 1952). Exploring expectations of millennials who chose retail as a career added insights regarding viable leadership styles for the retail industry and addressed the gap between purported retail leadership and millennials' self-descriptions.

Research Question

RQ1: How do millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership?

Conceptual Framework

I used a conceptual framework to gather the information about the influence of behavior on leadership that guided this study of millennials as leaders. Societal influence determines behaviors in a generation, and individual upbringing shapes adult behavior (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). In the workplace, generational differences in perception can be attributed to age, relating to the human cycle of development, and environmental influences affecting human development.

Such factors of characteristic development impact perceptions and behaviors and lead to stereotypical generalization when other factors, such as industry changes or career progression stages, should be considered (Lyons et al., 2015). Employees base their perceptions of leadership qualities of individuals within the group (Graybill, 2014; Gruda et al., 2018). Conceptually, in a multi-generational workforce, composite knowledge is not segregated by age but rather substance of knowledge.

The literature review included leadership differences affected by generational perceptions along with evolution of knowledge sharing from hierarchal to mentorship. Knowledge sharing is dependent on social relationships of groups, which are not necessarily divided by generation. Knowledge defines leadership in an unspoken hierarchy of command (Gruda et al., 2018). Mannheim (1952) supported behavioral differences that influence leadership style and social influence constructs.

Mannheim (1952) argued that events shared by a group influence their collective perspective. Life experiences, perceptions of those experiences, and leadership

expectations as the result of these experiences comprise characteristics of leader behavior. In the workplace, behavior characteristics of a leader are either supportive or destructive, with leaders exhibiting neither supportive nor destructive behavior, supportive nor destructive, which hurts employee perceptions (Schyns et al., 2018).

Mannheim (1952) defined generational theory as a collective personality identifying birth years by behavioral traits influenced by perceptions of life events. The key to a collective personality is perception, and Mannheim's concept of generational differences included the possibility of a collective personality based on a shared social event. In addition to the concept that generational differences influence leadership behavior, Bandura's model of cognitive behavior was used to understand how observation influences behavior. Continuance of the behavior depends on the received response. The cognitive model of behavior contains a mediational process that involves the individual observing, remembering, determining the possibility of mimicry, and imitating the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Positive behavior will continue and expand if there is an increase in self-efficacy through positive feedback that the individual perceives as sincere (Bandura, 1977). Workplace reciprocity is relevant to this study.

Reciprocity functionality in the organization includes an agreement that benefits both employees and employers and is rooted in the social concept of kindness begets kindness (Hu et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016). The third part of this framework is congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader, which is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Barbuto and Gottfredson (2016) conceptualized servant leadership to recruit and retain millennials seeking meaningful work, corporate social responsibility, recognition for good performance, and attentive and authentic leaders. Treating others with consideration of their individual needs is socially driven and is associated with religious teachings, but there is a connection to business leadership (Frey, 2017). The servant leader's controversial softer side of leadership has been labeled more of a philosophy than leadership style, but conceptually align with millennial expectations of leadership (Mertel & Brill, 2015).

The five aspects of servant leadership: altruism, emotional healing, wisdom, encouragement, and stewardship, outlined by Barbuto and Gottfredson (2016, p 62), serves as a model of leadership behavior that mirrors millennials' expectations. The theory of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) means the follower bestows authority because of the leader's willingness to serve others first. Coetzer et al. (2017) defined Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership as putting others' needs before one's own, considering those that follow and surrounding communities. Information regarding past and present leadership styles and the need for a leadership style to adapt as the landscape of the retail industry changes, led to the question of generational differences in leadership style. The concept that behavioral characteristics of each generation influence employee perceptions of successful leaders and leadership theory that involves millennials' expectations of leadership led to this study involving millennials' behavioral characteristics.

Nature of the Study

Of the three approaches to research, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, the best fit for this study was qualitative. Alignment of methodology with the research question was paramount, in addition to whether results were quantifiable. Qualitative researchers are interested in reasons or motivations behind a phenomenon, understanding the social implications of behavior, and understanding experiences (Klenke, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

I chose a qualitative analysis to study leadership because of the diverse nature of influence and dependency on contextual consideration. A relativistic ontology guides researchers' belief that several realities arise from individual interpretations of social constructs (Klenke, 2016; Rolfe, 2006; Scotland, 2012). A subjectivist epistemology leads researchers to believe there is no separation between self and perception, suggesting perception is a personal reality.

Qualitative research provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of phenomena involving a holistic point of view to explore the complexity of the human experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Denzin (2002) said qualitative research based on the interpretivism paradigm and believing that reality is subject to context, results in a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon. Qualitative research involves connecting scientific disciplines, concepts, and established theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The researcher may act as a bricoleur, using multiple tools to collect data. Bricolage research is interactive, involves challenging epistemology and ontology as universal rationales,

and encourages a multi-dimensional philosophy and more profound understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). The bricolage approach, used by researchers in studies that involve multidisciplinary areas of inquiry, enables a deeper understanding of participant's' personal beliefs rather than adhering to strict paradigms (Maxwell, 2013; Wibberley, 2017).

A quantitative method is not appropriate because the focus of this study is not testing a hypothesis with predictable outcomes or one correct answer. Quantitative research involves a deductive process with no variance in data retrieval, but qualitative research with an inductive process allows for alterations during the collection stage (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Mixed methods research involves looking at the research problem using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. I opted against mixed methods in favor of streamlining the study using a single method of inquiry with a bricolage approach.

I conducted a case study by interviewing participants that met inclusive criteria as part of the millennial age generation and retail industry leaders with a minimum of 10 employees and over 3 years of experience in a retail environment who were graduated or enrolled in a business curriculum. Yin (2018) suggested using the case study design in situations involving an embedded phenomenon in the context of world reality, such as one group's perceptions involving retail leadership. Other considered designs were ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory.

Ethnography is the primary method of studying cultures and standards of behavior which constitute group identity involving in-depth immersion (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Since the focus of this study is not the study of a way of life, I did not use the ethnographic design. Phenomenology involves individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I did not choose phenomenology because there was no specific event or situation being explored. Grounded theory involves the development of new theory as a link between concepts emerges with research or data collection (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). The development of a new theory was not the focus of this study; therefore, the grounded theory design was not used.

The qualitative purposeful selection strategy requires inquiries posed to a specific participant group determined by inclusive criteria to encourage collecting information that is relevant to research questions (Klenke, 2016). Of the choices for data collection tools, interviews offered a better opportunity than observation, documentation, or archival sources for desired depth of information. Interviewing participants who met inclusive criteria for the case study provides an opportunity to ask follow up questions and elaborate on experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Definitions

Baby Boomer: The term used to describe the generation born between 1943 and 1960 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Arellano (2015) defined the boomer generation as loyal, preferring to work alone with little need for praise, and possessing a strong work ethic (living to work).

Baby Buster: This is microgeneration of baby boomers, also referred to as late boomers, who were born between 1955 and 1964 (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Bricolage: Multi or cross-discipline approaches to research, which encourage pursuit of a broader understanding of the topic.

Generation X: Individuals born between 1960 and 1980 (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Generation Z: Individuals born between 2000 and a yet undetermined year (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Generational Characteristics: Aspects of personality that by consensus involve a group of individuals born during the same generation.

Latchkey Kid: Children with no one at home to meet them after school. The term was coined during the time when many Generation Xers were children of divorced or single parents who were still at work when their children arrived home.

Millennials: Individuals born between 1980 and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Xennial: Microgeneration between Generation X and Millennials that have characteristics of both groups (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Assumptions

Assumptions in this study involved qualifications of participants and their views of retail leadership. The primary assumption was that the participants met inclusion criteria. All participants had a birthdate between 1980 and 2000 and were classified as millennials per this study. Participants had 3 years of minimum experience in a retail industry leadership position. Participants also studied or were studying a business

curriculum. As I assumed participants' responses were given freely and honestly with a desire to voice their opinions, and results of this study would provide meaningful insights regarding comprehensive, amenable, and practical avenues for retail leadership consensus. I built the contextual framework on the supposition that individual perceptions come from personal experiences. I assumed results were analyzed without bias and led to essential information involving successful leadership in the retail industry.

Scope and Delimitations

I chose the retail industry for this study because of limited literature regarding causes or concerns for higher-than-average turnover rates. The retail industry includes small privately-owned one-person businesses as well as multiple location chain stores with thousands of employees. The study required narrowing the scope via inclusive criteria for participant selection. Participants were leaders in the retail industry. Leaders' behaviors influence voluntary turnover, training, and job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2017; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017). Because supervision is received and practiced, I addressed perceptions of received leadership and individual self-reflections in terms of how they lead.

I chose age parameters between 1980 and 2000 because the turnover frequency rate in this cohort was three times greater compared to other generations (Petrucelli, 2017), and the number of recruits choosing retail as a career has decreased (Broadbridge et al., 2009; Hurst & Good, 2009; Lee et al., 2017). The topic of possible academic shortcomings regarding retail promotion as a career choice was excluded from this study

but included as a possibility for future research. Late Boomers and Xennials were not included in this research. I addressed challenges involving generational differences affecting leadership styles.

Societal events create cohorts, not biological age, rendering previous leadership styles based on the age group or generation of the follower often prejudicial (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Rudolph et al., 2018). By using LinkedIn Professional Network, I expanded participant locations beyond the southern U.S. This reduced the possibility of regional bias and led to a thorough cross section of the participant pool. There is potential for transfer of this study to other industries. The underlying concept of understanding and considering perceptions of leader behaviors would benefit any organization striving for a holistic leadership style.

Limitations

This study was limited in terms of synchronicity of interviews during the second part of the data-gathering stage. Chosen participants for one-on-one interviews declared their interest via a questionnaire posted on a LinkedIn message board. Video conferencing was requested to provide access to individuals from any location as well as observation of body language. Video conferencing was replaced by phone and asynchronous interviews as choices of convenience and anonymity. While phone and asynchronous interviews did not provide visual information, these methods did add to breadth of results.

Researcher bias is a burden that challenges integrity of research. To avoid bias, researchers should remain vigilant when gathering and analyzing data (Yin, 2018). Abiding by inclusivity criteria for participant selection and using prepared interview questions, peer review of preliminary findings, transcripts of interviews, and member checking after analysis reduced opportunities for bias contamination. One limitation of this study involves transferability of results. Transferability of results of this study might benefit future studies in the field of sociology, psychology, or business leadership because the topic of the study was based on perceptions and behaviors as it relates to leadership. Participants' descriptions, context, and background were explained in detail to ensure transferability.

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to lead to a grassroots movement in terms of structure of retail leadership by exploring how current leaders' behaviors involve balancing organizational needs to drive business as well as needs of millennials to make a difference through meaningful work. With each generation, expectations, motivation, and goals reflect social influence, creating challenges for millennials in terms of adopting leadership styles to meet the needs of a changing workforce while maintaining organizational goals. The industry supports 52 million jobs and contributes over \$2 trillion to the U.S. GDP (National Retail Federation, 2020). Exploration of appropriate millennial leadership styles may lead to identifying attributes of desired leadership behaviors.

A leader who acknowledges the value of building up individuals strengthens the leader-follower relationship by demonstrating positive results of serving others (Maier et al., 2015). Grisaffe et al. (2016) said servant leadership positively influences sales environments, increased performance levels, job satisfaction, and ultimately customer loyalty, suggesting that characteristics of a servant leader mirror reported millennial expectations of successful leaders. Gunn et al. (2017) said retail leaders lack a clear path of advancement, resulting in millennials' disappointment with perceived lack of career opportunities in the retail industry and dissatisfaction with lackadaisical recruitment methods. Use of top-down driven leadership and reluctance to adapt to millennial expectations are particularly salient in terms of the fast-past environment of retail organizations that depend on customer service for survival.

The anticipated arrival of the newest generation of workers (Generation Z) to be led by millennials intensifies the need to understand how leadership reflects generational differences and expectations (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Lyons and Kuron (2014) said employee needs reflect societal needs and acknowledging generational expectations involving beneficent leadership may increase the attractiveness of retail careers.

A leadership style for the retail industry that serves the newest generation of employees instead of profit first might also lead to social change by supporting community needs, increasing employees' sense of meaningful work, and ultimately reducing voluntary turnover (Akers, 2018). Encouragement of leaders to serve employees might be significant in terms of retaining millennial talent, securing the succession of

qualified leaders, and ensuring the sustainability of the industry and surrounding communities.

Significance to Practice

The effect of positive leader behavior is significant in the retail industry. Benevolent leadership styles might transform the retail industry mantra from, *the customer comes first* to employee-centric (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016; Padma & Wagenseil, 2018; Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). Leadership influence aligned with benevolent leader behavior may change the followers' perception of retail employment.

Significance to Theory

Historically, leadership theory has reflected existing leadership behavior to explain the significance of a leader's behavior on a follower's motivation. This case study is an examination of leader behavior in real time. The advancement in leadership theory is a possibility of prevention instead of reparation in the voluntary turnover rate of retail industry employment (Nair & Salleh, 2017). The information provided via data collection gives insights about events that are significant in terms of leader-follower relationships and shifts in expectations of leadership behavior. Using a constructivist lens, information regarding leader behaviors was revealed through data collection, reducing the gap in literature regarding practical and successful leadership styles in the retail industry to mitigate voluntary turnover.

Significance to Social Change

The retail industry supports 52 million jobs and contributes over \$3.9 trillion to the U.S. GDP (NRF, 2020). Leadership styles for the retail industry that serve employees instead of profit first leads to social change by supporting communities, increasing employees' sense of meaningful work, and reducing voluntary turnover. Encouragement of leaders to serve employees first might be significant in terms of retaining millennial talent, succession of qualified leaders, and industry sustainability.

Summary and Transition

The above-average voluntary turnover rate of the millennial generation in the retail industry is indicative of a disconnect between millennial expectations and leader behaviors. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and expectations involving successful leadership by interviewing millennial leaders in the retail industry. This study had the potential for a grassroots movement in terms of structure of retail leadership by exploring how current leaders' behaviors balance organizational need to drive businesses and needs of employees. Societal influence determines commonalities of behavior and generational differences influence leaders' behaviors. Interview questions involved exploration of millennial perceptions from three viewpoints: employees, leaders, and organizations. A literature search produced limited results regarding retail industry leadership, and Chapter 2 goes into more detail about the field of leadership and its significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The general problem is that millennials employed in the retail industry are not finding adequate leadership support to meet their career expectations or social beliefs, often leading to a high voluntary turnover rate. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of millennials who chose retail as a career and their self-descriptions and expectations of leadership in the retail industry. This included a report involving positive social change through induction of a leadership style that balances organizational needs to drive profit and millennials' expectations of leadership. This brief history of the retail industry includes the social needs that are met by retailers and contributors to economic stability.

Examination of transformational, authentic, ethical, and leader-member exchange theories in terms of applicability to millennial leadership was used to highlight generational differences requiring recognition of changing social environments of the retail industry. My research centered on information about connections between leadership style and turnover intent and relevant concerns involving the sustainability of the retail industry due to a paradigm shift. This literature review includes three major topics: turnover causes in the retail industry, generational differences in terms of leadership expectations, and leadership theories that are present in the retail industry. This review concludes with information about retail management as a career choice, and research is centered on recruitment, retention, and mentoring of millennials.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review strategy included dissection of the problem statement to find keywords that would lead to notable information. I used the following keywords: *millennials, retail industry, leadership, social beliefs, voluntary turnover, retail industry, leadership, social beliefs, turnover, generation, characteristics, career expectations, statistics, leaders, leadership, turnover, history, careers, future of retail, changes, multigenerational workforce, theory evolution, current theories, generational differences, statistics for the retail industry, causes, psychological contract, prevention, results, generation, social influence, group identity, and environmental influence*. Most resources were peer-reviewed. However, there was limited information in peer-reviewed publications about the retail industry. There were publications available from industry journals, government databases, and other electronic sources that provided insights regarding the current state of retail and changes in recruitment and succession planning. Included in this literature review are resources supporting the conceptual framework that include current and seminal literature on generational and servant leadership theories and Bandura's cognitive model of behavior.

Walden University, University of Alabama at Huntsville, and Calhoun Community College libraries were used to conduct literature searches. The following databases were used: ABI/INFORM, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SAGE Research Methods Online, ScholarWorks, ScienceDirect, Thoreau

Multi-Database Search, Business Collection (Gale), Business Insights: Essentials, and Business Source Premier. Google Scholar and Google were used to research current events in the retail industry, and Research Gate was consulted to gauge amenability of this project and ongoing research involving leadership.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, each generation learns from the previous generation, often within a didactic relationship that leads to perceptions of leadership. Societal influence determines commonalities of behavior in generations, and individual upbringing shapes adult behavior (Fritsch et al., 2018; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Characteristic development impact perceptions and behaviors and lead to stereotypical generalization when other factors, such as industry changes or career progression stages, should be considered (Lyons et al., 2015). Employees base their perceptions of leadership qualities of individuals or individuals within groups (Graybill, 2014; Gruda et al., 2018). Events shared by a group influence collective perspective, life experiences, and perceptions of those experiences (Gruda et al., 2018; Mannheim, 1952). Leadership expectations result from experiences that comprise characteristics of leader behavior. In the workplace, behavior characteristics of leaders are either supportive or destructive, affecting employee perceptions (Schyns et al., 2018). Mannheim (1952) defined generational theory as a collective personality identifying birth years by behavioral traits influenced by perceptions of life events. The key to a collective personality is perception, and

Mannheim's theory included the possibility of a collective personality based on a shared social event.

In addition to the concept that generational differences influence leadership behavior, the cognitive model explains how observations influence behavior. The continuance of the behavior depends on the received response. The cognitive model of behavior contains a mediational process that involves the individual observing, remembering, determining the possibility of mimicry, and imitating the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Expanding on Bandura's model, workplace reciprocity is relevant to the framework of this study. Reciprocity functionality in organizations includes an agreement that benefits both employees and employers and is rooted in the concept of kindness begets kindness (Hu et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016). The third part of this framework was congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of servant leaders.

Barbuto and Gottfredson (2016) said the promotion of adopting servant leadership involves recruiting and retaining millennials by demonstrating social consciousness, providing recognition of good performance, and behaving as attentive and authentic leaders. The concept of treating others with consideration of their individual needs is socially driven and synonymous with religious teachings, but there is also a connection to business leadership theories (Frey, 2017). The five aspects of servant leadership are altruism, emotional healing, wisdom, encouragement, and stewardship (Barbuto & Gottfredson, 2016, p. 62), which served as a model of leadership behavior that involves Millennials' expectations. The follower bestows authority because of the leader's

willingness to serve others first. Coetzer et al. (2017) defined Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership as putting others' needs before one's own, considering those that follow and surrounding communities. The servant leader's behaviors influence followers' commitment to self, community, and organization, bringing about social change via the ripple effect (Grisaffe et al., 2016; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). The review of literature associated with the study begins with the evolution of the retail industry. It was necessary to review this topic to understand its significance in terms of societal changes and influence on leadership.

Literature Review

The literature review revealed how leadership behavior in the retail industry effects the level of commitment to the industry's sustainability. There has been long-standing acceptance of the high turnover rate in the retail industry compared to the national turnover average. The increasing expectation for organizational social consciousness requires leaders to evaluate recruitment and retention policies.

The review process began with the retail industry environment concerning employee relations and leadership styles, past and current. The search for a leadership styles that adapted to the retail industry changes over the years, led to the question of generational differences in retail leadership. The information regarding past and current leadership styles in the retail industry is slim, and historically, the description of the industry's immense growth holds more significance to the economy than workforce leadership. The retail history gave a glimpse of the service stores provides to society.

There were overlapping timelines where social events such as war, regulations, public policy, constitutional amendments aligned with existing leadership theory and generational characteristics. The behavioral characteristics of each generation influence employee perception of a successful leader. Generational influence on perception led to a query into millennials' behavioral characteristics and the assimilation of retail leadership to societal and generational expectations.

The last section of the literature review contains an analysis of leadership theories and their alignment with notable millennial characteristics. Included in the literature review is the need for further study of millennial leadership and the possible social influence of millennial leaders. There is evidence of a paradigm shift and a gap in the literature regarding a leadership style for the retail industry that supports the organizational goal of profit while promoting social consciousness.

Retail Industry

The search terms included: *leadership, leader behavior, and employee* to align with the purpose of this study, which is to explore leadership in the retail industry. The keyword *retail* and the phrase *retail industry* returned an unmanageable number of results, with the subsections including marketing and the demise of long-standing giants in the industry. Adding the term *history* to the search returned the history of specific organizations that have maintained a retail presence for decades. Still, the articles lacked any aspect of relevance to this research.

The background information sought for this study included a brief account of how the provision of goods and services influenced the evolution of retail leadership. A history of the retail industry was prudent for the beginning of this literature review. The research required the narrowing of the information on the retail industry into alignment with the general problem in this study and the significance of the specific problem of leadership evolution from the industry's transposition from socially supportive with sensitivity to community needs to socially destructive by absorbing small businesses.

History

The history of retail intertwines the story of America's social and economic development with businesses created to supply the needs of an ever-growing population. Depending on the context, a retail organization's life cycle description can vary. In the truest sense of the word, retailing means buying large quantities from a manufacturer, dividing the goods, and supplying consumers with a product quantified by the need.

Scholars plot the evolution of the retail industry, beginning with trading companies, the westward migration, and the trading posts frequented by early settlers. The niche of supplying goods and services culminated into the "general store" located in the heart of every small town, operating with little overhead and providing a service to the community (Castaldo, 2017; McArthur, et al., 2016; Ramaswamy, 2018; Rielly, 2018). These early entrepreneurs took a repeated risk, gambling that the goods they purchased in bulk would be in demand by consumers (McArthur). Until this point in history, the owner ordinarily managed the retail establishment with little or no staff.

The arrival of mass production and mass marketing changed the face of retail, which flourished in response to the need for a bridge from manufacturer to consumer (Dreesmann, 1968). The population growth created a consumer market for household goods, i.e., furniture, clothing, and cookware purchases from retailers instead of homespun goods (Dreesmann, 1968; Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015). With the arrival of automobiles and refrigerators, consumers were not limited to small purchases that they easily carried home from a corner store (Blakemore, 2018; Leibowitz, 2013; Moyer, 1962). Social advances influenced the establishment of larger stores, supermarkets, and department stores that offered an opportunity for consumers to spend time looking at new merchandise and enjoying the shopping experience (Blakemore, 2018; Castaldo, 2017; Moyer, 1962; Ramaswamy, 2018; Willis, 2019). Managing a workforce for the retail establishments was authoritarian and pay for performance. Leadership styles were based on the manufacturing industry style.

As the shopping malls with department stores, supermarkets, "big box" stores, i.e., Wal-Mart, Target, Lowe's, and Home Depot, gained prestige and proved to be a formidable opponent to the small businesses that anchored communities (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015; Korten, 2015). The final blow in the reported demise of shopping malls, with their department stores, chain stores, and consideration for social interaction, came in e-commerce. With the end of many brick-and-mortar stores, the need for optimal customer service reduced to a matter of fulfilling faceless orders. Removing the referenced "middleman" of the supply chain, the retailer, enables the consumer to pass by

the need to enter a brick and mortar store to compare products and prices (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015; McArthur et al., 2016). The economic and social contribution of the retail industry is dependent on the wants and needs of the consumer, and retail, by definition, will survive (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015). In what form of societal influence and GDP contribution occurs is dependent on the consumer.

In the context of social influence, the retail industry provided an outlet for the surge of manufactured goods to reach the consumer (Caius, 2018). The retailer's objective was to grow the business and rarely shared information, privilege, or decision-making with employees. If the profit margin decreased, employees were the first cost reduction (Korten, 2015). The corner store could not carry the large quantities needed to supply their customers, so most were lost to chain stores or supermarkets and department stores. In turn, the supermarkets and department stores continue a battle with the "big box" stores that have provided the consumer with "one-stop shopping" (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015). The opportunity for an inclusive type of leadership that affords the employee to take part in the decision-making process places a burden on the strict goal of driving the business and delivering a profit.

Economic Contribution

With an understanding of industry evolution and the social needs that retail fulfills, there is a comprehension of the industry's economic impact on a community. The economic impact of the retail industry is not limited to contributing annually to the United States Gross Domestic Product because the industry also supports 52 million jobs

(NRF 2020). Of the 52 million jobs, 20 million are assorted indirect support to jobs for advertisers, marketing firms, and those in the technological field (NRF, 2020). Drucker (2001) wrote that the health of a business is dependent on a healthy society, and the opposite holds as well.

A business that does not respond to the needs and demands of society will not survive (Dreesmann, 1968; McArthur et al., 2016). The growth of economic contributions of the retail industry aligns with the expansion and adjustment to the development of society. Still, Adam Smith warned that there is a cost of livelihood to small communities by taking more than a fair share of competition (Smith, cited in Wells & Graafland, 2012). Retail is the lifeline of communities, and the demise of retail business results in diminished employment rates and loss of economic stability for the community (McArthur et al., 2016). Conversely, establishing retail businesses create jobs and contribute to a community's economic growth and stability. Smith's warning aligns with the reports of "big box" chains eliminating the competition of surrounding small businesses without absorbing the displaced workforce of the closed businesses.

The 4.3% turnover rate in retail trade contrasts with the total national average of 3.6% and the voluntary turnover hovering at 30% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The retail industry has always been ebb and flow due to staffing needs reflective of holiday shopping. Moyer (1962) wrote that many gravitated to the retail industry because of the air of respectability, and information about the history of retail contains inferences to customers seeking the council of salespeople when considering a purchase. Hortaçsu

and Syverson (2015) delivered statistics of the disproportion between retail industry growth and retail wages, supporting the leader mindset that employees are a controllable cost of doing business. Throughout retail history, numerous companies have used staff reduction to bolster the bottom line. The fallout of this mindset is a picture of instability in terms of a viable career choice. Gunn et al. (2017) elaborated on the lack of consideration for a career in retail and how the National Retail Federation recognized the struggle of the business students' perception.

Retail Leadership

Fast-paced, ever-changing, and somewhat authoritarian are terms that many use to describe retail culture. The evolution of the field of leadership in the last 100 years included the challenge of balancing the needs of a growing industry. The parallels between retail and societal needs represent the growth of a nation. As the population grew, so did the businesses that provided for consumer needs in the form of first the general store and ultimately the industry we know today. A hundred years ago, the challenge for management was increasing profit by streamlining production. Following the guidelines of Frederick Taylor, businesses flourished in society and benefited from the *Scientific Method* and adopted Taylor's principles as guidelines for retail leadership (McArthur et al., 2016).

The shift in retail leadership behavior included the expectation of multiple roles, externally focused and production driven. Blumberga and Austruma (2015) researched the climate of the modern-day retail environment and concluded that the psychological

environment is a managerial responsibility, listing the increase of confidence, interest in employee well-being, and trust as necessary additions to the leadership style. Tunji (2022) added that leadership requires building trust with employees to increase dependability and collaboration. King and Badham (2018) described retail leadership as wrought with uncertainty and complexity because of the multiple tasks expected of leaders. The fast-paced environment of the retail industry, brought about by an ever-changing merchandising requirement to meet consumers' needs, causes difficulty for leadership to behave in anything but an authoritarian style.

Authoritarian leadership, usually on a lower level of the employment tier (cashiers, customer service representatives, stockmen, etc.), meets the description of top-down driven leadership. Middle management in a store setting includes department managers and assistant store managers, many surpassing the basic need level of mentoring but required to defer to the upper echelon for the store operation and merchandising task clarification. Relating to Douglas McGregor's concept of theory X and Theory Y motivation, retail leaders have justified many years of an authoritarian leadership style with the fast-paced environment and time limitations to complete the necessary tasks (Arslan & Staub, 2013). Theory X is the belief that people are passive, dislike work, avoid responsibility, need to be closely supervised, and told what to do. Furthermore, people are self-centered, prone to resist change, and aren't very intelligent (McGregor, 1960). During the explosive growth of the retail industry, employees were nothing more than a tool to use in the operation of the business.

Consequently, when the business suffered a reduced profit level, the employee was dismissed as a controllable cost (Moyer, 1962). A common manifestation of Theory X is an authoritarian approach characterized by transactional rewards or punishments with a disregard for the employee's welfare (McGregor, 1960). During the times of expansion, retail industry leaders centered on increasing profit and decreasing competition.

With the success of the business dependent on profit, restrictions on decision-making extended to daily operations, especially for a company with multiple locations and corporate guidelines. The lack of employee innovation or inclusivity in decision-making, under the guise of consumer convenience, the "cookie-cutter" store typical to drug stores and supermarkets sells the same products at each location and in the same aisle of every store. Moyer (1962) noted that the standardization of the industry fared well with consumers' expectations of fair pricing and shopping simplicity, especially with the emergence of self-serve businesses.

The rationale for including exploration of current leadership theory is that the concept of behavioral characteristics influences an employee's perception of a successful leader and a specificity of a leadership theory that aligns with the millennials' expectations. The retail industry has adapted to every social change necessary for corporate sustainability, but the time is now to evaluate, reconstruct, and create new leadership criteria (Anderson et al., 2017). The growing number of millennial leaders need strong direction to encourage organizations to perform at optimal levels, not just for

personal job satisfaction or paycheck but also for contributions to society. The challenge remains in the adaptability of present management to meet the needs of a changing workforce (Anderson et al., 2017; McArthur et al., 2016). In addition to setting goals for organization growth and stability, management has the task of planning succession.

The current literature about the changing trends in retail notes that consumers want the social interaction that a retail associate offers (McArthur et al., 2016). The section devoted to millennials expounds on the changes to the face of retail as older generations retire. The changes to retail leadership are not exclusive to the organization's daily operations but include a flatter structure of management with higher level of inclusivity and collaboration. The current literature centered on millennial academic business curriculum, career choices, retail industry recruitment, training, and retention recommends the inclusion of reciprocity functionality. Reciprocity in the organization establishes an agreement that benefits both employee and employer, rooted in the social concept of kindness begets kindness (Hu et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016). Exploring the life experiences, perceptions of those experiences, and expectations of millennials as they move into leadership positions, reveals the characteristics of the millennials' leadership behavior.

Generations

It was essential to include a review of the literature about generations due to the influence of social events on the collective perspective of leadership. The literature review of generations that comprise a workforce began with an essay by Karl Mannheim

about “The Problem of Generations” (Mannheim, 1952). Mannheim’s concept that social events influence individual and collective behavior began as a study in social behaviorism. Philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists have used Mannheim’s “Generation Theory” to classify groups by birth years. There remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes a generation, but one remark from Mannheim about the timing of a generation describes the term as when there are definitive modes of behavior resulting from the influence of environmental events (Purhonen, 2016; Teng, 2020).

The following section on generational theory gives detail to the sociological study by Mannheim in which he stressed the problem of labeling generations by age and not a cohort sharing social events (Mannheim, 1952). Katz (2017) argued that generation formation is not dependent on a set number of years but shifts with sociological influence. The inability to determine and claim the beginning and ending date of a generation resulted in cohorts relating to characteristics or experiences of more than one date-established generation.

The information on generations is incomplete without mentioning the authors that are synonymous with the term. Strauss and Howe (1991) cyclically described the age groups and argued that generational characteristics repeat every 80 years. Strauss and Howe committed that a generational theory centered on behavioral characteristics influenced by environmental conditions and reactions to stressors determined different social behavior. The generation characteristics section includes *Figure 1* listing

behavioral characteristics of the generations known as the baby boomers, gen X, millennials, baby busters or late boomers, and xennials.

The information collected in this review included the behavioral characteristics recognized as workplace behavior of the current workforce addressed as baby boomer, generation X, and millennial generations. A review of the literature about generational characteristics revealed sub-generations that straddle categorization, which aligns with Mannheim's observation of social influences having prevalence over birth year in collective behavior. The contributions noted in generational leadership center on how expectations of leader behavior differ in each generation. Employees respond positively to needs satisfaction, which is different with each generation location, but the perception of a psychological contract is cross-generational. Anderson et al., (2017) wrote that leadership style is influenced by the employees' perception of career potential with an organization. Expectations and perceptions change with environmental influence regardless of age resulting in multi-generational cohorts with similar needs and perceptions (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Mannheim, 1952). The concept of generational characteristics is the belief that knowledge was acquired and shared differently depending on the individual's generational location.

Generation Theory

The dissemination of information is simpler within a cohort because of similarities in speech and commonalities of reference. Strauss and Howe (1991) wrote that introducing generational theory requires a belief that history repeats and social

behavior reflects our environment. Mannheim's (1952) main attraction to studying generations was from a sociological point of view, and a theory of the sociological structure of knowledge (Katz, 2017; Purhonen, 2016). Mannheim described the social phenomenon of generation with the following characteristics: emerging and disappearing participants, limited time to influence the historical process, and the necessity of knowledge transference to subsequent generations.

The best definition for generational theory is an explanation of peer personality, described as a collection of personality behavior traits that emerge throughout the lifetime of a generation. The argument set forth by researchers of generational theory centered on behavioral characteristics influenced by environmental conditions and reactions to stressors demonstrated and social behavior. The concept that behavioral differences belong to an age group is considered stereotypical and not a complete and thorough analysis of the term generation (Cucina et al., 2018; Purhonen, 2016). Alongside the belief that a new generation emerges approximately every 20 years, another definition of generation relates to societal differences and environmental influence (Little & Winch, 2017; Mannheim, 1952). Many researchers have studied the significance of generational differences in the workforce to leadership behavior. The leadership theory section of this review includes further explanation of cross-generational characteristics, including comments on Mannheim's (1952) thoughts about the influence of environment on multi-generational cohorts.

Generational Characteristics

The most notable researchers that collected generational characteristics are Strauss and Howe (1991), and their categorizations are referenced in *Figure 1*, which shows the name, the birth years, and the characteristics significant to workforce behavior. Strauss and Howe (1991) named a sub-generation of baby boomers *the Late Boomer*. Taylor (2018) labeled a blended or crossover generation between generation X and millennials, “Xennials.” Mannheim (1952) noted that the timing of one’s birth does not restrict the beliefs and values formed by social events to an age-related collective perception (Lyons et al., 2015). For example, a baby boomer might react to a reduction in hours worked the same way as a millennial if neither could afford less money in their paycheck.

Conversely, age-related characteristics would have the boomer viewing the forced time off as a loss of productivity hampering progress. In an age-related fashion, the millennial would look at the time off as an opportunity to pursue a recreational activity. But maturation or a social event like a depressed economy bridges the generation gap and creates a new cohort with a generational locator of basic needs.

Table 1*Generational Characteristics*

GENERATION	BIRTH YEARS	CHARACTERISTICS
Boom (Baby Boomers)	1946-1960	Ambitious, loyal to career, majority of work experience under hierarchal rule, with one company and prefers independent work. Requires little feedback on performance and does not seek praise, nor praise others. Live to work.
Late Boomers	1955-1964	Social events solidified the determination to make a difference. The end of the Viet Nam war, Watergate, the destruction of the Berlin War supplied a purpose and collective perception of leadership. There was a mission to make a better world, and hard work was the way to achievement.
13 (GenX)	1961-1981	Need managers to acknowledge they work for the paycheck, and when the day is over, they have a life. Work to live.
Xennials	1977-1983	A blending of the “work to live” attitude of genX and choosing meaningful work, adaptability to technology, and empathy of millennials.
Millennials	1982-2003	Ambitious, socially dependent, distrustful of authority, requires complete transparency from leadership. First generation to think of technology as a necessity, not a convenience.

The topic of generational differences surfaces in articles that attempt to understand why a single leadership style is not effective for all followers (Anderson et al., 2017; Bako, 2018; Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; McCleskey, 2018). Researchers use behavioral characteristics assigned to individuals born in a timeframe to explore various

aspects of social phenomena. The substance of a person's existence, their behavioral characteristics affect those around them, causing a ripple effect of social influence. The ripple of affectation is not generationally specific and results in a blending of age groups caused by a shared event (Katz, 2017; Mannheim, 1952). Events are processed and individualized emotionally and differently in each generation. A member of an older generation might consult a previously lived event as a frame of reference to a current situation, but younger generations will attempt alternative rationalizations. Socrates encouraged the youth of Athens to gain wisdom through questioning the previous generation to help them determine their life course (Plato, n.d.). The behavior characteristics of each generation reflect a collective perception of the social values important at that time or generational location.

The generational reasons for voluntary turnover differ as much as the reason that employees stay, prompting practitioners to seek a cross-generational expectation of leadership (Ng & Parry, 2016; Sanner-Stiehr & Vandermause, 2017). Defining cross-generational proves difficult with the natural maturation of the workforce and entrance of another generation of workers, tentatively known as Generation Z (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Understanding the values and attitudes of the members of each generation is an obvious place to begin the task of choosing a leadership style for a multi-generational workforce.

Baby Boomers

Baby boomers were not always the workaholic, organizationally dedicated, and strong voices of moral authority. Boomers protested the Vietnam War, marched for women's rights and civil rights, and were called revolutionaries. They incited riots, resulted in youth uprisings on college campuses, and transformed social norms (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Research on the baby boomer generation revealed an increase in the labor force that echoed the birth rate and increase in educational institutions (Cox et al., 2017; Howe & Strauss). The early reports on the baby boomer generation examined the probability of tremendous social and economic influence due to the unprecedented addition to the population.

The offspring of the "greatest generation," the GIs and the Silent Generation, baby boomers benefited from the wartime and peacetime sacrifices of the GIs and Silents that contributed to society. The baby boomer generation included two distinct sub-generations creating a gap distinguished by social events. Strauss and Howe (1991) commented that the oldest of the boomers witnessed the first man walk on the moon, the assassinations of JFK, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, that created a generational bond and perception. They were old enough for the draft into the Vietnam War, which many openly protested and sought avoidance. They were the first 18-year-olds allowed to vote and use their votes to further their fight against societal injustice. The younger members of the generation mentioned sometimes as *late boomers*, remember Watergate, President Nixon's resignation, the fall of Saigon, the return of troops from Vietnam, yellow ribbons

tied around trees for the hostages in Iran, the rationing of gasoline due to the oil embargo, and the destruction of the Berlin Wall (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The baby boomer generation's perception was influenced by television as they viewed current news within hours of the event, i.e., the moon landing, Nixon's publicly broadcast resignation. Shared cultural events like the moon landing and the Vietnam War news reports erased geographical lines and brought the world into the living room. Baby boomers grew up with a sense of duty to correct the world's wrongs, and they trusted only themselves to accomplish the challenges of changing society. Howe and Strauss (2000) wrote that generations repeat approximately every 80 years, and the idealist persona of the baby boomers reflects the missionary generation that worked post-Civil War to bring about the reparation of America. Baby boomers came of age with a forceful, authoritarian idea of how the country should be run and translated it into an idealistic style of leadership experienced throughout society.

Personality characteristics of the baby boomer carried over into the business persona because of the deep investment of time and commitment to the organization. Baby boomer leaders tended to be authoritarian, demanding obedience, loyalty, and commitment to the organization. With unemployment a result of the boom in the labor force, boomers considered themselves fortunate to be employed. Just as in youthful pursuits, they devoted all their resources, ideas, time, and energy to an organization that provided feelings of accomplishment, a societal contribution, and only changed jobs if the money and prestige were a positive career change (Arellano, 2015; Rudolph et al.,

2018). The term "workaholic" first appeared to describe the adult baby boomer's work ethic due to their career dominating much of their self-image (Gentry, et al., 2011; Oates, 1971). Boomers displayed an idealistic sense of right and wrong when it came to social justice and expressed that through pain and suffering comes progress (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zabel et al., 2017). Baby boomers, early and late, viewed their home as an extension of themselves and often stressed the same orderliness expected in the workplace. Children were seen but not heard unless spoken to, and respect for elders was a foregone conclusion.

The 13th generation

The 13ers, named by Strauss and Howe (1991) for the distance by generations from the date of America's independence, were later called Generation X (GenX), but with a speculative explanation of origin. The term latchkey kids were GenX children left on their own and arriving home from school to an empty house due to a working mother (Katz, 2017; Swanzen, 2018). The sitcoms they watched on television after school were their tutors and one-way mentors. GenX reached adulthood knowing more about worldly problems, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, violent crime, and the state of the economy than previous generations. GenX grew up isolated and resentful because their parents divorced, lost jobs, and feigned interest in being a parent (Martin & Ottemann, 2015; Swanzen, 2018).

GenX had intentions of parenting differently than what they received and viewed work/life balance as a priority (Arellano, 2015; Ng & Parry, 2016; Swanzen, 2018).

GenX views work as a necessary evil, finding no intrinsic reward in a career and never bringing the “job” home. There is no trust in corporations, so there is no loyalty that prompts GenX to go above and beyond the assigned task unless an extrinsic reward exists (Strauss & Howe, 1991). With no expectation of success voiced by their parents, generation X works hard when needed, either for job retention or personal budgetary requirements, but the job doesn’t matter.

The paycheck is the only reason to work. GenX went to work at a young age, reminiscent of when children had to help feed the family. Conversely, GenX worked to prove self-sufficiency and fulfill their “work hard-play hard” philosophy by planning retirement with the first paycheck. GenX prefers to draw little attention to themselves and is more interested in the pay rate for the job than the scope of the position.

Millennials

The millennials have been the most documented generation to date. Initially introduced as the last generation in the millennial cycle. Strauss and Howe (1991) gauged the birth years to begin in 1982 with no estimation of an end date. In subsequent literature, the end date of the millennial birth years fluctuates with varying authors from 1978 to 2002 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The focus of the literature review on the millennials began with a search into the behavioral characteristics that labeled the generation as selfish, spoiled, and lazy. Strauss and Howe generalized the millennials' childhood with descriptions of child-centered households with two parents (likely late boomers and GenX) who determined that their offspring would grow up without the

burden of proving themselves for parental nurturing in return. Fritsch et al. (2018) and Twenge (2006) wrote about childhood when the mantra was individuality and self-love, and the millennial child was praised for participating and trying their best instead of acknowledging the loss of a competition. There was protection from anything that might bring discouragement, like losing a game or receiving a bad grade, subsequently witnessing parental defense of their behavior instead of corrective guidance.

With parents focused on the child's needs, and encouragement of individuality, millennials were always a winner, regardless of the situation (Fritsch et al., 2018; Gentry et al., 2011). Brought up on the value of diversity, fair play, open communication, personal wants, and needs are primary and social responsibilities, there is a deep belief that continuous connection through technology, they are informed and knowledgeable (Ghosh, 2016; Pyöriä et al., 2017). With the perception of leadership tarnished by corporate dishonesty, a recession, the war on terrorism, school violence, and a faltering economy, millennials entered the workforce with expectations of similarity to childhood, when the reason behind a request was explained and respected, and everyone's opinion was valuable and freely offered (Nolan, 2015; Twenge, 2006; Valenti, 2019). The challenge to authority is not unique to the millennial generation, but they have the distinction of influencing a needed shift in the leadership paradigm. While millennials bring purposeful teamwork, social consciousness, and empathy to the workplace, the social events of their youth cloud their perception of leadership (Anderson et al., 2017; Kilber et al., 2014; Tulgan, 2015). Research literature concerning the millennial

generation ranges from current leadership observation of workplace behavior to the supposition of failure to attract and retain, ultimately defining millennial characteristics with a complex evaluation (Holtschlag et al., 2020; Kilber et al., 2014; Nolan, 2015; Tulgan, 2015). Millennials' parental and social influence might be translated in negative terms of behavioral characteristics like a job-hopper, entitled, disrespectful, arrogant, and self-serving (Holtschlag et al., 2020; Nolan, 2015; Rodriguez & Rodriguez, (2015). Fritsch et al. (2018) agreed that millennials want status and recognition, but the motivation for millennial behavior resembles successful leadership qualities when their motives are understood.

Examining possible causes of voluntary turnover revealed millennial disappointment with the lack of opportunity for advancement, broken psychological contracts about work/life balance, and disapproval of leader behavior. (Arellano, 2015; Ertas, 2015; Gabriel et al., 2020; Grisaffe et al., 2016; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017). Akers (2018), Anderson et al., (2017), Ertas (2015), and Rudolph et al. (2018) agreed that leaders considered the generational differences of millennials as a crucial component of recruitment, training, and retention. Millennials approach a job interview to question whether the organization would fit personal expectations instead of competing for a job (Barbutto & Gottfredson, 2016; Nolan, 2015). Millennials expect initial and ongoing training with a mentor dedicated to career advancement (Anderson et al., 2017; Holtschlag et al., 2020), aligning with the ambition to move up the corporate ladder. Millennials excel at compartmentalizing, which means they have no sense of

commitment to an organization that is not serving their needs. Psychological contracts are essential, and millennials depend on transparency and honesty from leadership to avoid losing trust and voluntarily leaving an organization (Codrea-Rado, 2019) The information in *Table 2, Translation of misunderstanding*, compares the perceptions of previous generations to the millennials' expectations drawn from the literature published to date. For example, what one person views as selfish, might be the millennial following parental direction of taking care of oneself first, which is no different from the previous generation's "looking out for number one" advice. The characteristics listed are not intended to be a complete account but simply a demonstration of how perception can lead to assumptions and hinder successful leadership.

Table 2

Translation of Misunderstanding

PERCEPTION	EXPECTATION
Selfish, narcissistic, lack of focus.	Transparency from leadership with a clear definition of duties and compensation
No loyalty	Organizations need training and mentoring available so there is a clear path of advancement. “Nothing to work for, nothing to care about”. Want to know how they contribute to the organization and how the organization supports society.
Ambitious, feelings of entitlement	Organizations assign mentors to insure Millennial advancement in a timely manner. No one stays on the “bottom rung”.

Lack of respect

Leaders are deemed worthy of respect with the display of qualities Millennials expect, i.e. transparent, empathetic, open communication, authentic, and ethical.

A review of recent literature offered examples of millennial expectations from leadership. Anderson et al. (2017), Bodenhausen and Curtis (2016), Nolan (2015), and Stewart et al. (2017) stressed the importance of involving employees in daily operations to increase job satisfaction. The millennial employee believes in withholding loyalty until a leader is deemed worthy but readily follows a peer they perceive as interested about their welfare, emphasizing the need for empathetic and authentic leadership (Anderson et al., 2017; Tulgan, 2015). Research showed that millennials consider themselves valuable partners in decision-making, able to recognize opportunities for improvements, and worthy of the necessary training to advance.

My research of the leader behavior characteristics of millennials revealed similarities to servant leadership. The millennials were brought up on the value of diversity, fair play, open communication, and individual needs as primary social responsibilities. Millennials believe that they are informed and knowledgeable with a continuous connection through technology, open to inspiration, eager to experience life, and seek information (Ghosh, 2016; Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015; Sarwono & Bernarto, 2020; Valenti, 2019). Millennials' upbringing provides robust and inclusive behavior, leaning towards a collective personality of socially conscious behavior (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Valenti, 2019). The millennial strives to help another with a problem, often researching and offering possible solutions, and a lifelong team player with leaders

chosen based on knowledge or skill (Twenge, 2006). The millennial accepts the challenge of earning and giving trust with the understanding that authenticity is paramount to gaining that trust. The business world offers a fertile ground to practice the problem-solving, team-building, encouraging, and socially conscious behavior of millennials.

Leadership Theories

The evolution of leadership theories aligns with industry and societal events, often in response to employee demotivation or cessation of loyalty. An organization that considers and promotes the personal growth of employees' knowledge expands the opportunities for job satisfaction and organizational commitment and growth (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015; Schein, 2010; Senge, 2006). The differences in leadership style by generation were noted by Anderson et al. (2017), and Rudolph, et al. (2018) prompting a re-evaluation of the importance of generational recognition when determining leadership style. The continuation of research on generation theory lends support to areas of leadership styles (Anderson et al., 2017; Arellano, 2015; Bolser & Gosciej, 2015; Bottomley & Willie Burgess, 2018; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Sanner-Stiehr, & Vandermause, 2017). However, Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) and Lyons et al. (2015) questioned the significance of generational differences when adopting a leadership style. The commonalities of the generations' expectations from leaders are the focus of recent research, and the results support the concept of leading with the followers' needs as guidance (Alvesson & Blom, 2015; Grisaffe et al., 2016; Van Dierendonck & Patterson,

2015). Generational needs and generational behavior characteristics are not interchangeable.

A leadership style should accommodate a generational location related to social influence rather than biological age. How an individual reacts to social or environmental events remains a generational characteristic, but maturation or fulfillment of personal needs influences behavior (Drucker, 2001; Maslow, 1998). Included in the figure below is a presentation of the timeline correlation of leadership style or theory and social events by generation. For this review, the timeline is limited to the generations in this study, e.g., baby boomers, generation X, and millennials. The discussion of leadership style differences continues in the following section, where leadership theories are examined through the lens of generational differences, emphasizing the significance of the retail industry leadership and social events.

The field of leadership is deeply seated in psychological theories of behavior characteristics with past or on-going phenomena. The purpose of the documentation of singular leadership theory leading to leadership options lies in the field of social science and the privilege of opinion (Friedman, 2016). There is much overlap in the attributes of leadership, and no one theory has thus far had the distinction of the best approach to success. Leadership theories are divided into *established* and *emerging* categories, then further grouped by the type, i.e., charismatic, informational, exchange, dispositional, strategic, complexity, and ethical (Dinh et al., 2014). The following information on leadership theories are listed in chronological order with the subsections of behavioral

characteristics. There was limited information on the style of leadership used in the retail industry, therefore only a small contribution was offered in this area. The results of this study contribute to the field of leadership, particularly the underexplored retail industry, with information gathered directly from retail leaders.

Contingency Theory

The contingency theorist F. E. Fiedler argued that there is no single way to lead people, because it depends on the leadership style, the situation, or the strength of the employee (Northouse, 2021; Stahl, 1995). The *best fit* principle of assigning tasks to employees meant an increased possibility of task completion (Berisha & Lajçi, 2020; Rudolph et al., 2018). Leader characteristics influence effectiveness requiring the leader to alter leadership style to benefit the circumstances. This results in a varying level of interaction since the leadership style might be authoritarian, authoritative, or even laissez-faire at any given time (McCleskey, 2018). The multigenerational workforce today, with its different expectations, still agrees on the expectation of consistency in leadership. A leader chooses the best style for the situation, leaving the concerns of others aside to concentrate on the goal. The Contingency Theory approach in a retail organization with a fast-paced environment, consideration of the needs of the employees rarely rises to a concern. Associated theories include Hershey – Blanchard situational leadership theory, path-goal theory, Vroom – Yetton – Jago decision-making model of leadership, cognitive resource theory, and strategic contingencies theory.

Transactional Theory

The leadership theory often referred to as the “carrot and stick” method of leadership, leaves little room for inclusive employee behavior. Often judged by their contribution to the bottom line, the employee led by a transactional leader might view their leader as unapproachable, goal-oriented, unsupportive, and uninvolved (Albanese, 2018). . The retail industry adopted the transactional leadership style because of the fast-paced environment and the challenge of consistently managed multiple locations (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016). Transactional leadership is effective in work environments that do not have the luxury of adequate response time for problem-solving, i.e., military operations, police, or fire departments. The organizations are typically top-down driven, with little room for inclusive decision-making from employees.

The employee motivated by extrinsic means might respond positively to the exchange of pay for performance without requiring the opportunity for job input. The authoritarian atmosphere produces successful quantifiable results but at the cost of employee job satisfaction (Blumberga & Austruma, 2015). The social exchange theories of leadership, including leader-member exchange, base the reward contingent on performance and the motivating factors of the employee.

Authentic Leadership

Be true to yourself. Authentic leaders admit their flaws and acknowledge needs and wants, believing that trustworthiness increases by understanding one's psychological capabilities. Amunkete and Rothmann (2015) reported that the "authenticity of a leader is a psychological aspect of behavior, not a leader's style." Lemoine et al.(2019) reported

that authentic leadership contains self-awareness, internal moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. The definitive aspect is the follower's perception of the leader's trustworthiness, built on the leader's interaction with employees, which is never changing.

Each aspect of authentic leadership leads to performance improvement, job satisfaction and qualifies as a positive leadership behaviors. Jiang and Men (2017) and Xiong et al. (2016) expounded on authentic leadership as perceived as transparent and building trust with employees. Characteristics of an authentic leader align with the millennials' expectations of trustworthiness in leaders that builds the self-efficacy and overall psychological capital of employees.

A strong sense of balance in the workplace increases productivity and job satisfaction. Gabriel et al. (2020), Metcalf (2014), and Shapira-Lishchinsky and Levy-Gazenfrantz (2016) agreed that balanced processing is necessary for mentoring, requiring the combination of authentic and participative leadership. An authentic leader answers first to themselves, understanding and acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, then second the leader uses the style of leadership that produces needed results.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership, like authentic leadership, contributes to other leadership styles. With Servant Leadership as a central component of this study, information on leadership ethics has a place in the literature review. Ethical behavior is a cornerstone of servant leadership and aligns with the millennials' expectation of a successful leader (Bhana &

Bayat, 2020). The exhibition of a positive ethical core is an attractive aspect when millennials choose an organization as a career option. Bhana and Bayat (2020) and Gaudencio et al. (2014) reported that individuals choose organizations with core values that best represent the individual's ethical perception with the core values strong in ethical and social responsibility.

Servant Leadership

Choosing the gap between theory and practical application of servant leadership requires this research to examine the perceptions of millennials as leaders with a benevolent attitude toward social change. The literature on servant leadership contains negative views of a theory's viability that might place decision-making in the hands of employees, and Coetzer et al. (2017) argued that the lack of development renders the theory ineffective. The premise of leading in service of others necessitates a change in leadership style, and implementation of servant leadership depends on positive reception. The original idea of servant leadership, credited to Robert Greenleaf, still inspires researchers in the field of leadership decades after the publication of *Servant Leadership* in 1977 (Northouse, 2021). Servant leadership is a broad concept with a simple message of putting others before yourself and leading with benevolence (Grisaffe et al., 2016; Northouse, 2021; Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). Greenleaf (1977) credits his inspiration from his professor's challenge to react with concern for the emerging domination of institutions and negligence of societal issues. The philosophical approach

of leadership found in servant leadership studies has revealed a common thread of direction.

A definitive definition remains a debate due to the varying perceptions of qualifying behavior for a servant leader. The philosophy of putting others before yourself, a *golden rule*, serves as the basis for the actions of a servant leader. Bawany (2017), Greenleaf (1977), Liden et al. (2014) and Paas et al. (2020) hypothesized that the servant leadership philosophy is the basis for social learning and social identity theory research. The assumption of Liden et al. was that servant Leadership begat Servant Leadership as followers mimicked leader behavior.

The examination of servant leadership over the last 40 years has added insight to the leadership field centering on the softer side of leadership: empowerment, authenticity, ethical, benevolence, and empathy (Barbuto & Gottfredson, 2016; Coetzer et al., 2017; Flynn et al., 2016). Servant leadership's viability is an ongoing debate, including whether the theory is religious or secular, antecedent or learned behavior, multi-industry adaptable, or restrictive (Frey, 2017). Inquiry into transferability across generations, cultures, and industries supports the supposition of leadership style classification by environment (Barkema et al., 2015; Črešnar & Jevšenak (2019); Landis et al., 2014; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The focus and interest in the practical application of Servant Leadership is the argument for a theoretical bridge from recognition of the basic human need for compassion to leadership's resolute response to employee expectations.

Robert Greenleaf (1977) constructed the premise of a Servant Leadership theory on a belief inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. The follower bestows authority because of the leader's willingness to serve others first. A servant leader guides by intuition, the ability to foresee potential and be empathetic to the concerns of others. Recent literature expounds on Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership as putting others' needs before your own, considering those that follow, and the community surrounding you; including the question of antecedent attributes that contribute to servant leader behavior (Coetzer et al., 2017; Frey, 2017; Keith, 2016). Lemoine et al.(2019) and Northouse (2021) added that servant leadership contributes to the growth of others in all areas of concern like physical, mental, and emotional health, personal goals, social awareness, and the likelihood of serving others.

My research into the area of the retail industry's leadership builds upon the foundations of Robert K. Greenleaf's work by highlighting the commonalities of servant leadership characteristics and millennials' expectations of leader behavior. Specifically, the research on the millennial generation revealed desired antecedent characteristics of a servant leader (Beck, 2014; Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020). The following table illustrates the commonalities of servant leader characteristics and millennial expectations.

Table 3*Servant Leadership Characteristics and Millennial Expectations*

Servant Leadership Characteristic	Millennial Expectation
Altruism	Purposeful teamwork, social consciousness, and empathy
Emotional Healing	Value leaders they perceive as solicitous about their welfare emphasizing the need for empathetic and authentic leadership
Wisdom	Partner in decision-making, technologically advanced
Encouragement	Initial and on-going training with a mentor dedicated to career advancement
Stewardship	Social activists, conscious of environment, and is loyal to organizations that support similar causes.

Recognition of others' strengths and promoting leadership in others compounds the overall well-being of those served while benefitting the organization's goals. Servant leaders are worthy of followers' trust because there is authenticity, transparency, and ethical behavior in the relationship. Included in the literature is the argument for the exhibition of Servant leadership behavior influencing followers' commitment to self, community, and organization; bringing about social change via the ripple effect (Grisaffe et al., 2016; Karakas et al., 2013; Korten, 2015; Marks, 2015; Mertel & Brill, 2015; Northouse, 2021; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Each generation of workers requires and expects certain leadership behavior; therefore, the viability of a Servant

Leadership theory is subject to the perception of the employee and the transparency of the leader (Anderson et al., 2017; Arellano, 2015; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Mertel & Brill, 2015; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). A Servant Leader abides by ethical behavior requiring self-reflection of behavior. Organizations reap the benefit of the practical application of Servant Leadership, resulting in fully engaged employees.

Summary and Conclusions

The retail industry is a complex machine with beginnings rooted in serving a community by providing needed or wanted merchandise. The reported history has leadership concentrating on expanding businesses to support the manufacturing industry's need for a sales outlet. The accounts of early retail concentrate on the improvement in serving the consumer and little about the worker. As society's needs changed and customer demand included knowledgeable salesclerks, the employee became more than a business tool.

There is scant literature devoted exclusively to the retail industry with some notations as to a standard leadership style that is difficult to maintain because of the fast pace. A literature review on leadership theories mentioned retail leadership and how no single theory would suffice industry-wide. The literature review results revealed that life experiences, perceptions of those experiences, and expectations of leadership comprise the characteristics of workplace behavior. The gap between business goals and employee needs was at the heart of this literature review, but only pieces of existing theories matched the current leadership (Anderson et al., 2017). A lack of peer-reviewed material

and recent research supported the purpose of this study, which is to explore current retail leadership. The rationale for choosing the case study design for this research centered on the need to gather first-hand information about millennial leadership in the retail industry and is explained further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry, their perceptions, and expectations of leadership. I explored expectations of millennials who chose retail as a career, provided insights regarding viable leadership styles for the retail industry and addressed the gap involving purported retail leadership and misalignment with millennials' self-descriptions. I used the qualitative research tradition for this study. I included the rationale for using the qualitative design and an explanation of why a case study design with interviews was the best choice for this research.

Maxwell (2013) said researchers are obligated to analyze reasons for undertaking studies by exploring benefits and drawbacks. The methodology section includes data collection and analysis processes and possible trustworthiness issues in order to ensure researcher bias is acknowledged and controlled throughout the study. I address the problem statement, research question, and purpose of the study as well as transferability.

Research Design and Rationale

I chose the case study with an embedded group design for this research in order to gather firsthand information about millennial leaders employed in the retail industry. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the field of leadership in retail, where the voluntary turnover rate threatens the sustainability and profitability of the industry. A qualitative study design was appropriate for research involving leadership because the topic was styles of leadership in the retail industry. Qualitative studies involve depth of

significance in terms of context with results that challenge paradigms and offer an understanding of a problem. Millennials are the emerging leaders in the retail industry. Yin (2018) said the case study method involves examining a problem, often without the ability to separate the problem from a more significant phenomenon. The specific problem under exploration in this study was failure of retail leaders to connect consideration of employees' needs to voluntary turnover.

RQ. How do millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership?

The central concept of this study included the supposition that each generation of workers requires, expects, and displays certain leadership behaviors, therefore leaving practitioners to question the applicability of current theories in the workforce (Anderson et al., 2017; Arellano, 2015; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Mertel & Brill, 2015). Mannheim (1952) said events experienced by a group influence a collective perspective, suggesting a cross-generational phenomenon. Inclusivity is a behavioral characteristic brought to the workforce by the millennial generation.

I chose qualitative analysis for this study of leadership because of the diverse nature of influence and dependency on contextual considerations. Several realities rise from individual interpretations of social constructs (Klenke, 2016; Rolfe, 2006). A subjectivist epistemology leads researchers to believe there is no separation of self and perception (Rolfe, 2006), suggesting perception is a personal reality. I conducted a case study by interviewing participants who were millennials, were employed as retail

industry leaders with at least 3 years tenure and graduated or enrolled in a postsecondary academic level business curriculum. Yin (2018) suggested using the case study design in situations involving an embedded phenomenon.

Other designs considered were ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Ethnography is the primary method of studying cultures and involves researcher immersion and exploring the standards of behavior that constitute group identities (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Since the focus of this study was not the study of a way of life, I did not use the ethnographic design.

Phenomenology studies involve individuals' lived experiences with a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I did not choose phenomenology because there was no specific event or situation under exploration. Grounded theory involves the development of new theory as links between concepts emerges with research or data collection (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Developing a new theory was not the focus of this study; therefore, I did not use the grounded theory design.

Role of the Researcher

A qualitative study requires researchers to immerse themselves in the process. First, during participant interviews, the researcher is responsible for restricting questions to the topic of the study and then controlling for bias when asking initial and follow-up questions (Yin, 2018). My area of interest was motivation of leaders in the retail industry specifically related to servant leadership. My experiences in the industry over two decades supported my role as the researcher in this study. I addressed how millennials

viewed their leadership styles, and how they described successful retail leadership. My main goal was to provide insights regarding a more productive retail industry culture. I considered my role in this study as an observer. Although I had a professional career in the retail industry, I am no longer associated with any retail organization. There were no instances of personal or professional relationships with any participant.

My role as the researcher was collaborative and often involved controlling personal bias. Reflexivity was used as a process of self-analysis to manage bias and reveal possible influences on data. Reflexivity refers to how the researcher sees their part in the study and how self-reflection, experiences, knowledge, and bias shape the researcher's views in terms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008; Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Maxwell (2013) recommended a technique for tracking potential bias by listing original goals of the study combined with accounting for assumptions, perception, observations, and self-reflections to understand personal motivation. Reflexivity was a valuable exercise in maintaining focus through self-analysis and journaled my perceptions which proved helpful in defining possible bias.

A peer review of interview questions and interview transcripts for any leading questions controlled any bias that would jeopardize reliability of findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). A rigorous analysis was necessary to ensure cohesiveness and worthiness of the study in terms of ethics. Bias towards or against any group for inclusion or exclusion is unethical (Yin, 2018). The most critical role of the researcher was to prepare,

execute, and analyze in an ethical manner. Avoiding bias is not limited to introspection but resides at the root of ethical behavior in research.

Conducting a study involving human participants required me to proceed with consideration of complete well-being. Compliance with ethical guidelines included obtaining informed consent from the participants, disclosing the nature of the study and pre-published results of their contribution. I had the ethical obligation to protect the participant from physical, emotional, psychological, or financial injury and preserve their anonymity. Babbie (2016) noted that, for example, youth and prisoners as participants groups are vulnerable to exploitation and need special consideration. The researcher must be cognizant of certain groups needing extraordinary protection due to age, cognitive level, or threat.

I managed the ethical guidelines to research by including a brief description of the study, a request for consent, member checking intention, and pledge to maintain anonymity in the participant letter. The primary and follow-up questions presented to the participants were peer-reviewed for any potentially harmful content that may cause unethical treatment of participants and the information provided. The potential participant group did not classify as vulnerable to exploitation. Finally, to protect against bias, demographics that are not necessary for the conduct of this study were not included in data collection, i.e., race, gender, pay scale, place of employment. Participation in this study was voluntary with no incentive offered for their opinions.

Methodology

Qualitative researchers believe that there is no single way to approach social research. Babbie (2016) wrote that a case study is an avenue of discovery about one part of a larger picture. I chose the single case study design with an embedded group methodology for this research of the millennials' collective experiences, self-descriptions, and perceptions of leadership. I used the bricolage approach to follow the literature into areas of study that offer insight into the topic of study. The bricolage approach interplays constructivism and philosophical underpinnings to include individual and collective perceptions for a more profound sense of the participants' reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Yin (2018) stated that the case study design with an embedded group with unclear boundaries stressed the importance of data triangulation to stabilize the boundaries of the case study. I used data triangulation of semi-structured interviews, field notes, salient literature, including historical and government archives to establish validity. The case study design allowed me to explore the reality derived from the perception of a representative group of a larger population and understand the phenomenon from a collective viewpoint.

The target group of the millennial generation was reportedly leading differently from previous generations of Baby Boomers and Generation X. To better understand if or how the retail industry leadership is shifting, the case study targeted the recent addition to leadership for their perception of past and emerging styles of retail leadership. The procedure for identifying the participants was an invitation to interview sent to the retail

groups on LinkedIn Professional Network. The groups on LinkedIn were not specific to an age group but had commonality of working in the U.S. retail industry. The methodological guidance of Yin (2018) supported the use of the case study design for studying distinctive portions of an established intangible dyad, like the leader-follower relationship, based on perception and perspective. The criteria included the exclusion of participants with personal bias that responded to the invitation to interview i.e., there was a loss of anonymity due to mutual recognition, or their location was outside the United States. The timeliness of this study allowed me to include a millennial's response from two perspectives, leader, and follower, to examine any shift in the leadership paradigm.

To protect the ability to transfer the information gathered from this study, I did not include region inclusivity or any restriction to the nature of the retail establishment in the data collection. There was concern with the case study approach in that the case was unique, reducing the possibility of replication, and construed as explanatory. A case study that explains rather than explores a phenomenon might be labeled as instructive and used to revise or dispute an existing theory. Still, the inductive nature of qualitative research aims to add to the pool of knowledge by exploring different opinions so future studies can build upon the results.

This case study fell into the realm of open possibilities for future studies and replication by the retail industry restrictions of inclusivity and retention of a target population. The aspects of participant selection and the instrumentation for data collection were important to transferability and the study's validity. Transferability

requires that the participants be part of the environment under research, and researchers remain within the scope of the research (Givens, 2008). The choice of instrumentation, unit of analysis, and target group aligned with the researched problem and provided the appropriate data. The following section outlines my process of purposive sampling, and the explanation of the instrumentation I developed to explore the target population's perception and expectations.

Participant Selection Logic

Population

The target population of this case study was the millennial generation of retail industry employees that have advanced to a leadership positions in a United States retail organization. Many do not readily consider the retail industry a career choice but a job that provides an income while studying for an unrelated career (Broadbridge et al., 2009; Lyons, et al., 2015). The scheduling flexibility fits with most academic schedules, and management does not expect any long-term commitment from the employee.

Millennials with post-secondary education who have stepped up to a leadership position in retail have a unique environment perspective. They worked in the industry part-time, are still attending school without making retail a career, or returned to retail employment upon graduation. These co-mingling of academic and organizational responsibilities account for a portion of the turnover percentage.

Participant Selection Criteria

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), there are over 3 million managers of retail workers. Narrowing criteria was necessary to arrive at a manageable number of participants. Reducing the statistic by age identified the target population as the millennial generation with birth years from 1980 to 2000, numbering more than 1 million (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). I established that the participants met the inclusivity requirements through demographic data collection. Asking the participant's birth year established millennial generation status. The consensus of researchers in the last two decades of the 20th century is the average time frame for the birth years of the millennial generation. Strauss and Howe's (1991) referenced the generation beginning in 1982, but others have a 1978 beginning date and a late 90's end date.

The next criterion was serving in a retail organization with at least 3 years of leading other employees. The 3 years of serving as a leader in their place of employment and type of retail, listed as such by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), established the connection to retail leadership. The 3-year time frame was determined by reviewing the 2018 statistics from the Deloitte Millennial Survey (2019). The results of the Deloitte survey were an average of 56% of Millennials left businesses because of job dissatisfaction within two years, and 73% quit after five years, so I used a three-year timeframe as a qualifier.

Further inclusive requirements for participation in this study were enrollment or completing a business curriculum in a postsecondary institution. I included the inclusive criterion of academic studies in business or management to 1) narrow the participant

selection and 2) verify the contextual knowledge of the participant. A student or graduate of a business or management curriculum should have the knowledge and insight into leadership styles.

For this study, I used purposive sampling to ensure the participants met the inclusive requirements of the study. I selected the criterion for participant selection of a one-on-one interview based on inclusivity requirements and an expression of interest by the participant to be interviewed (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Answering these demographics truthfully was one of the assumptions in this study, and any participant that left the information blank was excluded and counted as non-qualifying.

Participant Sampling Strategy and Rationale

I used purposive sampling to recruit participants that had direct knowledge of the context and emailed invitations to complete a survey questionnaire about perceptions of leadership qualities to members of retail groups and individuals identifying as “retail” on LinkedIn Professional Network to increase the possibility of receiving an acceptable sample size. I posted the invitation with 160 views and sent a personal invitation to 120 members. Ravitch and Carl, (2016) listed 40 types of purposive sampling strategies and the maximum variation strategy aligned with this sampling logic. The maximum variation strategist purposely chooses a large population to gather diverse information and identify commonalities (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I decided on a purposive sampling strategy but opened the data collection to the United States instead of a region for the participant pool to capture aspects of diversity.

Sample Size and Saturation

If this were a quantitative study, I would have wanted a sample size closer to 100 respondents rather than the 8-20 for a case study. Yin (2018) wrote that the defining characteristic of a survey interview in a case study is the usefulness of the gathered information as an insightful consensus on the topic of study, but no mention of an appropriate sample size. Guest et al., (2006) revealed that saturation was met with six interviews in an experiment to discover the point of saturation. By removing the exclusion of regional restrictions, the information gained a higher level of transferability and provided a diverse view of the participants' environment. The omission of a region exclusion within the U.S. also influenced saturation. Six interviews did not produce overlapping information requiring an increase in the number of interviews conducted to 8 before I collected no new information.

Instrumentation

For this case study, semi-structured interviews, field notes, salient literature, including historical and government archives, were the instruments for data collection. The task of data collection in this case study required my constant attention to the topic of the study. Yin (2018) stressed the importance of continuity and alignment with all veins of data collection. Data collection for this qualitative inquiry began with a review of the literature surrounding the topic of research, forming an order of progression.

I used the concepts revealed in the literature review to develop the framework and to base the questions used in data collection. Babbie (2016) refers to this process as

explaining the research in a “conceptual order.” The conceptual order included the necessary connection of the concept to a real-world activity and the process succinctly. Using the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool, the researcher understands the millennials’ perception than with observation, literature syncretization, or archival resources for the desired depth of information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The millennial perception of successful leadership was the basis of this research, linked to concepts of successful leadership and the specific problem of reported ineffectiveness in retail leadership.

Review of Literature and Archival Sources

Of the many instruments for data collection, the literature review had the distinction of evolvement. The review process begins with the study and does not approach completion until the final chapter (Ridley, 2012). In the beginning, my literature review supported the problem as legitimate as I discovered a gap, then supplied the concepts that framed the study, and lastly, the statistical information added to the study's validity.

A standalone document within the dissertation, the literature review is a compilation of the research journey because it provides the facts of the study. The inclusion of archived information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics appeared early in this study as it provided statistics on the turnover rate in the retail industry. The National Retail Federation (2020) has guided the industry since 1911 and supplied statistics on the retail industry's societal contribution through employment and the GDP.

Deloitte U.S. has provided statistics for 150 years and was a collaborating source on the millennial generation employment statistics and survey information.

I collected other salient literature by seminal authors like M.S. Moyer for the history of retail; Robert Greenleaf for Servant Leadership; Albert Bandura for Social Learning Theory; Karl Mannheim for Generational Theory; and Neil Howe & William Strauss for information about the generations. The information gleaned from the literature review on the problem of high turnover in the retail industry led to the formation of a researchable and specific problem that set the base for a conceptual framework. The literature review and conceptual framework information supported the devised questions for the interview portion of data collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The collection of data from interviews provided insight that aligned with the study's purpose and continued the study's contextual order. The semi-structured interview is the most important and appropriate approach to provide opportunities for participant elaboration (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I developed six open-ended interview questions that had the required alignment to the conceptual framework, research question, and the purpose of this study (see appendix B).

The success of social research depends upon the collection of first-hand information. The qualitative interview involves the researcher's ability to see the world through someone's words (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Maintaining the structural design of the interview was paramount to ensure the data collected was relevant to the study.

There was no room for ambiguity; therefore, I carefully worded the questions with familiar terminology to avoid contextual confusion. Yin (2018) wrote that one of the reasons for the semi-structured interview in a case study is to verify pre-established information. The researcher must withhold knowledge, adhere to the general question, and avoid leading follow-up questions.

Following the protocol for a semi-structured interview increased the possibility that the interviewee's responses provided personal insight and perception of the phenomenon. The development of an interview protocol (Appendix D) followed a process to ensure the alignment to the research question, conceptual framework, and purpose of the study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) developed a four-part process to improve the interview protocol by verifying alignment with the research question, designing the questions to prompt narrative responses, soliciting feedback on the protocol.

The interviewees were asked the same questions in the same manner, to avoid researcher-influence on the responses. For this case study, I developed the interview protocol from the research question: *How do millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership?* I used the questions, listed below, and detailed in Appendix B, to prompt narrative responses during the interview.

Q1: In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader?

Q2: When you think of a leader in your workplace, describe how the leader assigns tasks. Follow-up questions: How are processes to the task determined? What procedure is taken if a problem arises?

Q3: What or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership? Follow-up question: What action do you take to influence others in the behaviors of a successful leader?

Q4: Describe the learning opportunities that you receive or expect to receive from leadership to advance your career. Follow-up question: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Q5: Research indicates job dissatisfaction is high on the list of reasons for leaving a job amongst the millennial generation compared to previous generations. Answering in terms of how you are led, describe how leader behavior does or does not influence job satisfaction?

Q6: Research indicates non-seasonal voluntary turnover is highest amongst the millennial generation compared to previous generations. In terms of how you are led, describe how leader behavior does or does not influence voluntary turnover.

I established content validity through transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The literature review I conducted on the topic is transferable to other studies on leadership, regardless of the industry, also revealed questions to examine in future research.

Transferability is present when enough information has been reported to understand the study, the participant selection, and the concepts supporting the study (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Transferability requires that the participants are part of the environment under research and researchers remain within the scope of the research (Givens, 2008). Complete reflective notes from the interviews established a method of data collection considered for triangulation in a case study.

I maintained dependability by maintaining alignment to the research question and design. Data collection instrumentation need to support the research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I achieved dependability with a constant review of the alignment by using an internal audit trail and external audits by my committee.

The third validity criterion I used was confirmability. Ravitch and Carl, (2016) mentioned reflexivity as a method to remain vigilant about any pre-conceived ideas of study outcome. To ensure the confirmability of this study, the survey questionnaire was scrutinized by my committee for any sign of influential language. The one-to-one interviews followed a carefully scripted format with influence-free follow up question choices.

Field Notes

The third instrument in my data collection was my reflective notes during data collection. Reflective field notes were the first stage of data analysis as I looked for keywords and noted the reference beside the question (See Appendix E). Reflexive notes help discover themes in the interview responses and recognize when feelings of bias

toward the interviewer or interviewee delineate the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My experiences with the retail industry served as an interpretive frame of reference, and I decided there was a need for a follow-up question for clarity. Reflexive notes are important when interviewing, not to influence the interview but to help interpret the problem from a different perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Having pre-planned follow-up questions for clarification helped ensure the inclusion of expanded answers during data analysis.

During the review of the responses, taking notes was used to determine if a follow-up was needed. Appendix B (Interview questions) contains notes made during the creation of the interview questions as to the supporting literature and concept, which were paramount to the “conceptual order” of the research (Babbie, 2016). Appendix B also contained potential follow-up questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The primary source of data collection for this case study was the semi-structured interviews. Other data sources were reflective notes, current, seminal information reviews, and government reports—the sources of data used in this study aligned with procedures to support the purpose of the study. The first consideration in recruitment for the semi-structured interviews was the alignment of the problem being researched and the contextual knowledge of the participants.

Recruitment

Recruitment depended on the participant's comprehension of the problem stated in the study, and the invitation outlined the purpose of the study to aid in an informed decision to participate. The opening paragraph of the invitation to interview stated that in this case study, the research problem is that millennials employed in the retail industry are not finding the leadership support and alignment to their career expectations or social beliefs, often leading to a high voluntary turnover rate (Friedman & Gerstein, 2017). The invitation continues with the purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry, their perceptions, and expectations of leadership. Exploration of the expectations of millennials who chose retail as a career may add insight into a viable and transferable leadership style for the retail industry and address the gap between purported retail leadership and misalignment with millennials' self-description.

The invitation concluded with a request to answer the three inclusivity questions and return the consent to the email address on the interview form. Setting limits or points of inclusivity for the recruitment phase accomplishes 1) the narrowing of the scope of the study and 2) identification of qualified respondents to interview (Guest, et al., 2006; Yin, 2018). When I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August 2019, I used LinkedIn as my primary source for recruitment.

LinkedIn is a professional platform that thrives on exchanging information and promotes all avenues of knowledge sharing. The invitation to be interviewed and an introduction to the study (Appendix C) were posted on the LinkedIn Professional

Network to recruit participants for the semi-structured interviews. I identified several retail groups on LinkedIn and began inviting individuals to participate in the groups and the main page. I repeated this process once a month, communicating with each respondent. I protected the respondent's personal information by requesting that they not identify themselves on the questionnaire.

The inclusivity questions did not ask for a birthdate, employer's name, or educational institution but only confirmation that they qualified. I planned to collect data using referrals from respondents that did not meet inclusivity but were supportive of the study as a follow-up plan to reach enough respondents for the study. I collected the data through an attachment in the LinkedIn messaging system. I responded with appreciation for their participation, my guarantee to guard their privacy, and my plan to send them a copy of the results.

Participation

The inclusivity criteria for participation in this study were: the enrollment or completion of a business curriculum in a postsecondary institution, a leadership position in a retail organization with at least three years of leading other employees, and a millennial. The participants for the one-to-one interviews had the commonality of retail leadership, which aligned with the interactive aspect of a case study (Yin, 2018). Interviewing participants that met the inclusive criteria that constituted the boundary of the case study provided an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and for participants to elaborate on their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Invitations to be interviewed about their perceptions of leadership qualities were extended to members of the LinkedIn online community to increase the possibility of receiving an acceptable and qualified participant group. I chose maximum variation sampling to open the data collection to a national (United States) participant pool to capture aspects of diversity and did not put any regional restrictions on the data collection. Maximum variation sampling requires the identification of the commonality of the population that is significant to the research (Maxwell, 2013), which in this study was the millennial generation. For the semi-structured interviews, I used purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusive requirements of the study were met by reviewing the responses from the invitation letters. The 10 participants for the semi-structured, 20-30-minute interview were chosen by response to the invitation to interview and meeting the inclusivity criteria.

Data Collection

For each data collection instrument, there was a connection to the research question, and the conceptual framework. The research was clearly stated to explore the perceptions and expectations of millennials in a retail industry leadership position. The specific problem noted in this study was the failure of retail leaders to connect the consideration of employees' needs to voluntary turnover; therefore, exposing a specific problem of leader behavior (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016).

Interviews. The interview questions were designed to explore the specific problem and outlined in Appendix B. For example, Mekraz and Rao Gundala (2016) and

Anderson, et al., (2017) provided support for interview question 1, *How do you describe a successful leader?* aligned with millennial voluntary turnover due to dissatisfaction with leadership. The frequency of data collection was dependent on the availability of the participants and interviews were conducted by e-mail, due to the fear of being recorded. The e-mail interview proved to be advantageous due to demanding retail schedules, but the process was lengthier than a virtual or telephone interview. There was the added disadvantage of the absence of reading body language that occurs with e-mail interviews.

Interview Exit. The first task when ending an interview was to thank the participant for taking the time to answer a few questions. It is important that they felt their time was considered valuable to the study included that their insights and opinions were important to the research conducted in retail leadership. I assured the participant that everything shared would be treated with the upmost respect for their privacy and reinforced that the permission slip they signed protected them from harm including their employment. The participant was informed that a copy of the results would be available for any corrections or additions they wished to make. Rubin & Rubin (2012) suggested closing with an informal invitation to further contribution. I left the invitation open to supplemental information from participants by repeating my contact e-mail and encouraging feedback on the interview results.

Reflexive Notes. During the interview process, I noted key words and phrases from the participants' responses to the questions. I noted words or phrases associated

with the concepts of the influence of behavior, generational differences, or servant leadership. I also recorded the communication by the respondents that did not follow through with the interview noting the reasons for delaying or withdrawing from the study. My reflexive notes became a permanent part of the research documents with any post interview correspondence with the participants. My notes and journal entries recorded important insight into the behavior of the interviewee and served as another source of data contributing to triangulation.

Review of Literature. The third source of data collection was the review of current and seminal research on the topic of this study included the history of retail, generational differences, the influence of behavior on leadership, and current leadership styles. Additional sources of information supporting my research was noted from government databases and research institutions with a long-standing history of assisting social research. Archival data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics supported the reported generational voluntary turnover, and statistical data from Deloitte Millennial Survey supplied insight into consensus about leadership concerns, which provided relevancy to the wording of my interview questions.

Data Analysis Plan

As part of this empirical research into retail industry leadership, thematic analysis of the data collected for the study of retail industry leaders began with patterns in the literature centered on the industry's evolution. I worked to present a holistic view of the case. Functioning as a bricoleur, I recognized commonalities in the literature that formed

a theoretical definition of the phenomenon from a social and psychological viewpoint (Maxwell, 2013). Yin (2018) suggested studying the data for concepts that may lead to an analytical process such as pattern matching, but Denzin (2002) suggested a case-oriented approach to recording more profound descriptions of a social setting; grounded in situational relationships. The purpose of conducting a single case study with millennials as an embedded group was to explore retail leadership and the impact on the subunit of a more extensive, possibly unmanageable case study, i.e., a holistic study of the retail industry (Yin, 2018). The case-oriented approach allowed for theoretical definitions of conceptual categories in the analysis in which the research question and the semi-structured interview questions referred to retail industry leadership.

The conceptual categories created by thematic analysis of the literature review provided me with the direction of my interview questions and a triangulation tool for data collection. Denzin (2002) and Yin (2018) suggested that the participants' interpretation of historical events, behavior, and relationships is the inductive study's cornerstone. Instead of asking questions about personal observations of any changes in retail leadership, I conducted a case-oriented analysis to understand how the millennials' perception of leadership transferred to their expectations and experiences as retail industry leaders. One example of the conceptual categories used for the interview questions was the correlation between leader dissatisfaction in millennial performance regarding initiative and loyalty and the reported millennial expectations of mentoring. Mentoring is an aspect of leader behavior linked to the interview question; Describe the learning opportunities that you

receive or expect to receive from leadership to advance your career. This question supports the concept of thinking of others' needs before your own, as described in Greenleaf's theory of Servant Leadership, and the concept of generational differences in leadership expectations (Anderson et al., 2017). The interview question aligned with the overarching research question of how millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership? and the general problem of millennials employed in the retail industry are not finding adequate leadership support and alignment that meets their career expectations or social beliefs, often leading to a high voluntary turnover rate (Friedman & Gerstein, 2017). Appendix B outlines the six semi-structured interview questions and potential follow-up questions reflecting the connection of the data analysis from the literature review, the conceptual frame, and the purpose of the study.

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews followed the same case-oriented approach to how the response related to retail industry leadership. Thematic analyses contain researcher interpretation of the data which can challenge the reliability and rigor of the results with researcher bias (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Guest et al., 2014). In the vein of analysis, beginning with the collection stage, follow-up questions in the interview to clarify any vagueness or generalizations will support the interpretation, but only if the question is void of subjectivity. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) included that searching for the real meaning of a participant's response is a fruitless endeavor.

Interpretation differences add to the positive aspect of qualitative research and should not be discounted as subjective.

After the interview, specific sentences, words, or phrases in each response were marked and recorded as significant to the research problem. During the analysis stage, I assigned codes to the phrases or sentences for each response. This process is a deconstruction of the participant's response to identify phrases or keywords representing the total (Maxwell, 2013). Saldana (2009) defined a theme as a phrase or a collection of descriptive words that relate to the study, and by using a table in Microsoft Word, I listed the themes in columns for easy coding (Appendix G). Based on the primary data collection source, the semi-structured interview, manual coding is a way to capture the theoretical propositions and "play with the data" (Yin, 2018). For the interview responses, manual coding is the option that will provide the best insight into the participants' perceptions and allow the bricolage approach to analysis, which upon closer scrutiny, can reveal relevance to the study (Maxwell, 2013).

For the construction or syncretization of the interviews, Microsoft Excel offers the beginning researcher a way to organize the keywords in the responses into categories and compile the commonalities (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). To develop commonalities, my analysis must contain syncretization where the conceptual categories and context of the study intersect with the meaning in the results (Givens, 2008). Using the Excel Program, the codes I assigned to the responses can be sorted by using the sort option, with the bonus of creating a new spreadsheet for each category.

This second stage of analysis was the beginning of the reporting of results, as the second spreadsheet was the tool used to synthesize the interview responses with the data collected from other sources. The analysis of the theoretical conceptions was easily integrated because the coding for the thematic analysis was the same as the interview coding. My recording of the commonalities of the three data sources generated meaning and insight into a contextual form of the problem.

While this was a single case study of the retail industry, there was an opportunity to divide the analysis into two stages. The second stage of analysis included observations, journal notes, archival and current literature, and statistical data, which allowed for an alignment to the context through theoretical concepts. There was an opportunity for discrepant cases or outliers in the sample with the interviews for this study. Discrepant cases are a contradictory voice in the study, often bringing a challenge of construct validity to the study (Maxwell, 2013). Outlying information is merely a difference of opinion but vital to qualitative research and possibly the voice of future research.

There are outliers in research, exceptions to the consensus, and the literature review supported my expectation of discrepant responses. One of the theoretical concepts is that maturation changes an individual's perception, as does the environment's influence on social behavior. Some interviewees disagreed with the specific problem of a lack of effective leadership influencing voluntary turnover in the retail industry, but their perspectives remained valuable to this study. In this study, all feedback from the

interview process was added to the body of knowledge about leadership, specifically retail industry leadership.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I achieved credibility in this qualitative study through reflexivity, triangulation, and member-checking. The study's credibility began with the relationship of the researcher and the participants in the study; the challenge is controlling the threats to internal validity, i.e., participant selection, misalignment of questions, or incorrect instrumentation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell, 2008). Questions to consider for validity are methodology alignment with research questions and whether the research design aligns with the study's context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The credibility of data was gauged on the believability of the participants, and the selection of participants that knew the contextual nature of the study was crucial in establishing credibility (Yin, 2018)

Transferability

Qualitative research does not produce generalizable results but a study that can be transferred to a broader or similar setting (Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The main question in establishing external validity is whether enough information has been reported to understand the purpose of the study, the participant selection, and the theoretical conceptions supporting the study (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). In this study, the information offered in the literature review is transferable to other studies on leadership, regardless of context.

Transferability requires that the participants be part of the environment under research, and researchers remain within the scope of the research (Givens, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative study is transferable when the information offered as background and synthesized literature is steeped in the possibility for future studies. I established transferability by the purposeful sampling of the participants chosen for the study that met certain criteria that aligned with the research design (Givens, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, the participants shared personal impressions of an environment that generalized results. Readers could recreate this study in any industry to study the leadership paradigm.

Dependability

I achieved dependability through maintaining alignment throughout the study. Arguments supplied by the researcher as to processes used, i.e., data collection, instrumentation, analysis, need to support the research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Constant review of the alignment by using an internal audit trail and external audits by my committee ensured the study's dependability. Auditing the study began with recognizing the possible threats to validity, and the lack of cooperating and triangulating data hinders the study's dependability. Urban and van Eeden-Moorefield (2018) suggested verifying whether the information is understandable and ensuring clearly stated results.

Confirmability

There are inevitable biases in qualitative research, but as a qualitative researcher, I did not attempt to answer a question but to understand a problem. The integration of bias into the direction of the study was a productive way of managing the threat (Maxwell, 2013). I established confirmability by implementing strategies to counteract personal influence in the data collection instrument and the analysis. Maxwell (2013) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) mentioned reflexivity as a method to remain vigilant about any pre-conceived ideas of the study outcome. Maxwell reminds us that the qualitative researcher is an instrument to be used for the collection of data free from influence. The study's confirmability was reached by my committee's scrutiny of the survey questionnaire any sign of influential language. The one-to-one interviews followed a carefully scripted format with influence-free follow-up question choices

Ethical Procedures

There are ethical issues throughout the execution of a research project. The consideration of the population's rights involved in the research, directly or indirectly, must be protected. Walden University requires all research involving humans to be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has the responsibility to protect participants from any physical, emotional, mental, or financial harm that may arise from the research project. With the interaction of researcher and participant, protecting the participants' rights falls to the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Receiving approval for research required complete disclosure of the data collection

process to ensure ethical procedures. Confidentiality is the main and most straightforward form of protecting a participant, and part of the data collection phase is providing and collecting informed consent from participants. The participation in data collection must be voluntary, and the participants must have confidence in the researcher's discretion if there is to be an expectation of truthfulness in the responses.

Maintaining the anonymity of respondents was necessary throughout the data analysis and reporting the results and ethical responsibility extended to protecting the research materials provided by participants. The materials, questionnaires, hand-written notes from interviews and e-mail correspondence are stored in a secure location during analyses and for seven years post-dissertation, at which point any identifying materials are destroyed. Protecting the anonymity of the participants during analyses involved assigning an alpha-numeric designation during the coding process. Anonymity also involved a disconnect between the participant and their exact location and place of employment to protect the participants from any perceived danger or repercussion that might risk livelihood.

Ethical considerations extended to my ethical behavior in reporting the results. The accuracy of the data is expected and deserved by anyone who reads the research. Trustworthiness of the results is necessary for the transferability of the study. Exaggerating or fabricating details from the data is subjecting the study to dismissal and hiding results that do not support the assumptions is not ethical behavior (Roberts, 2010). Ethical responsibility also involves protecting others' scholarly work. To copy someone's

original work without citation is an unethical act of plagiarism and deems the research untrustworthy. Resources used in the production of this dissertation were given recognition by citation in the text and complete reference per APA guidelines.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed a single case study involving interviews with millennials with three years or more of leadership experience in the retail industry and participation in a business curriculum to explore the millennial generation's perception of successful leadership. Interviews of individuals bound by a commonality of retail leadership and generational characteristics align with the interactive aspect of a case study of an embedded phenomenon in a larger context (Yin, 2018). The questions were aligned with the problem and included behavior questions, training procedures, mentoring examples, and planned career progression.

I provided the interview questions designed to gather information about the topic of the study, and I discussed the case-oriented approach to the thematic analysis of the interview responses. Chapter 4 is set aside to record the responses offered by the participants accurately, compiled, categorized by commonality, and respectively submitted as the results of the study. The results began with the demographics of the participant group and contributing factors to the settings of the interviews. Chapter 4 will contain a thorough accounting of the interview results using manual coding and syncretization of the information. The conclusion of chapter 4 will have any discrepant responses and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry, their perceptions, and expectations of leadership. Exploring expectations of millennials who chose retail as a career may lead to insights regarding viable leadership styles for the retail industry and the gap between purported retail leadership and millennials' self-descriptions. The research tradition for this study was qualitative. The research question for this study involved how millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations involving successful leadership. I used six semi-structured interview questions to collect these insights. Schram (2006) recommended researchers have between five and 10 participants for a qualitative study because a larger sample size can lead to weaker research results.

To better understand if or how retail industry leadership was shifting, I questioned millennials about their perceptions of retail leadership to examine leadership paradigms. Data triangulation of semi-structured interviews, field notes, and salient literature, including historical and government archives, were used to establish validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this chapter, I described the research setting, demographics, data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. I presented study results involving organizational and environmental conditions that influenced respondents. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research question and its applicability.

Research Setting

I posted invitation to interview letters on LinkedIn as an open post. I received various responses citing interest in the study but was resistant to virtual and recorded interviews. I contacted LinkedIn members through messaging who identified as retail in order to encourage participation with further explanation of the study and assurance of anonymity. I included informed consent forms for 80 individuals who self-identified as retail employees, but these were met with continued resistance. I also posted this letter in several groups on LinkedIn: Retail Industry Professionals Group, Southeastern Manufacturing PRO Network, Retail Executive Leadership, Servant Leadership Institute Discussion Group, and Retail Leadership Network. I confirmed anonymity by explaining the privacy portion of the consent form with every post or individual message but received few responses.

I began recruiting in August/September, but communication was hindered due to participants' trust of anonymity. I was an unknown individual, and employers feared retribution as a result of their opinions about retail leadership. Due to the COVID pandemic, there was a major change in the retail environment during data collection that increased the difficulty of collecting responses. Two of the responses were collected pre-pandemic, with the remainder requiring an extension from the IRB to complete data collection.

Interview times varied depending on whether participants were willing to talk with me about their answers. Three who agreed to speak with me clarified answers or

follow-up questions. Conversations averaged 22 minutes, but participants declined virtual or phone recordings. There were no risks to participants' safety or wellbeing, and the interviews or research questions were completed at participants' convenience. I kept notes regarding participants' responses and their struggles to participate. I used an interview guide (see Appendix E) to record reflexive notes during data collection and analysis.

Demographics

The target population of this case study was millennial employees in the U.S. who have advanced to leadership positions in the retail industry. Inclusive requirements for participation in this study included enrollment or completion of a business curriculum in a postsecondary institution and a leadership position in a US retail organization with at least 3 years of leading other employees (see Table 4). Participants were identified as P1 through P8 to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality.

At the time of data collection, the youngest participant was 19, and the oldest was 38. The average age was 29. Enrollment or completion of a business curriculum was a requirement, and 50% of participants were enrolled in a postsecondary business program, 25% had an Associate of Arts and Science degree, and 25% had their Bachelor of Science in Business. All participants were in a leadership position with an average of 7 years. Employee positions ranged from a lead/head cashier to a multi-store manager. Fifty percent of participants identified as male, and 50% identified as female. As Walden's IRB required, there were no vulnerable participants.

Table 4*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Education	Title	Gender	Tenure (yrs)	Age
P1	BS	District Mgr	M	16	38
P2	BS	Dept. Lead	F	5	28
P3	Enrolled	Sales Lead	F	3	26
P4	Enrolled	Dept. Lead	M	5	29
P5	Enrolled	Head Cashier	F	4	23
P6	Enrolled	Dept. Lead	M	3	24
P7	AAS	Asst Mgr.	F	10	33
P8	AAS	District Trainer	M	12	32

Data Collection

I collected data from eight participants who met criteria for inclusion in this study. I verified inclusion criteria information by first viewing their profiles on LinkedIn to ascertain their work experience and education. I then asked participants by email if they met inclusion criteria approved by the IRB. Data collection tools were semi-structured interviews and reflective notes.

I received my initial IRB approval (#09-19-19-0565230) on August 23, 2019, and an extension on August 24, 2020. Upon receipt, I posted invitation to interview letters on LinkedIn. I posted approximately once a month beginning September 2019 until I reached 10 positive responses. Four did not meet inclusivity criteria but agreed to help

recruit participants which led to snowball sampling of two additional responses, bringing the qualified participant number to eight. When I received a positive response, I forwarded the informed consent form to participants and questions by email due to lack of interest in phone or virtual meetings.

Data collection lasted for 15 months, requiring an extension approval from the IRB, and was deeply affected by the pandemic. COVID-19 affected the subject matter of LinkedIn posts and responses. During the pandemic, views of and responses to my posts decreased, and there were several negative responses to my invitation. Fear of retaliation among retail employees was expressed by P1, who requested assurance that no one would know of their participation or any employment or geographic location information. Other respondents chose online messaging to politely request I drop them from the research.

Interviews

I began data collection the same way with each participant. I thanked them for their interest in contributing to the study and ensured anonymity. I e-mailed each participant a copy of the informed consent and the interview questions. Those willing to speak to me were only willing to do so for any follow-up questions, and of the 8 participants that met the criteria, I spoke to 3 individuals to clarify their answers to the questions. I used the Interview Guide (see Appendix E) as an interview tool and a place to include comments from participants on follow-up questions as a record of data. The participants recorded the data and sent it by e-mail, with three responding to follow-up questions or expanding their answers. This additional data was added to my reflective journal and transferred to Appendix E in the comment section. Once the participant

agreed to respond to the questions, the return time was prompt, averaging three days. Clarification of answers was received more quickly, with receipts within a day. The three participants willing to speak by phone to clarify answers spent an average of 22 minutes responding to my follow-up questions.

Reflexive Field Notes and Journaling

My reflexive notes associated with the data collected consisted of comments made in response to the invitation, reaction to the request to record the conversation, and participants' general avoidance of follow-through. I recorded the responses to the invitation to interview, positive and negative, in my journal notes to use in my data analysis because they capture the participants' reactions, attitudes, and emotions during the collection process. My notes helped discover patterns of behavior and changing perceptions of millennials as leaders.

There were unusual circumstances that compounded the hesitancy or outright non-response to my invitation. Firstly, the retail industry's busiest sales season began three weeks after my first posting. Retail leadership had little free time in October, November, and December, and priorities are centered on 4th quarter sales. Secondly, COVID increased a reluctance to respond and the lack of time to participate in anything outside of work due to additional duties with less staff. Personal and environmental conditions influenced the participants' hesitancy to participate in virtual or even telephone interviews, but most were willing to answer the questions by e-mail. Mistrust

of virtual platforms, fear of being recognized in the published research, and an unbelievable work schedule were two of the reasons cited by the invitees.

As time progressed through the COVID lockdowns and the domino effect of businesses closing and rising unemployment, the interview responses reflected the fear and increased reluctance to participate in anything recorded. This constitutes a variation from the plan for data collection but did not prevent collection as long as e-mail responses were acceptable. My impressions and observations of the changes in the retail environment and the participants' perspectives were noted. All interview responses were printed out so any reference to the identity could be removed and replaced with a participant number (P1, P2, ..., P8). I reached data saturation after four responses but continued collecting data because the fifth response came during the height of the pandemic and showed a change in perspective. I reached a second saturation with the seventh response, and no new data emerged. Any electronic reference to the participant identity is saved on an external memory drive and password protected.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis of the data collected to study retail industry leaders began with patterns in the literature centered on the industry's evolution. Using a bricolage approach to data collection, commonalities were recognized in the literature, and the responses formed a theoretical definition of the phenomenon from a social and psychological viewpoint (Maxwell, 2013). I began with an initial review of the responses to the interview questions, making notes of phrases or keywords that aligned with the

codes assigned to the conceptual categories. I used manual coding for the interview responses, which provided the best insight into the participants' perceptions. Based on the primary data collection source, the semi-structured interview, manual coding is a way to capture the theoretical propositions and “play with the data” (Yin, 2018). I made notations as to any discrepant information or outliers in the responses when I created codes for analysis. Discrepant cases are a contradictory voice in the study, often challenging construct validity (Maxwell, 2013). Outlying information is merely a difference of opinion but vital to qualitative research and possibly the voice of future research.

There are outliers in research, exceptions to the consensus, and the literature review supported my expectation of discrepant responses. One of the theoretical concepts is that maturation changes an individual’s perception, as does the environment’s influence on social behavior. I recognized these differences aligning with the level of leadership the respondent had achieved. For example, some interviewees disagreed with the specific problem of a lack of effective leadership influencing voluntary turnover in the retail industry, but their perspectives remained valuable to this study.

During the second stage of analysis, I identified themes and patterns in the coding that aligned with the conceptual framework and the overarching research question of how millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership. I consolidated the themes of the responses and identified the conceptual category that represented how millennials’ perception of

leadership transferred to their expectations and experiences as retail industry leaders.

There were three categories identified in the conceptual framework: societal or generational behavioral influence, observations that evoke emulation or avoidance, and millennial characteristics' congruity with servant leadership. There were 12 themes that emerged during data analysis.

Themes aligned with societal influence on commonalities of generational behavior are that millennials expect adaptability, accommodation, authenticity, transparency, open communication, trustworthiness, ethical and empathetic leadership. Themes aligned with how observation influences behavior creating a desire to emulate or avoid include authoritarian, workplace culture, mentorship, task-oriented, and psychological contracts. Themes aligned with millennial expectations and characteristics of servant leadership congruity were noted as compassion, mentorship, supportive, employee-centric, and recognition.

The analysis process is a deconstruction of the participant's response to identify phrases or keywords representing the total (Maxwell, 2013). Saldana (2009) defined a theme as a phrase, or a collection of descriptive words related to the study. This study is a description of the millennial perception of successful leadership. The results included descriptions from the respondents about how they are led, how they lead, and the challenges they faced during the COVID pandemic. Table 5 accounts for the final data analysis with excerpts from the participant responses, with the corresponding conceptual category and theme.

Table 5*Conceptual Categories and Themes*

Participant	Interview excerpt	Category	Theme
P1	A successful leader is adaptable. Able to overcome adversity.	Societal/generational influence	Adaptability
P1, P2	When assigning tasks, there is clear communication around expectations. Clear communicator	Societal/generational influence	Authenticity
P2	“I’ve learned that trust is important in leadership by the way my leader treats me.”	Societal/generational influence	Trustworthiness
P3	Assigns tasks based on employee’s strengths	Societal/generational influence	Accommodation
P3	Trust and open communication set the tone of the workplace.	Societal/generational influence	Trustworthiness
P6	“During COVID, we were all (millennials) thrown into a scramble to keep the stores open. That time did give us opportunities to think creatively about serving our customers.”	Societal/generational influence	Adaptability
P1	“Personally, I don’t need an engaged leader to be motivated, but I do need to know if I’m meeting/exceeding the expectations.”	Societal/generational influence	Authenticity
P7	“someone who is trusted and respected across departments.”	Societal/generational influence	Trustworthiness
P7	“With current layoffs (due to COVID), leaders have taken a ‘hands-off’ approach and trust individuals to complete known, necessary tasks.	Societal/generational influence	Adaptability Accommodation
P8	“Leadership is all about trust. You have to trust and have faith that when you leave for the day, or you’re off for the day that the business runs just as smooth without you or even better. That’s true leadership.”	Societal/generational influence	Trustworthiness (trust works both ways)
P8	“I expect honest, straightforward feedback...feedback is the key to growth.” “The retail industry changes daily, affecting daily goals...you must	Societal/generational influence	Authenticity

be a step ahead to keep afloat.”

FOLLOW UP: “not in retail because of the lack of recognition for the staff’s success in spite of COVID restrictions.”

P8	FOLLOW-UP “The biggest challenge during COVID was how big staff reduction was. Because of a “whoever can make it to work is boss today” mentality of corporate; there was an emergence of leadership that may have never happened. A lot of great ideas were born.”	Societal/generational influence	Adaptability
P1	“I have learned from leaders I didn’t consider inspirational but were in a position of authority and had achieved success.”	Observation influence	Authoritarian
P1	“I have learned from good, bad, and indifferent leaders. You learn what to repeat and what to avoid. What works, and what doesn’t.”	Observation influence	Desire to emulate
P1	“evangelist for hope” (communicating corporate vision in a positive way)	Observation influence	Charismatic/organization culture (Organization is priority)
P1	“I’ve learned not just directly but watching interactions with other employees and hearing about their impact.	Observation influence	Emulation
P2	“...someone who can manage to make difficult decisions and keeps everyone on board.”	Observation influence	Persuasive/Authoritarian (Organization is priority)
P2	“Leaders assign tasks by what’s important for the store.”	Observation influence	Organization is priority
P2	“Voluntary turnover is sometimes just about better opportunities, not leadership.”	Observation influence	progress/psychological contract
P4	“...does the right thing without expecting validation.”	Observation influence	Ethical Behavior
P4	“A lot of baby boomer leaders use scare tactics to get compliance.”	Observation influence	Authoritarian
P7	“If I am micromanaged, or upper management plays favorites, my enthusiasm to perform vanishes.”	Observation influence	Workplace culture schism

P6	“I expect leadership to not be corrupt.”	Observation influence	Ethical Behavior
P8	“If you don’t have a great relationship with your team, it will show in your ‘numbers’ and your personal life.”	Observation influence	Workplace culture schism
P8	An organization where adequate “tools or training” to complete a task are ignored sets the employee up for failure. “I believe that’s the number one reason why millennials leave. The stress and workload combined with no leadership support.”	Observation influence	Authoritarian (avoid)
P1	“train their team to overcome adversity.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Mentor
P2	Listens to others	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Employee-Centric
P2	“My manager was great at breaking things down, so we understand completely.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Mentor
P2	“Learning opportunities took on a strategic direction to improve my performance”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Mentor
P3	“A successful leader creates a unified atmosphere and environment.” “I’ve found that millennials want transparency in leadership.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Inclusivity Transparency
P3	A successful leader cares for the employee	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Compassion
P3	“Strengths are encouraged, and weak areas are addressed with coaching.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and	Mentor

		characteristics of a servant leader.	
P3	“With open communication about what is needed to improve performance, there are chances to advance.”	Observation influences behavior creating a desire to emulate or avoid.	Psychological contract
P4	“...we are not a hard worker generation. we are a smart worker generation and look for companies with innovation and an open mindset to move forward. You must adapt or be left behind.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Supportive Adaptability
P5	“Tasks are assigned by the employee’s skill and familiarity with the task.” Voluntary turnover could be reduced by training by methods that are best or needed by the staff.	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Employee-Centric
P5	“A successful leader improves the entire staff’s abilities.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Mentor
P6	“I expect leaders to care for others.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	compassion
P7	“...patient when others are learning and willing to teach”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Mentor
P8	“My first manager showed me how to treat every single employee. When they clock in for work, ask them how they are doing, how is their day? Then thank them for being there.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	compassion
P8	“When I assign a task, I first look at the employee’s strengths and weaknesses and see how the task can benefit ... If you don’t think about how this is helping the employee, you’re not going to be a successful leader. The leader is only successful if the team is thriving.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Employee-Centric

P8	“When problem arises in the original goal plan, which happens often with COVID restrictions, working together to find solutions takes away a bit of the frustration and feelings of isolation.”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Inclusivity
P8	FOLLOW-UP – Q4 – “We felt punished by the loss of bonuses, 401K match, and reductions in pay”	Congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.	Psychological Contract (broken)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I achieved credibility in this qualitative study through reflexivity, triangulation, and member-checking. The questions for validity included whether the methodology aligned with the research question and whether the research design aligned with the study's context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The questions were designed in alignment with the overall research question and used to prompt the participants' memories of personal experiences. Reflexivity required examining and suspending my judgments and personal beliefs about the problem and instead focused on the participants' perceptions. Credibility is based on the believability of the participants (Yin, 2018) and reflexivity involves the inclusion of responses that conflict with the researcher's expectations. The reflexivity in the data analysis established a simple and open addition to the participants' responses bolstering the study's credibility.

Triangulation broadened the understanding of the results. Data triangulation involves several different sources about the same phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study used archival and current literature, semi-structured interviews of an embedded group with first-hand information of the phenomenon, and reflective field

notes as data triangulation methods. Blending the theoretical with the conceptual and result of the research strengthens the trustworthiness of results and deepens the understanding of the phenomenon.

As a collaborator, the participant's involvement allowed me to clarify responses with follow-up questions. Member-checking was my third method of establishing credibility. I used the messaging ability of LinkedIn to verify and follow-up participants' comments. An excerpt of the analysis was made available to the participants for the opportunity of approval, correction, or additional comments. Additional information was noted on the original questionnaire and the interview notes.

Transferability

The results of my literature review is transferable to other studies on leadership, regardless of context. Transferability requires that the participants be part of the environment under research, and researchers remain within the scope of the research (Givens, 2008). A qualitative study is transferable when the information offered as background and synthesized literature is steeped in the possibility for future studies. The interplay of constructivism and philosophical underpinnings supported the transferability of this study because the participants shared impressions of an environment that resulted in generalized results.

The choice of instrumentation, unit of analysis, and the target group aligned with the researched problem and subsequently provided responses that will support future inquiries into leadership paradigms in any industry. The interview questions were

designed to provoke responses about generational perception and self-awareness in retail leaders but have research potential in any field of study. The purposeful sampling of participants chosen for the study met certain criteria aligned with the research design (Givens, 2008). The transferability of the results of this study benefits future studies in the field of sociology, psychology, or business leadership because the topic of the study was based on a generalization of perception and behavior.

Dependability

My dissertation committee's continuous review of the study's alignment using an internal audit trail and external audits ensured the dependability. Qualitative studies are considered dependable when there is consistency in the data and alignment with the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation with empirical research, first-hand accounts provided by participants who meet the inclusivity requirements, and ensuring the information is understandable by verifying participant responses supports dependability and limits validity threats.

Confirmability

I established confirmability by implementing strategies to counteract personal influence in the data collection instrument and the analysis. The value of a qualitative study is found in the confirmability of the analysis. To be accepted as trustworthy, I implemented strategies to control my bias during data collection and analysis. My interview questions and conceptual framework were scrutinized by my committee, the

IRB, and my URR to verify the absence of bias or threat of bias. Ravitch and Carl (2016) mentioned reflexivity to remain vigilant about any pre-conceived results.

My constant reference to my journal and reflexive notes increased the confirmability of the results and my role as a participant rather than a reporter in the study. Consistency in the interview questions and follow-up clarifications was necessary for thematic analysis and controlling my biases. The researcher has to be a credible witness to the results during the analysis by providing a detailed, thick description of the coding and themes to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). This self-scrutiny of biases began in the framework and was addressed in the data collection and throughout the analysis phase.

Study Results

In qualitative studies, there is a depth of significance to the context with results that challenge paradigms, enlighten causation, and offer an understanding of the problem. This study answered how millennials employed in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership. As Yin (2018) suggested the case study design described the perception of millennial leaders within the context of retail leadership. The results of this study focused on the emerging leadership styles in the retail industry.

The responses from the semi-structured interviews were categorized by themes that emerged from the analysis aligned with the literature review of current and seminal sources of leadership behavior. The methodological guidance of Yin (2018) supported the

use of the case study design for studying distinctive portions of an established intangible dyad, like the leader-follower relationship, based on perception and perspective. Three concepts formed the basis of the framework for this study and allowed for data collection from the participants' perceptions as both followers and leaders.

The first concept was that societal or generational influence determines commonalities of behavior in a generation. The themes that emerged in the responses to societal or generational influence were adaptability, authenticity, trustworthiness, accommodation, ethical behavior, and transparency. These themes arose from responses to question 1, In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader? In a multi-generational workforce, as often found in retail establishments, the leader-follower relationship is formed by an unspoken hierarchy determined by knowledge rather than age (Gruda et al., 2018). The responses in the vein of follower perceptions and expectations do not necessarily reflect a generational difference but rather the millennial leaders' perception or their picture of the type of leader to follow. The behavior characteristics of each generation reflect a collective perception of the social values important at that time or generational location, which is notable in the responses taken during the COVID pandemic.

The second conceptual category of observational influence was designed to explore characteristic millennial alignment with reciprocity and emulation. Bandura (1977) established how observation influences behavior and the continuance of the behavior is dependent on the received response. The themes aligning with observational

influence were identified as the organization is priority/authoritarian, desire to emulate, and organizational culture/workplace culture schism, which came from question 1, and question 2, when you think of a leader in your workplace, describe how the leader assigns tasks, revealed both positive and negative responses.

The third and final conceptual category was labeled as the congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader. The themes that emerged from the responses were compassion, mentor, supportive, employee-centricity, inclusivity, and inference to psychological contract failure. Question 4, describe the learning opportunities that you receive or expect from leadership to advance your career, and questions 5 and 6 asked for the influence of leader behavior on voluntary turnover and job satisfaction. Millennials' upbringing provided them with strong, inclusive behavior, leaning towards a collective personality to lead a paradigm shift in retail leadership (Bottomley & Willie Burgess, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Strong evidence of inclusive behavior is noted in the responses from a millennial leader perspective.

There is much overlap in the leadership attributes, and no one theory has thus far had the distinction of the best approach to success, but there were overlapping themes that emerged in the 45 recorded responses that indicated characteristics of servant leadership from both follower and leader perspectives. The final portion of my analysis addressed the data that was either non-conforming or discrepant to the general problem of millennials employed in the retail industry not finding adequate leadership support and alignment to meet their career expectations or social beliefs, leading to a high turnover

rate in the industry. I identified themes from a follower's perspective and a leader's perspective which are discussed in the following sections.

Emergent Themes from a Follower Perspective

The conceptual categories drawn from the framework guided the data analysis, which revealed themes in the responses, and the analysis of the data supported the perception and expectations of millennials as followers and leaders. I organized the results by the themes that emerged from the responses, which aligned with the conceptual categories. The analysis included the leadership characteristics that millennials find unacceptable and the evidence of a paradigm shift resulting from the COVID pandemic.

Adaptability/Accommodation

Adaptability was not included in the original Code Book (Appendix G) but was used in 11% of the responses to questions aligning with the conceptual code of societal or generational influence. Responses to Question 1; *In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader?* Furthermore, Question 3; *What or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership?* provided the pattern of the term adaptable as a description of successful leadership. I attached the meaning of adaptability as embracing different ways to solve problems, including ideas from diverse sources to generate something that did not exist or was never a default solution (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). "An adaptable leader is able to overcome adversity" (Participant 1), and the fast-paced and ever-changing world of the retail industry demands leadership that has the soft skills of collaboration and critical thinking to focus on influencing change. Northouse

(2021) described an adaptive leader not as a problem-solving but as someone who provides others with the guidance to master adversity. Responses to questions 1 and 3 inferred the importance for leaders to adapt readily to both a normal retail environment and one that is challenged, i.e., the pandemic.

Northouse's (2021) assessment aligns with participant 6 (P6), who responded in the summer of 2020 amidst the COVID pandemic about how "... we were all (millennials) thrown into a scramble to keep the stores open. That time did give us opportunities to think creatively about serving our customers." Participant 7 (P7), also responding in the summer of 2020, commented that "with current layoffs (due to COVID), leaders have taken a 'hands-off' approach and trust individuals to complete known necessary tasks.

With the onset of the pandemic and subsequent economic uncertainty, adaptability was not generationally specific but a result of the blending of age groups caused by a shared event, which aligned more with societal influence. Participant 8 (P8) shared in response to the follow-up question to Q2, *what procedure is taken if a problem arises?* With the comment, "The biggest challenge during COVID was how big staff reduction was. Because of a "whoever can make it to work is boss today" mentality of corporate, there was an emergence of leadership that may have never happened. A lot of great ideas were born." "You must adapt or be left behind" (P4).

In response to how tasks are assigned, 4% of the responses listed *accommodation* as a characteristic of successful leadership under the concept of societal or generational

influence. Participant 1 commented that “when assigning tasks, there needs to be clear communication around expectations,” while participant 3(P3) noted that a successful leader would assign tasks based on employees’ strengths. Both observations support the concept of the *best fit* principle of assigning tasks to employees, which meant an increased possibility of task completion. Fiedler conceptualized that effective leadership is determined by personality traits and employee performance while dependent on leadership influence (Popp, & Hadwich, 2018) More recently, Gabrielova and Buchko, (2021) argued that millennials use societal influence to help them develop leadership skills such as teamwork and adaptability.

Authenticity, Ethical Behavior, Transparency, and Trustworthiness

These four themes share Authentic Leadership characteristics, which is noted as more of a behavior than a leadership style but is quickly gaining legitimacy as a style based on best-fit theory (Nikolic et al., 2020). Responses to Question 1; In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader? And Question 2; When you think of a leader in your workplace, describe how the leader assigns tasks provided a pattern of the themes under the conceptual code of societal or generational influence.

The study of Authentic Leadership combines certain leadership behaviors that build a style of leadership that leaves no question as to leader intent. Nikolic et al. (2020) reported that authentic leadership is multi-faceted with leading by example and encouraging transparency, thereby installing trustworthiness that reflects a stronger leader-follower relationship. Authenticity, at 4% of the responses, was represented by

participants 1(P1) and P2 citations of “clear communication” and P3’s addition that “trust and open communication set the tone of the workplace.” Clear communication is cited by P8 in the comment that “I expect honest, straightforward feedback...feedback is the key to growth.” P1 added to the point on leader feedback with “Personally, I don’t need an engaged leader to be motivated, but I do need to know if I’m meeting/exceeding the expectations.” In a follow-up to Question 4, Where do you see yourself in five years? P8 shared, “not in retail because of the lack of recognition for the staff’s success in spite of COVID restrictions.” Concerning the expressed expectations of Millennials, the lack of performance feedback and an unclear career path often leads to voluntary turnover (Gunn et al., 2017). Communication and honest feedback also underscore an employee-centric leadership style that promotes follower job satisfaction aligning with a millennial expectation of leadership behavior.

Ethical behavior in a leader was mentioned in 4% of the responses, with P4 stating quite plainly that a leader “does the right thing without expecting validation.” P6 summed the expectation of ethical behavior with “I expect leadership to not be corrupt.” Ethical leadership supports the millennials’ expectation of meaningful work and trustworthiness in leaders and followers. Bhana and Bayat (2020) reported that ethical leadership had gained recognition as a leadership theory because of constant reports of corporate and government misdeeds. Distrust of authority prioritizes millennials to seek and remain with leaders who exhibit authentic leadership characteristics.

At a combined 11% response rate, trustworthiness and transparency are components of authentic leadership and support a millennial expectation of a successful leader under the abstract concept of generational influence. Concerning trustworthiness, P2, P7, and P8 offered insight into the importance of reciprocity in the leader-follower relationship. “I’ve learned that trust is important in leadership by the way my leader treats me.” shared by P2 with P7 witnessing trustworthiness as “someone who is trusted and respected across departments” defines a millennial expectation as a follower. Participant 8 commented that “leadership is all about trust. Employees have to know that you trust and have faith that when you leave for the day or off for the day, the business runs just as smooth without you or even better. That’s true leadership.” P8 spoke about trustworthiness from a leader’s point of view, but the comment also reflects the follower’s desire to reciprocate good treatment with good behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Emergent Themes from a Leader Perspective

As themes emerged from the participants’ responses, reflexivity was a major consideration. The responses would reveal a perception of leadership that was different or improved upon what they experienced as a follower, and yet many responses revealed leanings toward situational leadership, deferring to the status quo. Putting aside my bias and “listening” to the responses proved enlightening as to how the millennials used their experiences as followers to express a compromise of organizational goals and a leadership style reflective of the generation’s characteristics of ambition, social dependence, and complete transparency.

Authoritarian, Emulation, and Organizational Culture

The majority of the responses aligned with a millennial leader's perspective were evident in the concept of observational influence with authoritarian responses at 4%, emulation at 4%, and organizational culture at 7%. The respondents' tone shifts to the voice of a leader with Question 3: What or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership? and the responses include both positive and negative responses.

Positive Influence. P2 contributed the responses with an authoritarian theme in a positive light with "...someone who can manage to make difficult decisions and keep everyone on board." and "Leaders assign tasks by what's important for the store." This response indicates the observation influence of authoritarian influence on expected behavior from millennials moving into a leadership role. P2's responses were collected pre-COVID, and leadership training was informal observation as a follower. P1 reflected that "I have learned from leaders I didn't consider inspirational but were in a position of authority and had achieved success." With no challenge of COVID restrictions requiring at times extreme adaptation of procedures, these responses align with the research outlining the generational differences in leaders and followers in different situations.

Emulation is the imitation of an observed action or characteristic and was a response to Q3, what action is taken to influence others in the behaviors of a successful leader. In leadership, a follower might pattern personal behaviors after something or someone they regarded as a positive influence. P1 shared that "I have learned from good, bad, and indifferent leaders. You learn what to repeat and what to avoid. What works,

and what doesn't." They continued with a follow-up comment, "I've learned not just directly, but by watching interactions with other employees and hearing about the impact." While emulation and reciprocity are different terms, they share a common resource of observational influence. Emulation is the imitation of behavior because of a belief in a similar outcome when the behavior is applied. Reciprocity involves adopting a behavior based on environmental or personal beliefs, and emulated behavior influences the surrounding environment (Du, et al., 2020). An example of reciprocal determinism (Bandura in Cherry, 2021) was indicated in Participant 1's comment that a leader should be an "evangelist for hope," positively communicating corporate vision and indicating the influence of behavior to be emulated. This comment would also fall under the theme of the charismatic or persuasive characteristic of authoritarian leadership, so not necessarily negative. In retail, it happens quite often before a substantial task for management to lead a "pep rally." Words of encouragement when delivering a looming deadline or change in the process are part of the retail organization culture.

Negative Influence. P4 noted a direct correlation to a generational difference in leadership styles with the comment, "A lot of baby boomer leaders use scare tactics to get compliance." Authoritarian leaders characteristically use threats of repercussion for poor performance. Du et al. (2020) noted that employees with authoritarian leaders exhibit low reciprocity and task performance levels. Another observation of negative authoritarian leadership is cited by Participant 8 with the comment, "In an organization where adequate "tools or training" to complete a task are ignored sets the employee up for failure. "I

believe that's the number one reason why millennials leave. The stress and workload combined with no leadership support.”

Organizational culture (OC) is described as the interaction between employees of a common workplace. OC is behavior-based, and guidelines rise from, at times, unwritten and unspoken agreements of what is acceptable or unacceptable for a member of the workplace. The responses to Q2 At times, a leader's behavior can clash with the OC resulting in decreased performance and/or morale as stated by P7, “If I am micromanaged, or upper management plays favorites, my enthusiasm to perform vanishes.” Participant 8 offered the warning that “If you don't have a great relationship with your team, it will show in your ‘numbers’ and your personal life.” The organization's culture can be a deciding factor in job choice. P4 noted about the millennial generation that “...we are not a hard worker generation. we are a smart worker generation and look for companies with innovation and an open mindset to move forward,” indicating an organization with a learning or innovating culture would be the best fit.

Compassion, Mentor, Inclusivity, and Supportive/Employee-Centricity

These remaining emergent themes are characteristic of Servant Leadership with a mentor or some definition resonating in 16% of the responses. Millennials' expression of how they lead others centers on building trust, compassion, inclusivity, and coaching employees to grow into strong leaders. Compassion, mentor, employee-centricity, and inclusivity are themes under the conceptual category of congruity of millennial

expectations and characteristics of a servant leader. The comments on compassion came from P3 and P6 with similar caring remarks. P8 expounded on compassion with a connection to emulation with “My first manager showed me how to treat every single employee. When they clock in for work, ask them how they are doing, how is their day? Then thank them for being there.” Bhardwaj (2022) and Fritsch et al., (2018) stated that millennials value employees and seek to know and care for the people they lead. Mentoring is notably the highest percentage of responses to interview questions with several concise responses. Question 3, what or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership? received the following responses with mention of multiple influences.

Figure 1

Responses to Question 3

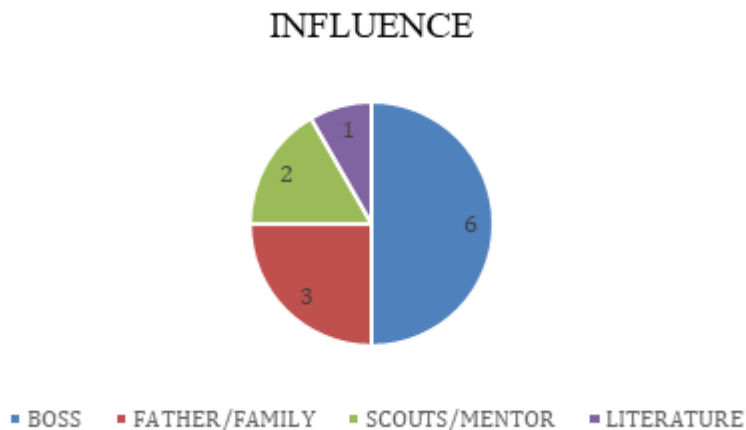


Figure 1 displays the data gathered in response to question 3. Six participants named a previous supervisor, manager, or leader a strong influence. Three participants listed their father or family, two remembered a scoutmaster or previous mentor as a good

influence, and one participant added books on leadership as a strong influence. This analysis supports the millennial expectation of continuous training opportunities from leadership.

One response from P2, “My manager was great at breaking things down, so we understood completely,” and “Learning opportunities took on a strategic direction to improve my performance,” was from the follower’s point of view. The remainder of the responses with the mentoring theme was provided as a leader in response to the follow-up question “what action do you take to influence others in the behaviors of a successful leader? As a leader, P1 wrote that they “train their team to overcome adversity” and P3 mentioned that “Strengths are encouraged, and weak areas are addressed with coaching.” As a mentor practicing inclusivity, “A successful leader improves the entire staff’s abilities” (P5) and “patient when others are learning and willing to teach” (P7).

Millennials lead with inclusivity to support collaboration and “...a unified atmosphere and environment.” (P3). Millennials consider themselves a valuable partner in decision-making, recognizing opportunities for improvement (Stewart, et al., 2017). Participant 7 added, “Working cohesively with other departments toward a common goal,” demonstrating inclusive collaboration. Participant 8 noted, “When a problem arises in the original goal plan, which often happens with COVID restrictions, working together to find solutions takes away a bit of the frustration and feelings of isolation.

Supportive or Employee-centric behavior involves “listening to others” (P2), “assigning tasks by the employee’s skill and familiarity with the task” (P5) and added

that “Voluntary turnover could be reduced by training with methods that are best or needed by the staff.” Participant 8 offered an employee-centric themed response to task assignment with this comment: “When I assign a task, I first look at the employee’s strengths and weaknesses and see how the task can benefit ... If you don’t think about how this is helping the employee, you’re not going to be a successful leader. The leader is only successful if the team is thriving.”

The last theme that emerged was psychological contracts and noted by participant 3’s comment, “With open communication about what is needed to improve performance, there are chances to advance,” and a broken contract shared by participant 8 expanded the follow-up question “Where do you see yourself in five years?” that contained contempt. “Not in retail! We felt punished by the loss of bonuses, 401K match, and reductions in pay. The fact that the store had an increase in sales in the middle of COVID was not enough to return our sales bonus.”

Summary

The thematic analyses of the eight participants in this study provided sufficient results to answer the question posed at the onset of this study. How millennials employed as managers in the retail industry describe their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership was the basis for the three conceptual categories described in the conceptual framework and the 12 themes that emerged from the participants’ responses. This single case study of the retail industry with an embedded group from the millennial generation was based on three concepts. The first is that societal influence determines

commonalities of behavior in a generation, joined by the idea that an individual's upbringing shapes adult behavior (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

The cognitive model of behavior was used to understand how observation influences behavior, and continuance of the behavior is dependent on the received response, and the aspects of servant leadership outlined by Barbuto and Gottfredson (2016, p 62) serves as a model of leadership behavior that mirrors the Millennials' expectations. The themes that emerged in data analysis were adaptability/accommodating, authenticity/transparency, ethical behavior, trustworthiness, authoritarian, desire to emulate or avoid, workplace/organizational culture, compassion, mentor, supportive, employee-centric, and psychological contracts.

The responses to the interview questions revealed a clear outline of millennial perceptions of successful leadership as a follower and how they conduct themselves as leaders in the retail industry. One discrepant response, "Voluntary turnover is sometimes just about better opportunities, not leadership" (P2), added to the strong feelings of continuous growth recorded in the literature review. The interpretation of these findings was compared with the peer-review literature in chapter 2 and the recommendations in chapter 5 for further research. Chapter 5 concludes with the implications for theory, social change, professional practice, and my conclusion to the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative case study involved exploring experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry and their expectations of successful leadership. I used a single case study of the retail industry with an embedded group identified as millennials. A qualitative approach was used for a holistic view on the phenomena, and the bricolage approach encouraged multidisciplinary inquiry and multidimensional philosophies. I addressed the gap between purported retail leadership and millennials' self-descriptions, my recommendations, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I interpreted findings of this qualitative case study involving the retail industry via thematic analysis of responses provided by an embedded group of millennial leaders. Findings confirm or extend knowledge in the discipline. I categorized responses from semi-structured interviews as confirming, discrepant, or an extension of existing knowledge. I discussed societal or generational influence, observational influence, and congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of servant leaders. I identified findings as follower or leader perception of successful leadership.

Societal or Generational Influence

Age and societal influence generational perceptions of leadership. Gruda et al. (2018) said leadership qualities influence perceptions. Mannheim (1952) said events shared by a group influence collective perspective. COVID-19 and environmental and

social changes were reflected in participants' responses. Life experiences, perceptions of those experiences, and leadership expectations resulting from those experiences comprised millennial leader behavior during the pandemic.

I identified the millennials' expected successful leadership characteristics, including transparency, training, mentoring, social consciousness, empathy, open communication, authenticity, and ethical behavior. One bias that remains is generational stereotyping. To avoid generational stereotyping, leaders should accommodate workforces based on societal influence rather than biological age.

Adaptability

Participants expressed they wanted their work to impact their employers and society. They emphasized flexibility, collaboration, and adequate training for the job to facilitate a more rapid ascent to leadership roles compared to previous generations. The desire for professional growth influences millennials' loyalty to an organization.

P4 said, "we are not a hard worker generation, but a smart worker generation. We look for companies with innovation and an open mindset to move forward." Millennials look for a balance of meeting organizational goals and validating their positional purpose and openness to inclusive leadership. They are impulsive and often disregard the chain of command when they have a solution to a problem, but in retail, the customer is more important than the rules. One observation I noticed during a follow-up interview P7 was how they adapted quickly to a maintenance problem with an exit door. First, they called the repair company, and then the corporate office for approval. P7 said, "If I waited for

corporate, I would have had to wait until Monday for an appointment or pay double for the weekend.”

As society’s needs change, the employee became more than a business tool. The retail industry has adapted to every social change necessary for sustainability, but the time has come for management to evaluate, reconstruct, and create new leadership criteria to accommodate the evolution of workers. In describing a successful leader, P1 said, “I have learned from leaders I didn't consider inspirational but were in a position of authority and had achieved success.” P4 said, “A lot of baby boomer leaders use scare tactics; to get compliance.” Codrea-Rado (2019) said millennials feel micromanaged because they are not trusted to perform tasks. Millennials are ambitious about finding a balance between meeting organizational expectations of leadership and millennial expectations of adaptability.

Authenticity

Open and frequent communications were noted in most responses and involved transparency and trustworthiness, which are components of authentic leadership. Millennials entered the workforce with expectations involving inclusivity (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Holtschlag et al., 2020; Nolan, 2015; Twenge, 2006). Moreover, millennials believe respect for leadership is earned, and loyalty is withheld until deemed worthy (Anderson et al., 2017; Tulgan, 2015). Identified leadership characteristics of the millennial generation align with emerging authentic and servant leadership theories.

I identified authentic leadership themes of communication involving performance expectations and building trust in the literature review and data collected from the millennials' interview responses. Millennials view leadership as either a positive or negative example of performance, depending on the leader's authenticity. If a leader's information cannot be discounted, then a relationship of trust is formed, and the leader becomes a positive force. Amunkete and Rothmann (2015) reported that authentic relational transparency leads to performance improvement and job satisfaction. Jiang and Men (2017) and Xiong et al. (2016) expounded on authentic leadership as perceived as transparent and building trust with employees.

More recent input acknowledged that authentic leadership is a philosophy with a humanistic focus based on a journey of self-awareness culminating in the self-actualization of an individual and unique purpose in life (Johnson, 2019; Nikolic et al., 2020). Self-actualization is the pinnacle of success for millennials because they strive to be part of something bigger than themselves, to make a difference, feel purposeful, fulfilled, and get paid while changing the world.

I included Maslow's hierarchy of needs in my review of the literature to support a generational need to progress through stages of personal development (Maslow, 1998). Responses from participants 1, 2, 3, and 8 offered comments aligned with authentic communication and supported the millennial expectation of validation to progress in their personal development (Bilge et al., 2021). "Clear communication around expectations when assigning tasks" and "Trust and open communication set the tone of the

workplace," and "I expect honest, straightforward feedback [from leaders] ...feedback is the key to growth." Millennials see feedback as validation of success or a plan for improvement. The quicker they master the task, the quicker they can move on to the next challenge.

Ethical Behavior

Trustworthiness in leaders and the observation of ethical behavior build employees' self-efficacy and overall psychological capital. My description of ethical judgment is a philosophy of right and wrong behavior and how a right decision for one might result in a wrong decision for all. Enacting the right decision involves careful thought about the outcome of the decision concerning the whole (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). A leader's individualistic ethical decision might result in behavior viewed as unethical for the organization or community or have even further consequences.

Millennial interest in ethical leadership stems from news accounts of corporate scandals of misbehavior that left employees jobless and financially ruined in the early 2000s. The millennial generation is not unique in its distrust and disdain of unethical behavior. In the background of the generations in chapter 1, every generation has experienced a breach of leadership ethics. Participant 4 made the following comment that as a follower, they expected a leader to "do the right thing without expecting validation." Participant 6 supported the expectation of a follower with "I expect leadership not to be corrupt." Hegarty and Moccia (2018) wrote that an ethical environment involves clear consequences to actions that result in a loss of trust in the leader-follower and follower-

follower relationship. Leadership theories include some type of quid-pro-quo that the employee adopts as external motivation to perform, and a psychological contract is an example of unethical behavior.

Millennials expect leaders to be ethical in treating followers, e.g., clear, and concise communication regarding expectations, task assignment, and equality in mentoring or training. The breakdown of psychological contracts is considered a break in trust, loss of transparency from leadership, and detrimental to morale. Psychological contracts are expectations of reward based on performance obligations (Solomon, 2019). The reaction of P8 to the loss of tangible bonus compensation and the lack of recognition from superiors for the staff's performance during COVID was a clear example of a broken contract. The withdrawal of contingent compensation resulted in P8's loss of trust in leadership and ultimate resignation.

Observational Influence

I drew the conceptual category of observational influence from Albert Bandura's work on the cognitive-behavioral model. The Cognitive Model of Behavior contains a mediational process that involves the individual observing, remembering, determining the possibility of mimicry, and imitating the behavior (Bandura, 1977). As the responses from the participants transferred from follower to leader, there was evidence of observation and emulation of behavior that aligned with millennials' expectations of successful leadership. In the comment, "I have learned from good, bad, and indifferent leaders. You learn what to repeat, and what to avoid. What works, and what doesn't,"

participant 1 expressed that those lessons about successful leadership came from "watching interactions with other employees and learning about the impact." The impact of observational influence on the development of a millennial leadership style came from a comment by participant 8. In response to the interview question, who or what has influenced your perception of successful leadership, P8 shared that "My first manager showed me how to treat every single employee. When they clock in for work, ask them how they are doing and how is their day? Then thank them for being there." Empathy is necessary for building trust through honest and open support communication for another person (Kohl, 2021). Demonstrating empathy is a cornerstone for servant leadership and a perceived quality of successful leadership by millennials.

Workplace culture

The negative observations are essential lessons in unsuccessful behavior and are evident in the workplace culture-themed comments from participants with expectations of partnership in decision making. Participant 8 commented, "If you do not have a great relationship with your team, it will show in your 'numbers' and your personal life."

Anderson et al. (2017) and Twenge (2006) argued that millennials respect each other's strengths, offer help to improve performance, and ensure that resources are available for the task. Participant 8 supports the argument with the observation that "where adequate tools or training to complete a task are ignored [by management], it sets the employee up for failure." Millennial leaders value collaboration, empowerment, and creating a workforce that encourages growth through innovation (Albanese, 2018). I carried these

observations over into the development of the millennials' successful leadership style explained under the conceptual category of the congruity of millennial expectations and characteristics of a servant leader.

Congruity of Millennial Expectations and Characteristics of a Servant Leader

There has been no single leadership style for millennials emerge, but this study revealed many aspects of servant leadership (SL) in the participants' comments. The literature review of the millennial generation and the characteristics of servant leadership led to the inclusion of the congruity of millennial expectations and the philosophy that outlines how consideration of others increases self-and group efficacy (Bilge et al., 2021). The original idea of SL is a broad concept of putting others before yourself with the demonstration of altruism, emotional healing, wisdom, encouragement, and stewardship (Greenleaf, 1977). Subsequent research and accounts expand on Greenleaf's descriptions to define the characteristics of SL with specificity to distinct behaviors.

Servant leadership has similarities and outcomes to diverse behavior and leadership theories that support the overarching guidelines of *showing kindness* and are characterized in current literature as authentic, empathetic, compassionate, employee-centric, mentoring, listening, inclusive, and empowering. Fritsch et al. (2018) argued that millennials are authentic, promote collaboration, are employee-centric, and are active mentors, resulting in a more inclusive and connected work culture. Participant 5 noted that "tasks are assigned by the employee's skill and familiarity with the task." Participant 8 explained employee-centric behavior as being considerate "when assigning a task, I

first look at the employee's strengths and weaknesses and see how the task can benefit ... If you don't think about how this is helping the employee, you're not going to be a successful leader." The leader is only successful if the team is thriving." Millennials bring a new definition to leadership with continuous feedback and training just as they expected from a successful leader.

Mentoring

Mentoring had the highest percentage of responses from the participants as a characteristic of a successful leader. The participants stated the importance of a follower that "my manager was great at breaking things down, so we understand completely" and "Learning opportunities took on a strategic direction to improve my performance" (P2). Millennials expect initial and ongoing training with a mentor dedicated to career advancement (Anderson et al., 2017), aligning with the ambition to move up the corporate ladder. Gabriel et al. (2020) reported that millennials want to be mentored as they gain leadership skills. Participant 1 commented that "mentoring is part of successful leadership and being a leader means training their team to overcome adversity." Being mentored and being a mentor develops a loyalty that reduces the need to look to other companies for the opportunity to gain knowledge and reach personal goals.

The idea of mentorship as a characteristic of a millennial leader has merit based on their expectations as a follower combined with strong inclinations for collaboration. While gaining the needed leadership skills, millennials are influenced by previous mentors and experiences and use the acquired knowledge to mentor across the

generations (Gabriel et al. (2020). Millennials are natural networkers, eager to seek answers and share knowledge, becoming natural mentors.

Half of the participants responded to who had the most significant influence on their successful leadership development with a supervisor, manager, or leader with comments about learning through behavior observation. The observed mentoring behavior and evidence of emulation were noted in the remarks of a leader's perspective by participant 3 "strengths are encouraged, and weak areas are addressed with coaching." Participants 5 and 7 offered their interpretation of mentoring as "a successful leader improves the entire staff's abilities" and "[being] patient when others are learning and [being] willing to teach." Senge (2006) included in his research on learning organizations that for the lesson to be adopted into practice, the teacher must practice what they teach, stressing the importance of learning as part of teaching. There are no boundaries to mentoring or being mentored.

Mentoring no longer describes an age-based dyad in a multi-generational workforce but a knowledge-based relationship. (Gabriel et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2018). Based on reciprocity, millennials mirror the support received from supervisors, etc., with instruction in areas of knowledge like technology. Through knowledge sharing, reverse mentoring mirrors the millennials' expectations of an inclusive work environment and servant leadership.

Inclusivity

Inclusive workplace culture is an essential characteristic of successful leadership by millennial followers, with the stated comment that "a successful leader creates a unified atmosphere and environment" (P3). Inclusion, by millennial standard, is described as promoting equal participation in decision-making, collaboration, establishing and encouraging mentoring, and open (and often) communication (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). A significant shift in behavior occurred with the struggles during COVID. Millennials consider themselves valuable partners in decision-making, recognizing opportunities for improvement (Stewart et al., 2017). "Sometimes you need to have problem-solving and critical thinking skills to fix the problem" (P4). The adaptability and flexibility that millennials noted as successful leadership examples were shared by participants 6 and 8. "During COVID, we were all [millennials] thrown into a scramble to keep the stores open. That time did give us opportunities to think creatively about serving our customers. The biggest challenge during COVID was how big staff reduction was. Because of a 'whoever can make it to work is boss today' corporate mentality, there was an emergence of leadership that may have never happened. A lot of great ideas were born." Participants 4, 6, and 8 indicated the shift in retail leadership. According to my findings, millennials lead with a style that promotes generational expectations and continued intentions of shifting to a new paradigm.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations to trustworthiness arose during the data collection phase of this study. I began data collection in August 2019 with the distribution of my invitation letter on the LinkedIn online community platform. My initial distribution included posting a message asking for help with my research with the invitation and consent attached to 150 connections. I received three positive responses from the initial posting that matched the inclusion criteria and four that did not but offered to pass it to their contacts.

Snowballing was not the original plan for data collection, but I did receive the remainder of the participants by this method. Only one followed through of the three respondents at the onset of data collection, but with reservations about being recorded. The participant and I agreed to complete the questionnaire online due to work and family time restraints.

The following limitation was environmental. Before the snowballed recruitment came to fruition, COVID restrictions and concerns became a psychological issue. During the turbulent times of COVID quarantines in 2020, answering research questions was not the welcome diversion I had hoped. During the quarantine, I sent personal messages through LinkedIn to individuals meeting the inclusion criteria to see if they would reconsider participating and only received a few well-wishers. I received an extension from IRB in August 2020 and reposted the invitation to LinkedIn, and the first snowball result came through. The last of the follow-up interviews were completed in June of 2021. Even with the limitations of sample size, limited access to a participant pool, and

the issue of the collection method, I found that the responses were rich with information despite the limitations.

Recommendations

The fast-paced environment of the retail industry, brought about by an ever-changing merchandising requirement to meet consumers' needs, causes difficulty for leadership to behave in anything but an authoritarian style. Retail leadership was modeled after the manufacturing industry's hierarchical organization, with the decisions made at the top and not questioned at the bottom. Decisions were in the company's best interest with little regard for the worker's thoughts or needs, which was fine until the millennial generation.

Occupations in the retail industry account for 6.3% of the total U.S. workforce, with over half between 16 and 34 (Anderson, 2020). According to the Deloitte Global Survey (2021), millennials maintain their belief that people should come before profit, and they continue to shift the leadership paradigm to include advocacy for social change (Khilji & List, 2021). The challenge to the decades-old status quo is balancing sustainability with a generation of leaders who desire employment with an organization that values innovation and inclusivity.

The literature review from behavior theorists and researchers from the field of leadership grounded by behaviorists and direct leaders of millennials supported a consensus of high job turnover due to job dissatisfaction. Research in leadership has linked job retention with the performance of the leader and the employee. The years of

research on job satisfaction as a retention tool leans toward leadership performance. The workforce has even adopted the mantra of “people quit bosses, not jobs” to solidify that turnover can be avoided if only we had better leaders. The mantra leads to the following recommendation.

Accuracy in Research

This study aimed to explore the experiences of millennials employed as managers in the retail industry and their expectations of effective leadership. My initial literature review indicated a gap in the accuracy of reporting the consistently above-average turnover percentage. Retail is not readily considered a career choice but a job that provides an income while studying for an unrelated career (Broadbridge et al., 2009; Heidig et al., 2018). Leaving an organization where the employee means only to have a financial source to fulfill basic human needs to continue a perhaps non-business career path should not be a leadership flaw. Additionally, the loss of employees who view retail as a "means to an end" and leave because of career opportunities should not be considered victims of ineffective leadership. As participant 2 in my research commented, "voluntary turnover is sometimes just about better opportunities, not leadership." Only in the current literature has the idea of retail being a transitional and temporary source of income highlighted the millennials' considerations of successful leadership as having nothing to do with leading but more with getting out of the way of other's progress.

I recommend that future research in retail leadership use the seminal study of organizational learning advocated by Senge (2006) as a theoretical approach for

organizations to support collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning. Senge (2006) said:

Deming shared that our prevailing system of management has destroyed our people. People are born with intrinsic motivation, self-respect, dignity, curiosity to learn, and joy in learning. The forces of destruction begin with toddlers – a prize for the best Halloween costume, grades in school, gold stars – and on up through the university. People, teams, and divisions are ranked on the job, a reward for the top and punishment for the bottom. Management by Objectives, quotas, incentive pay, business plans, put together separately, division by division, cause further loss, unknown and unknowable. (p. xii)

Deming (in Senge, 2006) acknowledged the misalignment of management practices with the workforce's expectations, realizing the failure stemmed from behaviors embedded in parental and institutional instruction. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) reported that millennials are bringing their life experiences and expectations of behavior as they establish a leadership style that aligns with the incoming generation Z. Inclusivity, social consciousness, two-way communication, and collaboration are characteristics shared by the generations (Khilji & List, 2021). The supposition of socialized expectations aligns with millennial expectations of successful leadership and the generational characteristics outlined in my literature review.

Future research in turnover intentions based on career goals should include the question of reciprocating organizational loyalty for employee-centric behavior.

Leadership extends support of the employee's deficiencies and establishes mentoring in the workplace to signify the existence of essential interpersonal skills (Marbun, 2021). Holtschlag et al. (2020) explored the connection between a turnover decrease and loyalty increase with the argument that individuals receiving recognition and encouragement for their career goals are more likely to remain where personal goals are supported.

Concerning the retail industry, I refer to the research by Broadbridge et al. (2009), where research participants described a career in retail as "uninteresting and providing limited advancement," and Heidig et al.'s (2018) research responses included "dull and poor salary." A current contribution to retail research by Gauri and Grewal (2021) outlined a proposition of collaboration between academics and practitioners to identify the problems in retail operations and direct the research to find workable solutions. Gauri and Grewal continued with praise for several institutions of higher learning that regularly interact as partners with the retail industry and serve as research centers. The National Retail Federation established a foundation that sponsors a free program, Rise Up, offering training and credentialing to train for jobs in the retail industry (National Retail Federation, 2022). Further research is recommended to continue searching for the balance of profit and people in an industry that relies on a transient workforce.

An additional recommendation for consideration would be the effect of COVID on the millennials' perception of leadership. Responses from the participants in this study commented on behaviors aligned with servant leadership and situational theory. Further

research would contribute to the field of leadership and an emerging theory of a millennial leadership style.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Industry Facts

According to the NRF (2020), the retail industry provides 32 million jobs that are directly related to the operation of the business and 52 million jobs in total, with a contribution of \$3.9 trillion to the U.S. GDP. Retail supports first the employee by providing income and position-dependent benefits of health care and retirement. Second, retail supports the community by providing jobs for the residents and taxes that provide income for the city. Retail also provides income for the transportation, manufacturing, and advertising industry. Retail began as a service to the community, a way for consumers to obtain manufactured goods, and it continues that mission. Still, the cost of turnover remains the most significant drain on the industry's financial stability.

Generational Influence

The largest consumer group to date, the millennials, have begun to insert their ideas of successful leadership into organizational operations to align their values with how they lead. The generation mirroring the millennials in size and buying power is generation Z (approximately 1996- 2011), and the generations agree on a higher loyalty to socially conscious businesses. Best and Mitchell (2018) commented that millennials consider a company's contributions to the community when choosing a job. For retail

organizations to continue and flourish in the job market, the work environment needs to be attractive to potential employees. Choosing retail as a job can depend on the company's social image and the perception held by the potential employee. P8 questioned, "can I be proud of where I work?" Millennials and Generation Z will support businesses, internally and externally, if they are giving back to the community.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention belong in the realm of social change implications because reducing the turnover rate in the retail industry will contribute to the “triple bottom line.” The triple bottom line is defined as widening the focus of business goals from profit only to including people and the planet (Bohlmann et al., 2018; Miller, 2020). The latter two, people and planet, comprise the basis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), known as the behavior model for organizations involving awareness of their influence on the stakeholders, community, and the GDP (Mehedi & Jalaludin, 2020). Stakeholders, in this context, are potential employees with high levels of social consciousness that influence their purchases and choice of companies where they work.

Promoting an organization’s pledge to CSR and creating opportunities for collaboration on CSR projects would increase the positivity of a retail career and retention (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2017). Ghosh (2016) commented that millennials insist on CSR to avoid a repeat of the fall of Greece and move toward a more meaningful approach to the measurement of success. The implications of higher visibility of CSR

could create a ripple effect on the GDP, from the direct employment in a community to the support of suppliers, manufacturers, and logistics providers of the retail industry.

Theoretical Implications

The discussions of the millennials' leadership style are majorly speculative. It is not easy to establish an opinion of practical theory application when the formation is in progress. The choice of a single way to lead retail is, in reality, never going to happen because of the fluctuating environment and the increasing level of knowledge needed to survive (Blair, 2020; Keevy & Perumal, 2014). Some days, followers are looking for strong authoritarian leadership, and other times, collaboration is expected. A successful leader in retail knows the correct approach for each situation, and the authoritarian approach and hierarchical structure will be difficult to eliminate.

Situational Leadership

The situational leadership theory could have a place in the retail environment because of the fast pace and continuous changes in products and procedures. During COVID, leaders used situational leadership to adjust the organization's goals to create new sources of revenue that aligned with societal needs (Stewart, 2021). Situational leadership dictates that certain occurrences, internal or external, require the appropriate leadership style. Graeff (1997) reviewed the evolution of the Situational Leadership Theory from its inception and found arguments against its robustness, the consensus being that confidence in one area of performance does not preclude success in another. Graeff included the theorists' proclamation that "model" would be a better description.

There are individuals that, based on behavior and performance, exude an air of confidence, self-efficacy, and the ability to shift to the appropriate style of leadership when encountered with change (Stewart, 2021). Participants in this study that responded during COVID commented on the importance of adaptability in leadership and the ability to guide staff through adversity effectively.

Servant Leadership

As the philosophical base of the conceptual framework for this study, I connected the tenets of servant leadership with the millennials' perception of successful leadership. All definitions of servant leadership are derived from Robert Greenleaf's writings about serving a higher purpose than yourself and a mantra based on selfless behavior (Langhof & Guldenberg, 2020). Greenleaf (1977) said:

Does those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? The natural servant, the person who is servant-first, serves another's highest priority needs (p. 27)

Millennial characteristics have strong leanings toward servant leadership (SL), but the attributes of SL should be used as a behavioral approach to the implementation of other theories (Grisaffe et al., 2016). Greenleaf (1977) did include the leader attribute of a leader having the courage in times of critical decisions to be first to act instead of delegating the task. Personal and professional goals are items of importance to the millennials and do fall under the purview of SL in the category of encouragement and a

commitment to a follower's growth. The expectations of millennials to have a work/life balance aligns with the SL philosophy of taking time to rejuvenate and restore the energy levels required to serve.

Supporting Theories

Supporting authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership theories are similar to servant leadership and are mentioned in Greenleaf's original collection of essays.

Authentic leaders know their strengths and weaknesses, communicate with transparency, are considered trustworthy, and lead with integrity. They inspire trust because of their transparency and listening skills but demonstrate a little positive effect on employees' work-life balance (Jiang & Men, 2017). Authentic leaders exhibit the positive attributes of SL and set the moral compass for the organization but may demonstrate a lack of empathy and forgiveness when it comes to an employee's ethical misjudgments.

Several terms are used to describe the components of ethical behavior; integrity, justness, and fairness, with a definition as a guideline of behavior considered proper by social mores. Greenleaf (1977) described an ethical society as free from manipulation and mediocrity. An ethical leader refrains from manipulation for their benefit, and mediocrity is the enemy of growth and performance excellence.

Transformational leadership may work in tandem with SL due to the similarities in organizational change, commitment, and work engagement. As an organizational change agent, they are in their element of mentorship, empowerment, development, support, and care (Bass & Riggio). The transformational leader is inspirational, builds a

culture of teamwork, is inclusive, collaborative, uses the feelings of belongingness to inspire employees toward team or organizational goals, and relies on setting a positive leadership example in times of change, inspiring followers to envision success (Murtaza et al., 2021). With additional research into the challenges businesses endured to survive the pandemic, a study of transformational leadership blended with situational and SL to meet the crisis would contribute to the CSR and leadership field of study. One negative aspect of a transformational leader is a primary concern of leader performance, and followers may mistake charisma for authenticity and trustworthiness.

Recommendations for Practice

Millennial Contribution – The Paradigm Shift

The millennial generation as leaders brings a paradigm shift to the retail industry. Bottomley and Willie Burgess (2018) reported that among the millennials' leadership skills, remaining calm and patient in crisis were high on the list of characteristics. The first-hand reports of the challenges during COVID indicated successful leadership by millennial leaders. Participants 7 and 8 spoke about the rise of co-leadership and interdependence aligned with millennial characteristics of a collaborative leadership style (Gabriel et al., 2020). With the information gathered from literature and interviews, I was able to align the characteristics of millennial leaders in the retail industry with how their behavior is shifting the practice of retail leadership.

The shift from a "top-down" involves a reminder that employees are the number one asset to retail success. Albanese (2018) commented that organizations with a rigid

structure of processes limit employees in their personal growth. Langhof and Guldenberg (2020) reminded readers that Greenleaf's thesis on servant leadership places the follower's needs ahead of business outcomes which in the literal sense seems detrimental to organizational survival. The philosophy of servant leadership supports the largest asset to the sustainability of the retail industry if the actual lines from Greenleaf are followed.

Millennials feel strongly about continuous growth and count it as a reason for turnover and retention, as mentioned by the participants in this study. "Voluntary turnover is sometimes just about better opportunities, not leadership" (P2). The future practice of leadership in the retail industry would benefit from asking employees about their personal goals and encouraging them in their pursuit. The retail industry can reduce turnover by simply partnering with employees when they need the flexibility of a retail schedule. An organization that values the employees' personal goals enacts reciprocity in loyalty and an increased time of employment (Holtschlag et al., 2020; Naim & Lenka, 2020). Gabriel et al. (2020) commented that millennials want to be leaders and remain longer with an organization if their development needs are met.

Lifetime employment in retail is as much a career choice born of a calling or passion as any other vocation. Individuals are drawn to the retail industry for various reasons, but those that endure have a servant's heart and can fill a desire to help others. The individual who works part-time, 28% of the labor force, places a higher premium on the social atmosphere rather than promotion possibilities (Clinebell & Taylor, 2016). The question arises whether serving the part-time employees with the attitude of thankfulness

for their service and invitation of inclusiveness would alter retail's reputation as a "last resort" job. This population is under-researched and an attractive proposition for future examination to learn if a servant leadership style would influence their perception of a career in retail or feel supported while pursuing higher education for their "non-retail" career goal. The strain on retail leadership to survive the pandemic revealed the strength of the millennial generation to be the leaders in the industry that can adapt, empower, empathize, encourage, and maintain organizational goals.

Conclusions

The beginnings of this study of the millennials' expectations of leadership were designed to discover and compile knowledge to answer one question. The answer to how millennials employed as managers in the retail industry were described by 8 participants by interview who supplied their perceptions and expectations of successful leadership. The turn of events amid this study, COVID-19, had a surprising effect on participants' responses as they quickly morphed from a follower perspective to a leader perspective in 8 months and expanded this study to a higher level of discovery. The fear that seasoned retail managers had for the ability of millennials to lead was replaced with awe of the generation's capabilities to adapt to the industry's challenges. Still, the paradox remains to be a paradigm shift requiring trust and adaptability, and the generation promoting trust and adaptability in leadership is not trusted to adapt to organizational expectations.

Previously established hierarchical organizations had placed their faith in proven techniques of sustaining a standard of operation that maintained a healthy bottom line.

The high turnover rate and the implications of such a loss have garnished little research or reaction from retail leadership. The retail industry's sustainability and continued growth are essential to their substantial contribution to the United States' GDP. Future research on a leadership style that addresses the avoidable causes of voluntary turnover will ensure the generational expectation of successful leaders is met with higher job satisfaction and continued industry contribution.

The millennial generation leads with a servant's heart; they live with a servant's attitude. They still have much to learn and insist that someone show them. They still want to experience life outside of work, find it essential to maintain social relationships, and seek an inclusive culture in employment choices. They still prefer to text than talk, not because, as early researchers believed, of a lack of social skills, but texting is faster, and time is precious. Most of their skills have evolved from life experiences, but unlike previous reports, they can relate to other generations because of the immense need to know everything and no fear of asking why. They respect each other's choices and believe that people matter more than profit. Their purchasing power has shamed corporations to improve CSR, and their curiosity will change the face of retail leadership. The findings in this study confirmed that the correct leadership style for the millennial generation is the one a follower respects and emulates.

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Appendix A: Retail Trade Subsections

The retail trade sector consists of these subsectors:

- Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers: NAICS 441
- Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores: NAICS 442
- Electronics and Appliance Stores: NAICS 443
- Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers: NAICS 444
- Food and Beverage Stores: NAICS 445
- Health and Personal Care Stores: NAICS 446
- Gasoline Stations: NAICS 447
- Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores: NAICS 448
- Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores: NAICS 451
- General Merchandise Stores: NAICS 452
- Miscellaneous Store Retailers: NAICS 453
- Nonstore Retailers: NAICS 454

(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019)

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Q1. *In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader?*

The interviewee's response provided insight into their perception of leader behavior that influences job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and desire to emulate. This question was aligned with the specific problem that millennials are leaving organizations because of job/leadership dissatisfaction (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016). Millennials entered the workforce with expectations of similarity to childhood, when the reason behind a request was explained and respected, and everyone's opinion was valuable and freely offered (Nolan, 2015; Twenge, 2006). The behavioral differences that influence leadership style are constructed from social influence and are supported by the seminal work of Mannheim (1952); who argued that the events shared by a group influence a collective perspective. Life experiences, perceptions of those experiences, and expectations of leadership as the result of the experiences comprise the characteristics of leader behavior. The cognitive model of behavior contains a mediational process that involves the individual to observe, remember, determine possibility of mimicry, and imitate the behavior (Bandura, 1977). A positive behavior will continue and expand if there is an increase in self-efficacy through positive feedback that the individual perceives as sincere (Bandura, 1977).

Q2. *When you think of a leader in your workplace, describe how the leader assigns tasks.* The second question prompted a narrative response of a daily activity and assess the type of leadership received and practiced. Follow-up questions like *How are*

processes to the task determined? or What procedure is taken if a problem arises?

clarified the leadership style. Anderson, et al. (2017), Bodenhausen & Curtis (2016), Nolan (2015), and Stewart et al., (2017) stressed the importance of involving employees in the daily operations to increase job satisfaction and reported that Millennials consider themselves a valuable partner in decision-making, able to recognize opportunities for improvements, and worthy of the necessary training to advance. Conversely, the retail industry adopted the transactional leadership style because of the fast-paced environment, and the challenge of managing multiple location with consistency (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016). The concept of installing the responsibility of a task is empowerment and related to the five aspects of servant leadership: altruism, emotional healing, wisdom, encouragement, and stewardship outlined by Barbuto & Gottfredson, (2016).

Q3. *What or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership?* This question prompted the interviewee to share experiences of someone in a position to influence their perception and form expectations. Millennials grew up with news reports of shamed leaders with unethical behavior, and questionable morals. The interviewee's narrative response assessed the value of transparency and authenticity. A follow – up question was *What action is taken to influence others in the behaviors of a successful leader?* This question was supported by the reported expectations of transparency, authenticity, and ethical behavior amongst organization leadership and aligned with aspects of servant leadership (Grisaffe, VanMeter, & Chonko, 2016; Zou, Tian, & Liu, 2015). Employees' perception of leadership is based on consensus regarding the

emergence of leader qualities in an individual or individuals within the group (Graybill, 2014; Gruda, McCleskey, & Berrios, 2017). Conceptually, the cognitive model of behavior was used to understand how observation influenced behavior and continuance of the behavior is dependent on the received response. In this context, how did a previous leader's behavior influence the Millennial's perception of successful leadership and is the perception their reality?

Q4. Describe the learning opportunities that you receive or expect to receive from leadership to advance your career. This is a request for a descriptive analysis of Millennials' expectations of advancement. Millennials expect initial and on-going training with a mentor dedicated to career advancement (Anderson, et al., 2017), which aligns with the ambition of moving up the corporate ladder. The concept of serving others before yourself through encouragement and sharing knowledge supports the exploration of the millennials expectation of mentoring and career advancement. The aspects of encouragement and wisdom found in servant leader behavior aligned with reported expectations of the millennial employee. Follow up was *Where do you see yourself in five years?* This follow up question was supported by the statistics from the Deloitte Millennial Survey that reported 73% of Millennials changed organizations after five years.

Q5. Research indicates job dissatisfaction is highest amongst the millennial generation. Answering in terms of how you are led, describe how leader behavior does or does not influence job dissatisfaction? Question 5 provided insight into the respondent's

perception of unsuccessful behavior. Literature supporting this question also supported the specific problem of a leader's failure to connect the consideration of employees' needs to voluntary turnover results in unsuccessful leadership (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016). Millennial disappointment with the lack of opportunity for advancement, broken psychological contracts about work/life balance and disapproval of leader behavior was examined as possible causes of voluntary turnover (Arellano, 2015; Ertas, 2015; Grisaffe, et al., 2016; 2016; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017). Included as support for Question 5 was the concept that integrated factors of characteristic development impact perception and behavior and led to stereotypical generalization when other factors, such as industry changes or career progression stages should be considered (Lyons, Urick, Kuron, & Schweitzer, 2015). The offered narrative of perceived causes of voluntary turnover should align conversely with the perceptions of successful leadership.

Q6. Research indicates voluntary turnover is highest amongst the millennial generation. Answering in terms of how you are led, describe how leader behavior does or does not influence voluntary turnover? Question 6 provided insight into the respondent's perception of unsuccessful leader behavior. Literature supported this question also supported the specific problem of a leader's failure to connect the consideration of employees' needs to voluntary turnover, resulting in unsuccessful leadership (Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016). Millennial disappointment with the lack of opportunity for advancement, broken psychological contracts about work/life balance and disapproval of leader behavior was examined as possible causes of voluntary turnover (Arellano, 2015;

Ertas, 2015; Grisaffe, et al., 2016; Mekraz & Rao Gundala, 2016; Petrucelli, 2017).

Included as support for Question 6 was the concept that integrated factors of characteristic development impact perception and behavior lead to stereotypical generalization when other factors, such as industry changes or career progression stages should be considered (Lyons, Urick, Kuron, & Schweitzer, 2015). The offered narrative of perceived causes of voluntary turnover should align conversely with the perceptions of successful leadership.

Appendix C: Invitation to Interview Letter

Good day,

My name is Phyllis Atwood and as a doctoral candidate with Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in my research about leaders in the retail industry. My research is about a problem with leadership support, career expectations, and social beliefs. The purpose of this study is to talk with individuals that match certain characteristics of birth years 1980 to 2000; enrolled in or graduated from a business program; and possess at least 3 years of retail leadership to learn what is expected leadership behavior. If you possess the inclusive requirements and have a few minutes to share your ideas about retail leadership, your insight will add to the research into a standard style of leadership for the retail industry that will address the high turnover rate due to job dissatisfaction. I believe the social significance of this study will be a practical and successful leadership style in the retail industry to reduce voluntary turnover, influence sustainability, and support millions of American jobs.

The 20-30 minute interview by Skype will include 6 questions that will explore your opinions of successful leadership in the retail industry. I have attached an **Informed Consent** to interview form that I ask you to read so you understand the guidelines and details of the study. The consent form allows me to use the information you provide in as data in my research. It also explains the precautions to protect your privacy.

If you have an interest in taking part in this study, please respond by return e-mail with the statement “I consent” with your name and e-mail address as the message, answer

the three questions listed below, list two dates and times of availability for the interview and return the consent form to Phyllis.atwood@waldenu.edu. I will respond to set a time to interview convenient to your schedule. Thank you for your time and interest.

Q1: What is your birth year?

Q2: Are you enrolled in or graduated from a business curriculum?

Q3: Have you at least 3 years of leadership experience in the retail industry

Please include two dates and times for possible interviews.

1.

2.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol Outline

Name of Study: Millennial Leadership in the Retail Industry

Basic Information:

- Voluntary turnover in the retail industry rates three times higher than other generations.
- The retail industry contributes to the U. S. Gross Domestic Product over \$2Trillion per year.
- The purpose of this study is the exploration of the perception and expectation of leadership in the retail industry.

Verify receipt of permission.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Interviewer: Phyllis Atwood

Interviewee: _____

Location of the interview: _____

(Add notes about the setting, e.g., "Interviewer and interviewee were sitting next to each other on a couch, the TV was on, and children were playing in the background.")

Data Collection

I can devote my attention to your answers if I record the interview. I will send you a transcription to review for clarification or additions you may want to make.

Do you have any objection to my recording this interview? _____

Thank you for your time and interest to speak with me. My name is Phyllis Atwood, and I am a doctoral candidate with Walden University conducting research on the perceptions and expectations of leadership in the retail industry. Do you have any questions about the Informed Consent you signed and returned? _____ I want to repeat that you may stop the interview at any time or withdraw your contribution at any time before publication. Shall we continue? _____

- How did you come to work in retail?
- What do you like most about working in retail?
- Have you worked for other retail companies other than your present employer? _____. How many? _____ (*“safe” comments.*)
- The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the experiences of Millennials employed as managers in the retail industry, their perceptions, and expectations of leadership. Exploration of the expectations of Millennials who chose retail as a career may add insight into a viable and transferable leadership style for the retail industry and address the gap between purported retail leadership and misalignment with Millennials’ self- description.
- I have developed six interview questions that I will ask you. There is no right or wrong answer because my goal is to understand your opinion of successful leadership.

Ask if there are any questions.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

	QUESTION	COMMENT	OBSERVATION
1	In the context of the retail industry, how do you describe a successful leader?		
2	When you think of a leader in your workplace, describe how the leader assigns tasks. FOLLOW UP How are processes to the task determined? FOLLOW UP What procedure is taken if a problem arises?		
3	What or who has influenced your perception of successful leadership? FOLLOW UP What action is taken to influence others in the behaviors of a successful leader?		
4	Describe the learning opportunities that you receive or expect to receive from leadership to advance your career. FOLLOW UP Where do you see yourself in five years?		

5	Research indicates non-seasonal, voluntary turnover is highest amongst the millennial generation. Answering in terms of how you are led. Describe how leader behavior does or does not influence voluntary turnover?		
6	Research indicates job dissatisfaction is highest amongst the millennial generation. Answering in terms of how you are led. Describe how leader behavior does or does not influence job satisfaction?		

Ending Instructions

- Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Your insights and opinions are important to the research conducted currently in retail leadership.
- Everything you shared here today will be treated with the upmost respect for your privacy. A copy of the interview transcription will available to you in the next week for any corrections or additions you wish to make. Please return it as quickly as possible.
- A copy of the results of this study will be shared upon request.
- My contact information is Phyllis.atwood@waldenu.edu, and yours is _____.
- **Ask if the interviewee has any questions.**
- **Thank the interviewee for participating again.**

Appendix F: Code Book

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY	CODE
ACCOMODATING/APPROACHABLE	AC
AUTHENTIC/TRUSTWORTHY	AC
AUTHORITARIAN/MILITARILISTIC	AU
CHARISMATIC/PERSUASIVE	CH
DEVISIVE BEHAVIOR	DB
EMPATHY	EM
ETHICAL BEHAVIOR	ET
EMPLOYEE-CENTRIC/INCLUSIVE	EC
MENTOR/SUPPORTIVE	M
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT	PC
UNINVOLVED/LAIZZE-FAIRE	U